

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

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

BLAENAU GWENT

CWM MERDDOG WOODLANDS

Date of Notification: 1994

National Grid Reference: SO 187064, SO 188073

O.S. Maps 1:50,000 Sheet number: 161
1:25,000 Sheet number: SO 10

Site Area: 23.5 ha

Description:

The Cwm Merddog Woodlands comprise an extensive area of beech *Fagus sylvatica* woodland near the westerly limit of its geographical range and part of the site is also the highest known station for beech in Britain. Cwm Merddog Woods also has interesting transition zones between beech and alder *Alnus glutinosa* dominated communities in areas of impeded drainage.

The site comprises two blocks of woodland below Mynydd Carn y Cefn to the south of Ebbw Vale. The main block, Cwm Merddog Wood is located on the middle and lower west and east facing slopes of the Nant Merddog. Whilst Coed Ty'n y gelli is an outlier located at an altitude of 380 m - 460 m above sea level to the north and east. Both woodland blocks are located on soils derived from underlying Lower Coal Measures and from material which has fallen from the Pennant Sandstones above. In Cwm Merddog Wood, the free draining soils of the steep upper slopes support areas of beech coppice and coppice-with-standards with a characteristic ground flora which includes the locally distributed broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*.

The lower slopes have extensive areas of acid flushes with an open carr community dominated by alder and willows *Salix spp.* These wetter areas and flushes have a rich flora of mosses, ferns and flowering plants including a number of interesting species that have not previously been recorded for this part of the county, eg. narrow buckler-fern *Dryopteris carthusiana*, greater tussock-sedge *Carex paniculata* and the heath spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*.

The Coed Ty'n y gelli outlier on the upper slopes is an area of coppiced beech woodland growing at the limit of its altitudinal range. The trees in this block are stunted and gnarled in appearance and large areas of the canopy are less than 2 m in height.

Additional species within the canopy of both woodland blocks include scattered individuals of sessile oak *Quercus petraea*, hazel *Corylus avellana*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and birch *Betula pendula*.

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