



South Wales RIGS Group Site Record RIGS Description

SECTION A

General	South Wales
Site Name: The Hermitage	File Number: AH_04
RIGS Number: 727	Surveyed by: AJ Humpage
Grid Reference: SO 22788 25173	Date of Visit: 16 February 2011
RIGS Category: Scientific	Date Registered: Unknown
Earth Science Category: Geomorphological, Sedimentological	
Site Nature: Valley floor river confluence	Documentation prepared by: AJH
Unitary Authority: Monmouthshire CC	Documentation last revised: 19 August 2011
OS 1:50,000 Sheet: 161	Photographic Record: See images attached to this report
OS 1:25,000 Explorer Sheet: OL 13	
BGS 1:50,000 Sheet: 214 (Talgarth)	
<p>RIGS Statement of Interest: This site forms part of a network of important scientific sites within the South Wales RIGS area associated with the glacial evolution of the area. It may be critical in determining whether or not the Black Mountains were glaciated.</p> <p>Fifty metres upstream of the gate marking the end of the public road, is a section in Quaternary deposits on the north side of the forestry track. This section records a loose diamict composed of Devonian Old Red Sandstone clasts in a loose sandy matrix.</p> <p>This has been interpreted by Lewis and Thomas (2005) to indicate that the valleys of the Black Mountains were glaciated during the Devensian, reinforced by degraded hummocky ground around Llanbedr village interpreted as cross-valley moraines and kame topography. Lewis and Thomas identified striated clasts in the section but none have been subsequently discovered.</p> <p>However, some doubt was cast on this interpretation by Thomas and Humpage (2007), and subsequent visits indicate that some of the material appears to have a marked downslope orientation suggesting that the deposit may be a dissected alluvial fan deposited at times of high water flow in the two rivers, possible during the Late Glacial – Interglacial Transition. Other parts of the section show pods of material suggesting deposition by sub-aerial debris flow processes.</p> <p>Adjacent to the site is a small bedrock quarry exposing well-developed, thickly bedded red/grey medium grained sandstones of the Senni Formation.</p>	

Geological setting/context:

The landscape evolution history of the Black Mountains is not well understood, as although extensive glacial deposits have been mapped in the dip-slope valleys of the Honddu, Grwyne Fawr and Grwyne Fechan (BGS 2004), there is no evidence of mid-Wales ice incursion over the northern escarpment of the Black Mountains, or conclusive evidence of glaciation of the Black Mountains during the last (Devensian) Ice Age, although Lewis and Thomas (2005) reported kame topography around Llanbedr in the Grwyne Fechan and glacial deposits were mapped on the basis of an aerial photograph interpretation reconnaissance survey in 2002 (BGS 2004).

References:

Baker-Gabb, R. (1913) Hills and Vales of the Black Mountains District. 81pp.

British Geological Survey (2004). *Talgarth. England and Wales Sheet 214. Solid and Drift Geology. 1:50,000*. British Geological Survey, Keyworth, Nottingham.

Lewis, C.A. and Thomas, G.S.P. (2005). The Upper Wye and Usk Regions. In: C.A. Lewis and A.E. Richards (Eds). *The Glaciations of Wales and Adjacent Regions*. Logaston Press, Logaston, Herefordshire.

Thomas, G.S.P. and Humpage, A.J. (2007). Llanvihangel Crucorney,. In: S.J. Carr, C.G. Coleman, A.J. Humpage and R.A. Shakesby (Eds). *Quaternary of the Brecon Beacons: Field Guide*. Quaternary Research Association, London.

SECTION B

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Please score Accessibility and Safety Red Amber or Green

Accessibility:



Comment: The site is privately owned but accessible.

Safety:



The Hermitage is in ruins and is now fenced off to prevent access to the structure which is unstable. The Senni Fm quarry is not easily accessible due to fallen trees.

Conservation status:

The river channel as far as Hermitage Bridge is part of the River Usk (Tributaries) SSSI otherwise there are no known conservation designations on this RIGS.

OWNERSHIP/PLANNING CONTROL:

Owner/tenant: Unknown

Planning Authority: Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

Planning status/constraints/opportunities: There are no known planning constraints or opportunities

CONDITION, USE & MANAGEMENT:

Present use: Access tracks and ruined house

Site condition: The main section exposing the Quaternary deposits is alongside a forestry track and is degrading and becoming overgrown. The Senni Formation quarry is heavily overgrown with some fallen trees.

Potential threats: None known

Site Management: Clearance of quarry and sections could be undertaken with landowner

SITE DEVELOPMENT:

Potential use (general): An important site for considering the glacial evolution of the Black Mountains

Potential use (educational): Good accessible site.

Other comments:

The Hermitage, built in the early 1800's and now in ruins, is described in "Hills and Vales of the Black Mountains" by R Baker-Gabb (1913), as a "four square Georgian style building with timber panelling and extensive cellars". It was constructed by John Macnamara who was reputedly a member of the notorious Hell Fire Club and a well-

known Regency period gambler. He won Llangoed Castle and estate, north of Talgarth, in a high stakes gambling match. Llangoed was a large country house (now a hotel) near Llyswen and was the home of the Williams family whose coat of arms gave its name to the village of Three Cocks. The Llangoed Estate of some 54,000 acres included large areas of Grwyne Fechan and Fawr valleys. The loser believed it unlikely that a high society gambler would settle long in this remote part of Wales and so he extracted a promise he would “sell back the estate when no longer on the land”. Contrary to prediction, Macnamara and his wife proceeded to establish themselves at Llangoed Castle.

Macnamara became so settled that he built the large house called The Hermitage in the remote upper Grwyne Fechan valley and installed a mistress. This section of the valley was not accessible by coach so he arranged to have a high level road built for his use, an indication no doubt of the lady’s fascination and attraction.

When the high living Macnamara died in 1818, allegedly killed in his coach on the high road he built to reach the Hermitage, his widow was put in a difficult position when pressed to honour the promise made at the gambling match. Mrs Macnamara was by now quite settled at Llangoed Castle and believed the land was rightfully hers, so she arranged for her dead husband’s body to be placed in a tomb deliberately built above ground. In this way John Macnamara would remain ‘on the land’ forever, his promise unbroken.

The Hermitage was part of the Glanusk Estate before the First World War. On the riverside adjacent to the house are the remains of what appears to be a water turbine house suggesting the house may have been an early recipient of electricity.

Photographic Record



Quaternary diamict on forestry track at confluence of the Gargwy and Grwyne Fechan.



East end of diamict section, with debris-flow type pods to right



Quarry in Senni Formation adjacent to the road – view looking west.



Ruins of The Hermitage – view looking south-west.