

Bryniau Dyfed – Disgrifiad cryno

Mae'r bryniau a'r dyffrynnoedd hyn yn pontio'r bwch rhwng bryniau'r Canolbarth a Phreseli, sy'n ehangach ac yn fwy adnabyddus. Nid oes yma drefi sylweddol, ac y mae'r prif lwybrau trafniadaeth yn mynd trwy'r ardal, nid ati. Mae iddi ei phrydferthwch tawel ei hun. Mae yma fryniau tonnog, graddol, a dyffrynnoedd coediog, cysgodol gyda phorfeydd cymesur lle cedwir defaid a gwartheg. Cyd-gysylltir yr aneddiadau a'r ychydig bentrefi gan ffyrdd culion, troellog cefn gwlad. Mae llawer o wrychoedd uchel, aeddfed, ac o gaeau lluniaidd o faint cymedrol, gyda chymysgedd o dir pori wedi'i wella a ffriddoedd ymylol.

Llwyfandir yw'r fro, mewn gwirionedd, gyda'i dyfroedd yn llifo i Deifi yn y gogledd, a Thywi a Thaf yn y de. Un o'i nodweddion pennaf yw bod llawer o'i nentydd wedi ysgythru hafnau culion, coediog, gan wahanu'r tir amaeth sydd rhyngddynt. Ceir bryniau unigol yma ac acw ar y llwyfandir, yn enwedig y Frenni Fawr (395m), Moelfre (335m) a Mynydd Figyn (325m).

Summary description

These foothills and valleys span the gap between the more widely known and extensive Cambrian Mountains and Preseli Hills. There are no major towns in the area and the main routes are 'through' rather than 'to' this area. The area has a quiet beauty of its own. It has gentle rolling uplands and sheltered wooded valleys with regular pasture fields grazed by cattle and sheep, hamlets and a few villages, linked by a network of narrow winding rural roads. There are many high, mature hedgerows and regular-shaped medium sized fields with a mix of improved pasture and marginal upland.

The area is essentially a plateau that drains tributaries to the Teifi in the north to the Tywi and Taf in the south. One of the most distinctive characteristics is that numerous streams have become deeply incised in narrow, wooded valleys, dividing the farmlands that lie between. Within the plateau, smaller individual hills rise, notably Frenni fawr (395m), Moelfre (335m) and Mynydd Figyn (325m).

Key Characteristics
Hills and valleys, foothills - between the Cambrian Mountains and Preseli Hills. The underlying geology mainly comprises Ashgill grits, shales, sandstones and conglomerates from the Ordovician system.
Incised small river and stream valleys – numerous examples, usually wooded, feeding the adjacent Teifi and Tywi rivers.
Glacial deposits - The movement of ice flows carved through the landscape leaving behind a varied topography of plateau tops and valleys. Moraine deposits left by the retreating ice are found in the east.
Small areas of heather moor and upland fringe – around the north-south watershed, however in many places improved and enclosed pasture is the dominant element.
Improved pasture for sheep and cattle with rough grazing on the uplands.
Woodlands - Conifer plantations are found on some plateau slopes, whilst valleys are clothed in mixed and broadleaved woodland.
Thick hedgerows – areas of small fields enclosed by thick hawthorn hedges or banks topped with trees or gorse interspersed with areas of larger, improved fields and fences or thin hedges.
Wetland habitats in hollows - in the glacial deposits, high ecological importance, including for flowering plants and breeding wildfowl.
Archaeology - Higher ground in the west is the location of numerous Bronze Age barrows and standing stones. Iron Age hillforts and medieval castles also occupy strategic valley locations. The 12th century Talley Abbey is a key historic feature from the Medieval period.
Small settlements are located along streams - connected by winding rural roads.
Modern developments at variance to traditional character – including wind turbines and modern agricultural buildings
Tranquil, quiet - peaceful rural area.

Visual and Sensory profile

Much of the peaceful beauty of this area lies within the valleys that cut into the plateau. Although not high in relation to the adjacent Cambrian Mountains or Preseli Hills, the higher parts feel elevated and exposed due to their proximity to the sheltered valleys and to the long views across the plateau. Just about all the land is farmland, enclosed with a variety of hedges and fences, interspersed with woods mainly on the steep slopes. There are only small areas of open common land, often marshy, and blocks of coniferous

plantations on some of the hills. Although traversed by several main roads between the Tywi and Teifi valleys, this is mostly quiet countryside.

The area differs subtly from east to west, with the patterns of ridges and valleys becoming increasingly pronounced the further west one travels. The eastern half, extending from north of Llandovery to north of Carmarthen, is an area of rounded hills, spreading back from the Tywi valley, gradually increasing in height to merge with the forested fringes of the Cambrian Mountains to the north. The pattern of small hills and shallow valleys is indistinct in the easternmost part, with a maze of twisting lanes linking between the scattered farms and hamlets. The mosaic of small irregular fields with large hedges, small woods and plantations gives an attractive small-scale landscape, quiet but well-settled, tranquil but undramatic.

Gradually westward the valleys, with intervening ridges, become more pronounced, carrying streams and small rivers towards the Tywi from their sources in the Cambrian Mountains. The most notable of these is the Cothi, a winding U-shaped valley where the small river runs through quiet meadows, and there are farms at intervals along the lower slopes, with many attractive views along the valley from the twisting lanes on either side. Throughout there is much woodland on steeper sides though large hedges give the impression of more woodland than is actually the case.

West of the Carmarthen-Lampeter road, where the Cambrian Mountains have dropped away, this part of the area covers a wider stretch of land between the two major vales of the Teifi and the Taf. Here the water courses have cut deep into the plateau, flowing both north and south, giving a particularly distinctive pattern of ridges dropping gradually southward and northward from a central line of higher points. To both north and south, this area merges with the adjacent areas of the Teifi Valley and Pembrokeshire. When viewed from distant higher land, the plateau can be seen to gradually rise, with the Blaenwaun windfarm being the only obvious landmark. The deep steep winding wooded valleys are quiet and enclosed, with very limited views, full of detail. Small villages and farms are tucked into the lower slopes at bridging points, backed by dark woodland and bright meadows, forming picturesque groups of buildings, often losing the sun early in the day. Others are perched on the rims of the valleys, clustered around ancient inconspicuous churches. Only the Gwili valley, with the winding Carmarthen-Newcastle Emlyn road and the preserved steam railway, has much noise and movement through it. Most of the roads run straight along the ridges, between sparse wind-bitten hedges, through a fairly uniform, wide-spreading landscape of regular fields of pasture and crops. Small lanes branch off to zigzag sharply down to cross the valleys.



View east from near Talley ©LUC



Mixed fieldscapes near Salem (north of Llandeilo) where clusters of small fields have thicker much hedgerows. © Getmapping 2014



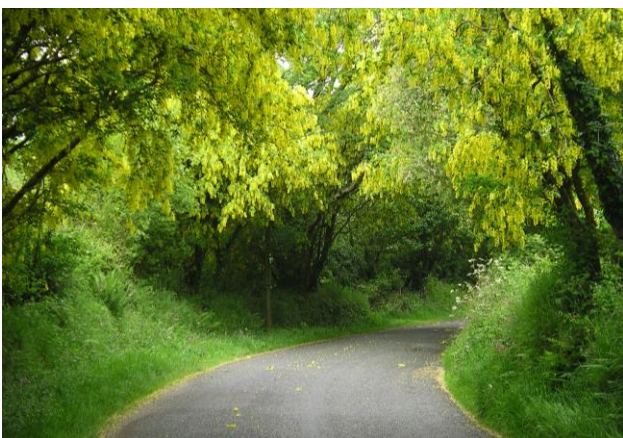
The distinctive pattern of many incised streams in narrow wooded valleys. © Getmapping 2014



Woodland and pools near Talley. © Bronwen Thomas



Rush Pasture and carr near Brynalwan © LUC



(Left) The unusual and distinctive abundance of laburnum in hedgerows. In early summer, this local peculiarity becomes apparent, when they burst into vivid yellow flower, and the lanes are adrift with fallen blossom. © Bronwen Thomas (Right) Stone bridge near Capel Iwan © LUC

Geological Landscape influences

This area covers the lowest part of the ridge that joins the Cambrian Uplands to the Preseli Hills, together with an area to the south of the uplands. The latter area, lying between Carmarthen and Talley, is effectively separated from the south-western part of the Cambrian Uplands by the Gwili and Cothi river 'basins'. These are enclosed valleys developed on the middle courses of these rivers, which then flow south to the Tywi through gorges which cut across the structural 'grain' of the area.

The higher ground of the LCA, which stretches westwards from Rhydargaeau to Crymych, forms the watershed between northward flowing tributaries of the Teifi and southwards flowing tributaries of the Taf and Tywi. There are three isolated hill masses which rise a little above the ridge, which is generally at 200-300m.

The rocks are of late Ordovician to mid-Silurian age and primarily consist of mudstones, displaying well-developed slaty cleavage, and sandstones, occasionally pebbly, together with some tuffs (volcanic ash). The latter two rock types have usually resisted weathering and erosion and are discernable as narrow ridges standing a little above the general topography of the southern part of the area.

The rocks are folded at varying scales, and are also faulted. The primary structural features are the south-westwards continuation of the Teifi Anticline and the Central Wales Syncline. In contrast, along the southern margin of this area, the structural alignments are approximately east-west.

Remnants of plateau surfaces formed by marine erosion during the globally high sea levels at the end of the Cretaceous Period, and subsequently revealed by falling sea level and uplift of the land, are discernable in places. They have been deeply dissected by river valleys and heavily modified by the bevelling effects of ice. The valleys were substantially deepened by meltwater during the Pleistocene and in some cases there is also evidence of glacial diversion of drainage and sub-glacial flow of meltwater above the level of ice-filled valleys. Melting ice also deposited 'boulder clay' in many areas.

The reduction in height of the ridge connecting the Cambrian Uplands and the Preseli Hills was most probably caused by erosion during southwards advance of ice sheets from the Irish Sea area during the Pleistocene. At times these ice masses would probably have passed over glaciers moving westwards through the Teifi and Tywi valleys.

During the most recent glaciation of Britain, although glaciers were present in these valleys, the Irish Sea ice did not pass over the watershed. The intense cold did, however, create permafrost within the ground of this area. During periods of thaw solifluction flows occurred (when soil saturated with water from melting snow and sub-surface ice flowed downhill) creating the distinctive alignments of tabular stones within these deposits.

Landscape Habitats influences

Soils range from well-drained brown earths, through seasonally waterlogged clay soils on lower ground, and wet peaty soils on the higher plateau. This has given rise to a mosaic of improved pasture, with wet meadows and rhos marshy grasslands on the lower ground. On the higher ground there have been many improvements in the past, and only remnants of the original heathland remains. The landscape is an agricultural one, with small fields of permanent pasture, where dairy farming maintains its continuing importance. Field

boundaries of mature species-rich hedges and occasional hedgerow trees provide an important habitat on the lower ground, with gorse and heathy clad banks on the higher more open and windswept ground.

Within this essentially improved agricultural landscape, Llety-wen has been protected as a very traditional and unimproved small farm with a suite of herb-rich grasslands, unploughed and unfertilised since before the last war. The hay meadows at Llety-wen contain a very diverse mixture of grasses and herbs, dominated by sweet vernal-grass, and with an abundant greater butterfly orchid population.

Remnant areas of wet pasture have been protected. Cors Farlais is an old glacial pingo, a roughly circular peat-filled hollow with marshy vegetation, and drier dwarf shrub heath on the drier pingo rims. Rhos Pwlygawnen is an extensive area of wet heathy pasture, one of the last remaining in Carmarthenshire, a favoured haunt for grasshopper warblers in the fringing wet willow woodland.

Water forms an important influence on habitat within the area. The many small rivers draining north and south have created steep-sided gorges. The Afon Duod forms a particularly narrow and steep-sided gorge north of Carmarthen, creating a series of long and thin sessile oak woodland habitats. The Afon Cych, a tributary of the Teifi, has a whole series of narrow fingers of sessile oak woodlands for many miles fringing its course. There are few areas of coniferous plantations, in the east of the area around Talley and Taliaris.

There are a number of natural water bodies, of which the most important, Talley Lakes, occupying a glacial hollow in the Cothi valley, is protected for its open water and wetland habitats. The lakes display a well-marked vegetational sequence from open water to mature alder carr.

The higher peaks have been largely improved in the past, as their more gentle slopes easily permit the passage of agricultural vehicles. Patches of heathland still remain, although little is protected. Mynydd Ystyfflau-Carn is an extensive area of wet heathy grassland, with some heather and cross-leaved heath in a predominant purple moor-grass setting, a summer breeding ground for curlew, and a hunting ground for merlin and hen harrier in winter.

Historic Landscape influences

Today's landscape displays a variety of features of archaeological and historic interest dating back to prehistory. The higher ground in the west is the location of a concentration of prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments, particularly Bronze Age round barrows and standing stones. These occupy prominent positions on hill summits, overlooking the surrounding valleys and lowlands. Later Iron Age hillforts, such as Maes y Castell, are found on Mynydd Figyn in the east, overlooking the tributary valleys which feed the River Tywi to the south.

The Medieval period saw the establishment of a number of distinctive motte and bailey sites and stone-built castles. Strategically located to maximise defence, these are often found within valleys. For example, Castell Mawr near Llanwinio occupies a position at the fork of two streams, thought to be on the site of a previous Iron Age hillfort. Medieval religious and monastic influences are also evident, including the prominent 12th century Talley Abbey. Traditional buildings are constructed of stone or render with slate roofs, with small nucleated settlements located at stream and river crossing points and radiating out in

a linear pattern along roads. More modern bungalows and houses are constructed of white or coloured render, largely in keeping with the traditional vernacular styles of the area. Distinctive Dutch barns are scattered throughout the rural landscape.

Cultural Landscape influences

The area is dominated by the traditional patterns of farms and small villages, with some quarrying for slate around Glogue. The people and communities that resulted from that way of life reflect this, being Welsh-speaking and noting that in many of the records in the The Dictionary of Welsh Biography record the importance of religion, education and politics. Very many notable Methodist and other dissenting ministers were raised here, as well as some notable school teachers and academics. Niclas y Glais (Thomas Evan Nicholas, 1879–1971) was born in the parish of Llanfyrnach – Independent minister, poet, rural dentist and committed Stalinist, who had a literally captive audience in the form of his patients. The village of Llansawel produced two successive Principals of Jesus College, Oxford in the early 17th century (John Williams, d. 1613 and Griffith Powell, 1561-1620). John Owen of Eglwysrwrw composed the ballad 'Mochyn Du' there in 1854, a composition of which he became thoroughly ashamed once he entered the ministry, but it is sung throughout Welsh-speaking Wales to this day and indeed provides the tune for 'Cosher Bailey' (or 'Crawshaw Bailey'), still a rugby club favourite. Talley Abbey was a foundation of the Lord Rhys of Deheubarth (1132-1197) and was the only Premonstratensian abbey established in Wales.



Higher plateau elevations between northern and southern watersheds as seen from the adjacent Preseli Hills, looking east towards the less hilly expanse of the Pembroke and Carmarthen Foothills. From these western parts the Preseli Hills sweep up to form a backdrop, with the distinctive profiles of Moel Drygarn and the outlying Frenni Fawr catching the eye as they change moods with the weather and the seasons. © Bronwen Thomas