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Bryniau Swydd Amwythig (allgreigiau) – Disgrifiad cryno

Ni ellir amgyffred yr ardal fechan, anghymesur hon heb gyfeirio at dirweddau cyfagos Bryniau Swydd Amwythig tua'r dwyrain. Yn y swydd honno mae mwyafrif y trumiau a'r dyffrynnoedd hirion hyn, a'u tuedd dde-orllewinol - gogledd-ddwyreiniol. Maen nhw'n cynnwys Carneddau Teon, Cefn Hirfynydd, a Cefn Gweunllwg: ond mae rhan o'r dirwedd hon yn ymestyn i Gymru, lle mae ardal fryniog fechan ar ochr ddwyreiniol Dyffryn Hafren wedi'i gwahanu rhag gweddill ucheldir Cymru ymhellach tua'r gorllewin. Dyma fryniau Cornatyn, Roundton, Cefn Digoll, Moel y Golfa, Treberfedd a'r Breiddin, pob un â'i

nodweddiad unigryw. Cynhwysir y dyffrynnoedd rhwng y brynau, ac yn neilltuol, Bro Trefaldwyn.

Tirwedd amaethyddol yw hon. Mae iddi lawr gwlad ffrwythlon â gwrychoedd cymen, coed aeddfed a sawl blanhigfa goed. Cymeriad mynyddig sydd i'r brynau uchaf, gan gynnwys rhostir o bwys ecolegol mawr ar fryn Cornatyn. Mae arddulliau adeiladu cymysg y pentrefi yn adlewyrchu'r ffaith fod yma ffin: ond yn ddiwylliannol, rhan o Faldwyn yw hon. Mae Clawdd Offa'n mynd trwy'r ardal, ac y mae yma gaerau a chaeau cynhanesyddol a chanoloesol, chwareli, tai bonedd bychain a phentrefannau. Y prif anheddiad yw pentref Trefaldwyn, i fyny ar fryn gyda'i gastell, mewn man o bwys hanesyddol lle gellir gweld tua'r gogledd, y gogledd-ddwyrain a'r de-ddwyrain. Heddiw y mae'n lle tawel, gwledig, gan gadw llawer o bensaerniaeth werinol, nodweddiadol.

Summary description

Sense of this small, irregularly shaped area is only gained with reference to the adjacent landscapes of the Shropshire Hills in England to the east. The majority of the SW-NE trending long ridged hills and vales lie within Shropshire. These include The Stiperstones, Long Mynd and Wenlock Edge. However part of this landscape spills over into Wales, forming a small area of hills on the eastern side of the Severn Valley that is physically separate from the main areas of Welsh upland that rise further to the west. The principle hills in Wales are Corndon Hill, Roundton Hill, Long Mountain, Moel y Golfa, Middletown Hill and the Breidden Hills, each being distinctive in their own right. Intermediate vales, notably the Vale of Montgomery, are included.

This is an agricultural landscape. It has fertile lowlands with neat hedgerows, mature trees and a number of woodland plantations. The highest hills have an upland character and include moorland with high ecological importance on Corndon Hill. Villages have mixed building styles reflecting this border area but culturally it is distinctly Montgomeryshire. Offa's Dyke runs through the area and there are prehistoric and medieval fortifications, field systems, quarries and small gentry houses and hamlets. The main settlement is the village of Montgomery, whose elevated location and castle occupy historically important vantage points, notably north, north-east and south-east. Today it is a peaceful, rural place, retaining much distinctive vernacular architecture.

Key characteristics
Outlying hills – a group of distinctive hills that are physically separate from the main upland areas of Wales this rise to the west, but that relate in many ways to those further east in Shropshire.
Hills, scarps – Ordovician sandstone long 'whale-back' ridges and conical or steep sided hills with localised tuff / volcanic rock and igneous rock outcrops.
Vales and lower hills - seasonally wet silty soils over shale support lush, grazing pasture interspersed with deciduous woodland on the lower slopes / foothills.
Upland hill tops - thin, infertile soils on the sandstones / volcanic rocks of the hill crests support moorland grassland. Corndon Hill is the largest upland area and has ecologically rich moorland and wet woodland
Dramatic and abrupt elevation of Breidden Hills – notably from the Severn valley flood plain, and notably with a prominent quarrying scar.
Hilltop and defensive sites - prehistoric ritual sites on the hilltops, such as the burial cairns on Corndon Hill, Medieval moated sites in the Vale and in the well preserved section of Offa's Dyke falling within the area, as well as Montgomery Castle.
Montgomery town and castle – medieval walled town and strategic defensive vantage

point over the vale of Montgomery, with distinctive architecture.
Settlement generally confined to the Vale - associated with historic river crossing points, for example, at Church Stoke.
Open views across the Vale - and neighbouring Severn Valley. Views from Montgomery into England.
Field pattern - Larger scale fields and straighter boundaries than in much of the rest of Wales, but with exceptions e.g. around Corndon and Roundton Hills, where the pattern is more characteristically small scale, with high hedges and narrow lanes.
Very rural

Visual and Sensory Profile

There is a dominant pattern of SW-NE trending ‘whaleback’ ridges and the intermediate vales and scarps. Some of the higher hills are crowned with open moorland, and many have woodland on steeper slopes. The shapes of each hill are distinctive. On hill slopes there is a patchwork of small pasture fields, giving way to arable lands in the vales with the most prominent land marks being the hills.

The group that includes the Breidden Hills, Moel y Golfa, and Middletown Hill are widely visible as a distinctive range from adjacent lowlands in Shropshire. The juxtaposition of the northern side of the Breiddon Hills by the extensive flood plain of the Severn Valley is a spectacular contrast, with its steep cliffs, scree, and woodland overlooking the flat, open meadows. However the large and very visible Criggion Quarry in this hillside is a widely visible and very significant visual detractor to the scene.

Long Mountain has a distinct whaleback ridge but as it is enclosed with rectilinear, straight field boundaries and farmed to its summits, it does not actually have the feel of a mountain. It has a low incidence of individual or hedgerow trees and some significant blocks of mixed woodland on lower western slopes in association with ‘dingles’, creating an enclosed in contrast to the summit where exposed skies and open views dominate.

Corndon Hill, Lan Fawr and Roundton Hill have a more dramatic, upland character, rising from an area of mosaic and grazed farmland, with dramatic views to Long Mynd to the east, and across the rolling lowland towards Afon Hafren river valley. The hills create a landscape of often sinuous line, with localised landform variation and containment provided by the undulating and often wooded foothills. Its foothills are traversed by a network of narrow, winding rural lanes, creating intimacy and enclosure. There is a patchwork of undulating pastoral fields, scrub and deciduous woodland, together with the network of field boundary hedgerows and trees.

The main Vale of Montgomery is a broad, flat, mixed agricultural landscape. There is a regular pattern of medium to large sized fields, managed hedgerows with many hedgerow trees. There are many clear views of the hills and scarps to the north and south and to adjacent higher landscapes to the east and west. Settlements provide enclaves of historic and architectural interest within this predominately rural landscape, the townscape of Montgomery being particularly notable, elevated above the vale yet under the ruined walls of its castle. The generally quiet, rural atmosphere of the area is notable.



Roundton Hill with Corndon Hill to the background right. © John Briggs



Corndon Hill from Montgomery Castle © John Briggs



Long Mountain (distance, right) as seen from Montgomery Castle, looking across the Vale of Montgomery © John Briggs



Corndon Hill and the Vale from south of Montgomery © John Briggs



Moel y Gofa and Middletown Hill from the south. © John Briggs



From near Trewern, showing the western end of the Moel y Golfa, with the partially quarried face of the Breidden Hills beyond. © John Briggs



Detail showing the steep wooded sides of Moel y Golfa / Middeltown Hill near the village of Middletown. © John Briggs

Geological Landscape influences

Corndon Hill rises to an altitude of 513m O.D. and forms the highest land mark within the area. The general pattern is of a SW-NE trending whaleback ridge/scarp and vale landform, formed by a bedrock geology of sandstones of the Llanvirn series interspersed

with localized intrusions of tuff/volcanic rock and igneous rock outcrops. Immediately to the west lies Lan Fawr (426m), to the south-east Black Radley Hill (354m) and to the south-west Roundton and Todleth Hill. To the south and south-west, this high ground gives way to the lower-lying floodplain occupied by the Camlad and Caebitra. These rivers are confluent at Church Stoke from where the Camlad flows north through Marrington Dingle, finally entering the River Severn west of Forden in the adjacent Severn Valley

The bedrock geology of the northern part of Shropshire Hills is characterized by Ordovician rocks, ranging in age from Llanvirn to Caradoc Series, with various sedimentary rock types present including conglomerates, sandstones, siltstones and mudstones, as well as a range of volcanic rocks including acid and basic tuffs, basaltic-andesitic lavas and volcanoclastic deposits. The total thickness of Ordovician strata is probably in excess of 3km. Volcanic rocks form much of the high ground of Todleth Hill, Roundton and Lan Fawr. This unit, together with other volcanic deposits, for example, near Hyssington, and the sandstone beds north and south of Hurdley, were once an important source of local stone, although there are now no working quarries in the area. Lead and barytes were mined at Roundton Hill.

During the Quaternary period of the last 2.6 million years, much of the Welsh Borderland area underwent episodes of glaciation, although there is evidence only for the last, Late Devensian phase, which ended here about 12,000 years ago. During this phase, ice from two sources, namely the Welsh Mountains and the Irish Sea, impinged on the northern Welsh Borderland region, although only Welsh ice directly affected this area. Whilst there is no evidence that Welsh ice overran the high ground of Corndon Hill and its environs, deposits of glacial till have been identified on the southern flank of the Camlad Valley and also in the ground north-west of Churchstoke. There are also many glacial hollows which have left a legacy of small pools and wetlands, especially just east of Montgomery.

Landscape Habitats influences

The Shropshire Hills area in Wales is dominated in the south by Corndon Hill, which is notable for a range of heath and grass communities, typical of Shropshire and the English Midlands. Large areas of the hill are dominated by sheep's fescue and mat-grass, with gorse and bilberry elsewhere, and the continental communities of bents with sheep's sorrel around the old quarry workings. The plant communities associated with the screes and rocky outcrops are particularly important, with a variety of ferns including beech fern. Corndon Hill is a SSSI.

The adjoining Roundton Hill NNR and SSSI is similarly protected for its grassland and heath communities, and its interesting lichen and spring ephemeral species such as rock stonecrop and knotted clover, tolerant of the dry conditions formed regularly on the thin soils. Horseshoe and Daubenton's bats now roost in many of the old mine adits and tunnels on Roundton Hill.

Further north, overlooking the Severn Valley, are the Long Mountain, Breidden Hill and Moel Y Golfa. the latter two being extensively wooded and SSSIs. Shallow soils susceptible to drought have limited the spread of woody species and enable less competitive plants such as rock cinquefoil and bloody cranesbill to survive, as well as the whitebeam amongst the tree population. Much of the woodland scrub has developed on stabilised screes, along with important lichen and moss communities. Moel Y Golfa is the largest semi-natural broadleaved woodland in Montgomeryshire, home to over 40 breeding woodland birds, including all three species of British woodpeckers.

In between the upland areas, the Vale of Montgomery contains seasonally wet silty soils, supporting a network of arable fields and grazed pastures, many of the later infested by rushes, and requiring careful agricultural management to avoid poaching and excessive trafficking in winter. Fields are bounded by mature hedges with many hedgerow trees. It is also an area where traditional farming practices have often continued and there is a legacy of smaller, unimproved grassland fields on the higher ground and margins. White Grit Meadows is an area of unimproved lowland dry grassland, characterised by sweet vernal-grass and crested dogs-tail. It supports dyer's greenweed and northern marsh orchid. Hillington Pasture is an area of unimproved acid pasture, on a peaty soil, with petty whin, yellow rattle and lousewort. Both sites are grazed.

The area has small areas of broadleaved woodland, largely on steeper slopes and in wetter areas of the valleys. Coed Pentre is a small ash-wych elm woodland typical of the area, with abundant oak and an understorey of hazel.

Historic Landscape influences

Many historic influences are visibly embodied within the present landscape. Older patterns and features signify past strategic importance as an Iron Age, Roman, early Medieval and Marcher land / border landscape. One of two Roman forts in the vale is at Brompton. There is also ample evidence of prehistoric and early medieval ritual and waymarking features, such as the cairn on Corndon Hill. Offa's Dyke, the 8th - 9th century's frontier work of the Saxon kingdom of Mercia, crosses the area north to south. It is an evident symbol of past efforts at territorial control but today forms a distinctive linear landscape feature within the Vale of Montgomery, where it still forms part of the national boundary with England and part of a National Trail. Remnants of Medieval moated sites have survived in lowland areas. The strongly sited Montgomery Castle built in the 1230s during Henry III's campaign against Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, overlooks its planned walled town and hinterland in the south west.

Settlement tends to keep to the vale. Church Stoke was originally a compact nucleated village, its early core and neighbourhood containing a considerable number of architecturally distinctive houses dating from the early 17th to the late 19th centuries with red brick and local stone being the predominant building materials. Other villages have retained a more compact character, for example, Hyssington. Elsewhere a strongly agricultural landscape prevails with a series of large farms, the quality of building, especially in early periods, indicative of considerable wealth. To some extent this story continued in a series of small country houses, with the mix of building materials that can be seen - timber, stone and brick- relating to chronology and location of settlement. The walled town of Montgomery was established as a borough in the early 13th century and retains the distinctive form of a medieval planned town. Although it never expanded far beyond its original limits, prosperity in the 17th to early 19th centuries is clearly indicated in the quality and status of many of its buildings.

The Parliamentary Enclosure agricultural landscape of the Vale is visually distinctive, owing to the presence of treed field boundary hedgerows. Leighton Hall and the model farm (now split into various components) is a historically highly important 19th century landscape in its own right

Cultural Landscape influences

The area was for many years a seat of Mercian, Anglo-Norman or English power, with Offa's Dyke marking a division with Welsh princedoms to the west, and in part still forms the national border today, just east of Montgomery. The town of 'Montgomery' takes its English name from the Pays d'Auge in Normandy, whence came Roger de Montgomery with William the Conqueror. Its Welsh name, Trefaldwyn, also comes from a Norman lord – Baldwin, who held Hen Domen in the 12th century. In later times, from the reign of Henry VIII, the Herberts of Montgomery dominated this area, and were active in bringing Wales into the Tudor polity by suppressing 'rebels, thieves and outlaws' and supporting the Laws in Wales Acts. The High Anglican poet George Herbert (1593-1633) was the most famous of this family, though in his lifetime Montgomery also supported a Puritan School and formed a link between the religious radicalism of Dolobran (NLCA17) and of Radnorshire (NLCA20).

It is hard to see the area now as a troubled border, or Montgomery as a garrison town. Leland recorded its 'great ruins' and 'broken towerets' in the 16th century but they have all gone. The views east, to Corndon Hill, and north over the Severn valley, are as peaceful as could be.

Culturally the area still conveys its historical significance as a contested landscape with its many defended sites and fortifications, the supreme example being Offa's Dyke that bounds the south west of the area and neatly splits the Vale of Montgomery into its Welsh and English halves. Today the Dyke can be enjoyed and appreciated by walkers using the Offa's Dyke National Trail. It is noticeable that place names are for the most part non-Welsh, owing their origins to dominant early Medieval and Anglo-Norman influences. The incidence of Welsh speaking is low, though the people are fiercely protective of their identity as residents of Montgomeryshire rather than of the super-county of Powys.