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# MID WALES

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## Bryn Copa

Last updated: 24 November 2005

Find out more about one of the oldest mine workings in Wales where copper from the Cambrian Mountains was mined during the Bronze Age.



**Location:** Approx. 2 km east of the hamlet of Cwmystwyth on the mountain road from Cwmystwyth to Rhayader.

**Grid ref:** SN815755

**Access:** There is a small layby by the bridge over the Nant yr Onnen stream by the side of the road at the foot of Copa Hill. There is no proper path - it is a stiff walk and you need to be reasonably fit.

**Note:** The site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and is legally protected against disturbance or removal of any artefacts. It is absolutely essential therefore that nothing is disturbed in any way or removed. Facilities: There are no visitor facilities.

Bryn Copa near the village of Cwm Ystwyth in Ceredigion is one of the earliest mining sites in Wales. Copper was mined here around 4,000 years ago.

The site has another claim to fame. It was here that the first example of mine drainage was found - with hollowed-out logs being used to take out the water. These are known as 'launder' and examples can be seen at the National Museum and Galleries in Cardiff. Picks made from antler horns have also been found.

The miners themselves were mainly coastal people who worked the mines in the winter and travelled inland to upland pastures in the summer.

If you visit the area, do take care. Copa Hill (to the east of the main Cwmystwyth Mine workings on the north side of the Ystwyth valley) is covered with old shafts, levels and mine tips as well as the remains of channels created by "hushing", a technique used to uncover lead veins.

There is no proper path but you can follow the course of a 19th century grass-covered incline. Turn back on yourself just below the old incline housing and level at the top, and follow the course of the old peat-sled track on your right which snakes its way up the hill, past one small opencast to the plateau above. The prehistoric opencast can be seen above you. A fairly steep walk up, but easily manageable if you are fit.

All the excavations inside the prehistoric opencast are filled in except a small grille-covered hole against the north wall. This is now unsafe and should not be entered under any circumstances.

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A flat stone cairn rests at the foot of the south wall of the quarry and similarly should not be disturbed. Loose cobble hammer-stones can be seen eroding out of the tips below the site, some of them collecting in the gullies in between. These are part and parcel of the site and should not be disturbed or removed.

You can get a very good feel of the location of this early mine site by standing on the rim of the opencast at the front. On a clear day, the views down the valley are superb.

There are other interesting workings to see on the hillside if you follow the contour line from the top of the opencast, walking northwards around the hill following the line of an ancient leat channel (Medieval or earlier). Most of these other workings are post-medieval in date, and similarly part of the same protected Scheduled Ancient Monument.

#### your comments

##### **Morris Woodberry**

I agree with every thing written above, when the weather is good this hidden area of mid-Wales is well worth slowly driving around. There are some interesting walks to be had all over the place in and around the Elan valley.

Mon Aug 24 16:26:56 2009

##### **Colin Warren, Surrey**

I worked in this area in the 70,s and 80's and found the valley and mine area to have a special eerie character similar to Glen Coe. In the 70,s the rusted seperation plant was still there but I believe it has since been removed.

Sun Jul 19 18:58:26 2009

##### **Christoph Bull of Chalk in Kent**

I first saw the mine remains at Cymystwyth in 2003 - very surprising to come across the remains. We had to stop the car and get out to look. I found your article very interting and informative, so very well done. I find these abandoned mines and settlements one of the most fascinating things about Wales - we have very little of such a nature in Kent.

Mon Jun 2 09:23:41 2008

##### **Paul Kendrick, Cardiff**

I have regularly travelled on the mountain road from Rhayader to Aberystwyth in the last 35 years the solitude and beauty of the Cwmystwyth valley have never ceased to amaze me. The remains of our industrial and ancient past which is Cwmystwyth lead mine, does come as a surprise as you reach the lower end of this valley. However its scars which are inbedded in the landscape do not detract for me what must be the nearest thing to heaven on earth. I would recommend that for anyone visiting Wales this has to be a must see trip. If you decide to venture down this road you must also take the detour along the way to see ! the Elan valley dams all five of them. You will also be able to visit the elan valley visitor centre which tells you about the local history of this beautiful area. For anyone who wants to explore and walk the hills and mountains that shadow this valley I would suggest obtaining one of George Borrow's books from their local library. George Borrow was an 18th century Englishman who fell in love with this area of Wales and has written extensively of its beauty and the walks that can be made in this area.

Thu Nov 16 09:38:59 2006

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