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Glannau Aberdyfi – Disgrifiad cryno

Mae gogledd a de Cymru'n cydgyfarfod yn nhirwedd aberoedd a glan môr y fro hon, bro lle mae tir a môr afonydd ac aberoedd yn cyfarfod, a lle mae Cymru ar ei meinaf o'r dwyrain i'r gorllewin. Machynlleth yw'r canolbwynt, lle mae llwybrau cludiant y de a'r gogledd, y gorllewin a'r dwyrain yn croesi Dyfi yn ei man croesi isaf. Dyma dref o'r pwys mwyaf ar un adeg, hen brifddinas Cymru lle cynhaliodd Glyndŵr ei Senedd.

Ar hyd y glannau agored, mwyn ceir twyni tywod, ac aberoedd y ddwy brif afon, Dysynni a Dyfi. Yr olaf yw'r fwyaf, o ddigon: yn ardal dywodlyd, eang, yn nesaf at gyforgors arfordirol fwyaf Prydain. Mae Aber Dyfi'n rhan o unig Safle Biosffer Cymru.

Mae rhan isaf dyffryn dyfi'n cynnwys llethrau coediog, gorlifdir gwastad, agored, a halwyndiroedd pori. Mae aber Dysynni rywfaint yn llai na Dyfi, gyda'r tir amaeth i fyny'r dyffryn wedi'i gynllunio'n rhan o ystâd wledig.

Ar draws yr aber o Ynys-las, mae tref Aberdyfi liwgar i'w gweld yn amlwg yn erbyn cefndir urddasol yr Horon, sydd ond megis rhan o'r panorama mynyddig sy'n ymledu tua'r de a'r dwyrain. Mae'r glan môr a'i bentrefi'n gyrchfannau gwyliau prysur yng nghanol ardal sydd, fel arall, yn wledig ac yn brydferth iawn.

Summary description

This estuarine and coastal landscape is where the northern and southern halves of Wales meet. It is where land and sea and rivers and estuaries meet, and where Wales is at its narrowest width from east to west. The fulcrum is Machynlleth, where north, south, east and west transport routes cross the Dyfi at its lowest crossing point. The town was once pre-eminent and regarded as 'the ancient capital of Wales' and was associated with Owain Glyndwr.

The open, soft coastline is backed by dunes and two main river estuaries, the Dysynni and the Dyfi, the latter much larger and forming a vast sandy area, adjacent also to the largest coastal raised bog in Britain. The Dyfi Estuary is part of the only Biosphere Site in Wales.

The lower valley of the Dyfi includes wooded hillsides and open flat flood plain and salt-marsh grazing. The Dysynni estuary is somewhat smaller than the Dyfi, and the rural farmland leading up the valley is laid out as part of a country estate.

Across the estuary from Ynyslas, the town of Aberdyfi provides a bright splash of colour against the majestic backdrop of Yr Horon and the Tarren Mountains, which is but one part of the mountain panorama that sweeps east and south. The coastline and settlements form busy honey pots in an otherwise very rural and scenic area.

Key Characteristics
Swash aligned soft coastline – with an exposed open coast line, but with artificial defences (groynes, promenade etc) by settlements.
Dunes and Estuary bars – extensive sand dune systems with sandy or shingle beaches, and extending to constrict estuary mouths to the Dysynni and Dyfi rivers.
Extensive sandy estuarine inter-tidal areas and salt marsh – including both sandy and muddy flats, marsh and wetland grazing.
Lower river valley – with extensive alluvial deposits and forming a flood plain. Enclosed by hills rising with a bedrock geology of Silurian rocks of the Llandovery Series, including slates and shale and mudstones. Some rocky small hills rise from the valley to estuary levels.
Lowland raised bog – extensive deposits of blanket and basin peats and fen peats in the lower lying marshland areas surround the Dyfi Estuary – the largest example in Britain.
Dramatic enclosing upland backdrop – setting for adjacent rising upland areas of Tarren Mountains (to the north) and Pumlimon (to the east).
Valley Pasture and woodland hillsides – grazing on valley floor and coastal levels with deciduous woodland and scrub being a feature of rising land that encloses the area.
Seaside towns – either in origin or modern use, with elements of Victorian resort development, but generally small in scale e.g. Borth, Aberdyfi and Tywyn.

Nature conservation importance – multiple designations and habitats of importance for birds, estuarine, raised bog habitats and woodlands.
Archaeological remains - principal features include Iron Age settlements and the site of a Roman fort within the valley floor at Pennal.
Industrial heritage – notably the surviving remains of the Dyfi blast furnace and associated waterfall and leat at Furnace. Mines and quarries in adjacent uplands issued slate to road and rail routes that run through this area.
Coast and rising land dictate transport route alignments - Machynlleth is the lowest crossing point, and marks north-south and east-west road crossing points. The Railways divide and run either side of the Dyfi estuary, the northern route hugging the estuary edge below steep hills.
Machynlleth – settlement pattern relates primarily to the valley’s historic function as a strategic route. The town is the ‘ancient capital of Wales’.
Farmed estate landscape – notably of the Dysynni valley
Patchwork of small fields and hedgerows on rising land

Visual and Sensory profile

In that both the Dysynni and the Dyfi Estuaries open into broad and flat coastal havens as their estuaries approach the sea, the landscape is simple, open and elemental. Here water meets the sky in striking abundance, with a seaward backdrop of beach and dune, and a landward backdrop of high, upland hills and valleys, from which the rivers flow.

The Dyfi has by far the larger valley and estuary and it is already a mature river as it enters the area and meanders from side to side across its flood plain, and expands quickly in width until it becomes a major sandy estuary. The flood plain is a well defined with its patchwork woodland and mosaic lowland pasture, rush pasture and fringes contrasting with the adjacent steep sided upland areas of Eryri and the Cambrian Mountains. Coniferous planting and hill sheep grazing on the upper valley sides create localised textural variation and setting, backed by open moorland.

The enclosed farmed valley contrasts with the much wider estuary, where inter-tidal areas, a salt marsh and lowland raised bog (with heather scrub) occupy much of the flat ground. Farming, settlement and the main transport routes are confined to the edges of these areas. In particular, Aberdyfi’s splash of colour contrasts with the exposed and simple character of the coastline itself, open estuary, coastal raised bog and nearby upland areas.



The coastal lowlands and town of Tywyn, and the smaller estuary of the Dysynni. © John Briggs



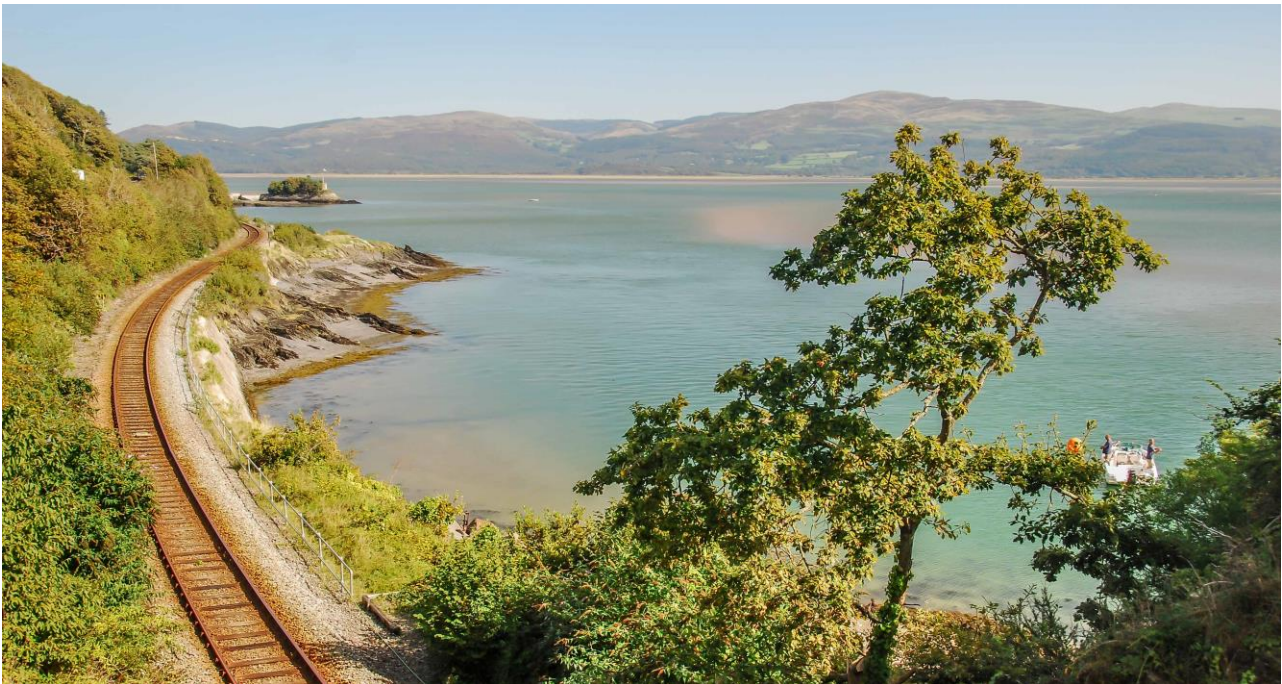
View from Ynys Las across the Dyfi estuary towards the Cambrian Mountains. © John Briggs



The resort town of Aberdyfi, on northern shore at the mouth of the Dyfi estuary. © John Briggs



The extensive raised bog, inland from Borth. © John Briggs



The northern side of the Dyfi estuary, where wooded hills meet the water directly. © John Briggs

Geological Landscape influences

The bedrock geology is dominated by Cambrian, Ordovician and Silurian sedimentary and volcanic rocks that span a period about 530-400 million years ago. Upper Cambrian sedimentary rocks are exposed in the northernmost part of the area around Llanfendigaid and these are overlain by Ordovician rocks that, in part, comprise volcanic ash-flows and dolerite intrusions. The latter form distinct, upstanding topographical features in the Tonfanau district and have been a local source of stone. The major part of the area is underlain by Lower Silurian (Llandovery Series), mudstone-dominated rocks. Small 'islands' of this bedrock protrude out of the low-lying coastal areas, for example, at several points along the southern margin of the Dyfi Estuary. The area also contains the north

westernmost part of the Central Wales Orefield, and includes several former lead/silver mines such as Allt y crib and Llancynfelin. The long-abandoned spoil tips, shafts and adits, form a distinctive element of the landscape.

The coastline reflects the complex interplay between rising post-glacial sea levels, marine erosion and sedimentation, sediment input from rivers and bedrock geology. On the south side of the Dyfi Estuary, Borth Bog (Cors Fochno) is a raised, rain-fed (ombrogenous) mire of about 800ha extent and containing peat up to 6m in depth. On its western side, the mire is flanked by a coastal barrier that extends north from Borth to Ynyslas.

On the northern side of the Dyfi Estuary, the coastline between Aberdyfi and Tonfanau is swash-aligned, facing directly towards the south western Atlantic swells. At its southern end, west of Aberdyfi, the coast is fringed by a belt of sand dunes up to 120m wide and 12m high, whilst farther north degraded and vegetated dunes form a 500m wide tract behind the storm beach around Tywyn and on the west side of the Broad Water. Northerly drift of sediment has created an impressive spit across the mouth of the Dysynni, behind which estuarine alluvium accumulates on mudflats and in tidally-influenced creeks.

Landscape Habitats influences

The areas inland from the coast are largely dominated by pastoral farming on the low-lying flat ground, which creates a generally improved grassland habitat in these areas. These farmland areas are generally of limited ecological value although those adjacent to, and south west of, the Ynys Hir NNR, which form a ditch drained coastal grazing grassland, are of considerable value for waders and wildfowl. Another area of considerable value away from the present coastline is the Borth Bog (Cors Fochno, NNR, SSSI), which is the largest expanse of primary near-natural raised bog in an estuarine context within the UK. This bog is formed on underlying peat soils and as well as being a valuable and rare habitat supports a number of rare species, most notably the rosy marsh moth.

Woodland is largely absent from the very low-lying land that flanks much of the coast, but near the boundary of the area where it meets the higher ground inland, a patchwork of small deciduous woodland parcels, and larger conifer plantation blocks occurs within the more undulating pastoral farmland on the lower valley slopes. This is most prevalent to the south of the Dyfi Estuary and further east up the Dyfi valley, as well as at the lower end of Happy Valley to the north of the Dyfi Estuary where there is also considerable woodland coverage. The woodland at Ynys Hir is a RSPB reserve and supports many species typical of Welsh oak woodlands.

The coast both north and south of the Dyfi Estuary is typified by long expanses of sandy intertidal areas, the exception being a small area of sea cliffs at Upper Borth. Dunes fringe the inland side of much of these sandy beaches with the Ynys Las dunes (SAC, Ramsar site, NNR and SSSI) on the south of the Dyfi Estuary being of particular ecological value. The dunes to the north of the Dyfi Estuary are also of considerable ecological value.

The Dyfi Estuary itself is the dominant feature of the area, together with the vast, flanking expanses of intertidal mud and sand and considerable extents of salt-marsh formed upon deposited silts. Their great ecological value is reflected in their status as a SAC, SPA, Ramsar site, NNR and SSSI, as, as well as being within the only Biosphere Site in Wales. The estuary supports many rare and protected species but is particularly noted for the wading bird and wildfowl populations. A much smaller estuary system is also present at the north of the area where the Dysynni flows into the sea.

Historic Landscape influences

This is a shoreline that has seen very extensive change over the centuries. It seems clear that Broad Water, north of Tywyn, was once far more extensive. Along with Borth Bog (Cors Fochno) south of Dyfi Estuary, it was probably reclaimed by many years of drainage and land-fill, though the greatest changes were made under Parliamentary Enclosure Acts of the early 19th century, sponsored by the local estates. Hill forts stand guard over areas that were once watered, and there is evidence that the prehistoric trackway known as the Ffordd Ddu ('the Black Way'), which crosses the shoulder of Cadair Idris, met the sea in the Dysynni valley. Other roads, trackways and transport routes either acknowledge early crossing points and landing places or – like the Cambrian railway – simply cut across them.

Some early settlements like Pennal, with its Roman fort and Medieval llys, and Tywyn, with its fine Romanesque church, also indicate historic river crossing or landing points. Aberdyfi grew up as a fishing hamlet in the late Medieval period, but clearly developed significantly in the 17th and 18th centuries both as an export harbour for slate and lead, and before long as a holiday destination, when it acquired its brightly painted Georgian and Regency stucco seafront houses. The character of the town reflects these dual origins, with tightly packed cottages in the centre, and long rows of seaside terraces and villas lining the sea and estuary shores. The coming of the railway made it even more of a Birmingham holiday resort. Railway-sponsored resort development also enabled Tywyn to expand and turned Borth from a little fishing hamlet into a row of hotels and guest houses – though boulder-built cottages from earlier days survive here and there. The picturesque qualities of the landscape also called into being an important series of large houses in landscaped grounds above the Dyfi shore-line.

Machynlleth, sited a few miles upstream of the tidal limit of the Dyfi at the first crossing point of the river, is a town of early origins and coherent plan, and probably owes its importance to its strategic position in relation to transport and marketing. Like many other Welsh towns, whilst it contains some early buildings, much of its character is the result of rebuilding in the 19th century. Stone predominates, but its variable quality encouraged the use of render, introducing a splash of colour into local building traditions.

Though exports of lead and slate drove the industrial development of the area, the mines and quarries were mostly located in the mountainous hinterland outside the area other than a few lead workings such as Allt y crib and Llancynfelin. The 18th-century Dyfi blast furnace formed part of a network of dissenter-operated iron working sites throughout Wales and England, and is now cared for by Cadw.

Cultural influences

A legend associated with this area tells how Maelgwn Gwynedd was elected here as monarch over the British people – a story which reflects the way in which this area has long been taken to be the great fulcrum point of Wales. A more persistent tale is the drowned kingdom of Helig, son of Glannog, described in the *Chronica de Wallia* as: "...between Ceredigion and Bardsey, and as far as St David's. That land was very good, fertile and level, and it was called Maes Maichgen; it lay from the mouth (of the Ystwyth?) to Llŷn, and upwards to Aberdovey."

This tradition had a long resonance in Wales, and underlies *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, an anti-Tory satire of Thomas Love Peacock in the early 19th century, as well as Ceiriog's sentimental ballad, 'Clychau Aberdyfi', a classic of late Victorian parlour entertainment.

The ancient settlements here are Pennal, with its Roman fort and motte near the tidal head, Tywyn with its clas church and early Welsh inscribed stone, and Machynlleth, with its association with Owain Glyndwr, hence the town's claim to be 'the ancient capital of Wales.' It may have been at Pennal rather than at the mouth of the estuary that Giraldus Cambrensis crossed with Archbishop Baldwin as they made their way from Llanbadarn Fawr to Tywyn. Pennal may have been the site of the assembly held by Llywelyn ab Iorwerth in 1216 and was certainly the court from which Owain Glyndwr wrote to King of France in 1406.

The area aptly illustrates the cultural shift within modern times from exploitation of the natural landscape to conservation of the landscape, as well as to a culture of leisure and enjoyment. Exploitation is evident in the many traces of mining and quarrying within the area, the extensive landlord-sponsored programmes to drain the Tywyn marshes and Cors Fochno, and in the development of roads, railways and harbours.

The Dyfi estuary forms an extensive barrier to north-south travel along the coast. It is perhaps a consolation that scenic mountain views await the traveller at Dyfi Junction, the land-locked and much satirised railway station that has become the epitome for Wales's less than easy communications.

Modern conservation is evident in the designation of the Dyfi Biosphere, the layers of other nature conservation designations within the area, and in the alternative and 'green' communities centred on Machynlleth. Leisure is evident in the development of popular holiday destinations at Borth, Aberdyfi and Tywyn, a change perhaps epitomised in the transformation of the Talylyn Railway from a decrepit loss-maker into a major tourist attraction, the first railway to be preserved by volunteers in the world. The cultural effect is the mingling of Merioneth and Cardiganshire Welsh with the accents of Birmingham and the West Midlands.