

A Happy Return

By Peter Salenieks

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I chose to celebrate a happy return to Wales after the easing of the COVID-19 lockdown with my favourite circuit from Pengenffordd. The Dragons Back car park was almost full, although people were spaced well apart on the hill.

The Normans built [Castell Dinas](#) to defend the Rhiangoll pass in the 12th Century, occupying the site of an Iron Age hill-fort.



The Crumbling Walls of Castell Dinas

Whilst only a few crumbling walls now remain, Barbara Erskine pictures how it might have been in Chapter 27 of her novel *Lady of Hay*: “Castell Dinas stood sentinel over the pass. It was an awesome, lonely place... The cold windswept valley was swathed in feeble sunshine as the heavy clouds streamed past, whilst all around them the mountains rose like evil presences, brooding, guarding Dinas and its secrets.”



View from Castell Dinas to the Black Mountains

In contrast, this day wasn't cold, windswept or brooding. A sunny afternoon during which to savour Y Grib, one of the classic ridges in the Black Mountains. Walter Poucher describes the ascent in *The Welsh Peaks*: "Advance along it for about half a mile and then take a direct line for its conspicuous spur seen on the skyline ahead. On attaining its narrow crest, which is embellished here and there by outcropping rocks, climb its sharp undulations..."



Looking from The Cairn On Y Grib Towards Mynydd Troed And The Brecon Beacons

Gliders launched from [Talgarth Airfield](#) at intervals, gaining height during aerotow before being set free to fly overhead and make the most of one of best ridge-soaring and wave-flying sites in Britain.



Glider Below Y Grib

Turning south-east from the top of Y Grib and following an improved path along the Gadair Ridge to Waun Fach, I saw people taking in the summit views. The old trig point no longer remains in place.



The Summit Plateau of Waun Fach

By comparing one of my photographic panoramas to Jonathan de Ferranti's computer-generated [map](#) after the walk, one of my friends identified the two small smudges that corresponded to Snowdon & Crib y Ddysgl – nestled behind Cribin Fawr, between Waun-oer and Maesglase – a distance of 86-miles as the crow flies.



Horse Grazing Below Waun Fach

Horses grazed the slopes beneath the rounded summit, disinclined to move away. Further along, I looked towards Macnamara's Road, which traces a line up Grwyne Fechan valley. I've been treated to colourful accounts of [John Macnamara](#) during walks with my mountaineering club; then there was another sunny day when a small group of us cycled up it on a mountain bikes.



Macnamara's Road Traces A Line Up Grwyne Fechan Valley

A scenic bridleway drops down from the cairn below Pen Truman into the Rhiangoll Valley, where lanes and tracks lead back to the start and an almost empty car park.



Return Track Leads to the Side of Castell Dinas

Though a short walk when judged against the yardstick of mountain days, my calves felt the ascent – about twice as much as any of my local walks during lockdown. A sign that it is time to relearn the muscle memory of a mountaineer.