

My Favourite Ride 8

An Alpine Adventure. Lost Lanes Wales #6

A circular ride starting and finishing at Bala N Wales.

Distance 34 miles. Total ascent 2,550 feet. Max elevation 1800 feet.
Terrain: Lanes, B Roads and hills, oh yes! Hard.

This ride starts at a car park near the Fire Station (The Green) LL23 7NG,
Google Plus Code WC64+X7 Bala.

This is a hard ride with some steep climbs but worth the effort, a magnificent route with magnificent views. We have done this twice on our visit to N Wales exploring the wonderful Lost Lanes routes. Starting and finishing in Bala which sits at the end of Llyn Tegid, the highest natural lake in Wales.

My first ever visit to Bala was in April 1967, it was an outward bound course for a week (Friday to Friday) at the Urdd campus on the shore of the lake. On the Saturday afternoon 15-Apr-1967 I was on the lake for a sailing lesson, an experience I will remember for the rest of my life! On this day and at this time Wales were playing England at Cardiff Arms Park, an 18 year old Keith Jarret made his sensational debut for Wales at Full Back, Keith played at centre for Newport but was selected at Full Back because he was a prolific goal kicker and Wales were sadly lacking a kicker at the time. He scored 19 points, a try, two penalties and five conversions in a 34-21 victory which equaled the Welsh points scoring record at that time for a debut. I remember the scores being shouted across the lake, boat to boat as the game progressed, but that is not all I remember, oh no! This was 1967, Risk Assessments and Wet Suits were not applicable, I was in shorts and a rugby jersey, soaking wet, freezing cold and far from home. I vowed then to never, ever, to go on a sailing boat ever again!

Back to the current time and this ride: From the car park we turn left onto the B4391 and follow this road across the river, passing Pen Y Bont Caravan park and shortly afterwards is a right turn and this is where the ride begins with an ascent of Cwm Hirnant. The first village on the route is Rhos-y-gwaliau and the field downstream of the village is where the first recorded sheepdog trials took place in 1873, ten sheepdogs competed in front of several hundred spectators. After the village the lane climbs through pine forests that line the steep valley, after the forest the road rounds a bend and the rest of the climb is revealed, a narrow road cut into the heather covered hillside that continues all the way up to the pass, there follows a high speed descent to the shores of Lake Vyrnwy.

Vyrnwy was the first of Wales's upland valleys to be dammed and flooded to provide a water supply to English cities in Victorian times; in this case it was the homes and factories of Liverpool.

The 11 mile circuit of the lake on the B4393 is a flat road offering some welcome respite after the big climb. At the far end is the dam completed in 1888, it was a world's first as a stone dam; previously all dams were constructed of massive earth embankments. We cycle over the dam for a well-earned refreshment stop. After refreshments, we continue clockwise on the B4393 as far as Pont Eunant, we go left here over the cattle grid and up, and up to the high point of approx., 1800' and the summit of one of the most challenging road climbs in Britain - Bwlch y Groes. It really is very, very steep and looking down the valley toward Dinas Mawddwy, it has 11 chevrons on the OS map, more than any other British road. It was once called the Hellfire Pass when used by early motor car manufacturers to test prototypes. In the 1970s and 80s, this road featured in the Milk Race, a

precursor to the Tour of Britain. Well we won't be going down that way for sure! After enjoying views from here, we have a long descent down Cwm Cynllwyd and a flat ride along the shore of Llyn Tegid and the Lake railway track back to Bala on the B4403.

Cwm Hirnant, here we go!



Still on the way up



Nearly there!



Arrival at Lake Vyrnwy.



The dam,

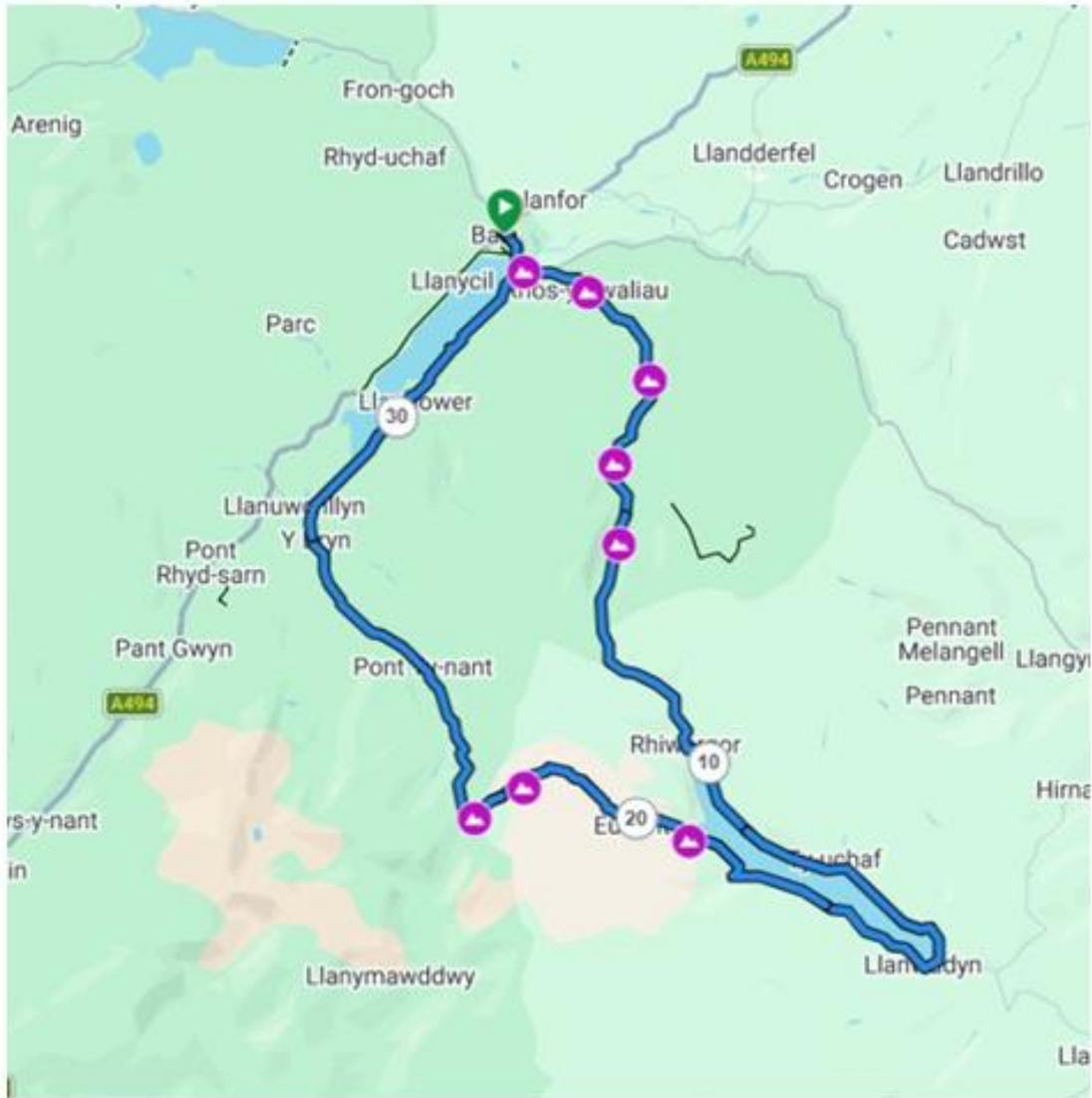


Looking down Bwlch-y-Groes



All downhill from here, everyone smiling now.





Ascent in feet **An Alpine Adventure, Bala – Lake Vyrnwy loop**
 35 miles, 2,550' total ascent

