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## Mynydd Preseli - disgrifiad cryno

Ucheldir agored, prin ei aneddiadau, yw Mynydd Preseli yng Ngogledd Sir Benfro, ac mae'r rhan fwyaf ohono'n gorwedd ym Mharc Cenedlaethol Arfordir Penfro. Mae'r arfer o bori gweundiroedd agored y mynydd wedi arwain at dirwedd agored a moel. Cyfyngir planhigfeydd coed i ambell ardal. Mae coed yn llawer mwy cyffredin ar y dyffrynnoedd is, sy'n hollti rhannau o'r ardal, ac ar y cyrion gogleddol lle y mae caeau bach a gwrychoedd trwchus â choed yn cynnig llawer o gysgod. Er nad yw Mynydd Preseli yn arbennig o uchel, mae'r ffaith ei fod wedi'i ynysu oddi wrth ucheldiroedd eraill yn golygu bod ei amlinell i'w gweld yn blaen o iseldiroedd cyfagos i'r gogledd a'r de, ac o'r arfordir tua'r gogledd-orllewin. Sonnir am yr ardal yn chwedlau'r Mabinogi, ac mae'n gyfoethog ei harcheoleg hynafol o'r cyfnod Neolithig ymlaen. O'r mynydd hwn y daeth cerrig glas Côr y Cewri. Ymhellach, mae olion y diwydiant chwareli llechi, a oedd yn bwysig yn ei ddydd, yn amlwg mewn manau, a cheir traddodiad balch o siarad Cymraeg a'r ffordd Gymreig o fyw ymhlith y cymunedau ffermio a'r hen gymunedau chwarela fel ei gilydd.

## Summary

The Preseli Hills are an open, sparsely-settled upland landscape in North Pembrokeshire, much of which lies within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. Predominant hill grazing on open moorland results in a windswept, exposed landscape. Forestry plantations are limited to a few areas. Tree cover is much more evident in the lower valleys that dissect parts of the area and in the northern periphery, wherein small fields and thick hedgerows with trees provide much shelter. Though modest in elevation, the isolation of the Preseli Hills from other upland areas means their profile is widely visible from adjacent lowland landscapes to the north and south and from the coast to the north-west. The area is commemorated in the Mabinogion folk legends and is rich in ancient archaeology from the Neolithic period onwards. It was from these hills that the bluestones for Stonehenge came. Remains of the once-important slate quarrying industry are also evident in places and there is a proud Welsh language tradition and way of life in this area, both in farming and ex-quarrying communities.

Key Characteristics
<b>Range of upland hills</b> - formed from Ordovician rocks, with areas of more resistant igneous basalt, dolerite and rhyolite forming prominent craggy outcrops.
<b>Smooth profiles but with harder igneous outcrops</b> – exhibiting effects of ice-sheet glaciation
<b>Glacial meltwater valleys</b> – a carved system of channels across the foothills, including the Gwaun valley. The meltwaters deposited large volumes of sand and gravel along these channels.
<b>Open upland moorland and grazing</b> – many upland parts are common land, grazed by sheep, cattle and ponies.
<b>Enclosed pastures on slopes and in valleys</b> - improved as sheep and dairy pasture.
<b>Prominent conifer blocks</b> - located on a few slopes and summits as an exception.
<b>Field patterns and boundaries</b> - on the slopes fields are enclosed by dry stone walls or stone-faced hedge-banks topped with gorse. Small riparian (riverside) pastures are bounded by hedges.
<b>Species-rich habitats</b> - a mixture of upland and lowland habitats are internationally and nationally valued for nature conservation. Wet flushes contain the second largest population of the southern damselfly in Britain.
<b>Wealth of archaeology</b> - many archaeological features, including prominent prehistoric ritual and funerary monuments, defensive sites, settlements and field systems. Bluestones were hewn and cut from local outcrops and transported to be used in the construction of Stonehenge in England.
<b>Slate quarry remains</b> – occasional tips, levels and settlement (limited area)
<b>Settlement is sparse</b> - with linear hamlets fringing watercourses or roads. Occasional villages are centred on churches. Scattered farmsteads are found across the slopes.
<b>Tranquil, scenic</b> – quiet with very few detractors, much of the area is within Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, recognised for its natural beauty.
<b>Vast open views</b> - to and from the area and to and from the sea
<b>Contrast between open hills and enclosed valleys</b> - remote and sparsely settled character of the hills and crags contrasts with the enclosed wooded valleys and small fields and hedgerows of the lower slopes.
<b>Traditional culture</b> – farming, ex-quarrying, Welsh-speaking, rural way of life, tourism.

## Visual and Sensory profile

The Preseli Hills are an open, sparsely-settled upland landscape of rolling moors, whose natural beauty is reflected by their inclusion within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park designation. Prevailing south-westerly, moisture-laden winds from the sea often result in cloud forming over these hills.

The predominant hill grazing on essentially open moorland results in a windswept and exposed landscape with little shelter. The few coniferous plantations here are conspicuous and contrast through their geometric edges and their dark, dense tree cover, but these tend to be an exception rather than a norm. Yet through roads often run up and over the moorland with relatively little deflection, helped by smooth topography.

Tree cover is more generally evident in the lower valleys that dissect parts of the area and in the lowland margins of the northern periphery, wherein mosaic of small rectangular fields and thick native hedgerows with trees provide much shelter and enclosure. A notable dissection valley is that of Cwm Gwaun, which together with tributaries have many wooded sides that provide seclusion and close off views from the wider skies gained on the slopes above. These valleys are characteristic of the wider, Pembrokeshire - Ceredigion coastal plateau but in the Preseli Hills they are also used by some minor road and rail routes to get through the upland area.

Remains of the once-important slate quarrying industry are evident in places, with tips and levels on hillsides, such as those at Rosebush, but they are also an exception. Scattered farms and infrequent settlements characterise the lower lying parts of the area, and with their upland context, make this a very rural landscape. Indeed there is a relatively strong sense of remoteness, compromised only by the main roads that run close to the boundaries of this otherwise peaceful area, such as the A479 to the eastern periphery.

Though modest in elevation, the isolation of the Preseli Hills from other upland areas means their profile is widely visible across lowland landscapes to the north and south, and in exceptional visibility their outline can even be discerned from the Llŷn peninsula and vice-versa. Being the highest available viewing points in this part of Wales, Snowdonia and Ireland's Wicklow hills can also be seen in very clear conditions. The Cambrian Mountains are also seen inland but, although remarkably closer, they do not dominate the view.

Gentle, smooth moorland profiles are typically seen when looking to the Preseli Hills, however on closer examination there are some rocky features and strewn boulders on open hillsides and summits in places, notably at the top of Mynydd Carningli. Together with Mynydd Dinas, these hills are also notable for their panoramic seaward views over the Teifi estuary, Newport Bay and Dinas Island, across a relatively narrow coastal lowland strip compared to Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire more generally.



Elevated and looking to Newport with Cardigan Bay beyond. Seen from Mynydd Carningli  
© John Briggs



Looking westwards up Cwm Gwaun near Pontfaen. The shelter of this deep and highly wooded valley is in distinct contrast to the open and exposed moorland hills to either side.  
© John Briggs



High summer pastures catch the sun near Rosebush, on the southern slopes of the Preseli Hills © John Briggs



Northern slopes of Preseli Hills showing the detailed patchwork of small fields, woodlands and heath. Seen from the summit of Mynydd Carningli © John Briggs



Hay time on the northern slopes of Foel Eryr, seen from Mynydd Carningli © John Briggs



Rosebush - remains of old slate quarries and new coniferous plantation © John Briggs

## Geological Landscape influences

The Ordovician rocks of north Pembrokeshire were formed 470 million years ago in a marine trough subject to numerous underwater volcanic eruptions. Subsequent earth

movements have caused intense folding and faulting. Although rock exposures are fairly limited in the Preseli Hills, the complex of folds and faults and the topographical features relating to them have been picked out by geological mapping. The ridges and hill masses have resisted erosion because of the presence of hard igneous rocks, generally occurring as intrusions (sills) between the other rock layers, and having been folded with them.

Meltwater from the ice sheets present during the last Ice Age carved out the Gwaun valley, part of a widespread system of these channels. The melt water torrents also deposited sand and gravel, most extensively around the outflows of rivers that flowed underneath the ice. Elsewhere sediments, typically boulder clay, were deposited directly from melting ice.

There was much reworking of these sediments under the ensuing tundra-like conditions. Spring thaws of the surface of deeply-frozen ground (permafrost conditions) resulted in down slope movement of sediment (solifluction flows) causing alignment of any tabular stones, allowing these deposits to be easily distinguished. The intensely cold conditions also caused frost-shattering of exposed rock and accumulation of scree, some of which was moved by solifluction to create extensive block-fields. These were generally cleared during creation of fields and used for stone walls, but many fine examples survive on the higher moorland.

## Landscape Habitats influences

Within this area there is a distinct contrast between the open heath and moorland of the uplands and the more enclosed, agricultural land of the lowlands. The latter are characterised by agriculturally improved livestock grassland bounded by hedgerows or hedge-banks. Arable farmland is relatively scarce. This agricultural land overlies relatively well-draining brown podsol soils. There are also some noticeable areas of marshy grassland, associated with poorer draining surface-water gley soils. Along with the marshy grassland there are some small areas of deciduous woodland scattered throughout the farmed landscape, which provide areas of greater ecological interest. The most significant woodland areas however are the linear stands that follow the numerous watercourses that flow across the area. These watercourses have their origin in the higher ground of the Preseli Hills, but with their associated woodlands are only well developed on the lower ground and in the foothills, with notable deciduous woodland and to a lesser extent coniferous plantations along the Eastern Cleddau, a number of its tributaries to the south of the Preseli Hills and tributaries of the Western Cleddau to the west. The largest and most ecologically important woodland occurs in the Gwaun valley where there are considerable areas of sessile oak woodland and wet woodland, both of which are of high ecological value as well as supporting a number of protected species.

The upland area on the other hand, is largely grazed common land, and falls into two distinct areas divided by the Gwaun valley. The smaller area of Mynydd Carningli to the north is largely dominated by dry heath with some significant areas of bracken on the northern slopes. The larger upland area of the Preseli Hills to the south contains a varied mosaic of heathland (both wet and dry) and acid grassland habitats. Large areas of blanket bog are also found across the area's upper slopes associated with poorly draining gley podsol soils; these areas support wet heath and cotton-grass communities with wet flushes on the slopes being another valuable ecological feature.

## Historic Landscape influences

The Preseli Hills contain a wealth of archaeological evidence reflecting thousands of years of human occupation and land use. Particularly notable are the extents of prehistoric relict landscapes, which contain monuments from the Neolithic through to the Romano-British

periods, with a prominent concentration of ritual and funerary sites, including standing stones, round barrows, chambered tombs and cairns present across the hill slopes and summits. A cluster of monuments on the southern slopes are believed to be religiously connected to the crags of Carnmenyn – the actual source of the Stonehenge bluestones. Other prehistoric remains such as the enclosed hut settlements on Foel Eryr, and numerous field enclosures and clearance walls often display multiple relationships with the more prominent monuments within the landscape. Iron Age promontory forts, such as Tre Gynon camp, occupy defensive positions along the river valleys of the foothills. Hillforts occupy the higher ground, offering commanding views across the valleys and towards the north Pembrokeshire coast.

Early Christian monuments, including churchyard crosses, are a feature of some villages, while the Medieval period saw the enclosure of the foothills and development of a dispersed pattern of farmsteads and small settlements, some of which are now deserted, for example at New Inn.

The distinctive imposed pattern of regular Parliamentary enclosures from the 19th century is preserved in the modern landscape, contrasting with the extensive open areas of upland commons, and the enclosed lands around Newport, which have survived since the Medieval period. Today the dispersed pattern of small, stone built settlements and scattered farmsteads remains concentrated in the valleys and lower slopes, often extending in a linear form along roads. Some of the few settlements are nucleated villages are centred on churches. In terms of architecture, settlement and farm buildings are largely 19th century. There was some quarrying for slate in this area, around Rosebush and elsewhere.

## Cultural Landscape influences

It is on the 'Preseleu' that the men of Dyfed urge 'Pwyll' to forsake 'Rhiannon' in the first book of the Mabinogion, and the knowledge that the Preseli Hills were the source of the Stonehenge bluestones only adds to the area's sense of a deep time beyond history. From a different literary tradition comes the early 17th century 'The Description of Pembrokeshire', written by George Owen, the Marcher Lord of Cemaes (in the eastern part of this area), which provides a compelling account of his native heath at a transitional moment.

The area remains culturally traditional in that the Welsh language is strong, despite its close proximity to lowland Pembrokeshire and to the Englishry (a traditional English-speaking part of Wales to the south). One ancient practice that survives still is the celebration of the Old New Year's Day in the Gwaun Valley. The poet Waldo Goronwy Williams (1904–1971), though he was born into English-speaking household in Haverfordwest, learnt Welsh when his family moved to Mynachlog-ddu in 1911, and this was to be the language in which all his creative writing would be done. From the Preseli communities, economically marginal but with a rich culture, he also acquired the sense of neighbourhood, social co-operation, compassion for the underprivileged, and independence of judgement which were to remain with him for the rest of his life.

The area, with its more mountain than hill-like scenery, was included within the otherwise coastal Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, designated in 1952, and thus today the area also looks to tourism.