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Our Heritage

# Princes of Gwynedd Guidebook

Discover the legends of the mighty princes of Gwynedd in the awe-inspiring landscape of North Wales





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Dolwyddelan Castle

## Inside this book

Step into the dramatic, historic landscapes of Wales and discover the story of the **princes of Gwynedd**, Wales' most successful medieval dynasty. These remarkable leaders were formidable warriors, shrewd politicians and generous patrons of literature and architecture. Their lives and times, spanning over 900 years, have shaped the country that we know today and left an enduring mark on the modern landscape.

This guidebook will show you where to find striking castles, lost palaces and peaceful churches from the age of the princes.





Castell y Bere

## The princes of Gwynedd, at a glance

Here are some of our top recommendations:



© Princes of Gwynedd



Why not start your journey at the ruins of **Deganwy Castle**? It is poised on the twin rocky hilltops overlooking the mouth of the River Conwy, where the powerful 6th-century ruler of Gwynedd, Maelgwn 'the Tall', once held court.

For more information, see page 15

© Princes of Gwynedd



If it's a photo opportunity you're after, then **Criccieth Castle**, a much contested fortress located high on a headland above Tremadog Bay, is a must.

For more information, see page 15

© Princes of Gwynedd



If you prefer a remote, more contemplative landscape, make your way to **Cymer Abbey**, the Cistercian monastery where monks bred fine horses for Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, known as Llywelyn 'the Great'.

For more information, see page 16

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**Castell y Bere**, overlooking the Dysynni Valley, is one of the most atmospheric ruins in Wales. This fortress once defended the southern boundary of Gwynedd's mountainous heartland.

For more information, see page 16

© David Longley



To delve into the courtly life of the princes, head for **Llys Rhosyr**. Here the remains of a royal palace have been excavated recently.

For more information, see page 17

© Princes of Gwynedd



And be sure not to miss the exceptional, romantic ruins of **Dolwyddelan Castle**, built by Llywelyn the Great to defend his pastures and one of the key routes through Snowdonia.

For more information, see page 17

© Sarah McCarthy



At Craflwyn, you'll be thrilled to discover the origins of the national symbol of Wales - the Red Dragon - on the ancient hilltop site of **Dinas Emrys**.

For more information, see page 22





# Contents

## 8 A four part history of the princes of Gwynedd

## 14 Key sites

## 18 Itineraries

## 35 Top five sites for...

## 36 Further Information

Left: Llys Eurnyn, Rhos on Sea

Below: Dafydd ap Gruffudd being drawn by a horse in the course of his execution.





## Penmon Priory

# The emergence of the kingdom of Gwynedd

According to legend, the kingdom of Gwynedd was founded in the 5th century by Cunedda Wledig, a chieftain from the north of Britain. This may seem like a strange connection, yet Wales and much of northern Britain shared a similar language and culture at the time.



# How much do we know about what really happened?

Around AD 400 the Roman legions were withdrawn from Britain after nearly 300 years of occupation. In the power vacuum that followed, the area of present-day Wales broke up into small kingdoms, with leadership and land shared among a network of families.

One of the earliest rulers of Gwynedd whose existence is confirmed in historical sources is Maelgwn. A formidable warrior, his principal court, or *llys*, may have been at Deganwy, and he died in 547, possibly of the plague. Our source of information about him is the text of a sermon by Gildas, a contemporary cleric – and it is scathingly critical of him. Gildas condemned Maelgwn as being the worst of five lamentable British rulers at the time, but this is probably propaganda brought on by rumours of Maelgwn's wavering commitment to Christianity. In fact Maelgwn seems to have been the patron of several early saints.

## Defence of the realm – defeat of the Saxons, Vikings and Normans

From the 7th century onwards, Gwynedd's leaders faced frequent attacks from enemies outside Wales. In 616 King Cadwallon (reigned c. 625 to 634) defeated King Edwin of Northumbria, and in the centuries that followed the kingdom suffered onslaughts by Saxon and Viking forces. Rhodri Mawr, known as Rhodri 'the Great', defeated the Vikings in 856 and became one of Gwynedd's most successful rulers, expanding his influence over much of Wales.

The **Norman conquest** of Britain in 1066 brought a new enemy. **Gruffudd ap Cynan** was the first prince of Gwynedd to face the Normans in battle, in the 1080s. Raised in Swords, near Dublin, by a Welsh father and an Irish-Norse mother, he was determined to reclaim the kingdom that his grandfather had ruled. Gruffudd had a remarkable life. Captured by the Norman earl, Hugh of Chester, in 1081, he managed to escape after more than 10 years in captivity. With the help of the Norse king, Magnus Bareleg, and his fleet, Gruffudd managed to drive the Normans out of North Wales in around 1100.

The latter part of Gruffudd's reign is seen as a golden age in Gwynedd's history, with reform in society and governance. According to his biography, Gruffudd had many new stone churches built such that 'Gwynedd glittered then with lime-washed churches, like the firmament with the stars'. This prosperity and political stability continued when his son, **Owain Gwynedd**, succeeded Gruffudd upon the latter's death in 1137. Despite opposition from the English king, Henry II, Gwynedd expanded under Owain's leadership. By the time of his death in 1170 Owain controlled all of North Wales, as well as some lands to the west and south. In the last years of his reign he began to use the title '**Ownis Walarium princeps**' – 'Owain, prince of Wales.'

### Did you know?

The gravestone of King Cadfan, the father of King Cadwallon, can be seen in Llangadwaladr Church, Anglesey. The Latin inscription honours Cadfan as the wisest of all kings.



# The legacy of the princes of Gwynedd can be experienced through the cultural life and landscape of Wales to this day

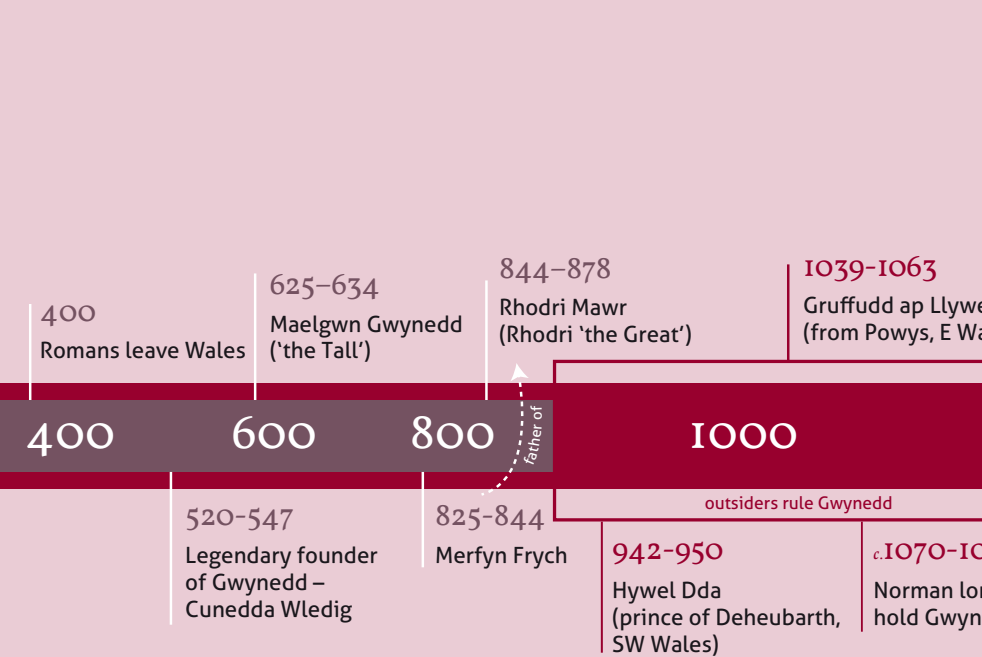
## Llywelyn the Great and his flourishing kingdom

In the 13th century the princes of Gwynedd expanded their kingdom even further, often finding themselves in cycles of uneasy peace and conflict with the Anglo-Norman kings of England. The powerful leader of the first part of this period was Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, or Llywelyn ‘the Great’, who reigned from 1201 until his death in 1240.

A grandson of Owain Gwynedd, Llywelyn took advantage of the power vacuum in Gwynedd that followed Owain’s death. He outwitted and defeated his uncle in battle, and when his cousin died he claimed full control of the kingdom.

From that point on, Llywelyn’s greatest struggles were with the English throne. In 1205 he made a strategic and diplomatic marriage to **Joan (Siwan in Welsh), the daughter of King John**. Joan, often referred to as the ‘Lady of Wales’, was an influential woman who intervened as peacemaker between her father and her husband a number of times. Llywelyn found John’s successor, Henry III, easier to deal with, and ended his reign without losing any ground to England.

Llywelyn was a great builder of castles, and fortresses at **Criccieth, Castell y Bere, Dolwyddelan** and **Dolbadarn** were all constructed during his reign. As an outward-looking leader, he was also a great benefactor of the **Cistercian monastic order**. His support of abbeys, such as the one at Aberconwy, where Conwy town stands today, was part of the way he linked Gwynedd to the wider religious and cultural scene across Europe.





## Llywelyn the Last - Prince of all Wales

Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, (or Llywelyn 'the Last') was the grandson of Llywelyn the Great. He came to the throne in 1255 and continued the expansion of Gwynedd. In 1267 the Treaty of Montgomery accorded him a status that none of his predecessors had quite achieved, when he was officially recognised as 'Prince of Wales'.

Llywelyn's success drew the enmity of the English king, Edward I. Llywelyn married the infant Eleanor de Montfort, daughter of Simon de Montfort, who was Edward's enemy and leader of the 'Barons' Revolt' (1264–7). This marriage, which took place by proxy, was part and parcel of the alliance struck between Llywelyn and de Montfort. However, when Eleanor was shipwrecked in 1275 en route from France to join her husband, she was captured and imprisoned in Windsor Castle by the king. Tensions simmered for years.

The final war with England broke out in 1282 after Llywelyn's brother, Dafydd, attacked Hawarden Castle – in response to Edward's officials imposing English law in Wales. In a famous letter, sent from his court, or llys, at Abergwyngregyn, Llywelyn set out his reasons for going to war: 'We fight because we are forced to fight, for we, and all Wales, are oppressed, subjugated, despoiled, reduced to servitude by the royal officers and bailiffs...'

Llywelyn's death at the hands of the English, in an ambush near Builth Wells in December 1282, sent his people into mourning and put to an end to the dream of a united, independent Wales. Dafydd succeeded his brother to the leadership of Gwynedd and continued the fight into the next year, but the English army was too powerful. Dafydd was captured, probably in the mountains of northern Snowdonia, and was executed gruesomely, being hanged, drawn and quartered in Shrewsbury.

The line of Gwynedd's princely rulers had come to an end.

### Did you know?

Owain Gwynedd was said to have 22 children by four different women.



### 1099-1137

Gruffudd ap Cynan  
(nominal ruler 1080s  
and 1090s, absolute  
ruler after driving out  
Normans)

### 1201-1240

Llywelyn ab Iorwerth  
(Llywelyn 'the Great')

### 1246-1255

Power shared between  
Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and  
his brother Owain

### 1282-1283

Dafydd ap Gruffudd

1100

1200

1300

### 1137-1170

Owain Gwynedd

### 1240 - 1246

Dafydd ap Llywelyn

### 1255-1282

Llywelyn ap  
Gruffudd  
(Llywelyn  
'the Last')

### 1255-1282

Edward I's conquest  
of Gwynedd; end of  
Gwynedd's  
independent  
princely line.



Fields to the west of Abergwyngregyn

Abergwyngregyn



© Princes of Gwynedd

Dolbadarn Castle



© Cadw, Welsh Government (Crown Copyright)



“Cold is the heart in my breast for dread and sorrow after the king, the oaken gate of Aberffraw. A lord, a prince of the Welsh like a stone roof, of the line that held Aberffraw by right.” Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Goch, 1282

## Poets and patrons

When Llywelyn the Last was killed in 1282, his court poet, Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Goch, wrote a moving elegy.

In it the poet refers to Aberffraw on Anglesey – the most important court, or *llys*, of Gwynedd's early rulers. During the heyday of the princes Aberffraw took on great symbolic significance, so much so that Llywelyn the Last's grandfather, Llywelyn the Great, styled himself as 'Prince of Aberffraw and Lord of Snowdon'.

Llywelyn's elegy is just one of many such poems that survive from the time of the princes. The authors of these beautiful verses received generous royal patronage and performed their works at court.

## Land and law – the running of the kingdom

The princes of Gwynedd had a distinctive way of governing. Their territory was divided into a number of administrative areas. Each of these had at its centre a township, known as the *maerdref*. Each *maerdref* had at its heart a *llys* – the court or palace at the centre of the royal estate. The princes and their retinue would travel around these *llysoedd* throughout the year, entertaining allies and dignitaries, dispensing justice and collecting taxes.

The population of each *maerdref* was expected to provide enough food for the prince and his entourage when they were in residence. It was a substantial undertaking, as the royal party could include as many as 500 people and their horses.

Each *maerdref* was connected to mountain pastures called *ffriddoedd*, where the princes' herds grazed. Cattle were currency in medieval Gwynedd, and these plots of land, along with the livestock they supported, were central to the princely economy. As a result the *ffriddoedd* were often protected by impressive castles, such as Dolbadarn at the foot of Snowdon.



### Did you know?

One Welsh law allowed a woman to claim half of a couple's joint possessions if separating from her husband after seven years of marriage. Children and even pet cats were included.

Their rule was supported by a system of Welsh law developed by Hywel Dda. He was a prince of Deheubarth (south-west Wales) who came to rule over most of Wales, including Gwynedd, in the early 10th century. A man accused of a crime could defend himself by calling character witnesses. The more serious the allegation, the more respected the witness needed to be. This legal system was progressive for its time, and similar laws were not adopted elsewhere for centuries.



Deganwy Castle

## Key sites

## Deganwy Castle

Fortresses have occupied this windswept spot for centuries. The two rocky peaks overlooking the mouth of the River Conwy were first occupied in Roman times, and seem to have been used in the 6th century by the great ruler of Gwynedd, Maelgwn 'the Tall'.

Robert of Rhuddlan, a hated Norman overlord, is said to have built a castle here in the 1080s; it was later destroyed to prevent it falling into the hands of King John. Llywelyn the Great rebuilt the castle in 1213, but it was in turn demolished by his sons in 1245, to stop it being captured by Henry III. You can still see the base of the round tower of Llywelyn's castle, and a section of its curtain wall on the larger of the two hills.

Henry III rebuilt the castle, but Llywelyn the Last recaptured the fortification and demolished it for the last time in 1263. Today you can still walk around its tumbledown walls and gateways.

*By car: the twin peaks of Deganwy are less than 2 miles south of Llandudno on the A546. No parking is available at the site.*

*By train: Deganwy station is on the Conwy Valley line, from Llandudno or Llandudno Junction. From the train station the castle is a 10–15 mins walk. OS map reference SH 783 795.*

Possible likeness of Llywelyn the Great, found at Deganwy Castle



Criccieth Castle



## Criccieth Castle

A 14th-century poem described Criccieth Castle, overlooking Cardigan Bay, as the 'bright fortress on the cliff top'. It's certainly stunningly situated, and still well preserved. As you enter the castle through the imposing gateway with its large round towers, look out for arrow slits high up in the walls.

Criccieth is one of several castles built by Llywelyn the Great. His grandson, Llywelyn the Last, enlarged it, and probably also added the outer wall. In 1282, after English forces had conquered Gwynedd, Edward I's army altered one of the towers to accommodate large catapults.

*By car: take the A497 to Criccieth from Porthmadog or Pwllheli. Roadside parking is available near the site, then there is a steep but short walk to the castle from the visitor centre. By train: Criccieth station, on the Shrewsbury - Machynlleth/Pwllheli line, is 400m away. Check the Cadw website for admission prices and the opening times.*



## Cymer Abbey

Cymer Abbey was founded in 1198 by Maredudd ap Cynan, cousin and ally of Llywelyn the Great, and was supported by successive princes over the next century. The Cistercian monks based here were certainly industrious: as well as keeping sheep, they fished for salmon and bred horses. During the reign of Llywelyn the Great, the monks were expected to supply 'two colts of a superior breed' every year.

You can still get a good idea of the size and shape of this simple church. Look out for the arches and the three tall lancet windows that survive at the eastern end. You can also spot the nearby remains of the cloister.

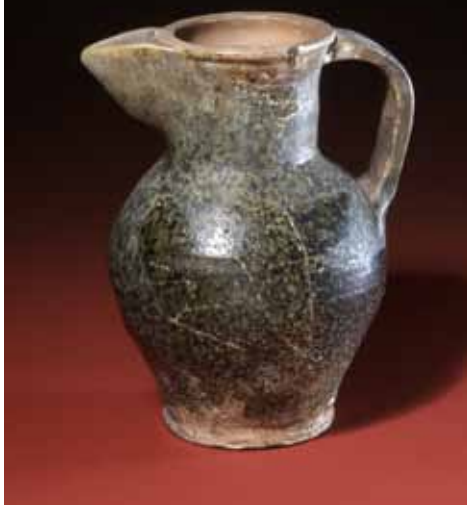
The abbey was damaged during the war with Edward I in 1282–3, and the monks received £80 in compensation from the English king. In 1537 the suppression of monasteries under Henry VIII brought an end to this tranquil abbey. Much of the site was destroyed; a house and farm were built over part of it, using some of its stone.

*By car: Cymer Abbey is signposted from the A470 2 miles north of Dolgellau. Check the Cadw website for further details.*



Cymer Abbey

## Reconstructed Saintonge jug found at Castell y Bere



## Castell y Bere

Built by Llywelyn the Great in 1221, Castell y Bere looks out over the beautiful Dysynni Valley.

The castle owes its origin to a family dispute. Llywelyn the Great was displeased with the way in which his son Gruffudd was ruling Meirionnydd and Ardudwy, so he took back control of these territories. He then imprisoned Gruffudd and built a new castle for himself here. Castell y Bere was one of the last fortresses in which Dafydd ap Gruffudd held out against the advance of Edward I after the death of his brother, Llywelyn the Last, in 1282.

*By car: the ruins are located near Llanfihangel y Pennant, off the B4405, 6½ miles north-east of Tywyn or by back road from Abergynolwyn. Parking is available near the site. By train: Tywyn station, on the Cambrian Coast route, is 7 miles away, or you can travel the Talyllyn narrow gauge line to Abergynolwyn which is 2½ miles away ([www.tallyllyn.co.uk](http://www.tallyllyn.co.uk)). Check the Cadw website for the opening times.*

## Dolwyddelan Castle

Dolwyddelan Castle, high on a rocky ridge overlooking the Lledr Valley, was built in the 13th century by Llywelyn the Great. It was constructed to defend an important route into Snowdonia and to protect the royal cattle pastures, a vital source of princely wealth. Llywelyn the Last used Dolwyddelan as a fortress and modified the original fortifications. The castle was finally captured in 1283 by Edward I, one year after Llywelyn's death. Enthusiastic Victorian restoration work added new floors and a roof to the tower, along with the distinctive battlements. The west tower, probably added by Edward I, now lies in ruins.

*By car: the castle is located 1 mile south of Dolwyddelan village and 5 miles north of Blaenau Ffestiniog on the A470 to Betws y Coed. Parking is available near the site. By train: Dolwyddelan station is on the Llan-dudno–Blaenau Ffestiniog route, just over 1 mile from the castle. Check the Cadw website for the opening times.*



Dolwyddelan Castle

## Llys Rhosyr

At Llys Rhosyr, near Newborough on Anglesey, you can see the only surviving material remains of a llys, or princely court. Archaeological excavations in the 1990s uncovered the foundations of a series of halls enclosed by a rectangular wall.

The halls were probably thatched, but it is not certain whether the footings were for timber-framed or stone buildings. The National Museum Wales has decided on the latter for its reconstruction of the main hall at St Fagans' Museum. Smaller buildings stood nearby; one of them was connected to the main hall by a passageway and may have been a private bed-chamber. So far one-quarter of the site has been excavated, revealing pottery and coins as well as the buildings. Who know what secrets are still waiting to be discovered?

*By car: Newborough is on the A4080 on the Isle of Anglesey. At the school take the first left, and continue straight for  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile. Llys Rhosyr is situated on the right. Parking is limited, we recommend that you walk from the village.*



The ruins at Llys Rhosyr



© Sarah McCarthy

Nantgwynant, with Dinas Emrys in a sea of mist

## Itineraries

We have put together some great itineraries that link places associated with the princes of Gwynedd, and use various modes of transport.



## How to use this guide

The following itineraries give suggestions of routes you can follow by various modes of transport, an indication of the level of physical effort required and an indication of how long it will take to complete the tour.

Remember to visit [www.snowdoniaheritage.info/princes](http://www.snowdoniaheritage.info/princes) to find out more about the historic sites featured here.

## Which mode of transport?

Each itinerary lists the modes of transport available to reach the featured sites. Look for these symbols as a quick reference:



**by car**



**by train**

[www.traveline-cymru.info](http://www.traveline-cymru.info)



**by bus**

[www.traveline-cymru.info](http://www.traveline-cymru.info)



**by bicycle**

<http://www.sustrans.org.uk/wales/national-cycle-network/free-leaflets-and-maps>



**on foot**

## How difficult is the route?



**easy**

accessible by car and public transport, involving shorter walking distances.



**moderate**

some physical effort is needed to tackle these routes.



**difficult**

requires a more strenuous effort; suitable for those wanting more of a workout.





**Itinerary 1**  
**Dinas Emrys** page 22  
 Beddgelert - Craflwyn

**Itinerary 2**  
**The princes of Gwynedd in the Conwy Valley** page 24  
 Llandudno - Llanrwst - Betws y Coed

**Itinerary 3**  
**Up the Conwy Valley and around the castles** page 26  
 Llandudno - Deganwy - Llandudno - Llanrwst - Betws y Coed - Dolwyddelan

**Itinerary 4**  
**Along the Menai Strait** page 27  
 Caernarfon - Llanberis - Bangor

**Itinerary 5**  
**Over the bridges** page 27  
 Bangor - Anglesey

**Itinerary 6**  
**The Dysynni Valley driving tour** page 28  
 Dolgellau - Abergwynolwyn - Tywyn

**Itinerary 7**  
**The Dysynni Valley cycle tour** page 28  
 Dolgellau - Abergwynolwyn - Tywyn

**Itinerary 8**  
**The Great Llyn road trip** page 30  
 Caernarfon - Clynog Fawr - Carn Fadryn - Aberdaron

**Itinerary 9**  
**The island of 20,000 saints** page 31  
 Aberdaron - Bardsey Island

**Itinerary 10**  
**The Grand tour** page 32  
 Conwy - Caernarfon - Beddgelert - Porthmadog - Blaenau Ffestiniog - Dolwyddelan - Betws y Coed - Llanrwst - Llandudno Junction - Conwy

**Itinerary 11**  
**The Llywelyn the Great tour** page 34  
 Bangor - Caernarfon - Llanberis/Dolbadarn - Pen y Pass - Nantgwynant - view of Dinas Emrys - Beddgelert - Llanfrothen - Blaenau Ffestiniog - Dolwyddelan - Betws y Coed - Llanrwst - Trefriw - Conwy - Sychnant Pass - Abergwyngregyn - Bangor



## Itinerary 1:

# Dinas Emrys

**Beddgelert - Craflwyn** **Duration: ONE DAY**

It was on the rocky outcrop of Dinas Emrys that the enduring symbol of Wales, the Red Dragon, first emerged.

The story goes that Vortigern, a powerful ruler of Britain in the 5th century AD, was rallying against Anglo-Saxon invaders. He sought to build a stronghold on the strategic hill. Each day he set his builders to work, and each morning they woke to find their work undone. Piles of rubble lay where newly built walls had stood. The magicians who advised Vortigern suggested a solution: he must sacrifice 'a fatherless boy' and sprinkle his blood upon the site where he wished to build.

An appropriate boy was quickly found. Before his blood could be shed, however, the boy convinced Vortigern that the problem lay with the site he had chosen. Beneath the hill, he explained, was an underground lake containing two dragons. Digging proved the boy to be right, and when they were released the two dragons – one red, one white – fought each other. The red dragon was eventually victorious, and this symbolic defeat of the Saxons by the native British people is commemorated on the Welsh flag to this day.

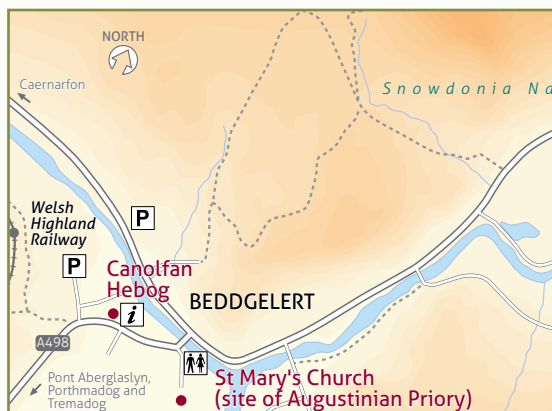
Vortigern named the castle which he finally built after the boy who had advised him. He was called Myrddin Emrys – but today we know him as Merlin, the great and wise adviser of King Arthur.

Beyond the myth, archaeology has revealed clear evidence of early occupation on the hill. Exotic pottery and fine glass have been discovered – high-status imports from the Mediterranean and southern France, dating from the 5th to 7th centuries. The remains of stone banks or ramparts at the western edge of the hilltop possibly date to the same time, although the fortified use of the site probably goes back to the Iron Age.

What about the later occupation of Dinas Emrys? There was a medieval keep on the site, thought to have been constructed at the end of the 12th century when there was a struggle for supremacy among the princes of Gwynedd after Owain Gwynedd's death. The hill certainly occupies an important strategic position, guarding one of the main routes through Snowdonia, and at that time was situated only 2½ miles from the sea.

Today visitors to Dinas Emrys can see the ramparts of the ancient hillfort, the stone foundations of the medieval tower and the silted pool below. Excavation showed the pool was once a timber-lined cistern; could there be a link between this watery area and the legendary dragons' lake?

**TRAVEL:** Take the train to Beddgelert and either walk, cycle or take the bus the 1.2 miles along the A498 to the National Trust car park at Craflwyn. The way-marked walking route up and down Dinas Emrys takes about 2 hours (c.2 miles), and is rough and steep in places.





Dinas Emrys



## Itinerary 2:

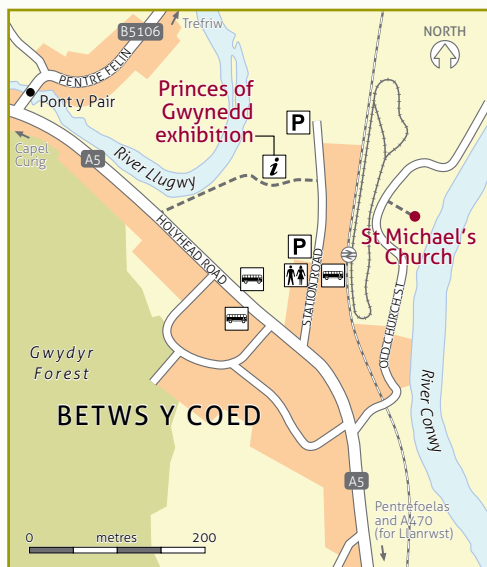
# The princes of Gwynedd in the Conwy valley

Llandudno - Llanrwst - Betws y Coed **Duration: ONE DAY**

Visit the historic market town of Llanrwst and enjoy a moment of quiet contemplation at Gwydir Chapel, attached to St Grwst's Church. Here rests the stone coffin of Llywelyn the Great (1173–1240), who ruled most of Wales during the early 13th century. Originally buried at Aberconwy Abbey, Conwy, Llywelyn's coffin was later moved to Maenan Abbey near Llanrwst, after Edward I forced the Cistercian monks to move there from Conwy in 1283.

At Betws y Coed, stop at St Michael's Church next to the railway museum to meet a descendant of the princes. Inside the 14th-century church is a life-sized limestone carving in battle armour. The effigy is thought to be that of Gruffydd ap Dafydd Goch, who fought alongside the Black Prince at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356. Gruffydd was the grandson of Dafydd ap Gruffydd, the last prince of an independent Wales.

**TRAVEL:** Take the train from Llandudno, changing at Llandudno Junction station to travel up the Conwy Valley to Llanrwst, or take the no.19 bus from Llandudno Junction train station. Jump back on the train to Betws y Coed to visit St Michael's Church. Finish your journey at Betws y Coed Tourist Information Centre, where you will find a small exhibition about the ages of the princes.







Sarcophagus of Llywelyn the Great, Llanrwst

Itinerary 3:

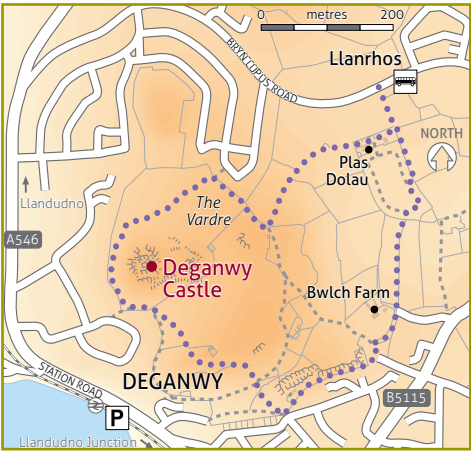
# Up the Conwy Valley and around the castles

Llandudno - Deganwy - Llandudno - Llanrwst - Betws y Coed - Dolwyddelan  
Duration: TWO DAYS

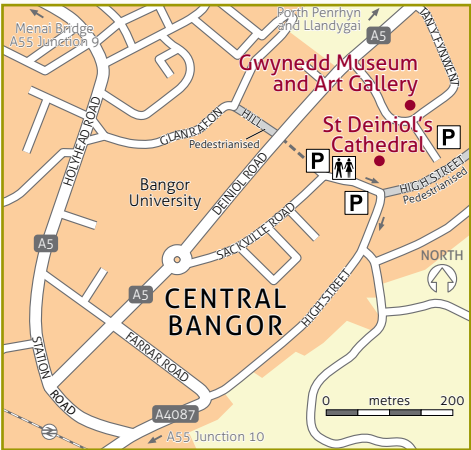
Take a relaxing two-day tour by train along the Conwy Valley, stopping to visit the princes' castles at Deganwy, Dolwyddelan and neighbouring Tomen Castell. Sited on an impressive rocky mound, now inaccessible to visitors, Tomen Castell may be the true birthplace of Llywelyn the Great.

**TRAVEL: Day one:** Start at Llandudno and travel to the ruins of Deganwy Castle. An hour's circular walking route to the castle begins at Bryn Lupus road in Llanrhos, details of which can be easily downloaded from the Conwy County Borough Council website ([www.conwy.gov.uk](http://www.conwy.gov.uk) – visit the Countryside and Rights of Way pages). Once you have enjoyed Deganwy, take the train or bus down into Llanrwst to visit St Grwst's Church. Then head to Betws y Coed and spend a relaxing evening in this beautiful village, taking time to visit the Tourist Information Centre's exhibitions.

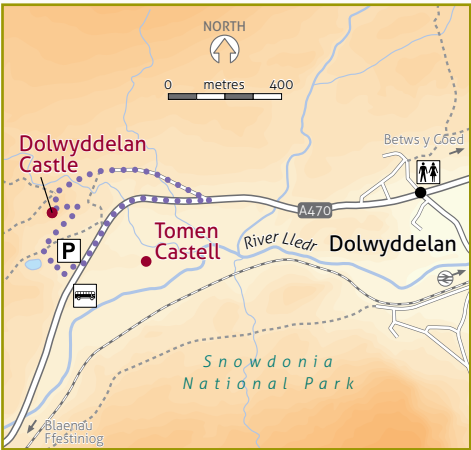
**Day two:** Take the train to Dolwyddelan in the morning. A 1-mile walk westwards along the A470, in lovely countryside, will bring you to the impressive ruins of Dolwyddelan Castle and its older, more enigmatic brother, Tomen Castell. The last stop on the train line is Blaenau Ffestiniog, with its incredible slate-quarrying landscape.



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#### Itinerary 4:

## Along the Menai Strait

Caernarfon – Llanberis – Bangor **Duration: ONE DAY**

Start your adventure in historic Caernarfon at Oriel Pendeitsh, opposite Edward I's extraordinary castle; here you will find an exhibition telling the story of Caernarfon and its surrounding area. Then travel inland to the fortress of Dolbadarn, near Llanberis, where Llywelyn the Last imprisoned his brother Owain for 22 years. Move on to the lovely city of Bangor and take in the magnificent St Deiniol's Cathedral, named after the 6th-century nobleman who built a monastery here. Deiniol erected a wattle fence around his new land; the word for this is 'bangor', which gives the modern city its name. While in Bangor, explore the treasures of Gwynedd Museum and Art Gallery.

**TRAVEL:** Travel easily between Caernarfon, Llanberis and Bangor, either by car or using one of the frequent bus services that shuttle through this area. While on the road, enjoy dramatic views of the Snowdonia Mountains; the lower slopes were once used as grazing pastures (friddoedd) for the princes' cattle from their base at Dolbadarn Castle. As you travel alongside the Menai Strait, gaze over to the rolling landscape of Anglesey and its fields of grain. Once known as the 'bread basket of Wales', Anglesey provided grain and bread for Snowdonia.

**CYCLE OPTION:** Follow the Lon Las Menai Cycleway, the cycle route from Caernarfon to Bangor, along the Menai Strait. The route is 10 miles (with some uphill stretches).



#### Itinerary 5:

## Over the bridges

Bangor – Anglesey **Duration: ONE OR TWO DAYS**

Starting from Bangor Cathedral, spend a couple of days enjoying the princes' spiritual places on Anglesey and archaeological remains of a llys, one of their courts. Visit the Church and Priory of Penmon, the finest example in North Wales of a church surviving from the time of the princes of Gwynedd. The royal court at Llys Rhosyr, Newborough has been excavated and the outline of the hall is now visible. If time permits you may also want to visit Beaumaris, where the stone sarcophagus of Joan, 'Lady of Wales', can be visited, as well as Aberffraw – the important early seat of the princes of Gwynedd dynasty.

**TRAVEL:** Anglesey's main villages are well served by regular buses from Bangor. See [www.anglesey.gov.uk](http://www.anglesey.gov.uk) or call 0870 608 2608. Penmon Priory will require a walk of just under 2 miles if you have taken the bus to Beaumaris. Further information is also available at [www.walkingnorthwales.co.uk](http://www.walkingnorthwales.co.uk), where you can also find out how to link your Anglesey visit to the wonders of the Wales Coastal Path.





## Itinerary 6:

## The Dysynni Valley driving tour

Dolgellau – Abergwynolwyn – Tywyn **Duration: ONE DAY**

Take a day to enjoy the peaceful atmosphere of lovely Cymer Abbey where Cistercian monks once farmed the surrounding lands. Move on to explore the romantic ruins of Castell y Bere, perched on a rocky spur below the slopes of Cader Idris. The castle was built by Llywelyn the Great after he took control of this area back from his son. You may also wish to visit the ancient Church of St Cadfan in Tywyn, where an inscribed stone of the 7th or 8th century features the earliest known written Welsh.

**TRAVEL:** Starting from Dolgellau, go by car to Cymer Abbey to visit the abbey. The site, which is under the custodianship of Cadw and is signposted, lies 2 miles north of Dolgellau on a minor road off the A470. From here drive down the coast to Castell y Bere, 2 miles north-east of the B4405 at Abergynolwyn.



## Itinerary 7:

## The Dysynni Valley cycle tour

Dolgellau – Abergwynolwyn – Tywyn **Duration: ONE DAY**

Take a day to explore this stunning valley on two wheels, stopping off at castles along the way.

**TRAVEL:** Cycle from Tywyn to Castell y Bere, and then on to Abergynolwyn before heading back to Tywyn. This loop follows reasonably quiet roads (after the main roads at the beginning of the route) and enjoys beautiful scenery. The big hill between Castell y Bere and Abergynolwyn can be avoided by following a shorter section of the route from Tywyn to Castell y Bere. Visit the sustrans website ([www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)) to view the National Cycle Network relevant to this area.





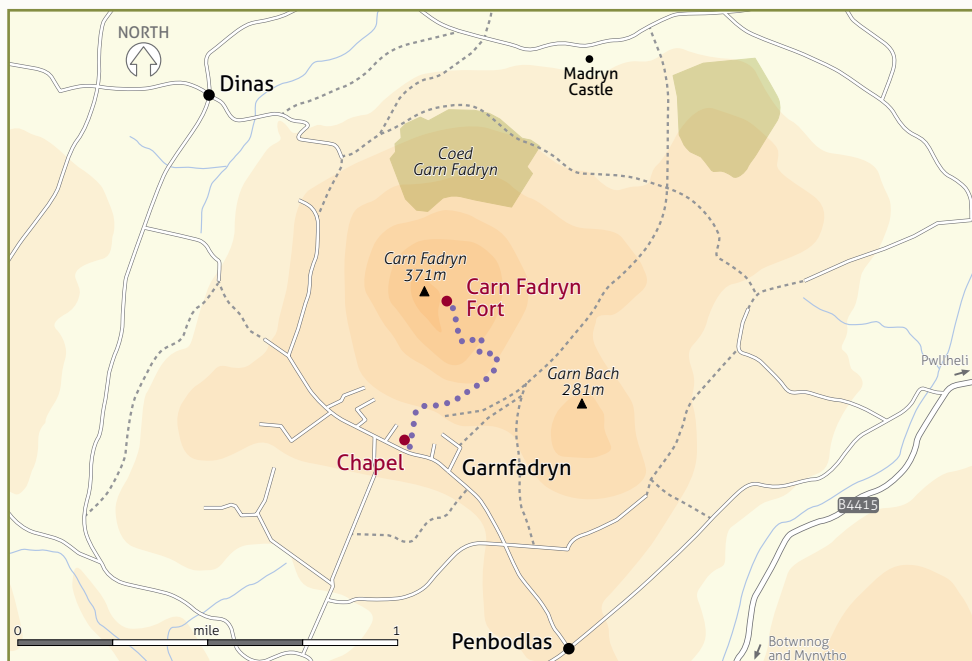
## Itinerary 8:

# The Great Llŷn road trip

Caernarfon - Clynnog Fawr - Carn Fadryn - Aberdaron **Duration: ONE DAY**

Travel down this stunning coastal stretch, and take in some of North Wales' most stunning and unspoilt landscapes as you discover the princes' spiritual connections. This is the Pilgrims' Way, a route taken by pilgrims travelling from St Winifride's Well at Holywell to the holy island of Ynys Enlli (Bardsey Island). You will see the charming village of Clynnog Fawr, with its beautiful 16th-century church dedicated to St Beuno, as well as the magnificent remains on Carn Fadryn. This Welsh castle (or citadel) mentioned by Gerald of Wales sits amid a huge Iron Age fort. End your journey at picturesque Aberdaron and St Hywyn's Church which was a place of refuge for Gruffudd ap Cynan, an important prince of half-Irish origins who lived between c.1055 and 1137.

**TRAVEL:** Starting at the exhibition at Oriel Pendeitsh (opposite the Castle), travel by car to Clynnog Fawr (on the A499, and 20-mins drive from Caernarfon). From here, drive to Garnfadryn and park at the chapel. It is a strenuous, 45-min walk up a footpath from the chapel to the summit of the mountain. Once you have conquered the mountain, if you have the energy, continue down to Aberdaron to visit St Hywyn's Church, once a place of refuge for Gruffudd ap Cynan (1055–1137). This route should take a day to complete.







Bardsey Island

### Itinerary 9:

## The island of 20,000 saints

Aberdaron - Bardsey Island **Duration: ONE DAY**

Still have time to explore? Stay overnight in Aberdaron and spend the next day on Bardsey Island (Ynys Enlli) to enjoy the peace and beauty of the island of '20,000 saints'. While there, visit St Mary's Abbey, the monastery founded by St Cadfan. The island is still farmed, and is much visited by bird-watchers, especially in spring and autumn.

**TRAVEL:** A day trip to Enlli from Porth Meudwy is available (weather dependent) by advance booking. Contact the Tourist Information Centre at Criccieth or Pwllheli, or the National Trust Visitor Centre Porth y Swnt in Aberdaron (see rear cover).



## Itinerary 10:

# The Grand tour

Conwy - Caernarfon - Beddgelert - Porthmadog - Blaenau Ffestiniog - Dolwyddelan - Betws y Coed - Llanrwst - Llandudno Junction - Conwy **Duration: THREE DAYS OR MORE**

Enjoy a tour through the kingdom of Gwynedd by train. You can start and end this circular route at any point, and make use of North Wales' excellent rail and bus network to explore most of the sites described in this guidebook. If this overview whets your appetite, you can find more details on our website [www.snowdoniaheritage.info/princes](http://www.snowdoniaheritage.info/princes).

**TRAVEL:** Start from Conwy railway station, after visiting the nearby princes of Gwynedd exhibition in the Tourist Information Centre. Take the bus direct from Conwy to Caernarfon; the bus stop is about 100 m uphill from the Tourist Information Centre. From Caernarfon take the Welsh Highland narrow-gauge steam railway to Beddgelert (1 hour), travelling right through the heart of Snowdonia. After the spectacular climb to Rhyd Ddu at the foot of Snowdon, hop off the train at the lovely village of Beddgelert. If you are travelling with a bike, why not take a detour and head from Beddgelert into Nantgwynant and to Dinas Emrys (see itinerary 1 on page 22) Beddgelert offers a selection of quality accommodation should you decide to end your first day with an overnight stop here.

From Beddgelert continue on the Welsh Highland Railway and steam down the Aberglaslyn Pass to Porthmadog (55 minutes). There you can change on to the Ffestiniog Railway and head for Blaenau Ffestiniog. This route is the charming heritage railway that once carried slate from the Ffestiniog quarries down to Porthmadog for export by sea. From Blaenau Ffestiniog take the Conwy Valley

mainline railway to Dolwyddelan. Here you can walk or cycle the mile or so to the stunning Dolwyddelan Castle.

From here, continue to Betws y Coed, which offers plenty of over-night accommodation, should you wish to stop over here. At Betws y Coed you can visit St Michael's Church before travelling further along the line to Llanrwst (under ten minutes). Pause to take in the wonderful St Grwst's Church, resting place of Llywelyn the Great's sarcophagus. The train from Llanrwst will return you to Conwy (changing at Llandudno Junction), but there is plenty of scope for stopping off to explore sites en route such as St Mary's Church (Trefriw), either on bike or on foot. Be aware that trains are infrequent along some parts of the route, so it is worth spending some time planning your journey carefully against timetables. See our website for more details.



**FURTHER INFORMATION:** Bicycles may be taken on these train services free of charge (groups of four or more should contact the train company in advance). The Ffestiniog and Highland Railways have restricted service between 1 November and 1 May each year. If visiting during these months you can use the Sherpa Bus Service (which does not carry bicycles) instead, but will need to check timetables carefully (it has a restricted winter and Sunday service). For further information and contact details, see the rear cover of this guidebook.





## Itinerary 11

# The Llywelyn the Great tour

Bangor - Caernarfon - Llanberis/Dolbadarn - Pen y Pass - Nantgwynant - view of Dinas Emrys - Beddgelert - Llanfrothen - Blaenau Ffestiniog - Dolwyddelan - Betws y Coed - Llanrwst - Trefriw - Conwy - Sychnant Pass - Abergwyngregyn - Bangor

**Duration: TWO, THREE OR SEVEN DAYS (for a more leisurely pace)**

An epic route for keen cyclists! This tour is designed for those who want to visit as many classic princely locations as possible, and who are ready for an inspiring cycling holiday. The entire route can be completed in two or three days by the keen cyclist, or extended over a week at a more leisurely pace, with stops at Caernarfon or Llanberis, Beddgelert,

Blaenau Ffestiniog, Betws y Coed and Conwy. Remember to visit exhibitions about the princes of Gwynedd at Conwy, Betws y Coed, Caernarfon and Beddgelert (see rear cover).



Dolbadarn

## Top five sites for...

Short on time? If you only have half a day or a couple of hours to explore, why not jump in the car to any one of these fantastic princes of Gwynedd locations. Find all the information you need at [www.snowdoniaheritage.info/princes](http://www.snowdoniaheritage.info/princes).

### Top five sites for a stroll:

1. Castell y Bere
2. Deganwy Castle
3. Dolwyddelan Castle
4. Beaumaris town centre
5. Conwy town centre

### Top five locations with easy access:

1. Dolbadarn Castle
2. Cymer Abbey
3. Bangor Cathedral
4. St Grwst's Church, Llanrwst
5. Conwy Castle

### Top five places for families:

1. Dolwyddelan Castle
2. Dolbadarn Castle
3. Criccieth Castle
4. Castell y Bere
5. Dinas Emrys

### Top five spots to enjoy stunning views:

1. Deganwy Castle
2. Castell y Bere
3. Dolwyddelan Castle
4. Dolbadarn Castle
5. Criccieth Castle



## FOLLOW THE STORY:



### Ewloe Castle

Be sure to seek out the remains of one of medieval Wales' best kept secrets – 'the castle in the corner of the wood', built by Llywelyn the Last.



### Dolforwyn Castle

Don't miss this fine Welsh castle, built by Llywelyn the Last in open defiance of the English king.



### Tomen y Rhodwydd

Today the site of Owain Gwynedd's 12th-century castle is grazed by sheep, but it was once the site of a hard fought struggle between rival Welsh rulers.



Visit our website at  
[www.snowdoniaheritage.info/princes](http://www.snowdoniaheritage.info/princes)

## Princes of Gwynedd information points

Don't hesitate to contact our friendly staff for directions or details of walking trails, cycle routes, opening times and access information. Most of the sites are open all year and free of charge.

### Beddgelert

Canolfan Hebog / TIC  
 LL55 4YD  
**01766 890615**  
[TIC.Beddgelert@eryri-npa.gov.uk](mailto:TIC.Beddgelert@eryri-npa.gov.uk)

### Craflwyn

Nr Beddgelert,  
 Gwynedd,  
 LL55 4NG  
[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/craflwyn-and-beddgelert](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/craflwyn-and-beddgelert)

### Betws y Coed

TIC  
 Royal Oak Stables  
 LL24 0AH  
**01690 710426**  
[TIC.BYC@eryri-npa.gov.uk](mailto:TIC.BYC@eryri-npa.gov.uk)

### Criccieth

Criccieth Castle  
 Castle Street  
 LL52 0DP  
**01766 522227**  
[cadw@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:cadw@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

### Caernarfon

Oriel Pendeitsh / TIC  
 Castle Street  
 LL55 1ES  
**01286 672232**  
[caernarfon.tic@gwynedd.gov.uk](mailto:caernarfon.tic@gwynedd.gov.uk)

### Conwy

TIC  
 Muriau Buildings  
 Rosehill Street  
 LL32 8LD  
**01492 577566**  
[conwytic@conwy.gov.uk](mailto:conwytic@conwy.gov.uk)

### For information on public transport links contact:

**Traveline Cymru** [www.travelinecymru.info](http://www.travelinecymru.info)  
 Tel: **0871 200 22 33**

**Conwy Valley Rail** [www.conwyvalleyrailway.co.uk](http://www.conwyvalleyrailway.co.uk)

**Arriva Trains Wales** [www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk](http://www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk)