Brace yourself for a varied and challenging walk up and over peaks from Cadair Idris’ quiet side. **Kate Worthington** takes the lead...

**Cadair Idris from the west**

Cadair Idris. Cader Idris. Penygadair (or indeed, Pen y Gadair)? An array of titles for this majestic peak, rising so stupendously from the lowlands of the Afon Mawddach (Mawddach Estuary) to its north west and the Dyfi Forest to its south east. From the quiet and more arboreal hamlet of Llynhafangel-y-pennant, the mountain’s smoother western flanks keep secret its impressive set of glacial cwms and northern scarp slopes. A longer day out could take in a linear walk from east to west along Penygadair’s spine, but this more modest loop allows for topping out on its highest point at 893m, via Mynydd Pencoed. After an impressive effort of the legs to rise out of the valley, you are rewarded with a high level and rocky parade above Llyn Cau to reach the summit, Penygadair.

Even Snowdonia National Park is undecided as how to refer to this grand mountain: does the ‘cadair’ name imply that the legendary giant Idris sat atop the summit in his ‘chair’ to ponder heaven, or maybe ‘cader’ refers to the giant’s fortress or stronghold. Once standing aloft on the summit or ‘top/head of’ Penygadair, as it is spelled on OS maps, you’ll also see why this location is spot-on for surveying the Welsh landscape around you. For here, you stand in the footsteps of giants...
ROUTE STATISTICS

Distance 15.5km (9½ miles)
Total ascent 964m
Time 7 hours
Start/finish Llynfachangel-y-pennant car park (SH672088)
Nearest town Tywyn
Terrain farmland; rocky/grassy slopes; high mountain plateau
Maps OS Explorer 1:25,000 OL23; OS Landranger 1:50,000 124; Harvey Superwalker 1:25,000 Cadair Idris

Accommodation
Grac Wen (camping, bunkhouse, cottages, self-catering), near Dolgellau (01341) 250482
Public transport Lloyds Coaches (01654) 702100 (only to Aberynolwyn)
Guidebook Great Mountain Days in Snowdonia: 40 classic routes exploring Snowdonia by Terry Marsh, pb Cicerone Press
Tourist info Cadair Idris Visitor Centre & Tea Room 0300 665 3000
Best cafe Caffi'r Ceunant, Aberynolwyn (at the base of Cadair Idris) (01654) 782372

1. SH672088 From the car park follow the village lane north for around 400m until a public right of way path is marked off to the right (ignore other signs for ‘Cader Idris’ – they are your descent route). Gently rise and then contour above Afon Cader. After crossing the lower reaches of Nant Pencoed, you’ll start to gain height towards the open fell, above Pencoed farm building.

2. SH685110 After crossing astile to the right of the building, you now have 400m to gain to Mynydd Pencoed. There is not much of a path here on the ground, and in poor visibility you might want to take a compass bearing towards the hill’s summit area. On a clear day you can see your best line up the broad shoulder, all the while gaining height through rocks and grass. You’ll meet a line of fence posts rising from your right at 670m.

3. SH696113 Mynydd Pencoed: what a treat to gain this height now! It’s a really lovely progression along this high ground in a north-easterly direction towards Craig Cwm Amarch and a cairn at 791m. It’s pleasant walking in good weather, but is very much exposed to the elements if its windy!

4. SH701021 From this fine viewpoint, a great deal of Cadair Idris’ east-west traverse can be viewed, over the gaping hole that holds Llyn Cau, towards the summit and east to Mynydd Moel and beyond. Here the very well-established Minffordd Path clammers up from below, but just on the grassy top here it’s a little ill-defined, so check a bearing for your onward progression, and note the steep drops to Llyn Cau to the east below. Heading north-north-west you’ll soon see evidence again of the good track leading to the summit, hugging Craig Cau’s edge.

5. SH710130 Penygadair summit. A rightful relaxation spot for a giant!

6. SH710135 Otherwise, keep going down the main Pony Path for a further 1km. Descending from the summit, there are a few rocky sections of path that need care when wet, but the track is more defined than your ascent route. More grassy and some boggy ground as you reach a distinct turn in the track, heading south-west.

7. SH791125 The final leg back to your start

There are impressive views to the coast especially, but in poor weather you’ll be thankful for the shelter of a small summit building. Cadair Idris does present challenges in terms of the high summit being so relatively exposed to wind and weather coming from the coast, and the rocky terrain at this level can be greasy when wet. A wonderful Welsh peak, this.