



**Bryniau Clwyd a
Dyffryn Dyfrdwy**
Clwydian Range
and Dee Valley

Awyr Dywyll
Dark Skies

Written in the stars

A guide to constellations and their Welsh tales



Getting started

Whether exploring the night sky from a Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB Discovery Site or simply from your back garden, star constellations, meteor showers and planets are there for you to discover!

Choose a clear night and find a safe outside space ideally away from tall buildings and bright lights. It will take at least 20 minutes for your eyes to properly adapt to the dim light. Light pollution can greatly affect what you can see in the night sky.

At a first glance the night sky can seem a jumble of stars but with a little know-how and practice you will soon be able to pick out the wonders of the night sky.

There's no need to invest in expensive equipment to begin appreciating the stars. Very often, the naked eye or binoculars suffice. However, before you head out here's our stargazer's checklist of things you'll need to keep safe and make the most of your dark sky experience:

- **Warm clothes** – Hat, gloves, and lots of layers!
- **Torch/head torch** – with a red filter (it takes your eyes 20 minutes to adjust to the darkness so turn off your headlights and don't look at your phone)
- **Mobile phone** – Always tell someone where you're going and what time you'll be expected to return
- **Binoculars**
- **Sturdy shoes**
- **Flask with a hot drink**
- **Blanket/roll mat to lie on**
- **Star map**
- **Please keep to the paths** in areas where requested in order to protect the ecology and biodiversity of the area.



Orion – The Hunter

The deity of the winter sun, this constellation rises as winter nights draw in.

Mabon was the only God powerful enough to handle the mighty hunting dog, Drudwyn (represented in the sky by Canis Major, a constellation which includes Sirius – the brightest star in the sky).

Mabon is the Celtic name for the Autumn Equinox and Pagans still celebrate a feast on Mabon to celebrate the harvest and winter about to begin.

Locally you can find the town of Ruabon, which is a form of 'Rhiw Fabon' or Mabon's Hillside'. We can but wonder that Mabon himself roamed this hillside looking at the same stars we see today.



How to find: Orion is a Winter and Spring constellation. The hunters shoulders will start to pop over the horizon towards the end of October. In late November as you look East in the early evening you'll see the famous 3 stars of the hunters belt. In the top left you will see Betelgeuse (meaning 'Giants armpit') and the bottom right you'll see Rigel, marking a knee. These are the two brightest stars of this constellation. Remember to look out for Mabon's hunting dog, marked by the brightest star in our night sky – Sirius.





Taurus – the Bull/Ox

Hu Gadarn was famed for bringing farming to the Cymry and for having tamed a pair of the Earth's strongest beasts, the Ox. He was called to save the good people of the Conwy Valley from a terrifying beast; Yr Afanc (represented by constellation Scorpius).

The Afanc was said to be like a giant beaver, with razor sharp claws and crocodile scales, it brought misery to the people, flooding the valley and destroying crops. Hu Gadarn used his Oxen to pull the monster from Llyn Yr Afanc in the Afon Conwy and dragged it to a lake high up on Yr Wyddfa, Llyn Ffynon Las, where it could cause no more harm.

Sadly, one of the oxen died in the struggle and his soul was placed in the stars as Yr Ych, the mighty Ox.

How to find: Taurus makes its return to our Eastern skies in November, it is a Winter and Spring constellation but is best visible in January. Look directly South at 9pm in January, you'll see Aldebaran, a very bright star that marks the eye of the bull and the star cluster of Pleiades (The Seven Sisters) that represents its body. Top tip; Look at the Pleiades with a pair of binoculars and you will see it's many more stars than you think!



Bootes – The Shepherd/Farmer

Hu Gadarn was the legendary leader of the Cymry appearing in the stories of the Mabinogion. It is said he brought the Welsh people to Britain from 'Deffrobani' (The Summerlands) and taught them to farm, inventing the plough and being the first human to put beast and machine together. This links Hu Gadarn and the Plough.

In Cymraeg, the plough has lots of agriculturally linked names such as 'Jac A'i Wagon', 'Yr Aradr' and 'Yr Haeddel Fawr', all names for a plough.

If you look into the winter sky, you'll see Hu Gadarn behind the Yr Aradr, with yr Ych out in front, pulling the constellations across the night sky.



How to find: Looking East in March, you will see slightly N East of East a very bright star called Arcturus. This is the brightest star of the Bootes constellation. Look for a 'kite' shape left of Arcturus to make up the rest of Hu Gadarn.





Gemini – the Twins

Gwyn & Gwythur

Gemini is known as the twins, but in Welsh legend they are Gwyn and Gwythur, the 'Rivals of May'; a story of two enemies, pitted against each other in a battle for the hand of the beautiful Creudyladd.

Gwythur Ap Greidawl was one of King Arthur's men, being the son of Greidawl Galldonyd, a Knight of the Round Table. He fell in love with Creudyladd, but sadly her evil brother, Gwyn Ap Nudd, stole her away. Gwyn was a deity of the underworld and in legend he signifies winter. Gwythur, the good, represents summer.

As the stars that create this constellation move through the night sky, they appear to tumble over one another, summer vs winter, good vs evil, Gwythur vs Gwyn, locked in an eternal battle.

As this constellation sets on Calan Mai, Calan Noson Haf, the evening before the first of May, sees a celebration of Summer overcoming Winter, therefore good defeating evil, Gwythur has his bride returned to him until the winter when the battle takes

place all over again. It is a night of feasts, known in other folklore as the feast of Beltane. An important time agriculturally, with rituals to promote growth, fertility and protection of crops and cattle.

How to find: February is the best time of year to see the 'Rivals of May' – 'Gwyn a Gwythur'. At 9pm in late February, look directly South. High in the sky you will see the 'twin stars', 'Castor' and 'Pollux' or as we know them in Wales, 'Gwyn a Gwythur'.



Safleoedd Awyr Dywyll

Dark Sky Sites

www.clwydianrangeanddeevalleyaonb.org.uk/projects/dark-skies



- 1 Maes Parcio Llangwyfan**
Nannerch, Dinbych CH7 5RP
Yn ymuno â Llwybr Clawdd Offa
Llangwyfan Car Park
Nannerch, Denbigh CH7 5RP
Joins the Offa's Dyke Path
- 2 Maes Parcio Moel Arthur**
Llwybr Clawdd Offa, Yr Wyddgrug
CH7 5NZ
Moel Arthur Car Park
Offa's Dyke Path, Mold CH7 5NZ
- 3 Mael Parcio Moel Famau
Bwlch Pen Barras**
Barras Pen Bwlch, Yr Wyddgrug
CH7 5SH
**Moel Famau Bwlch Pen Barras
Car Park**
Bwlch Pen Barras, Mold CH7 5SH
- 4 Rhaeadr y Bedol**
Llantysilio, Llangollen, LL20 8B
Horseshoe Falls
Llantysilio, Llangollen, LL20 8BN



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