

**CYNGOR CEFN GWLAD CYMRU
COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES**

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

POWYS

CWMSAISE

<u>Date of Notification:</u>	1997
<u>National Grid Reference:</u>	SO 140698
<u>O.S. Maps:</u>	1:50,000 Sheet number: 148 1:10,000 Sheet number: SO 16 NW, SO 17 SW
<u>Site Area:</u>	15.5 ha

Description:

Cwmsaise is of special interest for its neutral and acidic grasslands which have been maintained as part of the extensive, traditionally farmed pastures and meadows. There are also small areas of marshy grassland, woodland and scrub, as well as an extensive network of species-rich hedges, banks and ditches, and two watercourses.

Cwmsaise is situated in rolling hills at an altitude of 260-340m, 2km north of the village of Dolau. It consists of 19 enclosures, divided by ditches, banks which support a woodland flora, and relic, species-rich hedge lines. The fields lie on gentle to moderate south-facing slopes which run down to a brook. Two small tributaries of the River Aran are included in the site. The bedrock is composed of Silurian shales, which are overlain by free-draining brown earths, and in places by more water-retentive cambic stagnogleys. Small-scale variations in soil drainage and pH give rise to intimate, small-scale mosaics of neutral and acidic grassland, which grade into one another.

The neutral grassland is composed principally of red fescue *Festuca rubra*, Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris* and crested dog-s-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*. A variety of other plants are also present, including common bird-s-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*, common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* and cat-s ear *Hypochaeris radicata*. In some areas, the mosses *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus* and *Calliergon cuspidatum* are abundant. Where the brown earths are more base-poor, these swards also contain tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, carnation sedge *Carex caryophyllea* and devil-s-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*.

The major constituents of the acidic swards at Cwmsaise are common bent, Yorkshire-fog, sweet vernal-grass, red fescue and sheep-s fescue *Festuca ovina*. Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, tormentil, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile* and red clover *Trifolium pratense* are amongst the more common herbaceous plants. This latter species is indicative of less acidic conditions, and common bird-s-foot trefoil and common knapweed, which are more commonly associated with neutral soils, are also present in some parts of the sward. A distinctive variant of the predominant type of acidic grassland occurs the southern edge of the site, where the soils are even more base-rich. In addition to the species described above, these areas support mountain vetch *Lathyrus montanus*, quaking-

grass *Briza media*, betony *Stachys officinalis* and devil's-bit scabious. Elsewhere, damper sedge and rush-rich areas are interspersed with patches of acidic grassland.

The northernmost enclosure, at an altitude of over 300 m above sea level, consists of upland acidic grassland containing some heather *Calluna vulgaris*. Ridge and furrow topography indicate past ploughing or drainage. Tormentil, heath bedstraw and heath milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia* are also found in the sward. Patches of mire, dominated by purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, form a mosaic with the grassland.

Damper areas of rush-pasture occur along the watercourses, and as isolated pockets where drainage is impeded. These are dominated by sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, and associated species include common marsh-bedstraw *Galium palustre*, marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris*, marsh valerian *Valeriana dioica*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris* and lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*.

Woodland occupies some steep valley sides, and bracken, scrub and gorse have colonised parts of some enclosures, providing additional habitats for invertebrates and birds. No animal surveys have been carried out, but brown hares have been recorded at Cwmsaisie.

The enclosures north of the track, and the verges, support the largest known population of adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum* in Radnor. A few plants of wood bitter-vetch *Vicia orobus* occur in the neutral grassland.

Remarks:

The site boundary along the access road takes in the hedges and verges and adder's-tongue fern occur on the roadside banks.

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