

Places to Visit – Breidden Hills by Simon Boyes

The Breiddens are a group of three prominent hills in the east of Montgomeryshire, forming an easily recognized landmark between Shrewsbury and Welshpool and visible for miles around. Each hill is different in character and so must be described separately. The correct pronunciation is ‘Br-eye-then.’

Best known of the three is **Breidden Hill**, the most northerly in the group. On top (365m) sits the monument Rodney’s Pillar - a popular destination for hikers. The habitat on top is a mix of sheep pasture and mature parkland with many fine oaks. Redstarts and Tree Pipits sing here in May and June. Raptors include Buzzard and Sparrowhawk (common), Peregrine and Kestrel (regular) and occasional Red Kite and Goshawk. Most visitors park by Criggion Village Hall (SJ295149) and walk up through the Forestry Commission conifer plantation. Another access starts at SJ285136 and ascends (less steeply than the usual route) also through spruce. The west flank of Breidden Hill is being steadily eroded by a huge quarry. South of Rodney’s Pillar is Breidden Forest, a large area of commercial coniferous forestry. Here Crossbills are regular but unpredictable, and there is suitable habitat for Nightjar since areas are regularly cleared and replanted. Woodcock visit in winter.

To the south-east of Breidden Hill is **Middletown Hill** (367m). Almost treeless, this is the least interesting of the three for birds, although the views over the Shropshire plain are spectacular. Parking by the pub (The Breidden Inn) in Middletown village at SJ302125, a climb takes you up the southern slopes on public footpaths through many warbler territories in spring. (Also look out for the rare Pearl-bordered Fritillary on warm days in May; and for Adders sunning themselves on the footpaths). There is a closer car-park to the summit, along the minor road at SJ297130, a spot frequented by Mistle Thrush and Green Woodpecker (in any month) and Common Whitethroat (in spring and summer).



Moel-y-Golfa in winter by Simon Boyes

The jewel in the Breidden crown is **Moel-y-Golfa** (403m). Most of the hill is clothed in a magnificent mature forest of oak, beech, larch, and pine, especially on the southern slopes. Redstarts, Pied Flycatchers and Nuthatch nest in spring, though it is some years since the Wood Warbler disappeared as a breeding bird. Nevertheless, it is worth checking for their trilling song in the tall beeches to the east of the Gypsy Monument (on the summit) in spring. Ravens nest, and Fallow Deer (descendants of escapees from Loton Park, Alberbury) can often be seen.

Unfortunately, this hill is less well served by public footpaths than the other two. The best parking area is at SJ283118, where the minor road from Trewern village turns to the left. Heading through a conifer plantation, the path joins another public footpath. Turn left (and steeply uphill), and eventually the oaks give way to stunted larches and rocky outcrops as the summit is neared. On a clear day the Berwyn Mountains and Cader Idris can be seen to the west.

The energetic visitor can combine these three hills in a single visit, if armed with a good map showing the network of footpaths. The Breidden Inn in Middletown serves good Chinese meals!