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## Bro a Bryniau Sir Drefaldwyn – Disgrifiad cryno

Mae'r dirwedd hynod wledig hon, yn fryniau ac yn ddyffrynnoedd, i'w chael yn rhannau isaf dalgylchoedd Tanat, Efyrrwy, Banwy, Cain a Rhiw. Mae rhai o'r bryniau o ffurf hynod: weithiau'n ucheldirol, weithiau'n codi fel ynysoedd o'r llawr gwlad o'u hamgylch. Mae yma lawer o ddyffrynnoedd distaw, coediog, â'u cymeriad neilltuol eu hunain. Rhai'n orlifdroedd eang afonydd dolennog, eraill yn geunentydd mewn llethrau coediog, serth. Ceir caeau cymysg, trefnus yng ngwaelodion ffrwythlon y dyffrynnoedd, a thir pori ar y tir uwch a'r rhosydd. Mewn ardal eang ogyrch y Trallwng, mae llawer o goetiroedd ystadau'n rhoi gwedd barciog ar rannau o'r fro.

Mae sawl pentref yn y dyffrynnoedd, a ffermydd ar y llethrau. Ceir adeiladau traddodiadol o goed a brics cochion, yn ogystal â rhai carreg, yn enwedig yn y dwyrain. Yn nyffrynnoedd yr afonydd mwy ceir aneddiadau hynafol. Mae bryngaerau Oes yr haearn, a chaerau Rhufeinig mawr a mân, yn tystio y bu yma angen amddiffynfeydd cadarn. Felly, hefyd, y nifer helaeth iawn o fwntiau a chestyll carreg yn nhirweddau'r ffin, yn gwarchod mynedfeydd i ddyffrynnoedd ac yn cuchio ar Ddyffryn Hafren o'u huchelfannau strategol.

Mae gwahanol enwau'r sir yn y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg – yn atseinio'r modd y mae'r rhan ddwyreiniol ohoni'n wynebu tua Lloegr, a'r rhan orllewinol yn cadw ei chymeriad Cymreig. Ceir enwau lleoedd Seisnig yn nwyrain y sir, ond hefyd llawer o enwau Cymreig yno a thu draw i'r ffin yn Swydd Amwythig.

### Summary description

This very rural hill and valley landscape occupies the lower sections of the rivers Tanat, Vyrnwy, Banwy, Cain and Rhiw. Some of the hills are distinctively shaped, occasionally of upland character, or seen as isolated and rising from the general lowland that prevails across the rest of this area. There are many quiet, sylvan river valleys with a locally distinct character, from broad flood plain and meandering river, to steep wooded hillsides and narrow incised valley. There are neatly managed mixed fields in the richer valley bottoms and grazing on higher slopes and moorlands. Hedgerows enclose pastures that often reach right over the tops of the lesser intervening ridges. For a wide area around neighbouring Welshpool, many estate woodlands provide a parkland character in places.

There are a number of villages in the river valleys, and farmsteads on the valley sides. Timber and red brick appear as well as stone on traditional buildings scattered across the landscape especially in the east. The valleys of the larger rivers contain ancient places of settlement. There is much evidence of defence, from the Iron Age hillforts and Roman forts and fortlets, to the intensive proliferation of mottes and stone castles in the border landscapes guarding the entrances to valleys and overlooking the Severn Plain from high vantage points.

The different names of the County in Welsh and English – Sir Drefaldwyn and Montgomeryshire – echo the way in which the eastern part looks towards England while the west preserves much of the historic culture of Wales. This eastern area also displays the influence of English in place names, though there are many with Welsh roots across the border into Shropshire.

Key Characteristics
<b>A series of hills and valleys</b> - which are aligned broadly east to west, with sinuous, curved skylines.
<b>A mix of both upland and lowland parts</b> – the highest land in the north-west adjacent to Y Berwyn. As a whole the area is transitional between adjacent upland and lowland.
<b>A number of rivers</b> - carve through the area, notably those of the Tanat and Vyrnwy.
<b>Pastoral agriculture</b> - with lowland pasture in the river valleys and hill sheep farming on the upper valley sides and ridges.
<b>Hedgerows with trees</b> - as field boundaries
<b>Woodland</b> - blocks of deciduous woodland of irregular or organic form, especially on steep valley sides and with important ecological importance, and some coniferous plantation woodland.
<b>Archaeology</b> - sites and settlements from the Roman and Medieval periods, in addition to a number of historic parklands such as Llangedwyn and Bodfach. Meifod was an important Early Christian church foundation.
<b>Settlement</b> - confined to isolated farmsteads and compact nucleated valley villages associated primarily with historic river crossing points.
<b>Patchwork landscape of pastoral fields and woodland</b> , with an intimate spatial character created by the distinctive combination of vegetation and the undulating ridge and valley land form.

## Visual and Sensory Profile

To the north-west and south-west are the Berwyn and Cambrian Mountains respectively, with their higher elevations, greater upland extent and tendency for inclement weather providing a distinct visual backdrop. On the ground this change manifests as a broad transition zone with forestry in parts and with valleys penetrating the uplands and hillside spurs extending into the lowlands. The area is by no means flat, with many distinctively shaped and isolated hills and sections of steep sided valley. Distant prospects eastwards into Shropshire reveal a flatter lowland landscape, whilst the adjacent Severn valley to the south east is largely hidden from view, prospects instead being to the Radnorshire and Shropshire hills beyond.

Farming has been the main formative influence on the appearance of the land cover. Neatly set out fields occupy the more fertile valley bottoms, with pasture on higher slopes and moorlands, and farmsteads on the valley sides. Settlements generally occur along the river valleys.

The valleys form contained landscapes, with the hedgerows and hanging woodlands creating a patchwork effect, in parts with an intimate scale of enclosure. In contrast the ridges and associated scarps are more open in character, particularly to the north west. Skylines are sinuous, with repeating elements being reinforced by the undulating topography, particularly the irregular woodland blocks and rectilinear network of field boundaries. The estate woodlands and historic parklands have a more harmonious composition, whilst the scattering of isolated rounded or rugged low hills break the pattern and provide orientation and wide views over the area.

It is a very rural area, quiet in most parts, with very little large scale modern development. There are numerous lanes and paths that reveal streams, dingles, cottages and open

views. Often there are a wide variety of scenes of interest in short succession, providing a strong sense of place, but with repeating variations continuing across a wide area.



The view south from Dolanog, with Moel Bentyrch visible to the right. © John Briggs



Near Penygarnedd, looking north over the Tanat valley, towards the nearby Berwyn. © John Briggs



Looking across the lower Tanat valley to the hill of Craig Orllwyn (centre). © John Briggs



The valley of the River Vyrnwy between Dolanog and Pontrobert. © John Briggs



The prospect from Dolanog, south east (towards Welshpool). The wooded hill on the left is Pen y Berth. © John Briggs

## Geological Landscape influences

The area comprises an undulating landscape of minor upland ridges and deep valleys, flanked to the north west and south west by the higher ground of the Berwyn and the Cambrian Mountains, and to the east by the low ground of the Severn and Vyrnwy confluence. The area is dissected by several deep and well defined river valleys tending generally eastwards, including the Afon Rhiw which is confluent with the Severn near Berriew, the Vyrnwy, which flows into the Severn near Crewgreen, and several of its tributaries including the Afon Banwy, Afon Cain and Afon Tanat.

A thick succession of sedimentary bedrock geology ranges from late Ordovician (Caradoc Series) to mid-Silurian (Ludlow Series). There are a range of sedimentary formations, including shales and mudstones, siltstones, sandstones and interbedded sandstone-mudstone turbidites. Geological deformation during the subsequent Acadian phase of mountain building resulted in widespread folding and faulting and the present strong north

easterly grain in the topography. The landscape was re-shaped by several phases of glaciation creating steeper and deeper valleys bordering the nearby uplands. Elsewhere, glacial boulder clay deposits occur as spreads of silt, clay and poorly-sorted rock clasts. Drumlins form distinctive features in the local landscape, with fine examples north-west of Guilsfield, west of Welshpool and around Pontrobert. Valley bottom till with a hummocky topography, probably released from the ice front at a pause in its final retreat, occurs in many areas, for example at the northern end of Dyffryn Meifod.

Soils include well drained loams on the higher ground and seasonally wet silty soils over the shales, with deep loams overlaying the river alluvium deposits of the principal river valleys.

## Landscape Habitats influences

Much of the area is a pastoral agricultural landscape, characterised by small fields and pastures, with small woods, and occasional wet areas, relict heath and moor. Soils are generally well-drained and loamy, enabling year-round working and grazing, with smaller areas of wet and waterlogged soils in the valley floors. It is an improved agricultural landscape, of fields surrounded by mature hedges and hedgerow trees, with only small relict areas of wetland and mire remaining where improvement has been difficult on the wetter soils.

Gwaun Efail Wig (SSSI) near Pontrobert is of interest for its mosaic of wet and dry grassland and swamp plant communities. The wetter areas are dominated by purple moor-grass, with quaking grass and flea sedge, grading into patches of dry grassland with tufted hair-grass and fescues - a favoured cover and forage area for brown hares. Similarly, Gwaun Wern y Wig (SSSI) is an example of unimproved wet pasture, characterised by sweet vernal grass and quaking grass, with a range of sedges and marshland species.

Elsewhere basin mires have developed to a woodland stage. The nearby Cors Ty-gwyn (SSSI) mire is an example of birch, willow and alder carr fringing a relict swamp community in the centre of the mire. Similarly, Mawnog Gwaunynog (SSSI) is an example of carr woodland formed on deep peat in a well-developed basin, dominated by birch and willow with occasional hazel and rowan. The ground flora is predominantly common reed and meadowsweet.

Woodland is a key feature of the area, especially on the valley sides of the main rivers, but also in larger blocks of broadleaved woodland – much of it ancient - extending from the valleys onto the surrounding plateau tops. Coed Byrwydd (SSSI), in the small Luggy valley, is unusual in containing an area of sweet chestnut coppice. Although non-native, the management associated with this has helped maintain the wildlife interest. Pen-Dugwm woods (SSSI) have developed in the narrow Nant y Pandy, an oak woodland with an interesting ground flora including bird's nest orchid, and many epiphytic mosses and lichens on the older trees.

## Historic Landscape influences

Settlement is a close mesh of small farms, punctuated by nucleated villages mainly in the valleys and often at historic river crossings (such as Llangadfan, Llanfair Caereinion, Pontrobert, Dolanog, Meifod, Llanerfyl). Some of these expanded in the 19th century to become significant local centres, such as Llanfair Caereinion. Llanfyllin is a market town with early origins, retaining significant numbers of 16th-17th century houses. Outside the

towns, too, there is a good survival rate of early buildings, a sign of the area's prosperity, especially in the good agricultural land of the Dyffryn Meifod. These are often timber-framed, though stone and brick become prevalent in the 18th century.

The influence of designed and planned estate landscapes is relatively widespread, attesting to prosperity in the area, with significant historic parks and gardens at Trelydden Hall, Llanerchydol Hall, Vaynor Park and Gregynog.

The Tanat valley preserves much evidence of early occupation, in particular a number of Bronze Age monuments such as henges and circles, and the remains of several Iron Age hill forts such as Llwyn Bryn Dinas. Evidence of early metalworking has been revealed here, although metal ores in the upper valley sides were more fully exploited in the 19th century.

Other important features include moated sites (Tregynon and Plas yr Alarch) and earthworks (the motte at Castell Caereinion), in addition to Roman sites such as the Gaer. Fortifications such as Dolforwyn Castle and Powis Castle attest to the conflicts between the Welsh and English in this Border area, on the east of which runs the 8th/9th century iconic 'barrier' of Offa's Dyke.

## Cultural Landscape influences

Powys paradwys Cymru 'the paradise of Wales' is both a borderland area and yet part of the 'wasp waist' of Wales – its western extremity is no more than 28 miles by road from the tidal reach of the Dyfi. This landscape of rolling hills, small villages and a few market towns nevertheless feels remote, so it is neither a surprise that in the western and northern part of this character area the incidence of Welsh speakers is proportionately higher than the Wales average, nor that local people were vociferous in the loss of their ancient county name at the time of local authority reorganisation in 1974.

A sense of identity, and of Welsh identity, has never been lacking here. Llanfair Caereinion was an important local cultural centre by the 17th century; here Richard Jones, vicar of the parish, published his Welsh metrical scriptures. Charles Lloyd, the Quaker squire of Dolobran, fought out a bitter war with the vicar of Meifod; Thomas Lloyd, his brother, became a pillar of the Quaker community in Philadelphia. More recently, Gregynog has contributed to Wales' cultural sense of place, with its printing press and an annual musical festival that attracted Vaughan Williams, Holst, Elgar and Britten. Gregynog's architectural respect for the regional half-timbered idiom conceals the fact that it is built of concrete, a symbol of both tradition and change.