
UCHELDIR CEREDIGION

UPLAND CEREDIGION

Landscape description

This extensive area of Ceredigion comprises a series of upland plateaux between about 200 and 400m above OD, bounded to the east by the Cambrian Mountains, the central spine of Wales, and dominated by Pumlumon Fawr at 752m above OD in the north. The plateaux are deeply dissected by the valleys of the Rivers Rheidol, Ystwyth and their tributaries, the lower reaches of which are below 50m above OD at the plateaux margins along the west side of the area. Cors Caron, a raised mire occupying the basin of a former lake on the upper reaches of the River Teifi, is included on the south west side. The whole area is rich in diverse and often visually dramatic evidence of land use and the exploitation of natural resources, from the prehistoric period to the present, and it also includes several sites with important historic artistic associations.

The valleys provide two major cross-mountain, east-west routes, the northernmost from the Rheidol valley via Devil's Bridge to the upper reaches of the Wye valley below Eisteddfar Gurig, and the other route from Devil's Bridge follows the Ystwyth valley virtually to its source and thence to the headwaters of the River Elan. These routes provided the spectacle of mountain scenery, open upland moors and rivers and waterfalls that became almost the stock-in-trade descriptions and views of the 18th century travellers and artists, particularly if they continued on to visit Thomas Jones's inspired, designed landscape of Hafod in the Ystwyth valley.

The area became more accessible to the traveller with the coming of the railways in the late 19th century, but there were many false starts in the Manchester and Milford Railway's plans for lines across it. By the time the narrow gauge Vale of Rheidol line from Aberystwyth to Devil's Bridge was completed in 1902, the lead mines it was intended to serve had ceased production. From the first, as now, it was a tourist line from the seaside resort of Aberystwyth, up the Rheidol valley by a spectacular 1 in 50 gradient, to the beauty spot of Devil's Bridge.

Two major changes in land use separate the perceived, artistic and tourist landscape of the late 18th and 19th centuries from that of the late 20th century. The most recent, the afforestation of large areas of upland and valley sides, began in the 1920s and is now at its maximum planned extent. As in many other parts of Wales, it has created its own distinctive landscape which has arguably become as much part of the historical continuum of the exploitation of resources in the area as any other activity.

The second major industry represented in this area is the silver and lead mine industry whose period of most intense operation spans the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The principal sites with extant remains are Esgair-mwyn, Cwmystwyth, Frongoch, Ystum Tuen, Llywernog, Pontewryd, Goginan, Great Darren, Cwmsymlog and Bryndyfi. Most surface buildings and processing evidence is 19th century in date, but there are earlier traces from the 17th and 18th centuries era of the Mines Royal and Mines Adventurers. In 1637, Charles I gave Thomas Bushell permission to set up a branch of the Royal

Mint in Aberystwyth Castle, which used silver from the lead ores of five Ceredigion mines. Of even greater significance perhaps is the recent and convincing demonstration through excavation and survey of prehistoric, Bronze Age copper mining from such sites as Copa Hill near Cwmystwyth.

Despite their late 19th century period of operation, the Ceredigion lead mining and processing industry relied almost wholly on water power. Many miles of upland leats can still be traced and the storage reservoirs above the mines are now difficult to distinguish from natural pools. Water power is still important in the area and the River Rheidol and its tributaries are dammed below Pumlumon, at Nant-y-moch, the site of the largest hydro-electric scheme in England and Wales, completed in 1962.

Miners' housing survives both in isolated areas and in settlements like Ffair Rhos and Pontrhydfendigaid. The post-medieval growth of these villages was mainly due to the mining and quarrying industry and to the long distance livestock trade organised by the Drovers. Drovers converged on Cwmystwyth and Ffair Rhos, before taking the open mountain routes to the east. Fairs at Ffair Rhos and Pontrhydfendigaid were dominated by the livestock trade.

Livestock (cattle and sheep) production and the ability to supplement agricultural income by mining work enriched this area of Mid-Wales in the 18th and 19th centuries. Decline in these industries caused massive depopulation and many emigrated to America and Canada. The vegetational and land use changes of the 20th century, intended to compensate for the decline in hill farming and collapse of rural extractive industries, are particularly marked in this area not just by afforestation. The area is important for the experimental work in grassland improvement associated with Sir George Stapledon (and his successors) while Professor of Agricultural Botany at University College Aberystwyth (1919–1942), which was of world importance. It is appropriate that Plas Gogerddan, a former gentry mansion, and the former home farm at Trawscoed (or Crosswood) mansion are among the College's Field Stations. In an earlier period, the 18th and 19th centuries gentry were agricultural improvers and this area contains an intact bloc of Parliamentary Enclosures, near Ffair Rhos, which can be linked to the surveyor John Mathews.

The fortunes of the leading Ceredigion gentry families were enhanced by appropriation of the estates of former monastic houses, most notably of the Cistercian House of Strata Florida. Re-established at its present site in 1184, the Abbey came under the patronage of the Lord Rhys, prince of Deheubarth, and his descendants, many of whom were buried there. It had a number of Welsh abbots, and its important cultural influence in medieval Wales can be gauged from the fact that the Welsh Chronicle *Brut y Tywysogion* was partly compiled there.

The area encloses the Abbey site and the whole of the large upland grange of Cwmystwyth. Lead smelting at

Cwmystwyth reduced the areas of woodland, but the mainstay of the grange's economy was its upland sheep walks. Surviving landscape traces and good 18th century estate plans, notably of the Gogerddan Estate, make reconstruction of their full extent feasible. Work on pollen cores from Cors Caron has provided a firm outline of the vegetational history of part of the area, particularly on the impact made by Cistercian farming. The medieval livestock régime of both cattle and sheep was undoubtedly organised through seasonal grazing of the uplands or transhumance. Settlement studies of hafod and lluest named settlements have demonstrated how seasonally occupied holdings could evolve into permanent small holdings from the later Middle Ages onwards. There are many well-documented examples within this landscape area.

Bronze Age monuments are known from the high uplands as well as the plateaux west of the Cambrian Mountains. In addition to antiquarian explorations and finds of pottery and metalwork, groups of cairns have been excavated at Nant-y-moch and a barrow at Troed Rhiw Seiri. There are large areas of wild, remote, almost untouched moorland, for example, south and east of Cwmystwyth, which have not been systematically surveyed and have great archaeological potential. Changing use of the uplands during the first half of the first millennium BC, mainly brought about by climatic deterioration, led to changes in settlement patterns. A proliferation of different kinds of Iron Age defended sites occurs west and south of the area, but Iron Age settlement is attested by such sites as Castell Rhyfel hillfort, Caron-Is-Clawdd, and the strongly defended Castell Bwa-Drain high above Cwm Rheidiol.

The western limits of the area partly enclose the Roman route corridor of Sarn Helen, the principal north-south route through Wales, with an auxiliary fort at Trawscoed, strategically sited to safeguard the route across the deep valleys of the Rheidiol and the Ystwyth. Also included within the western limits are medieval Welsh settlements, commotal centres like Ystrad Meurig or Llanfihangel-y-Creuddyn, which

were seized by the Normans in the 11th and 12th centuries and made the centres of their new lordships. The area is also esteemed for its associations with the 14th century Welsh bard and lyricist, Dafydd ap Gwilym, who was born at Bro Gynin near Penrhyn-coch and buried at Strata Florida, and who may well have stayed and recited at these courts during his career.

SUMMARY

Ref number	HLW (D) 2
Index map no.	4
OS map	Landranger 135, 146, 147
Former county	Dyfed (Powys)
Unitary authority	Ceredigion (Powys)
Principal area designations	The eastern half of the area is within the Cambrian Mountains Environmentally Sensitive Area. The area includes: Cors Caron National Nature Reserve and parts of Elenydd, Llynnoedd Ieuan and Pumlumon Sites of Special Scientific Interest; Strata Florida Abbey Guardianship Site; Copa Hill, Cwmystwyth, lead mine Scheduled Ancient Monument; Tregaron Conservation Area.
Criteria	1, 2, 3, 5
Contents and significance	An extensive area of dissected upland plateaux situated on the west side of the Cambrian Mountains in Ceredigion, containing rich and diverse evidence of land use from the prehistoric period to the recent past. The area includes: prehistoric to recent mining remains and settlements; Sarn Helen Roman road; medieval settlements; Strata Florida Abbey and lands; Drovers' routes; Parliamentary Enclosures; historic literary and artistic associations and the setting for Thomas Jones's Hafod; modern changes in land use typified by forestry plantations and the Nant-y-moch hydro-electric scheme.

Ffynonellau detholedig / Selected sources

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