At about 3 miles, this is probably the shortest footpath up Cader Idris; although it involves the greatest ascent (2,850ft, 869m).

No one is certain where the name Cader Idris (Idris’ chair) originates. Some maintain that Idris was a national hero, killed in battle against the Saxons round about 630 A.D. Some insist that he was a giant, and yet others link Idris with the legend of Arthur.

Cwm Cau, with its lake, is a classic example of a ‘corrie’ or ‘cirque’. This immense crag-enclosed bowl was scraped out by a glacier grinding its way down from an enormous ice-cap. Cwm Cau is well known for its geology, which is enormously varied, partly as a consequence of ancient volcanic activity. This variation has had a profound effect on the plant and animal life of the crags, and many arctic alpine plants have their southern limit here.

The Talyllyn valley is part of the 30 mile long Bala Fault formed 400 million years ago.
Go through the kissing gate at the far end of the car park by the toilets, and turn right up the track, which is lined with mature trees. Bear left along the gravelled path, through a second kissing gate, and follow the track until you can turn right through a gate into a fine example of a ‘relic’ (8,000 years old) oak wood, now a National Nature Reserve.

Follow the footpath steeply up through the woods crossing a small stream until you reach the dry stone wall which marks the end of the wood. Pass through a small gate (please close) and onto the open mountain.

The path winds steeply above the oak wood. Keep the stream to your right. The path soon levels out a little, and the slopes of Mynydd Moel (2,768ft, 863m) are revealed, covered with long screes and thick growths of heather. Pass some ruins on your left as you climb gently into Cwm Cau.

Please Remember
The path passes through privately owned farm land. Dogs must be kept under close control, preferably on a lead when in the vicinity of livestock, and kept on a short lead at all times between 1st March and 31st July to protect ground nesting birds.
As the impressive cliffs of Craig Cau come into view, the way becomes difficult to follow. The terrain is grassy and the path poorly defined. Bear left around the marshy hollow immediately in front of you, and make sure on your return that you follow the same path back, and not a right-hand fork leading to some very steep ground which can be dangerous to the inexperienced.

Past the hollow you will notice some large ‘erratic’ boulders on your left. These were once trapped in a glacial ice, an were set down haphazardly when it melted.

You will soon reach a large and conspicuous cairn where the path divides. The right hand fork will take you to Llyn Cau. To continue towards the summit, take the left hand fork.

A short climb now will take you to the west of the cliff, and the fine views on the other side. The tip of Llyn Mwyngil, Talyllyn is just visible in the valley, and the road to Corris and Machynlleth can be seen opposite. In the distance on your right are the Tarren Hills.

Well-marked by cairns, the path winds steeply upwards, passing a band of white quartz in the rocks to your right. A short detour of the path will give you good view of the Talyllyn Pass and the lake.

The path winds steeply upwards, and is well marked by small cairns. Soon the waters of Llyn Cau are to be seen down on your right. Continue to climb until you reach a small level area where you can enjoy a good view of the lake and surrounding cliffs.

There are two ways down to Bwlch Cau from the top of Craig Cau. One follows the edge of the cliff and the other veers to the left away from it. The latter is the safer route. Beware of snow cornices in winter.

The path levels out a little as Cwm Amarch comes into view on your left with the Tarren Hills providing a magnificent backdrop. The long rounded ridge ahead is Mynydd Pencoed.

The well-cairned route up to the top of Craig Cau is steep and loose. Very great care should be taken on this section, particularly in wintry conditions, as snow and cornices are sometimes formed over the edge of the cliffs on your right.

There are two ways down to Bwlch Cau from the top of Craig Cau. One follows the edge of the cliff and the other veers to the left away from it. The latter is the safer route. Beware of snow cornices in winter.

The path now climbs steeply for the last time. This section is slippery, loose and suffering badly from erosion. Please keep to the footpath. A short zigzag finally brings you to the summit cairn. Close by is a shelter which is maintained by the Park Authority.

On your return journey, 50m from the summit, make sure you take the path that veers to the left. The right hand fork takes you down the Pony Path. If it’s foggy, take care not to deviate to the right while ascending Craig Cau on your way down from Pen y Gader.