

BRECON BEACONS

» TRAIL RUNNING

20 OFF-ROAD ROUTES FOR
TRAIL & FELL RUNNERS



Lily Dyu & John Price

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VP First published in 2018 by Vertebrate Publishing.

Vertebrate Publishing, Crescent House, 228 Psalter Lane, Sheffield S11 8UT, United Kingdom.
www.v-publishing.co.uk

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-911342-27-4

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Front cover: Tracy Purnell and Jen Scotney above Llangors Lake [run 5].

Back cover: Jon Drever climbing above Llyn y Fan Fach in the Mynydd Du range [run 16].

Photography by John Coe field unless otherwise credited.



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Design and production by Vertebrate Publishing – www.v-publishing.co.uk

Printed and bound in Europe by Pulsio.

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JOHN PRICE RUNNING UP AND ROUND TOWARDS TABLE MOUNTAIN (RUN 3).

» INTRODUCTION

John, a keen – but very moderate – fell runner, has lived near the Brecon Beacons most of his life after growing up in a Welsh farming family. Always happy to throw himself down a trackless mountainside, this may explain his adulation of shepherd and fell legend, Joss Naylor. Lily ‘comes from off’ – as they say about newcomers – and generally prefers sticking to footpaths. Before moving here, her only experience of the area was climbing Pen y Fan, whose summit view of mountains rising and falling like a petrified wave still takes her breath away after she has lived here for ten years.

We became friends through our running club and have shared many days out on local hills and further afield. For both of us writing this book has been a joy – revisiting favourite trails and discovering new places, and in all seasons.

There are in fact four separate mountain ranges within the Brecon Beacons National Park. The most easterly is the Black Mountains, where long, interlocking ridges and deep river valleys create a sense of isolation. The Brecon Beacons themselves form only the central range, despite giving their name to the whole region. Here a steep escarpment rises above the Usk Valley to form a collection of smooth, rounded summits – the highest in the area. Further to the west lies Fforest Fawr, the ‘Great Forest of Brecknock’ – once a royal hunting ground and today an area of austere, lonely moorland. The most westerly range is the Black Mountain, the wildest and most remote part of the park, home to the brooding peaks of the Carmarthen Fans – Picws Du and Fan Brycheiniog. »

There are also smaller regions with distinct characteristics, the most popular being the 'Waterfall Country' around Ystradfellte, while Mynydd Llangatwg is an expanse of limestone upland, riddled with shake holes, rocky outcrops, cliffs and cave systems. Industrial relics dominate the Bloreng mountain to the south-east, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. To the north of Hay-on-Wye are the Begwns, a National-Trust-owned range of hills, which although relatively low in height, nevertheless command stunning 360-degree views. Contouring through the southern reaches of the park are the tranquil waters of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, possibly the most scenic man-made waterway in Britain.

The area has a vibrant fell running scene and is home to several ultramarathons, including the South Wales 100, an epic circuit of the mountains starting from Cardiff. Perhaps less well known, compared to its sister rounds like the Bob Graham, is the Brecon Beacons Traverse – a 72-mile, 24-hour fell running challenge across the entire range, from Llandeilo in the west to Llanthony in the east.

Through our selection of easy-to-challenging routes in this book, we wanted to share the best of the running and the varied landscapes in the Brecon Beacons, through visiting popular spots but on quieter approaches, and by shining a light on those equally deserving but less well-known places. Even if you have run here before, we hope this book takes you on to trails that you have yet to discover.

Happy running!

John Price & Lily Dyu

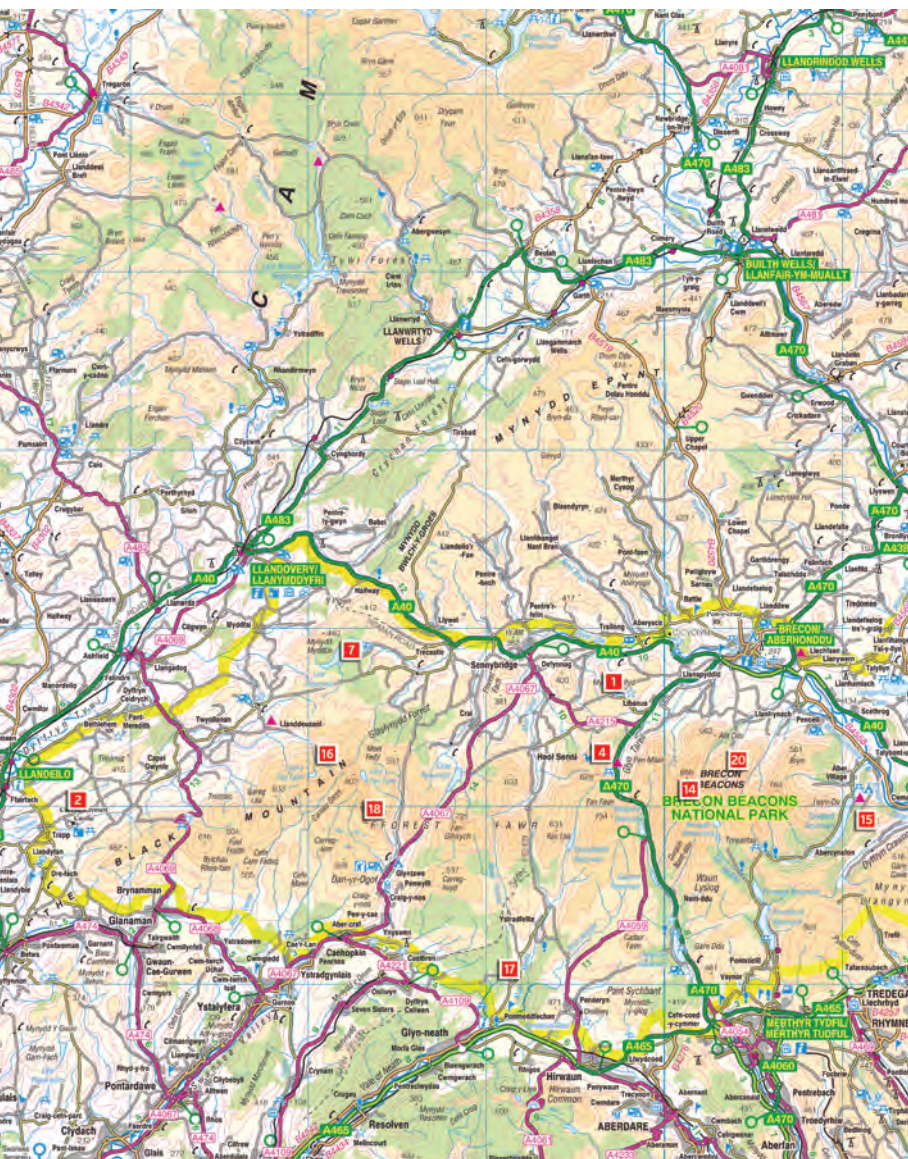


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BRECON BEACONS >> TRAIL RUNNING AREA MAP

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THE TRAILS

We have spent many happy hours choosing our favourite off-road routes in the Brecon Beacons with the aim of showing you the best trails, views and landscapes that the area has to offer. In this selection, there should be something for everyone: easier runs on peaceful common land or around lakeshore; moderate to tough fell runs in the mountains, immersing you in the region's varied terrain; and longer, more challenging circuits taking in the superb ridges, summits, escarpments and waterfalls of the national park. Apologies if we have not included your own favourite; we have chosen twenty and could have included many more!

Be prepared for rain, mist, bog and mud – this is Wales! But when the skies are blue, the mountains are glowing in the afternoon sun and a red kite is wheeling and mewing overhead, you won't wish to be running anywhere else in the world.



JEN SCOTNEY AND JON DREVER ON THE DRAGON'S BACK RIDGE [RUN 12].





THE STUNNING BACKDROP TO THE FINAL DESCENT OF THE CARMARTHEN FANS ROUTE (RUN 16).



JON DREVER AND TRACY PURNELL ON MYNYDD ILLTUD COMMON.

INTRODUCTION

This is an easy and beautiful run on the common land around the national park visitor centre. While short in distance, it packs in spectacular, far-reaching views, and the terrace outside the excellent tearooms is an inviting place to refuel afterwards. The route visits the remains of an Iron Age hill fort sitting atop the grassy mound of Twyn y Gaer. It's easy to see why our ancestors picked this natural defensive spot to settle – there are huge, widescreen views towards Pen y Fan and Corn Du, while the northern slopes of the Black Mountains and the snaking River Usk are also visible.

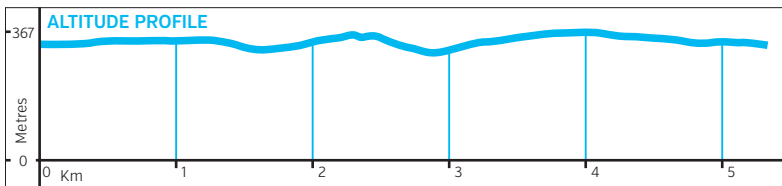
Mynydd Illtud is one of several commons purchased by the National Park Authority to conserve the open landscape. These are a remnant of the medieval manorial system where crops were grown on areas with better soil, and the poorer land was used for grazing and local people

had rights to use the common land. Commoners' rights are unchanged today, while visitors can enjoy an abundance of wildlife, such as red kites, larks, wheatears and colourful butterflies.

For keen runners, staff in the centre will show you other routes that can easily be tagged on to this one, perhaps venturing to the nearby nature reserve of Traeth Mawr or on to neighbouring Cefn Llechid common.

THE ROUTE

From the visitor centre you follow easy tracks over open common, enjoying superb views of the mountains. A short climb on a grassy hillside brings you to the ancient hill fort and trig point with 360-degree views. From here there is a lovely descent before following the boundary of the common back to the start.



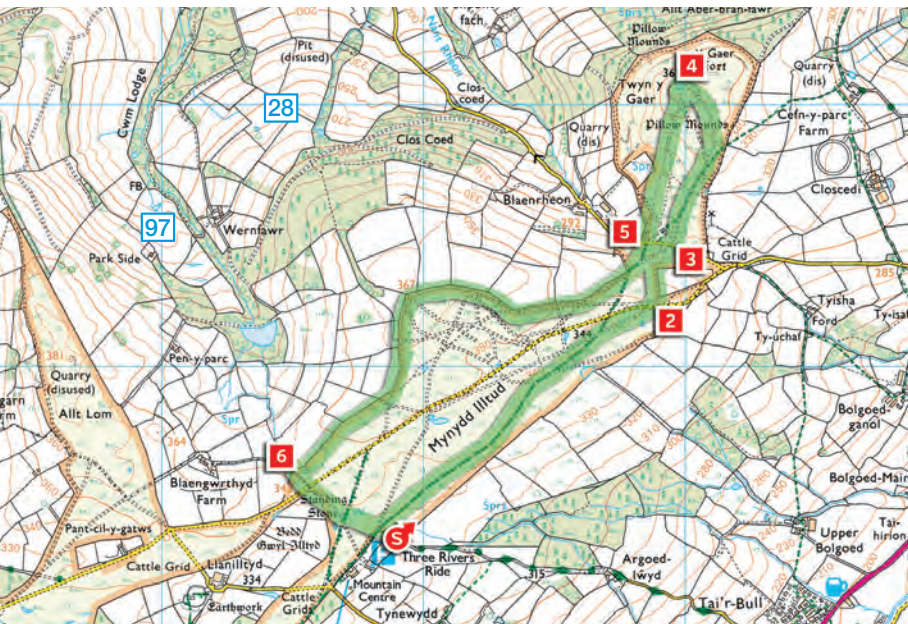
>> MYNYDD ILLTUD COMMON



DISTANCE 5.3KM >> **ASCENT** 100M >> **MAX ALTITUDE** 367M >> **TYPICAL TIME** 0:40 HRS >> **TERRAIN** GOOD TRACKS ON OPEN COMMON LAND >> **NAVIGATION** 1 - EASY >> **START/FINISH** PAY CAR PARK AT BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK VISITOR CENTRE, LIBANUS >> **GRID REF** SN 978263 >> **SATNAV** LD3 8ER >> **OS MAP** EXPLORER OL12 BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK WESTERN AREA, OR LANDRANGER 160 BRECON BEACONS >> **REFRESHMENTS** TEAROOMS IN VISITOR CENTRE.

DIRECTIONS >> MYNYDD ILLTUD COMMON

- 5** Go through the gate at the far (north-east) end of the car park on to the common. There are several paths radiating out from here, but take the widest one that continues **straight ahead**, parallel with the fence to the right. On the right, there are exceptional views of Pen y Fan and ahead to the Black Mountains. **Ignore** any paths off to the left and right. The track goes through an area of gorse and eventually passes to the left of a small marshy pond. Soon after, the track emerges on to a clearing and meets a minor tarmac road. Ahead to the left you can see the hill of Twyn y Gaer and its trig pillar.
- 2** Cross the road and follow the path to the left of the fence, descending to another minor road.
- 3** Cross the road and take the grassy path that climbs ahead and up the **right-hand side** of the hill to the Iron Age fort and trig pillar. Make a note of the other track to the left, on which you will descend. Remains of ditches are still evident around the summit and you can look down into the Usk Valley as well as enjoy superb mountain views.
- 4** You can vary your route back by taking the path to the right of your ascent, which is almost directly south and looks towards Pen y Fan from the top. After 50m from the trig pillar, you cross a track and shortly after this the path splits, both options dropping down the hillside. Take the track **on the right** that descends towards the left of some trees and crosses a stream before reaching the road.
- 5** Cross the road to a signpost. Follow the bridleway sign for the *Mountain Centre* but after about 10m the path forks. Here **fork right** to join a track next to the fence. Follow the wall/fence boundary of the common all the way around until eventually you meet a farm access track just after passing a small pond on your left. (You can also cut across the common, back to the Mountain Centre at any point.)
- 6** **Turn left** on to the farm access track then cross the road and **continue ahead**. At a large stone, **take the left fork** to follow a path the short distance back to the start.



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