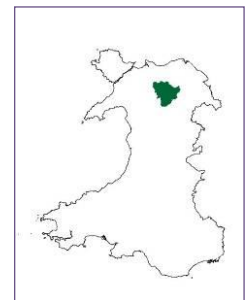


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Mynydd Hiraethog – Disgrifiad cryno

Yn dirwedd anial ond deniadol ei golygfeydd, mae Mynydd Hiraethog yn llwyfandir o weunydd tonnog, graddol yng nghanol gogledd Cymru, rhwng Eryri yn y gorllewin, a dyffryn Clwyd yn y dwyrain. Plannwyd coed ar rannau helaeth ohono, ond ym mannau eraill ceir gorgorsydd eang, rhostiroedd grugog ac amrywiaeth sylweddol o safleoedd archeolegol yn dyddio o'r cyfnod cynhanesyddol ymlaen.

Er mai prin fu'r boblogaeth yn y gorffennol y gwyddom amdano, bu llawer o weithgaredd dynol. Bu amaethu, coedwigo, hela, ac adeiladu a chynnal rhwydweithiau casglu a chronni dŵr eang ym mlaenau Aled, sydd wedyn yn llifo i Elwy, ac yna i Glwyd: ac ar Alwen a Brenig, sy'n llifo i Ddyfrdwy.

Mae'n ardal boblogaidd ar gyfer gweithgareddau awyr agored, yn enwedig yng nghyffiniau Canolfan Ymwelwyr a Chronfa Brenig: a sefydlwyd llwybr archeolegol ym mhen gogleddol y gronfa. Sefydlwyd datblygiadau tyrbinau gwynt yno'n ddiweddar, hefyd.

Mae lôn bost Thomas Telford, yr A5 bresennol, yn mynd trwy'r fro, ac yn cyrraedd ei man ail uchaf rhwng Llundain a Chaergybi yn ymyl Cerrigydrudion. Gwahana gweundir a choetir Mynydd Hiraethog yn y gogledd-ddwyrain rhag tir amaeth brasach cyffiniau Llangwm. Mae clasur Hugh Evans, "Cwm Eithin" (sef Cwm Main) yn darlunio'n gyfareddol fywyd ac arferion y fro hon ganol y 19eg ganrif.

Summary description

A desolate but scenically attractive landscape, comprising a gently undulating upland moorland plateau in central North Wales, situated between Snowdonia to the west and the Vale of Clwyd to the east. The area has been partially afforested, but elsewhere there are extensive tracts of blanket bog, heather moorland and a significant variety of archaeological sites dating from the prehistoric period onwards.

Though it has been sparsely inhabited in recorded history, there has been much human activity – farming, forestry, hunting and the building and maintenance of the extensive water-catchment systems and reservoirs based on the headwaters of the Aled, which flow into the Elwy and then into the Clwyd, and on the Alwen and Brenig, which flow into the Dee. The area is popular for outdoor activities, many of which are focused on the Brenig Reservoir and Visitor Centre, while an archaeological trail has been established at north end of the reservoir. Wind-turbines developments have also been recently established here.

Thomas Telford's post road, the modern A5, runs through the area, and reaches its second highest point between London and Holyhead near Cerrigydrudion. It divides the moorland afforested landscape to the north-east (the area traditionally ascribed as being 'Mynydd Hiraethog' in Welsh) from the gentler farmlands around Llangwm. Hugh Evans' classic Cwm Eithin (translated into English as Gorse Glen) vividly describes life and farming customs in this area in the mid-19th century.

Key Characteristics
Rolling unenclosed uplands with gentle topography. Generally between 350m and 600m AOD.
Dissected by a number of minor rivers with their sources - in the hills of Hiraethog and Clocaenog.
Scarplets – Occasional grit bands within the shale and mudstone bedrock geology, create more pronounced land form variation, giving rise to gentle but distinct landform profiles and exposures including scarplets.
Moorland – often managed grouse moors, with large tracts of peaty and thin soils, seasonally wet, overlaying the impermeable Silurian sandstones of the western part of the area, with finer, well drained loamy and silty soils evident in areas overlaying shale/mudstone.
Borrowed distant horizons in views - appearance of moorland horizon upon horizon giving a sense of being in a much larger continuous open moorland. This is especially notable on Mynydd Hiraethog with borrowed views to Snowdonia (to the west) and Clwydian Range (to the east).
Extensive afforested areas – mostly in the Clocaenog area, whose enclosure and

shelter contrasts entirely with adjacent moorland.
A number of moorland reservoirs - some large, some long and twisting, some in association with afforested areas.
Bedrock geology is composed of Silurian sandstones of the Wenlock Series and argillaceous rocks (shales and mudstones) of the Llandovery, Ashgill and Ludlow Sseries, and in part masked by glacial till and drumlins.
Very isolated, little settlement - other than small linear villages connected by the few roads that cross the area.
Field patterns – distinctive open, stone wall field patterns evident in parts e.g. between Cerrigydruidion and Pentrefoelas. Hedges and more trees in more sheltered pastoral valley landscapes e.g. around Betws-Gwerfil Goch.
Archaeology - a distinctive series of prehistoric ritual and funerary sites
The quiet upland space between the more iconic but busier upland landscapes of the Clwydian Range and Snowdonia.

Visual and Sensory profile

This is a very rural, generally quiet, inland, upland area. It is the land between the Vale of Clwyd and the high ground of the Clwydian Range to the east, and the much higher ground of Snowdonia to the west.

The majority of tourists speed through the area on the straight A5 road, heading to and from the more famous icons of Snowdonia to the west. As such there are areas that are very 'off the beaten track', where it is still just about possible to walk for miles across rolling open moorland and meet no one. The area is bisected by the A5, which runs through a comparatively gentle, farmed vale containing the Merddwr and Ceirw tributaries of the Rivers Conwy and Alwen respectively. Although the vale is framed by the mountain summits of Snowdonia to the west, it is only by leaving the main road that the open character of the land rising to the north and south can be fully appreciated.

The sense of tranquillity and windswept openness is very notable in the Mynydd Hiraethog area, where the gentle rolling topography of the moorland is seen as layered horizons of wide, featureless heathery panorama. Distant horizons are borrowed from hills beyond the area to give a sense implicit of a much vaster, continuous upland plateau. Here the occasional lake reveals in undulations and valleys, reminding of what horizons can hide. A number of larger water bodies are reservoirs, from which more sheltered valleys and enclosed pastures run down with rivers such as Aled, Brenin and Alwen.

Part of the area, Clocaenog, is now afforested extensively, with plantations topping much of the higher ground. Combined with large reservoirs, Clocaenog has changed its character entirely over the last hundred years. Much of the woodland is planted in single stands managed on a large scale, but in association with the reservoirs, networks of tracks are popular for walking and cycling.

To the south of the A5, rounded, empty, moorland hills including Garn Prys, Moel Eglwys and Moel y Gydro are outliers of the Arenig Mountains.

The wind turbines north of the Llyn Brenig reservoir represent the latest modern additions to this, in places, still ancient landscape.



Rollin upland grazing and forestry by Clocaenog Forest. © John Briggs



The very open, remote, exposed character of Mynydd Hiraethog and A543 road. © John Briggs



Llyn Brenig, one of a number of reservoirs. © John Briggs



The gentle vale and historic route corridor of the A5 trunk road that divides the Clocaenog Forest and Denbigh Moors from the higher, rounded moorland to the south. © John Briggs

Geological Landscape influences

The bedrock geology consists predominantly of Silurian sedimentary rocks, dominated by turbidites, a rock type consisting of repetitive sequences of sandstones, siltstones and mudstones, occurring in varying proportions. In many places the mudstone beds are highly contorted because of slumping and sliding of the mud during deposition. Weathering of these disturbed beds has produced a hummocky land surface in places. There is an area of Ordovician rock between Cerrigydrudion and Bala comprising mudstones and siltstones with layers of volcanic ash (tuff). Upland topography above 350m height, characterises much of the area, with the highest points of 532m occurring within the moorlands of Mynydd Hiraethog at Mwdwl Eithin and 611m at Foel Goch in the south east..

Although the area lacks the wealth of large-scale glacial erosional features seen in Eryri, there are some important areas of glacial deposition. Drumlins (ice-moulded mounds of sediment) are dotted throughout the region and contribute towards the undulating 'basket of eggs' character of the area, with mounds commonly varying between about 400m long, 150m wide, and between 3 to 30m in height, with their longer axes aligned with the directions of ice movement across the region. Another notable glacial feature are glacial meltwater channels, which were cut by powerful streams flowing within and beneath the ice sheet. Fine examples of these can be seen alongside the A494 Bala-Corwen road near Glan yr Afon, and between Llangwm and the A5.

Landscape Habitats influences

Within the area as a whole, Mynydd Hiraethog, including those areas designated as SSSI, is a unique area of wet, upland plateau and blanket bog, degraded in places and with much of its heather cover lost, but large areas remain in good condition. It supports a diverse range of upland breeding birds, including the second largest population of breeding golden plover in Wales, as well as other waders such as dunlin, snipe, curlew, lapwing and common sandpiper. The red grouse population is still significant, but declining. Hunting and nesting raptors include peregrine falcon, buzzard, hen harrier, merlin, kestrel and short-eared owl.

Away from, and on the fringes of, the semi-natural upland plateau is an area of agricultural and improved land, devoted to sheep grazing and silage production, with a pastoral landscape of large fields, bounded by stone walls or post and wire fencing, and wet rush pastures in many of the river valleys and on many of the poorly drained upland soils. Within the steep sided valleys draining Mynydd Hiraethog are a number of ancient broadleaved woodlands. Coedydd Dyffryn Alwen, in the Alwen valley downstream of Llanfihangel Glyn Myfyr, is a good example of a mosaic of different woodland types, reflecting the complex underlying geology and soil type. It includes ash, oak and rowan, with a hazel understorey, with a rich ground flora including globe flower, oak and beech fern.

Clocaenog now supports one of the largest coniferous forest blocks in Wales, and a well-promoted recreational area. It holds the largest population of red squirrels in Wales. Black grouse occur around the forest edge, and recent conservation work has led to a doubling of numbers of this unusual and elusive bird, well-known for its noisy 'lekking'. Small ponds in and around the forest support dipper and provide habitat for dormice.

Historic Landscape influences

Though the Denbigh Moors are nowadays remote and largely unsettled, there is abundant evidence of prehistoric activity and habitation. A number of the summits are topped by Bronze Age cairns while an important Bronze Age barrow cemetery and related funerary and ritual monuments were excavated during the construction of Llyn Brenig Reservoir in the early 1970s. The sites which escaped flooding have been reconstructed and interpreted as part of the Brenig Archaeological Trail. Earlier in the 20th century, the Alwen reservoir was built in 1911-1916 to supply water to the Birkenhead Corporation, while the Aled reservoirs followed in the 1930s, to supply the resort of Rhyl with water.

Historically, Mynydd Hiraethog is also significant as a large and increasingly rare survival in Wales of uninterrupted heather dominated moorland. Much of this habitat was progressively modified from the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods, through continued seasons of summer grazing, associated with temporary valley settlements, a number of which later became permanently settled. Peat extraction was characteristic in the 19th and early 20th centuries, while a vast tract of heather moorland was reinstated on Mynydd Hiraethog between 1908-25 and managed to provide grouse shooting for Viscount Devonport's estate. Ruins from Devonport's estate, such as the summit hunting lodge at Gwylfa Hiraethog, still form prominent elements in this desolate, exposed landscape. The forest of Clocaenog, initially planted in the 1920s, and much extended in the 1970s forms the other significant, and by now historic, element of this landscape, and occupies an area which has been partly planted with woodland since the 19th century.

What there is in the way of settlement is sparse, and much of it is confined to the Holyhead (A5) road corridor – the main villages are Cerrigydruidion, Pentrefoelas, Llanfihangel Glyn Myfyr, Bettws Gwerfil Goch and Clawdd Newydd. One of these – Pentrefoelas – is a planned village associated with the Foelas estate, but otherwise, development in the area has an informal character, and is overwhelmingly agricultural. There are some large estate farms, but many more smaller ones. By far, the predominant building materials are stone and slate.

Cultural Landscape influences

The cultural character of this area mostly relates to the lives of hard-working farm families struggling to make a living in an inhospitable environment, as well as forestry workers, and those involved in the shooting, whether as participants or as beaters and assistants. It did also inspire poets, three of whom adopted the name of part of the region as their bardic title – Gruffudd Hiraethog in the 16th century, who sang the praises of the gentry of Denbighshire, Anglesey, Caernarfonshire and Merioneth, but was also a herald and a scholar in the humanist tradition, and two Victorian poets, John Davies 'Taliesin Hiraethog' and William Rees 'Gwilym Hiraethog', additionally a journalist, a friend of Mazzini and author of *Aelwyd F'wythr Robert*, an adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Also from the area was Hugh Evans (1854-1934), born in Llangwm in the southwestern part of this region. He is best known for *Cwm Eithin*, his account of the farming customs and social conditions of the area in his childhood, but also wrote on folk-lore and religious history as well as producing stories for children, and founding the Welsh language *Brython* paper.