

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

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

POWYS

ERWOOD DINGLE

<u>Date of notification:</u>	1992, 1997
<u>National grid reference:</u>	SO 090426
<u>O.S. Maps:</u>	1:50,000 Sheet number: 147 1:10,000 Sheet number: SO04 SE
<u>Site area:</u>	24.8 ha

Description:

This site comprises semi-natural woodland clothing the steep-sided valley of the Nant Cletwr, a small tributary of the River Wye by the village of Erwood. The woodland is of special interest because local variations in geology, topography and past management have produced a variety of distinctive woodland types that together support more than 150 species of vascular plant. The bryophyte flora is also rich, particularly on the riverside rocks and in the steepest parts of the dingle. Of the ancient semi-natural woodlands lying on the Old Red Sandstone in Brecknock, Erwood Dingle is outstanding in having one of the richest ground floras and the most diverse range of woodland sub-communities. The Cletwr is also of special interest as it supports important populations of otter *Lutra lutra* and Atlantic stream crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes*.

The underlying base-rich sandstone influences the species composition of most of the site. The lower slopes and drier stream sides support a canopy of ash *Fraxinus excelsior* with an understorey of hazel *Corylus avellana*, field maple *Acer campestre* and young wych elm *Ulmus glabra*. The field layer is characterised by the presence of dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, herb-robert *Geranium robertianum*, hart's-tongue *Phyllitis scolopendrium*, soft shield-fern *Polystichum setiferum* and yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*. Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* becomes dense at the eastern end of the dingle. Stream-side rocks and crags support a similar canopy, but here species such as wood sage *Teucrium scorodonia*, false brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*, wood melick *Melica uniflora*, hard shield-fern *Polystichum aculeatum* and woodruff *Galium odoratum* become more prominent in the field layer. The more shaded waterside rocks support oak fern *Gymnocarpium dryopteris* and lush bryophyte communities. There are small stands of wet woodland along the stream banks which are dominated by alder *Alnus glutinosa* and ash, with hazel beneath and a field layer characterised by meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, opposite and alternate-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and *C. alternifolium* and marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris*.

The upper dingle slopes and higher sandstone outcrops support ash woodland with an understorey of hazel and occasional rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and wych elm. Small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* is locally prominent and wild service-tree *Sorbus torminalis* occurs on the steeper cliffs. The field layer is variable and rich. Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, lords-and-ladies *Arum maculatum*, wood melick, wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, soft shield-fern and other large ferns *Dryopteris spp.* are all locally prominent.

Deeper soils at the top of the slopes support a canopy of pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, which is accompanied by ash or birch *Betula spp.* in places, with an understorey of hazel and occasional rowan. The field layer is dominated by bluebell with mixtures of creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis*, wood-sorrel, greater stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*, tufted hair-grass, pignut *Conopodium majus* and broad buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata*. Bramble and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* are locally abundant within this community. On the southern edge of the dingle, areas of wet pasture supporting species such as sedges *Carex spp.*, sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus* and marsh valerian *Valeriana dioica* merge into damp, base-rich woodland, with a canopy of ash and an understorey of hazel and field maple. The field layer here is characterised by species such as dog's mercury, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, lesser celandine *Ranunculus ficaria*, bluebell and early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula*.

Base-poor outcrops of shale occur in places, especially at the western end of the dingle. These support a sessile oak *Quercus petraea* canopy with occasional hazel, birch and rowan. The field layer is largely grass-dominated, but areas of deeper soil support bluebell, bracken and wood-sorrel, whilst areas of thinner soil have extensive moss carpets, and species such as heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and common cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense*.

The Cletwr is a good example of a small oceanic river with mesotrophic water chemistry. It is characterised by an abundance of mosses and liverworts including *Amblystegium fluviatile*, *Brachythecium plumosum*, *B. rivulare*, *B. rutabulum*, *Cinclidotus fontinalioides*, *Rhyncostegium riparioides*, *Thamnobryum alopecurum*, *Chiloscyphus polyanthus* and *Conocephalum conicum*, and lichens *Verrucaria spp.*. The brook also supports a good population of otters. Breeding holts are often located in the roots of large trees at the water's edge.

The brook also contains Atlantic stream crayfish, a species which has declined in the UK and is now specially protected. A few Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar* are able to negotiate the falls in Erwood village and pass through the dingle when migrating to their spawning areas. The Wye and its tributaries, including the Cletwr Brook, support nationally important populations of these species.

Remarks:

The site supports the following species covered by EC Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and wild flora and fauna:

Common otter *Lutra lutra* – Annex II and IV

Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar* – Annex II and IV

Atlantic stream crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes* – Annex II and V

Otter and Atlantic stream crayfish are also listed in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended.

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