



PARTNERIAETH TIRWEDD Y  
**CARNEDDAU**  
LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP

# Statement of Significance

Cultural Heritage

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### Cultural heritage

Some of the strongest local mountain traditions relate to livestock farming and its annual cycle of activity including lambing, shearing and gathering. During an oral history pilot project carried out by Lois Jones during the development stage, three interviews were undertaken with farmers in the Abergwyngregyn and Llanllechid area who are in their 70s and 80s; full details are provided as an additional report. Common themes of discussion included: family connections across the mountains; changes in agriculture; sheepfolds; the establishment and maintenance of flocks' cynefinoedd (hefts) in the mountains; social aspects of farming; shearing; earmarking and; place names. The interviews were conducted in Welsh; the excerpts below were translated for this report.

Gathering and sorting flocks of sheep on open mountain land requires collaboration and coordination between many different farmers and landowners. Sheep gathering takes place three times a year; early summer for shearing, late summer to separate lambs for market, and autumn to bring the stock down from the mountain. There is a traditional pattern which sees the gathering start in the Conwy Valley commons and then work its way round the Carneddau anticlockwise from the north east through to Dyffryn Ogwen over successive days. Gathering featured in all the interviews.

*"We've got two gatherings in a way, usually we gather on a Friday and a Monday and then there's another gathering the next day in Buarth Newydd up the top there, then Llanllechid gather... Well Llanfairfechan gather first, well it starts in Penmaenmawr really, then Llanfairfechan, then Aber, it works fine. Everybody helps each other.*

*We've got two sheepfolds, three, four all together, there were two in Anafon, there's one in Cwm and another in Buarth Newydd. There was one big 'corlan' in the middle and then everyone had their own separate 'corlan'. The shepherd would have a 'corlan' to keep the rogue sheep."*

One of the interviewees described the first time he took part in gathering from the high mountains as a child.

*"I'm talking about a time around about the beginning of the 60s between 63 and 65 something like that when I was starting to walk up. I remember going to my first gathering I think I was about 10 years old and I'd had a pair of hob-nailed boots as was the fashion in those days on every farm! And I walked all the way up from Chwillan [Cochwillan], got up at 3am and walked up across other farm fields towards the mountain and kept going up towards Moel Wnion and across then towards Drwsgwl Bach and up past Cwt Jacob and Bere Mawr. I don't remember how long it took but believe me I was tired when I got home! I remember so well. Of course, I didn't have a dog then, but my Dad and my brother had a dog each. Yes, gather and then come down and sort them all. That's characteristic of all gatherings in the Carneddau and many other areas I think, that sort of routine."*

There are far fewer people involved in gathering today and quad bikes and 4x4 vehicles have made some of the work easier, but the only way to reach many areas in the rugged mountain terrain is on foot. Skilled dogs and handlers are essential, with teams of dogs working together to cover large areas of ground.

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Traditionally the ears of mountain sheep were notched so that they could be identified to their farm. There are long established books of the markings, which allow farmers to identify strays, although they will know most patterns by heart. The tradition is still used although today there are also plastic tags.

Shearing in early summer used to be a major communal event, but with mechanisation and collapse in the value of wool this has changed.

*"In the old days every farm would help each other but now we do the shearing ourselves, the boys do the shearing and one comes out to help, but you used to have lunch... Too much lunch be honest! Shearing was quite difficult afterwards! No shearing day isn't as big as it was."*

Hay making was another major social event involving communal labour which has declined with the advent of silage making and new machinery, to the regret of the interviewees.

*"The fun's gone from it now, the leg pulling and trick playing, yes, it's gone. Gathering hay, in my time, small hay bales and everyone would make them with their own baler, we used to make 7,000 small bales of hay here. School boys used to come down and offer help and I'd say 'Duw yes, come down tonight there's a lot of carrying work!'...They'd all come to the house for supper – gosh! At midnight we'd have to send them all home – we had to get up at 6 to milk the cows! It was like a Noson Lawen [musical party/event] in the house here. That time has passed, nobody comes down here to offer help any more, no one."*

Placenames given to the locations in the landscape over the generations, in the Welsh language of course, often reflect events, activities and associations. One of the interviewees related the following story about Maen Cwrw (beer stone) on Llanllechid Common:

*"Because the [Penrhyn] estate used to walk the boundaries and they'd come down to this stone and staff from the castle would come up on mules with beer barrels and food for them...Maen cwrw! That's how it was."*

The field names of a farm near Llanllechid include a small field known as 'Cae Ffeltiwr', where a felt-hat maker once lived.

Cymdeithas Enwau Lleoedd (Welsh Place Name Association) has held a mapping day for Dyffryn Ogwen placenames in Bethesda which generated a lot of local interest and recorded many previously unrecorded names for mountain locations, including fisherman's names for sections and pools on rivers. In Nant y Benglog, 'Waun Fflogyn' is thought to refer to an historic association with Woodcock, a bird which was hunted for its meat and feathers and were used by local fisherman. Placenames on historic and current Ordnance Survey maps tell us a lot about past activities and habitats, for example hafod names are common in the uplands and (mostly) relate to former summer upland dwellings and pastures. Ieuan Wyn discussed the placenames of Dyffryn Ogwen in his talk to the Cymdeithas Enwau Lleoedd, 'Mae'r Mynyddoedd yn Siarad' ('The Mountains Talk') and a script of the talk is provided as a supporting document. This work shows that the richness of local knowledge about place names in the landscapes goes well beyond those on maps. However, local knowledge about place names has not been recorded or interpreted in the same way for other areas of the Carneddau.

The fairs and markets held in and around the Carneddau, tied to the agricultural calendar (labour-hiring and produce fairs) or religious festivals, were major communal events historically. Conwy town retains its Honey Fair which dates to the Medieval period. Until the 1960s Carneddau ponies were sold at the autumn fairs in Llanllechid and Menai Bridge and whilst this practice has come to an end, an annual

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fun-fair in Llanllechid survives as a reminder of this past practice. The annual carnival at Rowen is said to have its origins in a fair related to the droving trade. But new events, such as the long standing Dyffryn Ogwen agricultural show and the more recent Afon Ogwen river festival in Bethesda could be seen as a latter-day version of older communal events.

For at least the past six millennia the Carneddau landscape has been shaped by the changing relationship between people and environment over time. In turn the landscape has influenced the character of the communities of the area and providing inspiration for creativity, imagination and representation.

Artists Brenda Chamberlain, Kyffin Williams, J.M.W. Turner and John Piper have been discussed in the landscape character area descriptions, and Ieuan Wyn has listed thirty artists associated with the area (see supporting document).

The Carneddau has a strong literary tradition, which has been reviewed for the project by Ieuan Wyn as discussed in the landscape character section of the LCAP and presented in detail in a supporting report. Amongst the earliest poetry are those of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century bards who were sponsored by gentry families of the area (in return for their praises in verse) such as Cochwillan, Coetmor and Penrhyn. Many poets in the nineteenth to twenty-first century have drawn on the Carneddau as a motif or inspiration in their work, a number of them winning bardic Crowns at National Eisteddfodau (cultural competitions). Four Prifardd (the highest accolade awarded by at National Eisteddfod) have been born and brought up in Dyffryn Ogwen.

In prose, there are numerous important works, including one of the earliest guidebooks to a single mountain written in any language - Hugh

Derfel Hughes, 'Llawlyfr Carnedd Llewelyn' (1864) - early and influential studies of the antiquities of Dyffryn Ogwen (also Hugh Derfel Hughes, 'Hynafiaethau Llandegai a Llanllechid', 1866) and Llanfairfechan (Walter Bezzant-Lowe 'The Heart of Northern Wales', 1912), fisherman's guides (William Roberts, 'Llawlyfr y Pysgotwr' (1899)) and personal accounts of farming life (Margaret Roberts 'Oes o Fyw ar y Mynydd', 1979) and customs (William Williams' 'Observations on the Snowdon Mountains' (1802) as well as guides to paths, nature and cultural figures of the area.

The quarrying communities have traditionally placed an emphasis on the importance of knowledge, learning and culture. The non-conformist chapels and the Sunday Schools held at many of them have been essential foci for education since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in both rural and industrial communities around the area. Mythic and folklore associations with the landscape include magical beings and creatures (Rhitta Fawr, Arthur, the ancient owl of Cwm Cowlyd in the Mabinogi tale of Culhwch and Olwen and various stories of the mischievous and malevolent Tylwyth Teg (fairies) – see additional literature report).

There is a substantial body of early travel and tourist writing relating to the area, particularly from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The accounts are generally focussed on the picturesque or sublime qualities of the landscape, its wild characteristics or beauty and present an outsiders' view, in contrast to the insiders view of the Welsh language literature. Thomas Pennant's account of his visit to Cwm Pen-llafar in the 1770s (in which he describes the Ysgolion Duon as 'the most horrid precipice that thought can conceive') is in stark contrast to Hugh Derfel's 'Llawlyfr Carnedd Llewelyn' or John T. Jôb's elegaic farewell to Cwm Pen-llafar in his poem 'Ffarwel i Eryri'. George Borrow ('Wild Wales') is unusual in his engagement with local people, traditions and culture, but it is still a romantic view.

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Perhaps the starkest difference in vision of landscape is between the experience of landscape through dwelling and work and that of leisure, particularly mountaineering, although this has become an important part of the cultural heritage of the area. Helyg, a cottage in Nant y Benglog, became a bothy for the Climber's Club in 1925 and was the base for an innovative generation of climbers in the early to mid-twentieth who established new climbing routes in the area (particularly the Glyderau) and trained for major expeditions in the Alps and Himalaya. From the mid-twentieth century more local people have become involved in climbing and mountaineering and in leisure use of the mountains and a number of people born and brought up in the area have established new routes at the uppermost standard and become international mountaineers. Recently, Clwb Mynydda Cymru has reclaimed the genre of mountain-writing, with its beautifully produced volume *Copaon Cymru* (2016) which includes six walks in the Carneddau and blends route descriptions with narratives of landscape, culture and heritage.

For many people, the hardy and independent semi-feral Carneddau ponies are a fine icon of the area and its qualities. The Chough was recognised as emblematic of the area by many people during our consultations, and we were told that in the 1950s there was a category for Chough in the Dyffryn Ogwen agricultural show and that they were kept by quarrymen in the area. Childhood memories of Bilberry picking are common and there was near universal appreciation of the area's qualities of space, nature and in the high uplands, solitude and peace.

('Yr Helfa Fawr' is the gathering. Ieuan Wyn reflects on Sir Ifor Williams' recollections of participating in Yr Helfa Fawr with the poet's Grandfather. Williams commented in his publication, *I Ddifyrnu'r Amser*, that although nobody knows where Yr Helfa Fawr's traditions came from, they're respected and followed to this day).

#### ***Yr Helfa Fawr***

Uwch Tan y Garth mor fyw y buarthau,  
A'r rhos anial yn ferw o synau;  
Stŵr y breffu, y cyfarth a'r arthio,  
A gwŷr y mynydd yn eu grym yno;  
Ogleuon baw a gwlan ar yr awel,  
A'r cnuf yn iach o'r cynefin uchel.  
Mae eto swyn ddaw i'm tywys heno - i'r llethrau  
A hen hafau nad oes mo'u hanghofio.

*By Ieuan Wyn*

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To survive they cut their flocks' ears  
Hafod y Mynydd, Tyn y Gaer ...  
to tell them apart  
Brongoronwy, Careg y Gath ...  
When the blood dried  
the mist cleared on a new language  
Canwair, Tori Blaen, Bachiad ...  
strange geometries  
bitten into leaves, scrolls, cave walls ...  
Hollt, Grisiau, Cwliad ... –  
the landscape's grave eloquence  
Gareg Ddu, Sychnant, Gorwyr ...  
preserved in a sheep's ear!

*By Paul Henry*



Shearing, Rowen mid-20th century (courtesy Suryiah Evans)



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