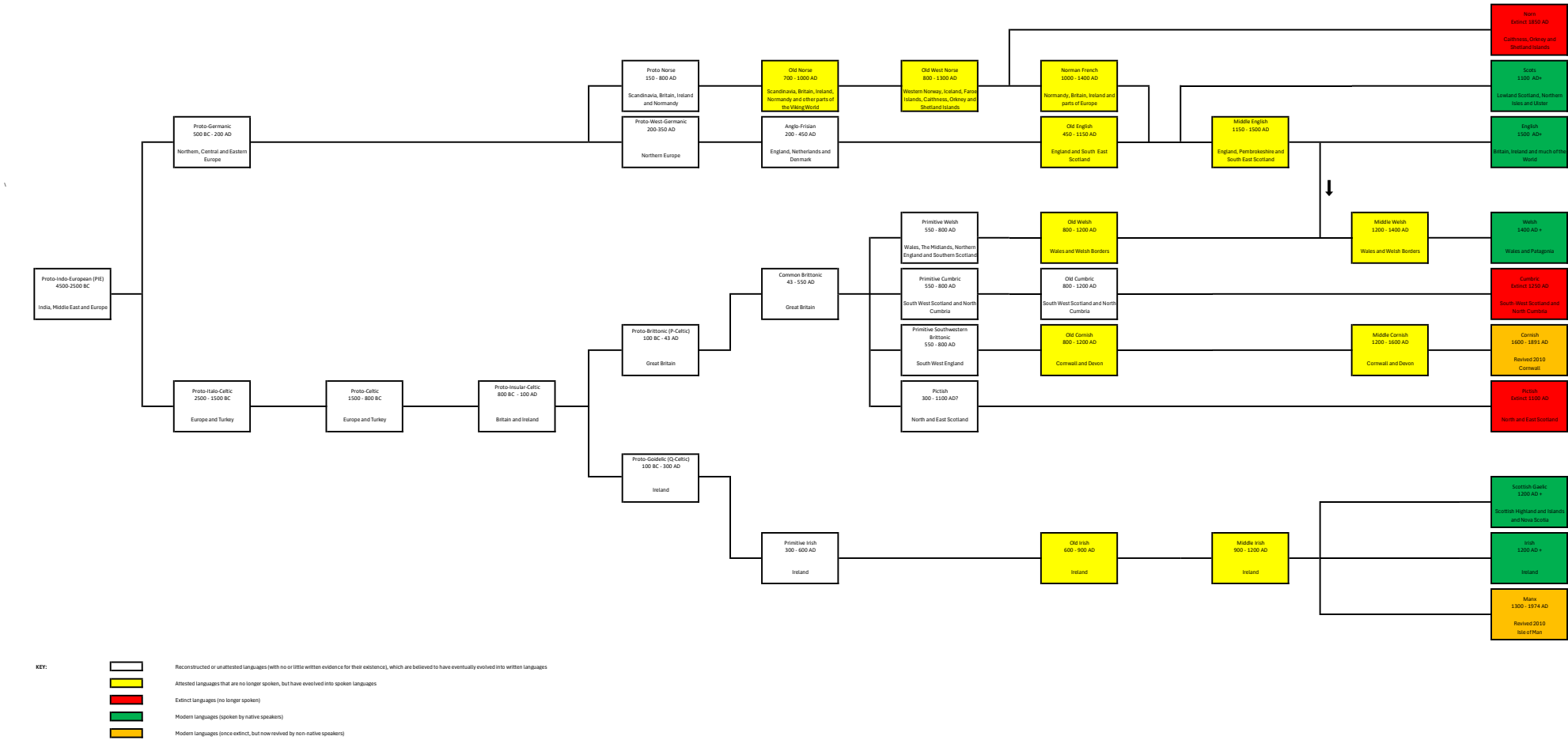


Chart showing the evolution of languages that can appear in British mountain names, rough dates when they were spoken, and where the languages were/are mainly spoken



NOTES:

Only languages or their predecessors that impact on mountain names in Britain are shown. The chart showing all the Proto-Indo-European languages on Wikipedia is massive!

Old Norse was carried by the Vikings from Scandinavia to many places, including, Iceland, Greenland, Normandy, Scotland, Ireland and the North of England. A number of British and Irish mountain names (or part names) result from this. Old Norse's other influence on British and Irish mountain names comes from the Normans, whose Norman French language developed in Normandy from Old Norse and Old French, and greatly expanded the vocabulary of Middle English, after the Norman Conquest of England in 1066.

Norman French only had a very small Old Norse component. It mainly descended from Vulgar Latin (an Italic language descended from Proto-Italic-Celtic) with some Frankish (a West Germanic language) and Gaulish (a Continental P-Celtic language). To show Old French (which has no direct influence on British and Irish mountain names) and all its antecedents on this chart would hugely overcomplicate it and the lines would have to cross in several places.

Celtic languages were once spoken across most of mainland Europe and these languages are classified as Continental Celtic, as opposed to the languages spoken in Britain and Ireland, which are classified as Insular Celtic. Continental Celtic languages are all now extinct.

There are two families of Insular Celtic languages spoken today, Goidelic languages (Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx) and Brittonic languages (Welsh, Cornish and Breton). These are also known as Q-Celtic and P-Celtic, respectively. Breton, although spoken on the Continent, is an Insular Celtic language, descended from Primitive Southwestern Brittonic which was taken to Brittany by migrants from South West England between the 5th and 7th Centuries.

Q-Celtic and P-Celtic languages are so called because they have some similar words, which in Q-Celtic start with a 'k' sound (involved from a Q or Kw sound) and in P-Celtic with a P sound. This is particularly noticeable in the interrogative pronouns (what, which, where, when, who, why and how), but also in many other words. Interestingly, in Germanic languages such as English and German, these pronouns normally start with a W (the K dropped from Kw) and in Romance languages, such as Latin, French, Italian and Spanish, they normally start with a Q!

In Proto-Indo-European, interrogative pronouns are also believed to have started with a Kw (Q) sound, with Germanic languages dropping the K and using W, other languages keeping the Kw sound as Q, while Goidelic dropped the w from Kw and use C, and Brittonic changed the Kw sound to P.

Some scholars believe that the split between Q-Celtic and P-Celtic occurred in Continental Celtic before Insular Celtic split off, as some Continental Celtic language like Gaulish are P-Celtic. The more accepted theory today, due to so many similarities between Old Irish and Old Welsh, is that the split occurred quite late in Insular Celtic and a similar split occurred much earlier in Continental Celtic.

After the conquest of Wales by England in the 13th Century, Old Welsh borrowed a large number of words from Middle English and developed into Middle Welsh.

There are no written records of Old Cumbric, which became extinct in about 1200 when the Cumbric speaking Kingdom of Strathclyde ceased to exist. The main evidence for the existence of the language is in Cumbric place names, such as Carlisle and Penrith, and mountain names such as Helvellyn and Blencathra.

Pictish is also an extinct language with no written records, and it is not clear what sort of language it was. At one time, it was thought to be a non-Proto-Indo-European language spoken by the Iron Age people who inhabited Britain before the arrival of the Celts. But it is now believed to have been a Brittonic language, because of many place names similar to Welsh place names, starting with Aber (notably Aberdeen), Pen, Lan, Caer, and Pett or Pite (notably Pitechry).

Old Irish was taken from Ulster (Northern Ireland) between the 5th and 8th Centuries by Irish people (known as the Scotti) who raided and settled on the Isle of Man, and the language they spoke displaced the Brythonic languages spoken there and developed into Manx. The Scotti also settled in Argyll and the Inner Hebrides in the 5th and 6th Centuries, where they established the Kingdom of Dal Riata and their language displaced Cumbric and developed into Scottish Gaelic.

When the Gaelic-speaking King of Dal Riata, Kenneth MacAlpin, unified the Gaels and the Picts in 843 AD, Gaelic became the language of the newly formed Kingdom of Alba (Scotland). Over the next few centuries, it rapidly spread eastward and northward, absorbing the Pictish language entirely. Over time, the Old Irish spoken in Scotland evolved independently into Scottish Gaelic.

Cornish and Manx both became extinct, but were successfully revived in the 20th Century with hundreds of fluent second-language speakers and native-speaking children. UNESCO changed their status of both languages from Extinct to Critically Endangered in 2010.