

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

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

POWYS/MERTHYR TYDFIL

BRECON BEACONS

Date of Notification: 1965, 1972, 1978, 1986

National Grid Reference: SO102200

O.S. Maps: 1:50,000 Sheet number: 160
1:25,000 Sheet number: SO 01, 02 / SN 91, 92

Site Area: 4993 ha

Description:

Biological

This site is an important example of the Old Red Sandstone uplands to be found in this part of Wales. It contains mixed broadleaved woods in the lower sheltered valleys, a rich rock-ledge flora on the escarpments of the major corries and blanket bog and montane bent-fescue grassland on the summit ridges, the highest of which is Pen y Fan at 886 metres.

The precipitous north-facing cliffs of Craig Cerrig-gleisiad, Craig Cwm-llwch, Craig Cwm-Sere, Graig Cwm Cynwyn and Craig Cwareli support a notable range of arctic-alpine plant species, here at or close to the southern-most edge of their range in Britain. Examples are purple saxifrage *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, dwarf willow *Salix herbacea*, serrated wintergreen *Orthilia secunda* and northern bedstraw *Galium boreale*. Craig Cerrig-gleisiad supports at least 300 plant species, including 100 different bryophytes. Rock outcrops on Garn Fawr and Cwar y Gigfran provide a habitat for upland lichen species such as *Pseudephebe pubescens* and *Umbilicaria cylindrica*, both scarce species in southern Britain.

Blanket bog, badly eroded in places, clothes the more gently sloping ridges. Apart from inaccessible ledges, frequently with a rich moss, fern and herb flora, the entire site is heavily grazed. Dwarf-shrub heath still survives in a few places, notably on Y Gyrn, Waun Lysiog and in Cwm Cwareli. Elsewhere it has been replaced by extensive stands of montane bent-fescue grassland with varying quantities of mat-grass *Nardus stricta*. Wet flushes are frequent in the cwms and often support a notable flora, including bog orchid *Hammarbya paludosa*. Herb-rich flushes are particularly well developed in the alder, ash and oak woodlands of the Nant Sere valley, which are also included in the site. Open water is scarce, Llyn-cwm-llych providing one of the few examples of a corrie lake in

Brecknock. Although the animal life of the site requires further study, the northern cwm woodlands are known to support an interesting range of crane-fly species.

Geological/Physiographical

There are three localities of special interest. The disused Craig y Fro Quarry at SN 972203 is of importance for its Seigenian, Senni Beds flora. A number of genera have been described and it is the type-locality for *Gosslingia breconensis* Heard and *Krithodeophyton Edwards*, the latter being the only representative of the order *Bamirophytales* recorded from Britain. The petrifications collected at Craig y Fro are essential in any anatomical study of the Senni Beds flora, and are second only to those from the internationally renowned Rynie Chert locality in Scotland as regards the quality of their preservation.

Cwm Llwh (SO 005220) is a classic landform providing a particularly fine example of a corrie cut into the Old Red Sandstone escarpment of the Brecon Beacons. It would have acted as a source of ice on a number of occasions during the Pleistocene and contains a tarn and a striking 25 metre high terminal moraine that probably formed during the very last glacial episode, the Loch Lomond Stadial.

Cwm Cerrig-gleisiad (SN 964223) provides important geomorphological evidence for Late Devensian glaciation in the Brecon Beacons and also a pollen record which has significant bearing both on the age of the last glaciers in the area and on Flandrian vegetation changes in upland South Wales. A complex of glacial deposits extends beyond the lip of the corrie and is succeeded up-valley by an arcuate end moraine. While the age and origin of the former are debatable and could relate to a stage of the last ice sheet glaciation or a pre or early Loch Lomond stadial ice advance, they provide the potential for elaborating the glacial history of the area. Comparison of the pollen stratigraphy from within the end moraine with that from Traeth Mawr on Mynydd Iltyd provides the clearest evidence in the region that dates indirectly the last glaciers to the Loch Lomond Stadial. Further, the pollen record from Cwm Cerrig-gleisiad, in conjunction with that from other sites, has allowed a detailed reconstruction of Flandrian vegetation and environmental history in the Brecon Beacons.

Remarks:

The site lies within the Brecon Beacons National Park.

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