

A New Welsh Mountain?

While there is no good dictionary definition of a mountain, it is usually regarded in mountaineering circles that any elevation in the UK should exceed 2000ft in order to be considered. Over the years many people have attempted to catalogue the British and Irish hills. Perhaps the most well-known is Sir Hugh Munro who in 1891 catalogued all the Scottish mountains of 3000ft or over and this list now bears his name. The first list of 2000ft mountains in England or Wales was published in 1925 by Carr and Lister and many authors have followed since (Handout 1). Currently used lists are those of John and Anne Nuttall (The Nuttalls) and of Alan Dawson (The Hewitts). Climbing the Munros has become a popular challenge, often taking aspirant baggers a lifetime to achieve. For those living South of the border though, it has become popular to climb all the mountains of England and Wales that are 2000ft or over. This may appear at first sight to be a less ambitious target, but there are more of them and they represent a challenge to even the fittest athletes.

As the activity of mountain-walking has evolved, enthusiasts have, not unreasonably, sought confirmation that all the 2000ft mountains in England and Wales have been identified and that the lists they are aspiring to complete are indeed accurate and comprehensive. It had been many years since the discovery of a new 2000ft mountain, which is hardly surprising considering that the country has been accurately mapped by the Ordnance Survey. But in 2006 we found, following a comprehensive survey, that Birks Fell in the Yorkshire Dales exceeded the magic height. This was achieved using a Leica automatic level to survey to the summit from a trig point 2km to the South. The result was subsequently confirmed by the Ordnance Survey.

There are very few summits in Wales that are just below 2000ft and which if re-surveyed might meet this criterion. We found just six between 1990 ft and 1999ft (607m – 609m) and only two of these hills have trig points conveniently situated nearby from which we could line-survey, as we had done for Birks Fell. One of these, Y Garn (Glan-hafon), we had previously line-surveyed and found it to be only 607.8m and the other, Mynydd Troed (609.1m), has the trig point on the summit itself. Of the remainder, two, Craig Fach and Mynydd Graig Goch, given as 609m (1998 ft) on OS maps were very close to the 609.6m (2000ft) criterion, offered most promise and as a bonus they are located within a 45min drive of one another. Craig Fach is located above Pen-y-Pass on the road from Penygwryd to Llanberis and Mynydd

On Craig Fach



Courtesy John Nuttall

Graig Goch is located at the Western end of the Nantlle ridge above the village of Nebo south of Caernarfon. (More on Welsh hill and mountain names is given in Handout 2)

We next required a method of determining height to a level of accuracy of but a few centimetres. A consultancy with James Whitworth at Leica Geosystems confirmed that the company's SmartRover 1200 GPS system was the equipment of choice and would give us results well within our desired specification. A date was then agreed with Leica for the use of the equipment and the expertise to operate it.

Sheltering beneath the summit tor of Mynydd Graig Goch



Courtesy John Nuttall

The survey took place on Monday 11 August in poor weather that deteriorated during the day. Nevertheless, the survey, which was conducted with the cooperation of the Snowdonia National Park Authority and Clwb Mynydda Cymru, was a complete success. Craig Fach proved to be only 608.75m high, but Mynydd Graig Goch was found to be 609.75m (2000.49ft). So the survey confirmed that Wales has a new 2000ft mountain. Despite the poor weather, the equipment performed perfectly and even in wind and rain it was easy to set up and operate.

For those wishing to climb Mynydd Graig Goch a separate sheet (Handout 3) is provided that discusses points of access and possible places to park a car.

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