

Preface

Long before I understood the structure of the Welsh landscape, or the patterns that shaped its stories, my first sense of Cymru as something more than land came from my grandparents.

My Nan and Bampa introduced me to a world that existed just beneath the surface of the one I could see. They did not present it as history, folklore, or theory, but as something immediate and familiar. Through them, the forests, rivers, mountains, and valleys of Wales were never empty places. They were landscapes filled with memory, meaning, and presence.

Nan's stories often carried a sense of caution. She spoke of beings that lived beyond ordinary sight, within woods, beside streams, or in quiet places where few people ventured. These were not distant figures from a forgotten past, but presences that felt woven into the landscape itself. Bampa's stories were different. They were quieter, less concerned with warning and more concerned with remembrance. He spoke of traditions, places, and beliefs that had been passed down through generations, carrying the sense that certain ideas belonged to the land in the same way that rivers belong to valleys and mountains belong to the horizon.

Together, they shaped how I experienced the world around me. The landscape was never simply physical. Different places felt different for reasons that were often difficult to explain. A mountain ridge did not feel the same as a lakeshore. An ancient woodland created a different experience from an open moor. Some places felt welcoming, others unsettling. Some encouraged reflection, while others seemed to invite stories. Even as a child, I sensed that the character of a place was about more than its appearance alone.

Only later did I begin to understand that these impressions were not isolated experiences. They reflected a much older way of seeing the world, one in which landscape, memory, folklore, and identity were

inseparable. Across Wales, stories became attached to particular mountains, lakes, caves, islands, rivers, forests, and valleys. These associations were rarely random. The landscapes themselves often helped shape the stories that emerged around them. Places that felt mysterious acquired mysterious traditions. Places that appeared powerful became associated with powerful figures. Over generations, landscape and story evolved together.

This book explores that relationship. Rather than serving solely as a guide to Welsh folklore or a catalogue of remarkable places, it seeks to bring the two together. Each landscape featured within these pages has been selected not only because of its history or beauty, but because of the way it helped shape Welsh belief, memory, and imagination. The stories associated with these locations reveal how generations of people understood and experienced the land around them.

A central idea runs throughout *The Cymru Cycles*: the history of Wales cannot be separated from its landscape. In this volume, that principle extends beyond history into folklore, mythology, and cultural memory. Mountains became homes of giants and heroes. Lakes concealed kingdoms, treasures, and otherworldly beings. Islands acquired sacred significance. Forests became places of encounter and transformation. The landscape was not merely a setting for Welsh stories. It was one of their principal creators.

Like every volume in this series, this book is intended as a framework rather than a catalogue. The origins of many traditions remain uncertain, and different interpretations often exist. Folklore changes as stories are retold, landscapes acquire new meanings over time, and historical evidence is not always available to explain why particular traditions emerged. Throughout this book, the aim is not to provide definitive answers, but to present the explanations and connections that appear most consistent with the available evidence while recognising that alternative interpretations may exist.

In many ways, this book is also a continuation of what my grandparents first gave me. Not simply stories, but a way of looking at the world. A recognition that landscapes are more than collections of physical features, and that places often carry meanings which extend beyond what can be measured, mapped, or described. The mountains, lakes, forests, and valleys of Cymru still possess that quality today.

They do not announce it openly. They do not explain themselves. Yet certain places continue to inspire the same feelings they inspired generations ago. They encourage curiosity, reflection, wonder, and imagination. The stories may have changed, but the landscapes that inspired them remain.

This book is an invitation to those places. To explore them, to understand them, and to discover how the landscapes of Cymru helped shape the stories that belong to them, and how those stories continue to shape the way the land is seen today.

Nathan Williams
The Cymru Cycles