

# MAWDDACH MARVEL

*Within walking distance of the stunning Mawddach Trail near Dolgellau, North Wales, the 'other' childhood home of serial farmhouse renovator Ruth Tudor is a magical mystery tour of country house chic*

Words: Catherine Waterfall Pictures: Howard Gudgeon & Martin Lyons



**Brynadda, Dolgellau, Gwynedd.**  
**Tel: 07530 528600 / 01600 740254**  
**[www.brynaddasnowdonia.com](http://www.brynaddasnowdonia.com)**  
**[ruth.trealy@btinternet.com](mailto:ruth.trealy@btinternet.com)**



**E**veryone we pass, whether they're leisurely cycling by or on foot with a dog at their heels, seems happy to be alive on this glorious spring morning. The euphoria is understandable; there are few places in Wales more beautiful than the Dolgellau-to-Barmouth Mawddach Trail, particularly on a dry, bright day in early April. Made even more famous recently by Julia Bradbury's book, *Railway Walks*, this panoramic 15km path is a haven for lovers of the great outdoors. But after a stroll over the iconic estuary bridge into Barmouth for a coffee and a cream cake (we've earned it after all the exercise), we're on our way back, skirting the glistening water in the direction of our home for a couple of days, Brynadda – a 16th-century farmhouse, just a mile up a steep hill above the historic town of Dolgellau.

Completely on its own, Brynadda is surrounded by gently sloping fields and private gardens well tended by gardener, Richard Britland, who kindly lit the impressive outdoor, log-fuelled barbecue before our arrival. The gardens are natural and rustic, in keeping with the surroundings, and there are plenty of hidden places with seats to escape for a few peaceful moments. It's in this tranquil, secret environment that the grade II listed building sits perfectly, like it's been part of the countryside forever.

Parts of the farmhouse – such as the wing housing the current sitting room and dining room – date back to the 1500s, while other rooms have been skilfully added over the centuries. And unsurprisingly, some interesting people have resided here down the years.

A forward thinking English woman called Elizabeth Baker lodged at Brynadda between 1780 and 1784 while she prospected for metal ores in

the nearby mines and tried to breed silk worms, as you do! She was unusual for the time and an example of a single woman confounding historical stereotypes. She kept a diary which makes frequent mention of the farmhouse and of life in Dolgellau for the gentry class, and a short, edited version is available for guests to read. That said, she isn't very complimentary about Brynadda, complaining fairly bitterly about the cold, and her Welsh speaking landlords!

Fortunately, thanks to current owner, Ruth Tudor, who lovingly restored the house after she inherited it from her father, these problems no longer exist. In fact, despite being large enough to accommodate 14 people in seven bedrooms – plus a couple of tots in a kids room with 'shorty' bunks – it's cosily warm and has piping hot water to all five bathrooms, thanks to the biomass boiler run on eco-friendly wood pellets. Stored outside in its very own outbuilding, it's worth taking a look at this innovative machine which many argue spells out the future for remote homes like this.

And if Ruth's name sounds familiar, we reviewed her other nearby childhood haunt – Y Felin – in the January issue of *Welsh Coast*, and remarked then on the love and attention lavished on the converted watermill. Well, Ruth's gone and done it again!

Take the other outbuildings, utilised to the full, making Brynadda a dream escape for families. As well as a games barn with table tennis, there's a cinema room with 50-inch flat screen 3D television and a selection of the latest DVDs. And while the kids and teens are being kept happy, the adults can relax in the large sauna in another converted barn. You don't even have to run across the courtyard in dressing gown and slippers either, as it also houses a shower, toilet and changing area.



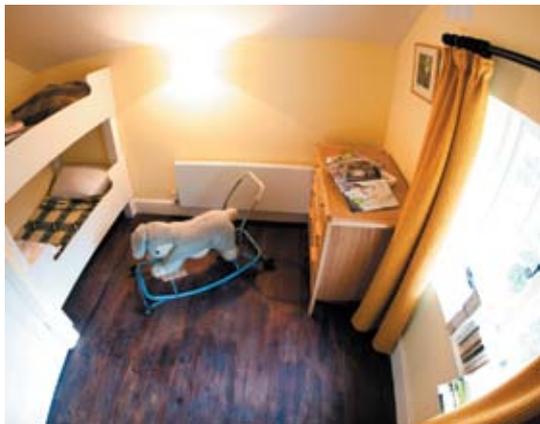
*"There are great vantage points from the windows, offering different perspectives on the surroundings. One of the best is from the roll top bath in the master bathroom..."*



These are inspired additions to the house and set Brynadda apart from other large holiday rentals. But it's inside where the five-star house really exudes luxury and homeliness. An enormous table seating 20 sits majestically in the panelled dining room, off the impressive kitchen, that's replete with stunning Aga (thankfully electric, for those, like myself, who've

never flown a traditional Aga!). The kitchen is also extremely well-equipped with microwave, large family fridge, dishwasher, washing machine, tumble drier, separate freezer and – as with Ruth's other holiday let the other side of Snowdonia's Cadair Idris – the almost signature addition of a bread-making machine.

When we sit down to eat a simple supper later in the evening, despite only having brought pasta, we cook up a tasty dish thanks to the complimentary oils, spices and dried herbs, which guests are welcome to use. There's also tea, coffee, butter and ingredients for the bread maker. Ruth also provides all guests with a



### **Rooms and rates**

Brynadda has a total of eight bedrooms, including a kids' room, a self-contained suite with disabled access, two rooms with king-sized beds and three with super king-sized/twin beds. One week costs from £2,275; three nights from £678. For fewer than 14 staying, the price is reduced on a sliding rate of £40 per double and £20 per single, not including bunks.





## Dining

Brynadda's kitchen and dining room offer everything you need to host your very own dinner party. There's even an honesty freezer with a good selection of frozen Welsh mountain lamb, mutton, Welsh Black steak, rare-breed pork and chicken and some wonderful meat products from Ruth's husband's multi-award winning artisan food business, Trealy Farm Charcuterie.

For a break from cooking, there are many good restaurants and cafes close by, all listed in Brynadda's information booklet. Notably, Bwyty Mawddach in Llanelltyd has stunning views across the Mawddach Estuary and of Cadair Idris (tel: 01341 424 020 / [www.mawddach.com](http://www.mawddach.com)). Elsewhere, housed in a listed ironmongery in Dolgellau's Parliament Square, TH Roberts café serves great coffee, cakes, a wide range of teas, savoury snacks and also doubles as an internet café (though free wifi and a reasonable mobile signal in Brynadda means you won't have to leave the house to stay connected). The Riverside at Pennal between Machynlleth and Aberdyfi does very good pub food (tel: 01654 7 91285 / [www.riversidehotel-pennal.co.uk](http://www.riversidehotel-pennal.co.uk)). And for lunch, the café at the Centre for Alternative Technology in Corris serves soups and vegetarian main dishes. It also has a safe play area right outside for children. Visit [www.cat.org.uk](http://www.cat.org.uk).



## Activities

**The sea:** There are lovely beaches at Aberdyfi, Fairbourne, Friog, Barmouth, Harlech and Pwllheli.

**Fishing:** By prior arrangement with the owner, guests are welcome to fish the Mawddach. Rods not provided.

**Walking and cycling:** There are plenty of routes and maps in the house. But you may also want to check out [www.mawddachtrail.co.uk](http://www.mawddachtrail.co.uk) for maps and guides to the walk/cycle trail along the disused railway line around the Mawddach estuary. There are two RSPB reserves on the trail well worth visiting. Bicycles can be hired from Dolgellau Bike Hire on Smithfield Street (Tel: 01341 423332 / [www.dolgellaucycles.com](http://www.dolgellaucycles.com)).

For keen walkers, the slopes of Snowdonia and Cadair Idris are on the doorstep. For more information, visit [www.visitsnowdonia.info](http://www.visitsnowdonia.info) or [www.snowdonia-wales.net](http://www.snowdonia-wales.net)

**Golf:** Dolgellau has a course with stunning views (Tel 01341 422 603 / [www.dolgellaugolfclub.com](http://www.dolgellaugolfclub.com)) as does Aberdyfi (Tel: 01654 767493 [www.aberdoveygolf.co.uk](http://www.aberdoveygolf.co.uk)).

**Shopping:** Dolgellau and Aberdyfi are both historic towns with a variety of interesting, independent shops, and nearby Machynlleth has a very good weekly market on a Wednesday.

welcome hamper consisting of a variety of Welsh produce, such as jams, biscuits, muesli, chocolates and Welsh tea.

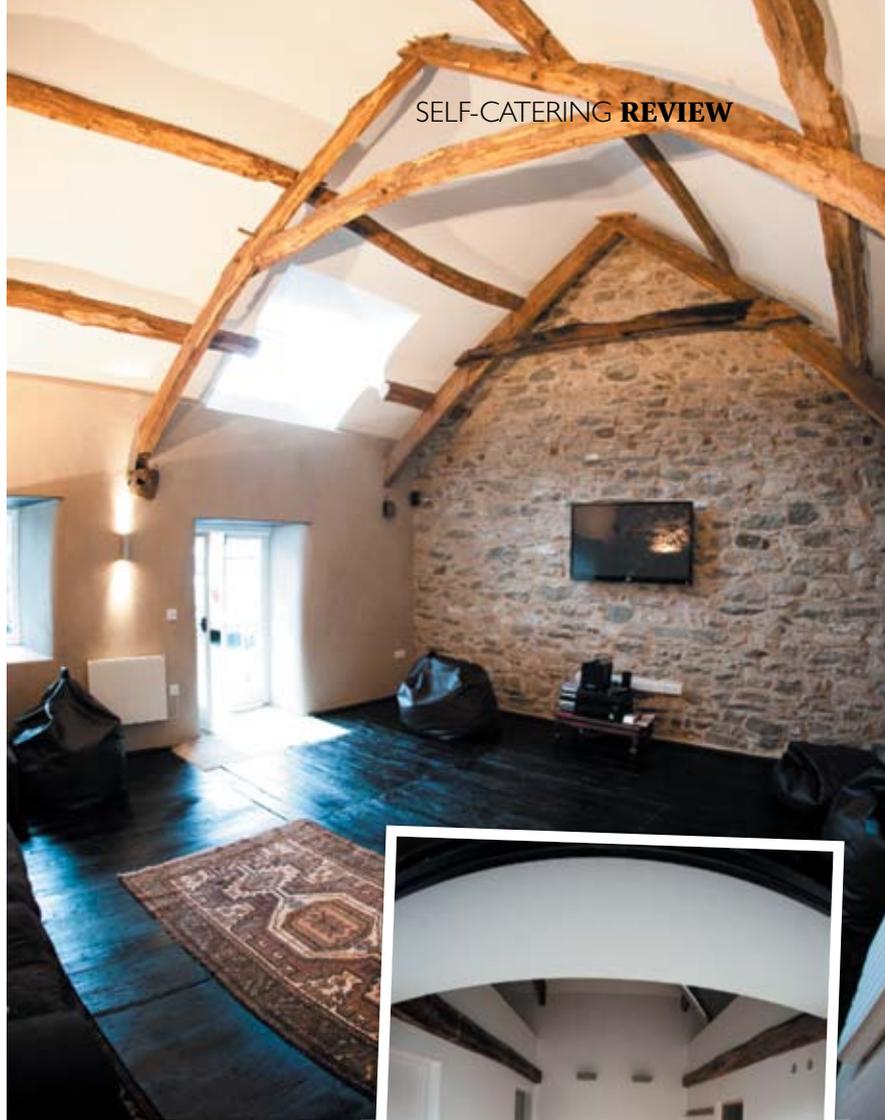
There are many more little touches like this throughout the house. All luxury bed linen and towels are provided, together with Faith in Nature soaps and shower gels. There are even bottles of children's shampoo. Books and the latest magazines (*Welsh Coast* included, of course!) are on the coffee tables in each sitting room, and even the log burners are laid out ready to light. Clearly Ruth, who grew up here, has tried to think of everything. And the result is wonderful.

Although it's a big rambling country house, comfortably accommodating up to three families, it's well-proportioned, so offers that cosy feel wherever you go. The smaller

sitting room at the back of the house is the perfect place to sit in front of the log burner reading a book and gazing out onto the gardens. But there are plenty of great vantage points from all the windows in the house, offering different perspectives on the surroundings. One of the best is from the roll top bath in the master bathroom, offering the perfect way to unwind at the end of the day.

It all adds up to the feel of staying in your own luxury country house hotel, not someone else's holiday home. And we're not the only ones to think so. A glance at the visitor's book suggests plenty of guests agree, particularly one family who enjoyed a recent anniversary party here. ▶





SELF-CATERING REVIEW

For our stay, there was just the two of us, and we thoroughly enjoyed all the space to ourselves. But for a family gathering, Brynadda has everything you could possibly need. Children are safe in the enclosed gardens and outbuildings, leaving grown ups time to relax with a glass of wine in the courtyard or in one of the cosy rooms on chillier days. And the large dining room is ideal for a celebratory meal. You don't have to leave the family dog at home either; Brynadda is pet-

**Despite its 16th-century roots, Brynadda is equipped with the latest home-cinema technology and a luxurious sauna complex**

friendly, which is just as well, given all the fabulous walks in the area.

For a livelier time of it, the house is well-located for towns such as Barmouth and Dolgellau, as well as the hills of Snowdonia, plus other attractions like the nearby Talylyn Railway. You could easily enjoy a two-week break here and still have plenty to see and do.

For us, after a couple of days, we depart relaxed and refreshed, but not quite ready to leave this beautiful area. ✨



# WIN A THREE-NIGHT STAY

**WORTH £1000!**



**Like the sound of Brynadda? Course you do. Well, you could try it for free, as a wonderful Welsh break awaits one lucky party...**

For your chance to win a three-night break at Brynadda for you, your family and friends (up to 14 plus two small children), simply answer the following question: **Whose recent book on railway walks has brought The Mawddach Trail yet more national acclaim? a) Kate Humble, b) Michaela Strachan or c) Julia Bradbury**

Send your answer, together with your name, address and telephone number to: Brynadda Competition, Welsh Coast, Border Publishing Ltd., Salop House, Salop Road, Oswestry SY11 2NS or email: [brynadda@borderpublishing.com](mailto:brynadda@borderpublishing.com)

Competition is open to readers aged 18 and over only. Prize can be taken until March 2013 (excluding July, August, October half-term, Xmas & New Year), must be booked in advance and is subject to availability. One winner (plus guests to house capacity) will win a three-night stay at Brynadda. The prize cannot be exchanged for monetary value or given to a third party. Closing date for entries is 31st May 2012. Usual competition rules apply. Editor's decision is final.