

The Battle of ‘Crogen’, 1165

For many years a tradition has grown up for a battle having been fought at ‘Crogen’ during the Corwen campaign. This is based on no more than the words printed by David Powel in 1584.

Llywelyn, remembering how Elise ap Madog had served him, seized upon all his lands, and Elise fled the country, but afterward yielded himself to the prince’s mercy, who gave him Crogen castle and seven townships. And here I think it not unmeet to declare the cause why the Englishmen used to call the Welshmen *Crogens*, a word of reproach and despite: but if they knew the beginning, they should find it contrary. For in the voyage that King Henry II made against the Welshmen to the mountains of Berwyn, as he lay at Oswestry, a number of his men that were sent to try the passages, as they would have passed Offa’s Dyke at the castle of Crogen, at which place there was and is at this day a narrow way through the same ditch, for that ditch appears yet to this day very deep through all that country and bears his old name. These men, I say, as they would have passed this strait, were met withal, and a great number of them slain, as appears by their graves there yet to be seen, whereof the strait bears the name...^{*371}

This ‘battle’ can soon be put to rest, having its origin in the sixteenth century rather than any contemporary medieval source. Firstly, in 1202 Elise ap Madog received Crogen castle (SJ.006370) at Llandderfel in Edeirnion^{*372}. This was seven miles south-west of Corwen and nowhere near to Offa’s Dyke in Nanheudwy or Cynllaith. Secondly, there is no Crogen castle along the length of Offa’s Dyke, despite a nineteenth century attempt to rename Chirk castle such^{*373}. Consequently, people have been trying to find this place in the valley of the River Ceiriog since the sixteenth century. The real Corwen campaign has been discussed in the first book of this series and this shows that Henry II neither reached Corwen nor the valley of the River Dee running down to Crogen well to the west of the final line of the king’s advance. It is therefore readily apparent that the battle of ‘Crogen’ is no more than a sixteenth century antiquarian mistake which has muddled a castle in Edeirnion in 1202 with the skirmishing that took place when Henry II had the woods of Ceiriog cut down in 1165. The fantastical details added by Wikipedia need no comment other than they are not found in any contemporary source.

^{*371} Powel, D., *The Historie of Cambria, now called Wales...* [1584, reprinted London, 1811], 186-7.

^{*372} *Peniarth*, 82.

^{*373} Pennant, T., *Tours in Wales* [3 vols, London, 1810], I, 363-4.