

BEDDGELERT FOREST: Llywelyn's Loop

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Beddgelert had been patiently waiting in the wings for six months. I'd even come out to Snowdonia with the hope of completing this circuit once before, but Mr Russell and I had plumped for a route from the Chapel over to Dolwydellan and round via Betws. It was with an eagerness and anticipation that I arrived in Beddgelert forest and parked the car, assembled my bike and hoped that the skies which were overcast and overhead didn't rain all over me.

Earlier in the week, I had spoken to a person at Coed y Brenin about this trail, and their reaction had concerned me when they suggested that there wasn't much left of this circuit. I had hoped that this wouldn't be the case, although at the same time I wondered how a trail could "have little left" had someone popped in to the forest perhaps and thought, oooh, that bit of rock strewn path would go well with the azaleas.....I think I'll cart that off back to the car in my rather fortuitously empty rucksack? What could have been taken away or now be missing? Or is it simply that the trail had fallen into disrepair through lack of use?

For my own part, I had done some digging around and from what I could discern back in the early days of mountain biking this trail was a feature in the Welsh Cross Country Mountain Bike Series, and indeed it was mentioned in my guidebook. However, it appeared that access and landownership issues had arisen and the event was no longer held here. It is possible also, of course, that other venues may have been favoured as they were themselves developed, but this is simply my own conjecture. Regardless, apparently the access issues were now resolved and the circuit was mine to try. As it turned out, I didn't bump into another mountain biker, although I passed by a few walkers during my day.

Starting out at the car park I headed along fire roads trying to correlate the information in my guidebook with that of the map and the countryside around me. Unfortunately, despite my ability to cover seemingly the same ground two or three times, I still maintained a skill developed over many years, that of getting somewhere and then wondering if perhaps, I should be somewhere else.

Still, despite this balls-up I managed to get to the start of a quite ridiculous climb up to the very far reaches of Cwm Du. This long, slow, blistering uphill eventually brought me, wind battered and cold to the crest from where the descent began in earnest just beneath Mynydd Drws y Coed.



I set off less than fortuitously on a slight downhill, through pools of water laced with frog spawn and the occasional branch or tree to avoid. It was at this point that the words uttered by the Forestry Warden came back to me, was I going to find just occasional bits of a trail here at Beddgelert? Soon I would have my answer.

After only a few more minutes of this the trail started a true descent. The bike and I dropped like a stone, instantaneously our speed picked up out of nowhere and I found it harder and harder to keep the speed under control. Down this track we hurtled, and with the lack of any restraint on speed, my control over the bike and our course started to slip too, worrying in the best of circumstances, but now as the track offered me only narrow ruts to cycle down my concern was that the bike would shift its heading slightly, we would bounce off the side of the rut and then with what I'm sure to any onlooker would appear like consummate ease I would probably take a brief flying lesson with my crossbar being a likely landing strip. It turned out that I would be spared this particular fate and at its end the track forked and I came to a stop here with the smell of my brakes wafting past me.

A cycle along from the end of the descent and I found my way turned left off down onto a section of singletrack.

This particular section was not, however, singletrack in any sense already experienced anywhere else. This was different, it was without doubt special. It was a truly testing experience, it left no room for error, it was undoubtedly the most technical singletrack I believe I have ever ridden and this at the end of a week when I searched ever more fervently for tracks with increased technical difficulty.

This trail had you cycling through a stream in places, flying down the track elsewhere and in other sections you were required to haul back on the brakes and tease your bike through a particularly tricky section.



The trail continued, more singletrack, fire roads, some doubletrack that was bumpy and bouncy and great fun – watch out for the closed gate at its end though! Then off past Beics Beddgelert on fire road round to another section of singletrack at which point you would undoubtedly take one look at the track and then get your guidebook out once more to have a double take as you might struggle to conceive this was indeed the right turn off.

However, you are definitely on the right track, even though the start of it has you off the back of your saddle staring straight ahead at the ground which suddenly seems an awfully long way away and hoping for the best. The track now takes you up past Beics Beddgelert once more and then up the bumpy bouncy track a little way too until you see a singletrack section on your right.

It was whilst trying to navigate my way down this that I suddenly encountered resistance through my pedals. Naturally I gently tried to work out the problem using logic and deductive reasoning, which manifested itself physically as me forcing as much pressure through the pedals as I could and trying to blast my way out of whatever it was that was slowing me down.

When the pedals came to a dead stop I thought it might be prudent to have a look at whatever the problem could be and it was then that I saw the bit of tree branch stuck in the back of my bike. It wasn't that far from where my rear

derailleur should have been which I found odd as normally derailleurs don't move too much, and I was quite perturbed to find it now closer to my seat than its more useful position, that of being in the general area of the chain.

Shit.

Which was one of the words I now utilised to vent my spleen. I quickly performed a technique I had read about by transferring the bike into single speed and attached the de-railed derailleur to my bike. It really was a pity that this was about as effective as a chocolate fire guard, so I attempted to look like I knew what I was doing as I passed some workers and then struggled my way, short as it was to the car.

Beddgelert forest is a superb track with probably the best section of technical singletrack I have ever ridden, go there and try it, it really is worth it.