

Fact file Traws Eryri

Distance: Full route is 200km (125 miles), with 4,710m of ascent. We tested a slightly longer version.

Route: Across Eryri from south to north. Machynlleth to Conwy via Mawddach Estuary, Coed y Brenin, Betws-y-Coed and Bethesda. A mix of forest tracks, bridleways, byways and quiet roads.

Conditions: Warm and dry. Rugged terrain in places.

Getting there: Machynlleth and Conwy both have train stations. There are others at Blaenau Ffestiniog, Betws-y-Coed and Bangor.

Accommodation: We stayed at Treks Bunkhouse in Llan Ffestiniog and The Rocks hostel in Capel Curig.

Bikes & kit: Hardtail mountain bikes were ideal. Gravel bikes would be possible but involve more pushing. Bikepacking bags recommended to avoid pannier racks rattling loose. Pack light!

Maps/guides: OS Landrangers 135, 124 and 115. There will be a route guide on the Cycling UK website.

I'm glad I had: Low gears, swimming stuff

Next time I would: Include a few more detours on the MTB trails through the forest trail centres

Further info: Be the first to hear when the route launches at the end of August and get the chance to win £280 worth of Alpkit bikepacking gear: [experience.cyclinguk.org/traws-eryri-learn-more](https://www.cyclinguk.org/traws-eryri-learn-more)

This photo: Riding through the spectacular Nant Ffrancon valley en route to Bethesda. The pass was used in the 1968 film Carry On up the Khyber



tackle the steep climbs and some of the more rocky descents without a fully loaded bike made a huge difference. With our guide Polly leading the way, we knew we were in safe hands.

It was a good job we had refuelled, as immediately afterwards we were faced with a punishingly steep climb on a tiny lane up Cwm Mynach, which translates as Valley of the Monks (although we didn't spot a monastery). Polly's local knowledge came in handy for a few short detours to incorporate some of the mountain bike trails at Coed y Brenin.

This sparked some discussion about the different ways of riding Traws Eryri. At one end of the scale, you could do it as a fully loaded bikepacking trip, sticking to the main route along the forest tracks. At the other end, you could ride it supported and spend some more time exploring the more technical trails at the various trail centres along the route. I found myself wanting to try it both ways, for two entirely different experiences.

ICE CREAMS IN BETWS-Y-COED

That second morning, Eryri blessed us with crisp September sunshine and ever-changing patterns of light and shade on the hills as we climbed a lane curving up the valley, taking frequent opportunities for a breather to turn back and admire the view. The bit we couldn't see, hiding behind the hill to our left, was Manod Quarry.

During WW2, the underground chambers of the quarry acted as a repository for the National Gallery, with priceless artworks evacuated from London and hidden deep in the mines, safe from German bombs, a secret arrangement that continued into the Cold War. The Llwybr Llechi Eryri (Snowdonia Slate Trail) walking route passes through the old quarry, and Cycling UK is in discussions about potential landowner permissions for the Traws Eryri trail to follow the same line. Riding through here would be an incredibly atmospheric way to appreciate the impact that slate mining has had on the landscape of this area. For now, though, we skirted around the quarry on the road to reach Penmachno.

No time for a rest on the other side: we had to push on up another bottom-gear climb into the forest. We were aiming for lunch in Betws-y-Coed, which didn't look far, but the constant ups and downs of the forest tracks made progress slower than expected. We were relieved when Phill appeared to meet us (along with trail dog Suki), saying we didn't have to make it that far as he had sandwiches for us around the corner.

Finally, we made it to Betws-y-Coed for a mid-afternoon ice cream. The square bustling with people was a bit of a shock, having seen almost no one all day. We were staying just a few miles away in Capel Curig but the straight-line option would have been too easy. We had another climb waiting