

Eryri – Disgrifiad cryno

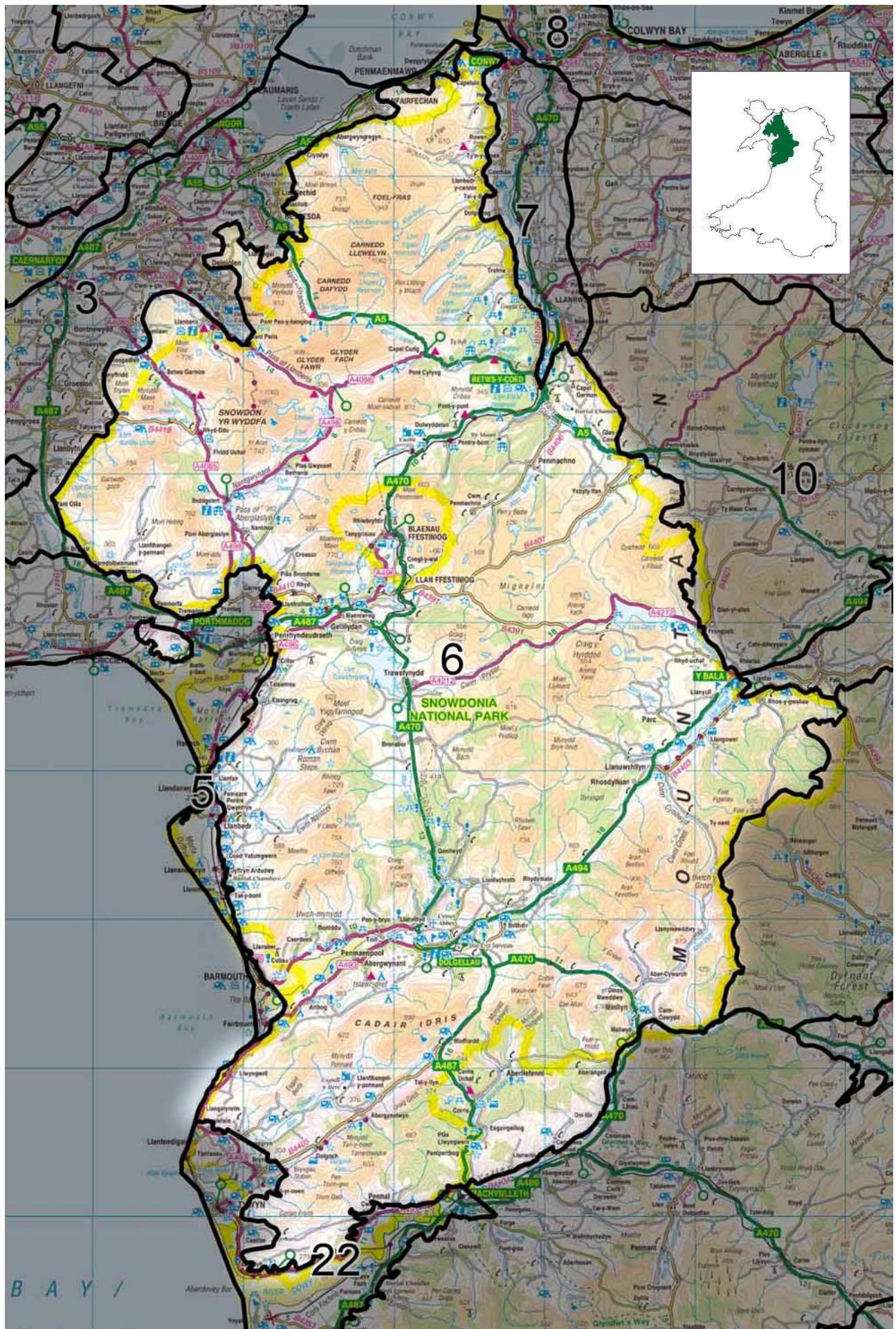
Dyma fro eang, wledig, uchel, sy'n cyd-ffinio'n fras â Pharc Cenedlaethol Eryri. Ei nodwedd bennaf yw ei mynyddoedd, o ba rai yr Wyddfa yw mynydd uchaf Cymru a Lloegr, yn 3560' (1085m) o uchder. Mae'r mynyddoedd eraill yn cynnwys y Carneddau a'r Glyderau yn y gogledd, a'r Rhinogydd a Chadair Idris yn y de. Yma ceir llawer o fryndir mwyaf trawiadol y wlad, gan gynnwys pob un o gopaon Cymru sy'n uwch na 3,000 o droedfeddi. Mae llawer o nodweddion rhewlifol, gan gynnwys cribau llymion, cymoedd, clogwyni, llynnoedd (gan gynnwys Llyn Tegid, llyn mwyaf Cymru), corsydd, afonydd a rhaeadrau. Mae natur serth y tir yn gwneud teithio'n anodd, a chyfyngir mwyafrif y prif ffyrdd i waelodion dyffrynnoedd a thros fylchau uchel. Yn ddaearegol, mae'n ardal amrywiol, a fu â rhan bwysig yn natblygiad cynnar gwyddor daeareg. Denodd sylw rhai o sylfaenwyr yr wyddor, gan gynnwys Charles Darwin, a archwiliodd yr ardal ym 1831.

Y mae ymhell, foddy bynnag, o fod yn ddim ond anialdir uchel. Am ganrifoedd, bu'r ardal yn arwydd ysbryd a rhyddid y wlad a'i phobl. Sefydlwyd bwrdeistrefi Dolgellau a'r Bala yng nghyfnod annibyniaeth Cymru cyn y goresgyniad Eingl-normanaidd. Felly, hefyd, llawer o aneddiadau llai ond hynafol fel Dinas Mawddwy. O'i ganolfan yn y Bala, dechreuodd y diwygiad Methodistaidd ar waith trawsffurfio Cymru a'r ffordd Gymreig o fyw yn y 18fed ganrif a'r 19eg. Y Gymraeg yw iaith mwyafrif y trigolion heddiw.

Blaenau Ffestiniog yw un o'r trefi Fictoraidd gorau sydd wedi goroesi yng Nghymru. Y chwyldro diwydiannol roddodd fod iddi, pan arweiniodd y galw am lechi at drawsffurfio caeau a llethrâu creigiog y plwyf mynyddig hwn, fu unwaith mor brin ei boblogaeth. Gadawodd diwydiannu ei ôl ar ardaloedd eraill, hefyd, a hynny nid oherwydd cloddio am lechi yn unig, ond hefyd am blwm, sinc, manganîs, copr ac aur.

Yn gyffredinol, cadw defaid a choedwigaeth yw prif ddefnyddiau hynny o dir nad yw'n greigiau noethion. O gerrig yr adeiladwyd llawer o fythynnod, ffermydd, hen weithdai diwydiannol, a therfynau caeau. Plannwyd coed ar sawl darn eang o dir, yn enwedig yng nghyffiniau Betws-y-coed, Coed-y-brenin a Chorris.

Heddiw, mae'r ardal yn denu llawer o ymwelwyr, sy'n archwilio ac yn edmygu drama naturiol yr olygfa. Mae atyniadau poblogaidd yn eu denu yn eu miloedd yn yr haf: rheilffordd, caffi a chopar Wyddfa yw'r enghraifft fwyaf adnabyddus.



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Summary description

This is an extensive, rural upland area, broadly coinciding with the Snowdonia National Park. It is dominated by mountain ranges of which the Snowdon massif rises to the highest peak in England and Wales, Yr Wyddfa, at 3560' (1085m). Other ranges include the Carneddau and Glyderau in the north and Rhinogydd and Cadair Idris in the south. The area encompasses many of the country's most spectacular uplands including all 15 of Wales's mountain peaks over 3000 feet. There are numerous glacial features including sharp ridges, cirques, cliffs, lakes (including Llyn Tegid, Wales' largest), bogs, rivers and waterfalls. The steep topography is challenging for travel with most main routes being limited to valley bottoms and over high passes. It is a geologically diverse area, playing an important part in the early development of geology as science, attracting the attention of some of the discipline's founding fathers like Charles Darwin, who explored the area in 1831.

However, it is very far from being purely wild upland. The area became a symbol for centuries of the spirit and freedom of the country and of its people. The borough towns of Dolgellau and Bala both owe their origins to the years of Welsh independence before the Anglo-Norman conquest, as do many smaller but ancient settlements such as Dinas Mawddwy. The Methodist revival, from its centre at Bala, began its work of transforming Wales and the Welsh way of life in the C18th and C19th. Today the Welsh language is spoken by the majority of inhabitants.

Blaenau Ffestiniog is one of the best surviving Victorian towns in Wales, located in the middle of the area. Its origins were purely in the industrial revolution, when the demand for slate led to large-scale transformation of the rocky fields and mountainsides in this once barely inhabited upland parish. Industrialisation left its marks in other areas too, not just from quarrying and mining for slate but also for mining for lead, zinc, manganese, copper and gold. Generally, hill farming and forestry cover much of the land that is not open mountain. Stone is the dominant building material for the many small cottages, farms, old industrial workshops, and field boundaries. A number of large areas have been afforested, notably around Betwys-y-coed, Coed-y-brenin and in the Corris area.

Today the area attracts many tourists, who explore and admire the natural drama of the scenery. Popular locations become 'honeypots' of activity in summer, the railway, café and summit of Snowdon being the most famous example.

Key Characteristics

A mountainous topography - with the principal mountain range orientated broadly north east to south west.

Wales's sharpest ridges and highest peaks lie within this area – in a landscape often defined by massive, angular skylines. Most famously this includes the massif of Snowdon, with the peak of Yr Wyddfa, highest in England and Wales at 1085m AOD, and a number of radiating ridges.

U-shaped glacial valleys and corries - carved through the mountainous terrain and deepened by the ice in the last Ice Age.

An upland character to principle land cover elements - including hill sheep grazing, forestry, heather dominated moorland and upland grassland. Rock outcrops and slate/shale ridges and screes are frequently apparent.

Moorland and blanket bog – substantial areas with significant ecological interest and large parts of the area are designated SSSI. Species rich crag flora and grassland is a feature of upland areas, for example, at Moel Hebog.

Rivers, lakes, waterfalls - principal rivers include the Dysinni, the Llugwy, the source of the Conwy, the Mawddach, Glaslyn and Dwyryd. There are numerous small lakes and waterfalls e.g. at Betws-y-Coed, and Llyn Tegid at Bala is Wales' largest natural lake.

Estuaries and coast – although only directly fronting open sea in a few places, the tempestuous, dark, mountainous character abuts, or is seen in views close to, milder, sheltered, woodland-fringed estuaries and sunnier, sandy open coast. This combination provides an iconic and contrasting image of great appeal to many.

Prehistoric archaeology - many ritual and funerary sites including cairns, standing stones and stone circles, many located along hill crests, mountains, ridges and passes, often forming strong visual features.

Ancient stone built remains - deserted stone-built Iron Age, Roman period, Medieval and later, settlements and field systems survive in an almost unbroken “cordon” of relict landscapes along the lower slopes between the Dyfi in the south west and the Conwy in the north east.

Slate mining heritage - abundant in many parts but notably created the extensive slate landscape of Blaenau Ffestiniog and slate is the principal building material in much of the area. Remains include quarries, waste heaps, mines, levels, workshops and cottages.

Copper, gold and other minerals heritage – copper mining was historically important, notably at Sygun, near Beddgelert and Drws-y-Coed, near Nantlle. The exploitation of other minerals, for example, gold, lead, zinc and manganese, have also left industrial archaeological remains in the landscape. Welsh gold is worn by the Royal Family.

Sparsely populated / few large settlements – confined to valleys, the few include the small towns of Dolgellau and Bala, and the slate town of Blaenau Ffestiniog, and compact valley villages in slate and stone such as Beddgelert and Betws-y-Coed.

Transport routes affected by steep topography - the majority of the area has few roads, these are routed along valleys, linked by the occasional twisting mountain pass. Railway routes do likewise and with tunnels. There are remains of numerous narrow-gauge quarry railways, some with inclines. There are several operational narrow-gauge heritage railways for tourists.

Sublime, picturesque, iconic visual and sensory landscape of great drama – the inspiration for many artists over the last 200 years, part of the great tour for Wordsworth, and others.

A stronghold of the Welsh language and culture - of small-scale rural farming, of large-scale mineral exploitation. It includes great contrast, and exhibits an intimate relationship between the natural drama and the cultural heritage of its people.

Tourism - today Snowdonia is recognised as a National Park and is visited by thousands of tourists who come to experience the natural and cultural heritage. The area forms a great outdoor challenge for many recreational visitors as they explore.

Visual and Sensory Profile

Snowdonia forms one of the most distinctive and spectacular landscapes in Britain, with its high, angular mountain peaks and numerous natural geological, hydrological and historic features. The experience for many people is along roads that run along the deeply cut river valleys, over high mountain passes, and through the small towns and villages, and in coastal fringes, a close and contrasting visual relationship is evident with enclosed, woodland-fringed sandy estuaries and an extensive open sandy coastline. For the many people who walk, ride or climb, the numerous high ridges and peaks offer wider ranging panoramas across much of north-west Wales. Indeed there are numerous valley and mountain ‘honey-pots’ that attract visitors, in contrast to the prevailing tranquillity.

The dramatic topography results in a visual character that varies considerably over short distances. Indeed, the suddenness with which the vista changes is remarkable throughout Snowdonia and is typified by the Afon (River) Dwyryd: tributaries emerging from the dramatic but heavily quarried and bleak mountain sides above Blaenau Ffestiniog cascade down a deeply incised, wooded valley before meandering gently as a mature river through the picturesque Vale of Ffestiniog and into a broad sandy estuary, hemmed between rocky and wooded mountain sides, before opening out into the sea - all within a distance of 10 miles.

Northern Snowdonia comprises the Carneddau, Glyderau, Snowdon massifs. Close-by to the south are the Moel Hebog/Nantlle ridges, and the Moelwyn and Cnicht massifs. South of this are the Rhinogydd, Migneint and Arenig, Aran, Cadair Idris and Tarren massifs. They encompass many dramatic topographic features and many are dominated by their mountain peaks or deep valleys. The area of the Gwydir Forest around Betws y Coed is much softer and renowned for picturesque walks to small lakes, waterfalls, rivers and streams, rocky hills and knolls, as well as to small scattered abandoned mine workings and deserted farmsteads, as similarly are the Coed-y-brenin and Corris areas.

Each area has it's own distinctiveness, for example the Rhinogydd for their ruggedness, the Migneint for it's emptiness, Blaenau Ffestiniog for it's slate quarrying and the Mawddach Estuary for it's serene and picturesque beauty. Most famously the massif of Snowdon is known internationally, with the peak of Yr Wyddfa, highest in England and Wales at 1085m AOD, and a number of narrow, radiating ridges including Crib Goch and Y Lliwedd. Generally the mountains of the west are the highest and most rugged, but with that, some are also very popular with walkers and climbers.

Combined with motoring, nearby valleys and settlements have in places been adapted to a great degree to meet their needs, with car parks, shops, camp sites, picnic places and new trails. Despite the many 'honeypots', it is remarkable that there remain many very quiet places too, where traditional farming prevails and where local walks are still quiet. This includes the Aran and Tarren mountains in the south and the Migneint area.

There are well over a hundred lakes in Snowdonia of more than an acre, some of the largest include Llyn Ogwen, Tal-y-llyn and Llyn Tegid. The latter, also known as Bala Lake, is the largest natural fresh water body in Wales at nearly 4 miles in length. Their abundance, together with rushing rivers, bogs, tumbling waterfalls and the well developed estuaries are matched by characteristic wet upland weather and cloud on many days.

The extensive industrial scars, remains of mining, quarrying and related transport systems at Blaenau Ffestiniog and Corris, and on the borders with Arfon, at Nantlle, Llanberis (Dinorwig) and Nant Ffrancon (Penrhyn) challenge a purely aesthetic appreciation of the heritage of the area. However, the sheer extent and drama of these old workings, with their abruptly changing topography and land cover, makes for a fascinating and distinctive landscape, and of remarkable extent, like few others in Britain.



Rugged, dramatic, upland scenery and contrasts, with many lakes, rivers, mountains and valleys. Here, Cwm Idwal is just one of numerous cymoedd (corries) and lakes. © John Briggs



The sandy Mawddach estuary penetrates inland into Snowdonia, surrounded by a vast amphitheatre of hills and mountains. Note the distinctive colour on a sunny day. © John Briggs



Roads, farming and settlement are all tightly confined by the steep, upland or rocky ground, as seen here at Nant Peris. © John Briggs



To the southern and eastern parts of the area, seen here in the upper Dyfi valley, the landscape is smoother and softer, but still steep, upland and in places rugged. © John Briggs



The uplands take many forms, from craggy and open, to smooth and afforested...



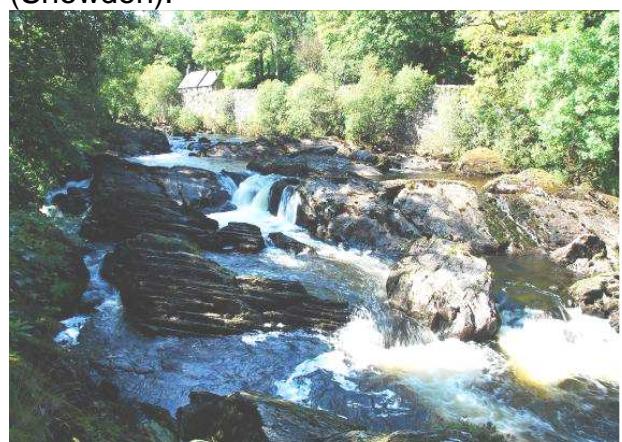
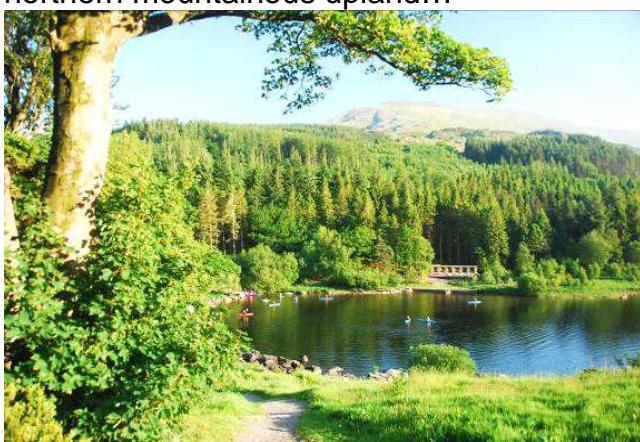
...from open marginal farmed land to heavily quarried and mined hillsides.



From the 'empty' Carneddau, part of the northern mountainous upland...



...to the busy summit of Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon).



There are numerous forests and lakes, rivers and waterfalls. © John Briggs all photos on this page



Blaenau Ffestiniog, the Victorian slate mining town set within a horseshoe of stark, grey, dramatic, rising mountainous uplands that are heavily scarred by the extensive slate quarrying workings from which the wealth of the town arose. © John Briggs



Llyn Tegid (Bala Lake) is the largest natural freshwater body in Wales. The Aran Mountains rise menacingly to the south, in contrast to the gentle 'patchwork quilt' of improved pastures, hedgerow patterns and hedgerow trees that occupy the lower land near the lake. © John Briggs

Geological Landscape influences

Snowdonia presents a richly varied landscape composed of mountain peaks and ridges, deep valleys and moorland plateaux. The bedrock geology is dominated by Cambrian, Ordovician and Silurian sedimentary and volcanic rocks. A large area of Cambrian sandstones and shales, known as the Harlech Dome, underlies the Rhinogydd and extends west into Coed-y-Brenin and south to the northern foothills of Cadair Idris. Coarse-grained sedimentary rocks form some of the higher peaks in the Rhinogydd. Around the Harlech Dome, major volcanic centres developed at different intervals during the Ordovician period and these erupted vast quantities of lava and ash that are now preserved in upland areas such as Rhobell Fawr (705m) and Cadair Idris (893m) in the south, and farther north around Yr Wyddfa (1085m) and the Carneddau. This volcanic activity was also accompanied by the widespread emplacement of igneous intrusions of granitic and basaltic composition that now form distinctive, erosion-resistant features throughout the landscape. There was a major phase of mountain building during early to mid-Devonian times, the consequence of which was to create the important slate belts of the Bethesda, Llanberis, Nantlle, Blaenau Ffestiniog and Corris districts, of which only the later two are entirely within the confines of this area identified here. The industrial exploitation of slate from the mid 18th to the mid 20th centuries transformed the landscape of these districts to leave a legacy of slate quarrying and mining remains that are of international renown.

Ancient volcanic activity created a number of types of mineral deposit in the area and copper, lead and zinc mineralization is a particular feature of the Snowdon area. These deposits too became the focus of much exploration causing characteristic remains to be left within the landscape. Manganese was mined from around the flanks of the Harlech Dome, whilst copper and gold were won from quartz veins that outcrop to the west and north of Dolgellau. Collectively known as the Dolgellau gold-belt, this mining district experienced a major gold-rush during the last half of the 19th century when large gold deposits were found at the Clogau and Gwynfynydd mines.

The glacial history of the area has resulted in a very rich and often spectacular upland scenery that we see today, with over-deepened U-shaped valleys caused by glaciers radiating out from the upland core down slopes and valleys such as Nant Ffrancon and Nant Peris. There are a wealth of classic features such as high cwms or cirques, pinnacled ‘knife-edge’ ridges, moraine dammed lakes, glacial striations, roche moutonees, dramatic waterfalls and so on. Snowdonia played a key role in the development of geology as a science and the very challenging terrain has had a profound influence on the pattern of transport, farming, industry, tourism and culture throughout the area.

Landscape Habitats influences

The principal land cover habitats of this largely upland area are heather-dominated moorland and acid grassland, together with extensive coniferous woodland plantations. Much of this moorland includes heath, acid grassland and blanket bog and is of considerable ecological value, which is recognised in the Snowdonia and Myneint-Arenig-Ddualt SSSI. It also supports many species that specialise in living in these peaks such as rare arctic/alpine flora, and specialised invertebrates including a number of iconic species for this area, the Snowdon Lily and Rainbow Leaf Beetle, of which Moel Hebog SSSI is but one example location.

The deep valleys that intersect these moorland areas are characterised by acid grassland and woodlands; indeed 17% of the Snowdonia National Park is wooded. Coniferous woodland of relatively limited ecological value dominates, as at Coed y Brenin and the Gwydir Forest. Deciduous woodland is also evident particularly on lower land and valleys, such as Fairy Glen Woods, Coedydd Nantgwynant and Coedydd Aber, as well as at a number of woodland areas in the west of the area.

For an area with such high rainfall levels, freshwater features also form significant features within the landscape. As well as its rivers, the area also has a considerable number of water-bodies ranging from relatively small mountain lakes scattered through the uplands, to the largest natural lake in Wales at Bala (Llyn Tegid) as well as the large reservoir at Trawsfynydd. A number of wetland habitats are also present such as Cors Goch (Trawsfynydd).

Semi-natural habitats remain extensive across many parts of Snowdonia, with relatively low intensive farming, often summer sheep pastures, across many other areas. This has led to the recognition of a number of extensive, landscape-scale areas for their nature conservation value, including NNR (e.g. Cwm Idwal National Nature Reserve) and numerous SSSI sites.

Historic Landscape influences

Snowdonia is a sparsely populated landscape, in which the few areas of settlement are focussed on river valleys and crossings. The earliest surviving elements in its historic landscape are the prehistoric way markers along ancient track ways, and a wealth of ritual and funerary sites including cairns, barrows and stone circles, which often characterise the hill crests and mountains. Prehistoric, Roman period, Medieval and later, stone built settlements and field systems survive in great profusion, often forming blocks of relict ancient landscapes in an almost unbroken 'cordon' along the foothills from the Conwy Valley in the north to the Dyfi Estuary in the south. Although marginal in many ways, these lands have attracted recurrent use and occupation, the latest manifestation of which is represented by the remarkable 19th century 'fridd' enclosure walls that criss-cross large blocks of land within the area.

Roman military influence is attested by the presence of a number of strategically located forts and camps guarding routes across the area; the complex of remains at Tomen-y-mur, near Trawsfynydd is particularly notable. The strategic importance of this remote site as a gateway to the eryri heartland and the fertile lands of the coast and Anglesey beyond is confirmed by the foundation of Castell Prysor a short distance away, one of the fortifications settlements of the 13th century Welsh princes. At Dolwyddelen the single tower of a stone castle also built by the Welsh princes stands guard over the upland pastures of the Lledr Valley; at Cymer Abbey, just above the tidal head of the Mawddach, there survive the ruins of Cymer Abbey.

Later symbols of wealth and prestige in the landscape include a number of historic parks and gardens located within this area, such as the remains of an extensive 18th century landscape park near Cymer Abbey and the parkland of Bryn Gwynant.

Blaenau Ffestiniog, the 'hole' in the Snowdonia National Park, is remarkable for its extensive networks of slate quarries and mines and associated settlements built to house the workers. It is one of the best-surviving Victorian towns in Wales, dominated by enormous piles of slate rubble, and for the transport systems which the industry created.

To the west, the Trawsfynydd Power Station (Britain's only inland nuclear power station), which was designed by the architect Sir Basil Spence, and the surroundings landscaped by Sylvia Crowe, are potent visible reminders of the modern era in the landscape of this area.

In such a large area, there is general consistency of traditional building form and style with local stone, render, more occasionally whitewash, and slate being the most ubiquitous choices. Slate walls, cladding and fencing is common close to quarry sources, whereas quarried stone characterises Dolgellau, Beddgelert and Betws-y-coed almost to the exclusion of other materials.

Cultural Landscape influences

The mountains which dominate this area have become immensely strong cultural symbols. Snowdon is associated with the warrior-prince, Rhita Gawr, who is said to be buried at the summit, and with King Arthur, mortally wounded by an arrow shot from Bwlch y Saethau (the Pass of the Arrows). The views from the summit inspired numerous English Romantic poets of the 18th and 19th centuries, notably Shelley and Wordsworth. Not only the tourists who climbed Snowdon, but also the local guides who led them, contributed greatly to the study of botany as well as to the evolution of Romantic thought. Richard Wilson's famous view of the mountain from Nantlle, and Turner's painting of Dolbadarn castle at its foot both articulate this strong landscape, of mountain peaks and the narrow valleys into the uplands. A giant also sleeps at Cadair Idris, where legend relates Gwyn ap Nudd leads the hounds of Annwn. Carnedd Dafydd and Carnedd Llywelyn bear the names of the princes of Welsh independence.

Even though it is dominated by mountain peaks, this wide area also supports several distinctive market towns. Dolgellau, a Medieval Welsh foundation, was from the 17th century a great centre of the Quakers, many of whom emigrated to America in 1686, taking with them their distinctive Merioneth architecture. Bala, though founded by Edward I, only developed under the patronage of the Calvinistic Methodists from the late 18th century, becoming known as 'the Geneva of Wales'. The whole of the Eryri area was a stronghold of the confident Welsh-language culture of 19th and early 20th century Wales, sustained by the radical nonconformity of the tenant-farmer and the slate quarryman. Of the many poets whose work reflects this powerful landscape, the best-known within Wales is Hedd Wyn, the shepherd-poet killed at Pilckem Ridge in 1917 whilst serving with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. He is commemorated in the Oscar-nominated film of 1996. Liverpool Corporation's decision to build a reservoir at Tryweryn within this area was one of the catalysts that led to growing electoral support for Plaid Cymru from the 1960s onwards. In this respect Dafydd Elis-Thomas and Elfyn Llwyd have inherited the mantle of Tom Ellis and David Lloyd George; by the same token the pop-singer and nationalist politician Dafydd Iwan is a son of the manse from Llanuwchllyn.

However, tourism has also been an important cultural phenomenon from the Victorian period onwards, reflected in the development of settlements such as Betws y Coed. As well as the area's natural beauty, and its potential for outdoor activities, its industrial past is also reflected in the range of visitor attractions. These include 'Quarry Tours' at the working Llechwedd Slate Mine in Blaenau Ffestiniog, one of the only two surviving operations in this once-important quarry town, and the revived narrow-gauge railways, originally built to serve the slate industry.