



## Fforest Glyn Cothi Cultural Heritage Project

The Fforest Glyn Cothi Cultural Heritage Project set up by the Brechfa Forest and Llanllwni Mountain Tourism Cluster raises awareness of the traditional lifestyle of forest dwellers and the built and natural heritage sites within Brechfa Forest, Llanllwni Mountain and the communities which encircle them.

You can find information about famous local figures and about spiritual, religious and tourism sites in our literature and on our website:

[www.roam-brechfaforest-llanllwnimountain.co.uk](http://www.roam-brechfaforest-llanllwnimountain.co.uk)

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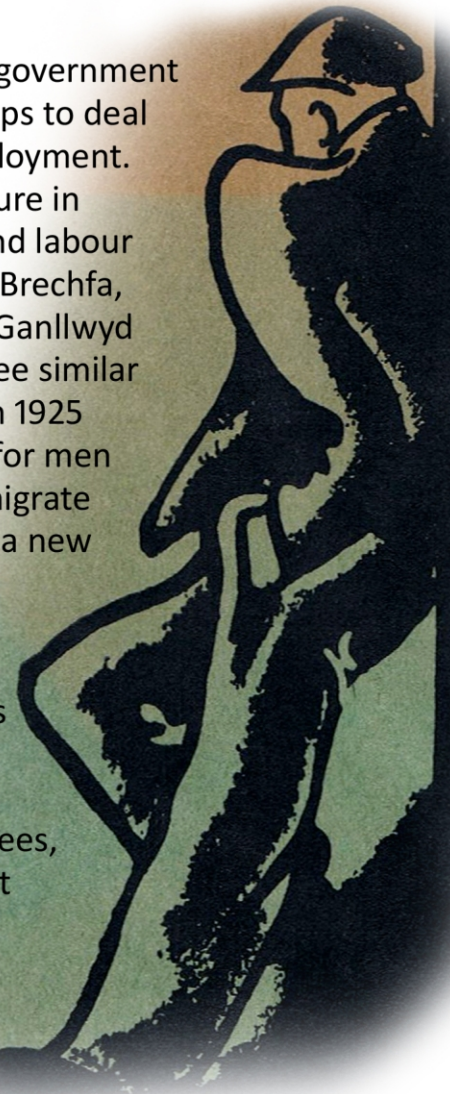


Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Brechfa Labour Camp

In the early 1930s, the government established labour camps to deal with prolonged unemployment. The unemployment figure in Wales was over 40% and labour camps were located at Brechfa, Llansawel, Presteigne, Ganllwyd and Betws-y-Coed. Three similar camps existed earlier in 1925 which offered training for men who were willing to emigrate to the colonies to start a new life.

Wales was the ideal location for such camps where the work was of a very physical nature. Men chopped down trees, prepared land for forest plantation, dug ditches and built roads.





In the 1920's, the British government responded to prolonged high unemployment by moving unemployed men from the worst affected areas to areas in the UK where unemployment was lower. An Industrial Transference Board was formed in 1928 to monitor and control the process and the board brought to the attention of the Ministry of Labour that a 'class' of men existed who were considered to be too 'soft and demoralised through prolonged unemployment' to fit into the scheme. These men were classified as being a danger to the morale of the other men and it was decided that they would be unfit to join the scheme until they had been 'hardened' or 'reconditioned' in Labour camps.

Twenty five labour camps were set up in remote areas of Britain between 1929 and 1939 with more than 200,000 men sent to the camps. The scheme was devised by Baldwin's Tory government, but it was Ramsay MacDonald's Labour Government that built the camps and put the scheme into action. Trade unions supported the establishment of the camps.

The men housed in a camp were provided with food and work clothes and their family continued to receive a proportion of their dole, 9 shillings (45 pence) a week.

Some anecdotes suggest that part of the role of the camps was to bring back to good health men who were suffering from malnutrition. Other anecdotes suggest that camps were a form of forced labour.

The Labour Camps were conducted under military discipline and were run by former policemen and sergeant majors. The men stayed at the centres for three month periods, working for up to nine hours a day. It was not compulsory for men to attend the labour camps, but their dole was stopped if they refused.

Some of the land which had traditionally formed part of the Glyn Cothi Forest and had been developed into small farms over the previous century was purchased by the government to create Brechfa Forest.

Brechfa Forest camps were open from March to October each year. They were used to accommodate men from the Welsh Valleys, who carried out the work of transforming the small farms into conifer plantations and built most of the roads through the forest. The ruins of some of the old farm buildings still exist in the forest today. As opportunities for work increased in the 1930's the camps were closed.

Brechfa camp was not demolished immediately, but went on to be briefly used to house refugees from the Spanish Civil War. There is nothing left of this camp now other than the results of the men's labours and the nicknames for some of the forest roads. The camp near Llansawel is retained as workshops by the Forestry Commission.

