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# The Ancient Tree Hunt

## Welcome to the Ancient Tree Hunt

([www.AncientTreeHunt.org.uk](http://www.AncientTreeHunt.org.uk)) and our new Great Yews of Wales Tree Trail. The idea of the trail is to highlight the spectacular wealth of ancient trees found in Wales by providing a national tree trail. Wales has many types of ancient trees but we have decided to concentrate on yew trees not only because of their great age (some are believed to be thousands of years old) but also because of their cultural significance.

On the map are twelve fantastic examples ranging from the yews at Discoed and Llangernyw which are believed to be as old as the pyramids to the remarkable Bleeding yew of Nevern and the wonderful Aberglasny yew tunnel.

The trail can be started at any point and doesn't necessarily need to be followed in order. Those who follow the trail will witness many magnificent ancient trees and some of Wales' most spectacular scenery along the way. You could say it offers a journey through time – you can stand next to trees which were possibly full grown in the Bronze age and others that definitely pre-date Christianity – as well as a rich cultural experience. **Enjoy!**

### Acknowledgements and links

Many thanks to the Ancient Yew Group for helping us put this trail together

[www.ancient-yew.org](http://www.ancient-yew.org)

Many thanks also to Archie Miles, Tim Hills and Edward Parker for the use of their photographs

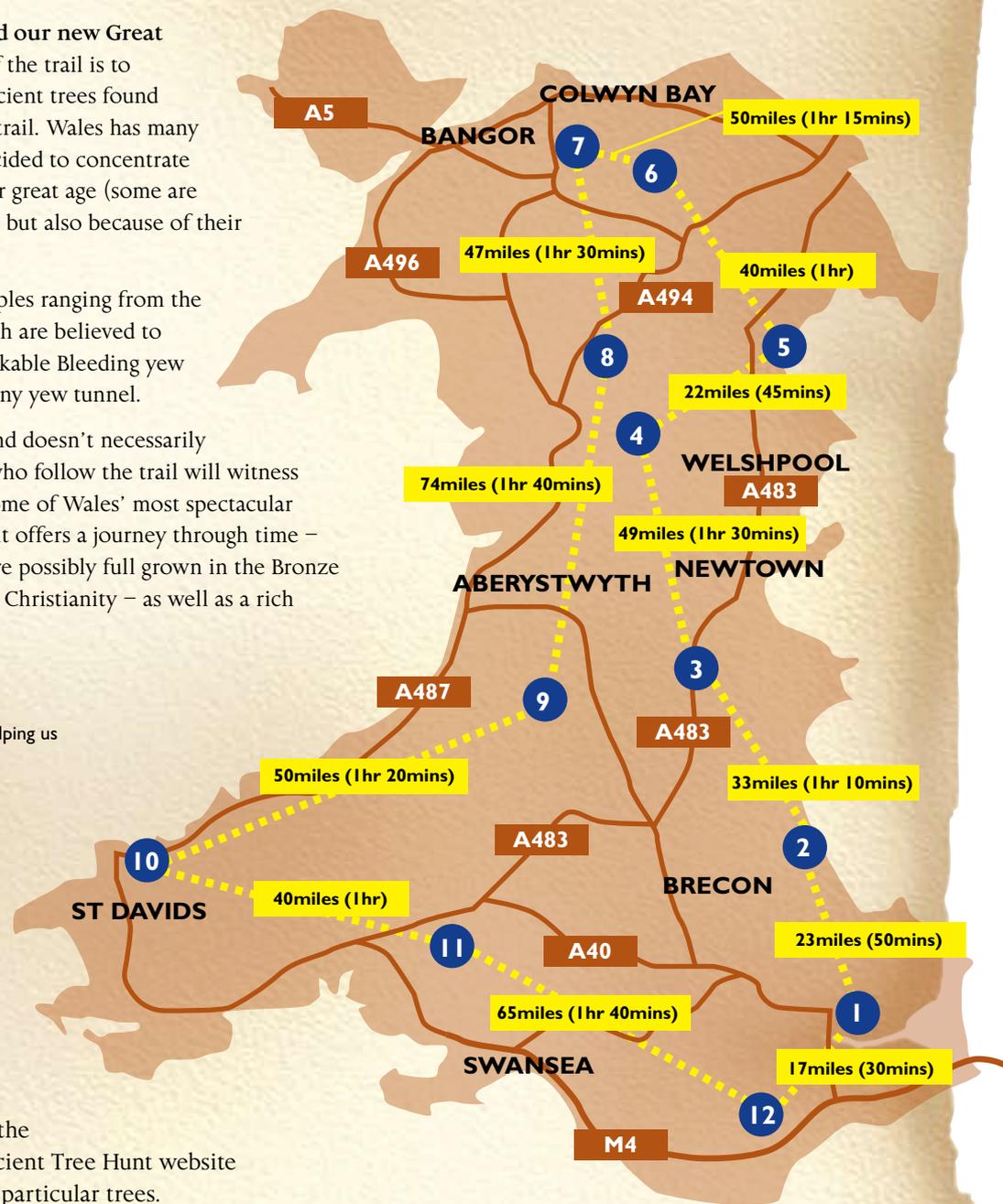
### Useful Books

*The Heritage Trees of Britain and Northern Ireland* – Stokes and Rodger, Constable Publishers

*A Yew – A History* by Fred Hageneder

The forthcoming *Heritage Trees of Wales* by Archie Miles

You can enter the **tree number** on the following pages, when using the Ancient Tree Hunt website to find location and information on particular trees.



## The Great Yews of Wales Tree Trail

[www.AncientTreeHunt.org.uk](http://www.AncientTreeHunt.org.uk)



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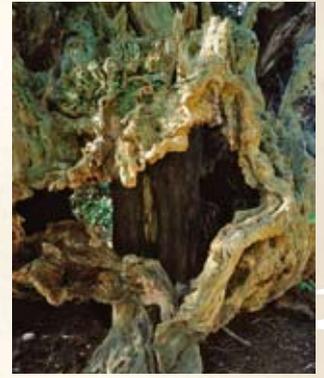
## 1 Betws Newydd

Standing in the grounds of the 15th century church in Bettws Newydd are three exceptional ancient yew trees. The largest, near the entrance gate, is estimated to be at least 2,000 years old. Its weathered outer trunk is in an advanced state of decay but a new trunk is clearly visible in the hollow. This helps it continue on for hundreds, possibly thousands of years. Artistic representations from the 1890s shows that the tree has changed very little over the last 120 years.

*The oldest wooden artefact ever discovered is the tip of a yew spear, unearthed at Clacton-on-Sea, in Essex, which is 150,000 years old.*

### Tree number 5301

Bettws Newydd is a small village about 3½ miles north of Usk and a few miles south of Clytha near Raglan



## 2 Capel-y-ffin

Heading north for less than half an hour takes you to the ancient Capel-y-ffin yews. Here there is a semi-circle of fine yew trees. Because it is close to Offa's Dyke the church has been visited by many pilgrims and some believe even St. David himself. The nearby Llanthony Priory is an excellent stop for tea before continuing north.

*In Britain, the yew longbow was the principal weapon of war for about 500 years, from the time of the Norman Conquest to the end of the 16th°C.*

### Tree number 2871

Turn south off the B4350 in Hay on Wye on to Forest Road and follow for 8 miles.



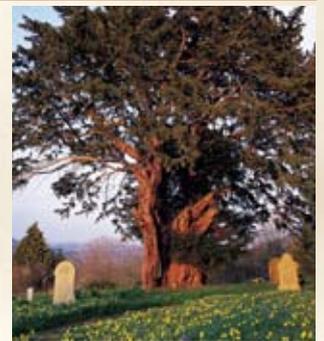
## 3 Discoed yew

Heading north takes you over the dramatic Gospel Pass on and on to the ancient Discoed Yew. A closer look at its exceptional fragmented trunk suggests that it might be one of the oldest trees in all of Wales (and of Europe). In many European cultures yew trees were believed to be immortal – here we might get a sense of why.

*The hollowing of the yew's trunk, doesn't mean that the tree's life is coming to an end but seems to be part of its strategy for survival since it becomes better able to resist strong winds by allowing them to pass through it.*

### Tree number 4059

Discoed is 3 miles west of Presteigne, near B4356



## 4 Llanerfyl

The Llanerfyl Yew is known as the Patriarch Tree. It appears to comprise of four large fragments, three of which are female while the fourth is male. This has aroused much discussion. One theory is that the female parts once formed a single tree that long ago split and fell and that the male is a second tree.

*The genus Taxus dates back 140 million years, while fossils of the common yew (Taxus baccata) have been found that are 15 million years old, making this the oldest tree species in Europe.*

### Tree number 10659

Llanerfyl is 14 miles west of Welshpool on A458



## 5 Llansilin yews

St Cadwaladr's Church in Llansilin is an unforgettable churchyard because it has the largest gathering of ancient yews in one place in Wales. There is evidence to suggest that sacred sites in Wales were once graced with many yew trees often in a circle.

*The Romans believed that the yew gave the souls of the dead safe passage to the after-life, while the Saxons planted thousands of yew trees in Britain to mark the interment of their dead.*

### Tree number 10350

Llansilin is 6 miles west of Oswestry on B4580



## 6 Nantglyn

In the churchyard of St. James parish church, Nantglyn, stands an ancient yew tree whose hollowing trunk has been turned into an impromptu pulpit. Rough steps made of local slate have been fashioned to lead up to the elevated platform. Legend has it that sermons were preached from here including one by John Wesley, founder of Methodism.

*The two main threats to yews in the wild are habitat destruction and the hunt for taxanes – the tumour-active chemicals extracted from yews for the global pharmaceutical market.*

### Tree number 3473

Nantglyn is roughly five miles south of Denbigh on the B5435.



**7 Llangernyw yew**

This tree is widely considered to be the oldest living tree in Wales and thought by some to be up to 4,000 years old. This gives us the astonishing notion that the tree could have been alive during the Bronze age and could be older than the great pyramid of Giza. The tree is found in the grounds of St Digain's Church in the charming village of Llangernyw, in the County Borough of Conwy.

*Yew 'fruits' form a quarter of the autumn diet of song thrushes.*

**Tree number 5126**

Llangernyw is on the A548 about half way between Abergele and Llanrwst



**8 Pennant Melangell yews**

Four magnificent yew trees, the oldest thought to be up to 2,000 years old, stand in the graveyard of the small village of Pennant Melangell. The village takes its name from The legend of the Irish princess and the hare in which Pennant the name of the hunting area and Melangell the mysterious Irish princess found hiding out with the wild animals there.

*Britain has the largest number of ancient yew trees in Western Europe.*

**Tree number 5101**

Pennant Melangell lies 2 miles west of the village of Langynog on the B4391



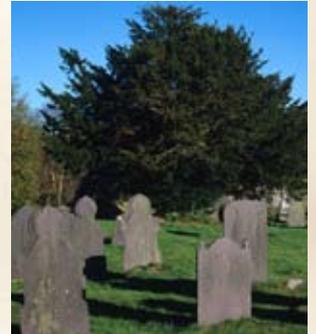
**9 Strata Florida – Dafydd ap Gwilym's yew**

The Cistercian Abbey at Strata Florida in Cardiganshire was founded in 1184. The abbey was known to have been surrounded by 39 great yew trees as late as the 16th century; however, by the end of the 19th century only two remained. The larger is female and stands by a stone wall next to the chapel. Now only two remain, under one of which it is believed Dafydd ap Gwilym, the greatest poet of medieval Wales, is buried.

*In ancient Greece, both Homer and Virgil noted that the best bows were made of yew wood.*

**Tree number 12810**

The abbey is about a mile east of the village of Pontrhydfendigaid, on the B4343



**10 The Bleeding yew of Nevern**

The Bleeding yew of Nevern while unremarkable in terms of age is remarkable for the spectacle of a blood-like fluid that oozes from a wound on the tree. There are a variety of myths associated with the rather realistic bleeding attracting Christian and Pagan pilgrims alike. The Christian story says that the tree bleeds every year in sympathy with Christ.

*Yew trees occur from Norway in the north to the mountains of North Africa in the south, and from Ireland in the west to the western Himalayas in the east.*

**Tree number 11075**

The yew stands in St. Brynach's Church in Nevern, on the B4582 approximately 8 miles from Fishguard



**11 Aberglasney yew tunnel**

The yew tunnel is thought to be unique in the UK. As the yews grew, their branches were trained to arch over until they touched the ground forming an arch. Over the years the branches have become entwined and fused making it difficult to work out exactly how many trees make up an extraordinary organic sculpture.

*The genus Taxus dates back 140 million years, while fossils of the common yew (Taxus baccata) have been found that are 15 million years old, making this the oldest tree species in Europe.*

**Tree number 27625**

The gardens are approximately 10 miles east of Camarthen signposted off the A40. The Gardens are owned by the Aberglasney Trust and open to the public. Charges apply.



**12 Myny-ddeslwyn yews**

At Mynyddeslwyn in Monmouthshire 5 great yews grow in a remarkable circular site a thousand feet above sea level. Adjoining the churchyard is a tumulus known as Twyn Tudur (Tudor's Mound). Unusually, each tree is surrounded by a low stone wall.

*For centuries, yew branches were used as a substitute for the 'palm fronds' displayed on Palm Sunday.*

**Tree number 79469**

Mynyddislwyn is approximately 3 miles north of Wattsville. Turn north off the B4048 along Troed y Rhiw road

