

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

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

POWYS

OGOF FFYNNON-DDU – PANT MAWR

Date of notification: 1954, 1963, 1967, 1970, 1988

National grid reference: SN 880155

O.S. Maps: 1:50,000 Sheet number: 160
1:25,000 Sheet number: SN 81 and SN 91

Site area: 1141.9 ha

Description:

Geological/geomorphological: The site contains a major part of an extensive cave system, which has at least 40 kilometres of passages, the largest length in any Welsh cave, situated within a vertical range of 300 metres, which is the greatest in any cave in Britain. In addition some other smaller, but related, caves are included in the site. The cave system is important not only for its sheer size, but also its spectacular morphological features, some extremely fine calcite deposits, and an historical record which may extend back to pre-Pleistocene times. Traversing the deepest exposed karst block in Britain, it offers an unparalleled record of successive rejuvenation in response to glacial excavations of an adjacent major valley.

Biological: The undulating upland plateau above the cave system supports the finest limestone pavement in mid and south Wales. It is rich in plant species, including such rarities as lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis*, soft-leaved sedge *Carex montana*, mountain melick *Melica nutans*, lesser meadow-rue *Thalictrum minus* and the nationally rare hairy greenweed *Genista pilosa*. Moss and lichen species are well developed, but are not as important a component as they are on the large areas of millstone grit block scree and pavement, of which the site provides the best examples in Wales. Large areas of rock pavement are covered by the rock tripe lichen, *Lasalia pustulata*, whilst flushed rocks support the black colonies of the moss, *Andraea rothii*. Upland lichen communities of the *Lecidietum kockiani* are well developed. *Cladonia* species occur in abundance, including *C. sulphurina* at its only known Welsh locality. Peat overlies large areas and supports blanket bog communities dominated by dwarf-shrub heath rich in heather *Calluna vulgaris* and bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*. Such communities reach their finest development in areas of low grazing pressure, notably in sink holes and within the ring fence of forestry plantations. These areas of sheltered, deep heather provide suitable habitat for nightjars, offering probably one of the last breeding localities in Brecknock for this summer-visiting bird. Also present within the site are a number of peat-bottomed pools with a well developed upland dragonfly and damselfly population.

The biological interest of the cave system itself has been extensively explored. A number of rare crustacean species restricted to subterranean habitats are of particular note.

Remarks:

Part of the water catchment of the cave system is included in the SSSI in order to safeguard the invertebrate fauna and the active geomorphological processes requiring water.

The site includes part of the Ogof Ffynnon Ddu National Nature Reserve.

The site lies within the Brecon Beacons National Park.

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