

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

**SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION**

**BLAENAU GWENT/POWYS**

**MYNYDD LLANGATWG**

**Date of Notification:** 1967, 1972, 1978, 1986, 1995

**National Grid Reference:** SO 187148

**O.S. Maps** 1:50,000 Sheet number: 161  
1:25,000 Sheet number: SO 11 and SO 21

**Site Area:** 1727 hectares

**Description:**

Mynydd Llangatwg straddles the Powys/Blaenau Gwent county boundary to the north of the Heads of the Valleys Road between Brynmawr and Ebbw Vale. Most of the site lies on a broad gently sloping Millstone Grit plateau, at an altitude of 500m. Steeper slopes are mostly associated with the Carboniferous Limestone outcrops which form extensive escarpments along the north-east margins. The variety of soils reflect geology and topography. Around the limestone escarpment the soils are generally base-rich humic rankers, and the slopes provide relatively free drainage. On the Millstone Grit plateau the moist base-poor humic rankers on the better drained slopes grade into podzols, with wetter peaty gleys on gentle slopes, and raw acid peats on the flattest land where blanket mire has developed.

The base-rich grassland, heather dominated blanket mire, and dry heath, are of special interest. The crags, woodland and grassland of the limestone escarpments support important assemblages of rare and scarce vascular plants, bryophytes and lichens. Below the surface lies an extensive and important cave system, noted for its geomorphological interest. Parts of cave system are also of special interest for the lesser horseshoe bat. Additional habitat interest is provided by wet heath, acid grassland, modified blanket mire, and other less extensive habitats including a small raised mire.

The base-rich grassland around the escarpments is characterised by the occurrence of sheep's-fescue *Festuca ovina*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris* and thyme *Thymus praecox*. It is a grassland type closely associated with outcropping Carboniferous Limestone in upland climates of north and western Britain and the swards on Mynydd Llangatwg provide a good representative example of a community scarce in Brecknock.

Within the limestone escarpments Craig y Cilau forms the most impressive section, with at least 250 species of flowering plants associated with its limestone outcrops, scree, base rich grassland and scrub woodland. The flora includes uncommon species such as mountain melick *Melica nutans*, angular Solomon's-seal *Polygonatum odoratum*, mossy saxifrage *Saxifraga hypnoides* and alpine enchanter's-nightshade *Circaea alpina*, occurring here at its most southerly known locality in Britain. The moss, liverwort and lichen flora of the rocks and scree is also of particular note, being diverse and including a number of locally scarce species. The scrub woodland is largely comprised of hawthorn, with ash, both small-leaved and large-leaved lime, and scattered beech at an unusually high altitude. Four species of whitebeam

*Sorbus* spp. endemic to Britain, are also found here, two of which are not known outside Brecknock.

In contrast to the base rich escarpments the gritstone plateau supports a complex of acidic moorland vegetation. Most of the plateau supports blanket mire although much of this is now degraded. The best remaining area around Pwll Gwy-rhoc is dominated by heather and hares-tail cotton grass *Eriophorum vaginatum*, occasionally grading into vegetation where deer grass *Trichophorum cespitosum* and cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, or purple moor grass *Molinia caerulea* become more dominant. This area of blanket mire provides one of the best and most extensive examples of its type in Brecknock.

Much of the degraded area of mire, and other soils with impeded drainage, are dominated by species poor stands of Molinia and associated grassland communities, providing only additional interest, as do the less extensive matgrass *Nardus stricta* and heath rush *Juncus squarrosus* dominated grassland on better drained land. On drier soils areas of heathland vegetation are of more interest, in particular the stands where bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and crowberry *Empetrum nigrum* are codominant. Extensive codominance of these two species is unusual in Brecknock. Other habitats providing additional interest include a small raised mire, Waun Ddu, which although degraded, is a relatively intact example of a mire type of extremely limited occurrence in Brecknock.

Beneath the Mynydd Llangatwg plateau lie more than 40 km of caves which drain from the northern escarpment to resurgences in the Clydach Gorge. The cave passages of the system are mostly large and have a long complex history revealed in both their morphology and their important clastic sediment sequences. Cave development is uniquely extensive under an unbroken cover of Millstone Grit, with important examples of collapse and upward stoping initiated at considerable depth. The eastern portion of the site contains the Craig-y-ffynnon cave system which is remarkable for its display of gypsum and calcite decorations.

The cave system is one of the five most important hibernation sites in the UK for lesser horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus hipposideros*, a species which is threatened in a European context. The Agen Allwedd part of the cave system appears to be the most important, with over 230 hibernating bats recorded in recent years. Seven other bat species have also been recorded hibernating in the caves.

### **Remarks:**

Most of the site is common land.

The Craig y Cilau part of the site is a National Nature Reserve (63 hectares), declared in September 1959.

The site is within the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Lesser horseshoe bat is listed in Annex Ila of Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna and in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

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