



Vegetation clearance project.

Moel Faban.

What is here?

Moel Faban is rich in both archaeology from the last 2,500 years and wildlife including grass and heath habitats and rare plant, bird and fungi species. It is located on the western slopes of the Carneddau above Rachub and Llanllechid villages. Its name probably comes from the Welsh *Moel*, meaning a rounded hill-top and a personal name, *Faban*, possibly an individual who once owned or farmed the land.

Archaeological remains on Moel Faban tell a long story of how people have lived in and shaped the landscape. There are 4,000 year old bronze age burial cairns on the mountain's summit ridge and flanks. Originally, these features would have had a domed profile as they are circular mounds of stone, some huge and visible from far away such as those on the ridge, others smaller and more difficult to find. They marked sacred places.

These types of burials on Moel Faban were places of practice for both cremation and inhumation. The cremations were often placed in ceramic urns, just as the one the centerfold. Other objects such as tools, jewellery and weaponry were also sometimes buried with the deceased. Many of the early bronze age cairns at Moel Faban have been disturbed either by treasure seekers centuries ago or to make shelters.

By around 2,500 to 1,500 years ago (the Iron Age into the Roman period), there were many roundhouse dwellings on the slopes around the Moel. Some were protected by enclosing banks and ditches. Others were scattered amongst large irregularly shaped fields. The field boundaries survive as lines of boulders and low banks and the houses as circular hollows or wall foundations. Nobody lives up here today, but these ancient settlements were probably used year-round.

What are we doing and why?

We are clearing gorse that is damaging important archaeological remains. Gorse roots can push stone-built features apart. Because any buried ancient remains are likely to be very shallow they are vulnerable to damage by the roots. Removing the gorse prevents further damage. It also makes the archaeological features easier for everyone to see and enables better understanding, for example through new survey and investigation.



Image caption A sequence of images of the same settlement enclosure. From left to right: 2020 aerial photo © APCE-ENPA ; 2022 survey © University of Sheffield; lidar 2020 APCE-ENPA

Lidar data capture for the Carneddau Scheme shows hundreds of archaeological features around Moel Faban in new detail. The lidar survey is a 3D model of the ground surface made from millions of laser measurements taken from a scanner beneath a plane. Using special software it can be shown in different ways to reveal features even when they are very slight and difficult or impossible to see on the ground. In the strip of images above, the lidar image at the righthand side shows many more roundhouse platforms in a settlement enclosure than were recorded in a 1950s archaeological survey.



Bronze Age urn found during antiquarian excavations of two cairns on the summit of Moel Faban in 1870, from the report by A.L.Fox in the Journal of the Ethnological Society 1870.

Gorse and heather on Moel Faban



What about nature and wildlife?

An important plant in this upland environment is the heather, seen in its summer purple alongside the gorse above. Unlike the enveloping nature of the gorse, heather grows with an uneven age structure which is important because it provides habitat for different species of wildlife. The uneven age structure is created by humans, traditionally through burning. The Carneddau birds which favour the gorse and heather to nest amongst, stonechats, linnets, wrens and dunnocks, can then forage in these open areas close to their breeding territories. The grazing sheep and Carneddau ponies keep this upland heath and grassland under control and keep the dung invertebrates happy, which in turn provide another food source for the nesting birds and clogh. Search between the blades and you may also come across a variety of wax capped fungi growing in this sensitive upland environment.

Whilst providing many benefits to wildlife, gorse-dominant environments reduce the number of micro-habitats available. To lessen impact on breeding birds, gorse clearance is carried out outside the main bird nesting season which runs from late March to September. The aim of these activities is to raise awareness of the archaeological and natural conservation on the Carneddau by uncovering hidden archaeological monuments and creating a mosaic of habitats to support more biodiversity.

Thank you for your time and effort by taking part in conservation first-hand.

By volunteering with us you have taken part in the Carneddau Landscape Partnership Scheme by discovering, conserving, and celebrating the Carneddau.

For more information, other volunteering opportunities or to get in touch, please email us at;

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