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## Bro Ceredigion – Disgrifiad cryno

Dyma dirwedd o borfeydd tonnog, o ffermydd a chaeau bychain yng nghanol sir Ceredigion. Cyfyd y tir hyd ragor na 300m yng nghopa'r Mynydd Bach, a ffinir yr ardal gan Ystwyth yn y gogledd, a Teifi yn y dwyrain a'r de. Mae graen haenog y tir yn effeithio ar y patrwm draeniad lleol.

Magu defaid yw prif ddefnydd tir y bryniau, lle ceir sawl cors a mawnog. Mae gwrychoedd eithin a drain bylchog, prin yn nodweddiadol o'r bryniau gwyntog hyn. Ceir clytwaith o gaeau bychain o dir wedi'i wella, rhwng cloddiau llawn gwahanol rywogaethau ar bridd gwell y dyffrynnoedd, gyda phorfeydd gwlyb, glaswelltir brwynog a rhosydd ar y tir gwlypach.

Aneddiadau gwasgaredig a thai ynysig sydd yma'n bennaf, gydag ambell i bentref ar hyd ac ar led. Bythynnod carreg syml yw'r adeiladau nodweddiadol, a'r rheiny'n aml wedi'u gwyngalchu, gyda tho llechi: ond ceir ambell i dŷ pridd gyda tho gwellt, yn ogystal â rhai to

sinc, deunydd nodweddiadol o'r rhan hwn o'r byd. Ceir hefyd sawl tŷ unllawr a deulawr mwy "maestrefol" ei wedd, a ffermydd mawrion gyda thai mas cyfoes, yn aml yn llechu yng nghysgod rhesi o goed conwydd.

Mae'r ardal yn un wledig iawn, gyda gweddillion ffordd draddodiadol o fyw, a siarad llawer o Gymraeg. Bu i dir ymylol ei ran yn nhodi'r 19eg ganrif, a bu llawer o ymfudo oddi yma. Eto, mae yma hefyd lawer o barciau bonheddwyr a thirweddau cynlluniedig yma. Llawer mwy diweddar, ac amlwg yn y dirwedd wyllt a gwyntog, yw mast cyfathrebu cyfoes y Mynydd Bach, a fferm wynt Trefenter i'r gogledd ohono.

## Summary description

This is a rolling pastoral landscape of small farms and fields in the heart of the county of Ceredigion. Land rises to over 300m in at the summit of Mynydd Bach, and the area is bounded by the rivers Ystwyth in the north, and Teifi in the south and east. The linear grain of ridged topography effects the alignment of local drainage patterns. Sheep-farming predominates on the hills, which include a number of peat bogs and mires. Sparse and gappy gorse and thorn hedges typify these windswept upland areas. There is a mosaic of small improved fields, bounded by species-rich hedges on the better soils in valleys, with areas of wet grassland, rush-infested grassland and rhos pastures on the wetter land.

The settlement pattern is one of scattered hamlets and isolated dwellings, with some loose-knit villages. Buildings are typically simple stone cottages, often whitewashed, with slate roofs, though there is some earth-walling and use of thatch as well as of corrugated iron, a vernacular material in this part of the world. However, there are also a number of more recent, 'suburban' style houses and bungalows and some large farms with modern outbuildings, often sheltered by coniferous shelter belts.

The area is very rural with surviving elements of a traditional way of life and much spoken Welsh. Marginal land played its part in the poverty of the C19th, with the area being a place of emigration. Yet there are also a number of important gentrified parks and designed landscapes in this area. In contrast today, a modern communication mast at Mynydd Bach stands out against its wild and windswept landscape, while the wind farm at Tefenter occupies its northern summits.

Key Characteristics
<b>A pleasant rolling plateaux, softened by small valleys, leaving a low central backbone of more elevated land.</b>
<b>Marginal upland - lowland landscape</b> - rolling hills formed by resistant Ordovician and Silurian shales, grits and sandstones of the Llanvirn and Llandovery Series.
<b>A distinct east-west structural grain to ridges and valleys</b> - many glacial moraine and melt water features, and post-glacial peat-filled basin mires.
<b>2 discrete catchments</b> - the high ridge of Mynydd Bach rises to over 300m in height, where numerous streams contribute to the Aeron, flowing to the north-west, and the Teifi flowing to the south-west..
<b>Pockets of blanket peat</b> - support wet moorland habitats on higher ground.
<b>Stream valleys contain important habitats</b> including flushes, fen-meadow, wet and dry heath, acid grassland and valley mire habitats, 'rhos' pastures, adding varied texture to landcover.
<b>Improved pasture</b> – on well drained, fine loamy and fine silty soils
<b>Field boundaries</b> - mixture of thorn or gorse hedgerows, beech hedges, stone walls and post and wire fencing.

**Shelter belts** - Large farms are often sheltered by coniferous shelter belts, with Scots pine featuring in many skyline belts.

**Archaeology** - Iron Age hillforts are positioned on the hill tops, where they have commanding views over the surrounding terrain.

**Settlement pattern** scattered hamlets, isolated dwellings and loose knit villages.

**Simple traditional buildings**, stone built, some whitewashed, with slate roofs.

**Modern features** – include coniferous plantations, communication masts, modern housing and farm buildings and the Trefenter wind farm are distinctive 20th and 21st centuries additions to the landscape.

**Mynydd Bach panoramic views** – a sense of tranquillity, but conifer plantations, field patterns and modern settlement diminish a true sense of remoteness or 'wildness'.

## Visual and Sensory Profile

A pleasant, rolling plateau, softened by small valleys coursing east and west, leaving a low central backbone of more elevated land. It is largely a working rural landscape of enclosed pasture, woodland, shelter belts and farmsteads. When seen from distant high points, from the Preseli Hills for instance, the area presents a surprisingly even appearance. At closer quarters, however, the valleys, particularly in the south, provide variety and contrasts, and arouse a more specific sense of place.

The plateau land is exposed, swept by westerly winds. A few patches of open common land remain, particularly in the north, but overall even the higher parts have been parcelled into large regular fields, bounded by fences or hedges and 'clawdd' hedgebanks, often with distinctive elements of gorse and even beech. The roads that cross the area tend to keep to the plateau: long and sweeping, including the Roman Sarn Helen.

Views on the plateau, where not restricted by hedges and trees, can be long and panoramic, across the gently flowing horizons, to the distant Preseli Hills or Cambrian Mountains. Although the coast for the most part is not visible, towards the west its proximity is evident by trees distorted and pruned by salt-laden winds. Occasional caravan parks, a mile or two inland, hint at the more popular Ceredigion Coast area with which Bro Ceredigion generally merges with no clear-cut distinction.

The Aeron cheese factory is prominent and dominates its surroundings, as does the telecommunication mast and the Trefenter wind farm on Mynydd Bach.

From Mynydd Bach there are extensive panoramic views, particularly from Mynydd Bach, whilst the large skies heighten awareness of the weather's ever-changing influence on landscape colour and character, between the sea to the west and the Cambrian Mountains to the east. There is a sense of tranquillity in these views, but conifer plantations, field patterns and modern settlement diminish a true sense of remoteness or 'wildness'.



General rolling landscape, typical of the Ceredigion area, as seen from Castedd Moeddyn.

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Llyn Eiddwen, a post-glacial lake at Mynydd Bach. © LUC



Typical improved pasture and hills © LUC



Typical open sheep grazing on the hummocky ridge of Mynydd Bach. © LUC

## Geological Landscape influences

The bedrock geology of the area comprises late Ordovician (Caradoc-Ashgill Series) and early Silurian (Llandovery Series) sedimentary rocks. The sedimentary sequence is

dominated by turbidites, a rock type comprising repetitive sequences of sandstones, siltstones and mudstones, occurring in varying proportions. Folds and faults can be traced many kilometres through the area, giving rise to a structural grain of linear, ridged topography, with corresponding effects on the alignment of local drainage patterns. An important geomorphological feature in the area's landscape is the presence of clusters of arc-shaped ridges, often partly or wholly enclosing peat basins, that occur on some valley floors and flanks. This topography is particularly well developed in the upper reaches of the Hirwaun, Ceri, Clettwr and Grannell catchments, while some of the finest examples occur in the Cledlyn Valley and form a key component of Nant Cledlyn Pingos SSSI, however, the origin of these land forms remains a subject of debate.

Sediments whose origins can be traced to either the Irish Sea or the Cambrian ice sheets occur in nearly all the major valleys suggesting that the two ice masses converged to cover virtually the entire area. With the melting of the glaciers, rivers re-occupied the valley systems and progressively re-worked the thick glacial deposits. This has resulted in the formation of a wide range of river and former glacial melt water lake land forms, including distinctive flights of elevated floodplain terraces, sinuous meander belts and bars of exposed river sediment. Sequences of lake clays and silts, over 50m thick, have been proven beneath post-glacial river deposits in the Aeron Valley near Ystrad Aeron.

## Landscape Habitats influences

In the north, the uplands of Mynydd Bach form both an important visual feature, and an area of semi-natural heathland and blanket bog habitat. Llyn Eiddwen, a post-glacial lake on the southern side of Mynydd Bach is partially infilled with peat and provides an important and diverse freshwater and basin mire habitat.

Soils vary between well-drained brown earths and heavy clay groundwater gleys, leading to a mosaic of small improved fields, bounded by species-rich hedges on the better soils, with areas of wet grassland, rush-infested grassland and rhos pastures on the wetter land. The original extent of wet meadows is reflected in the ubiquitous 'rhos' element in farm and fields names. Rhos pastures provide a range of habitats from wet marshy grasslands dominated by purple moor-grass to mire and fen, which and support important populations of marsh fritillary butterflies.

Traditionally there were large areas of wet heath in Ceredigion, which have been largely improved to the extent that only small areas of relict heath remain today. Inland from Llanon, remnants of the once-extensive wet heaths remain as lengths of heather and bilberry in the stone banks that form the field boundaries in these areas. Rhos Cilcennin SSSI is one of the few remaining areas of lowland wet heath, dominated by heather and cross-leaved heath. Many of the agriculturally-improved areas remain rush-infested and limited to only poor permanent pastures.

Natural broadleaved sessile oak woodlands cloak many of the small, steep-sided valleys that are tributaries to the Ystwyth, Teifi and Aeron rivers, supporting important populations of woodland birds such as redstarts and pied flycatcher. Elsewhere in the north, wetter areas of upland and heath have been afforested with conifers.

Hedges are a key habitat type, ranging from broad and overgrown species-rich hedgerows, through planted beech hedges in much of central and upland Ceredigion, to sparse and gappy gorse and thorn hedges in the more windswept upland areas. In the south, laburnum is a common hedging species, forming splashes of yellow colour over

wide areas in May. In some of the better agricultural areas, post and wire fencing around larger fields has replaced the original hedges.

## Historic Landscape influences

The area is well-populated with Iron Age hillforts that enjoy commanding views of the surrounding countryside. Earlier, prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments include round barrows, ring cairns and standing stones. Medieval castles are sited at Llandyfriog, Castell Hywel, Castell Trefilan, and Castell Flemish, whilst the Medieval sites at Trefenter and Hafod Ithel and the enclosure on Banc Pwllrainllwyn provide further evidence for settlement during this period. Later on, gentry landscapes become important here, for example, at the beginning of the 19th century, picturesque park gardens were laid out at Llanerchaeron, and a rare cob-walled kitchen garden was laid out at Llanllyr.

The settlement pattern today is one of scattered hamlets and isolated dwellings – with some loose-knit villages, for example, at Beulah, Troedyraur, Talgarreg, Temple Bar, Felin Fach, Llangeitho, Cross Inn, Bethania, and Lledrod, many clustered around Nonconformist chapels, or in characteristic dispersed linear form such as Cribyn, Cwrt Newydd and Talgarreg.

Buildings are typically simple stone cottages, often whitewashed, with slate roofs, though there is some earth-walling and some use of thatch as well as of corrugated iron, a vernacular material in this part of the world. However, there are also a number of more recent, 'suburban' style houses and bungalows and some large farms with modern farm buildings, often sheltered by coniferous shelter belts. Industrial processing plants, including a cheese factory, are found in the Aeron valley.

A decline in hill farming in the early 20th century was accompanied by afforestation of less versatile land on the heavier soils of the uplands. Coniferous plantations are a feature of the landscape today, visible as dark blocks in the landscape. More recent additions to the landscape include the communication mast at Mynydd Bach, which stands out against its wild and windswept landscape, and the wind turbines at the Tefenter wind farm, occupying the northern summits of Mynydd Bach.

## Cultural Landscape influences

As with its neighbouring coastal strip, this is primarily a hard-working landscape of farms and small villages. Its cultural story is mainly the every-day life of a country area whose people remain attached to a traditional way of life and to the Welsh language – and to their purse-strings, if the rest of Wales is to be believed. It has been suggested that this stereotype may reflect the grinding poverty of early 19th century Cardiganshire as it was reflected in the conduct of those who emigrated to other parts of the country. Freeholds were few, and the land of poor quality, so many of the rural poor eked out a living by knitting stockings, spinning and weaving, and mining. Migration took people to iron working towns in the South Wales valleys or to the USA, or to hop fields in Kent and market gardens in London.

This area's litterateurs have included the Wildean figure of Edward Prosser Rhys (1901-1945), poet and journalist of Trefilan, one of the beirdd y Mynydd bach, and (from an earlier generation) Theophilus Evans (1693-1767), author of *Drych y Prif Oesoedd* (1716), a classic of Welsh prose and an entertaining, if necessarily, uncritical account of early Welsh history. All Evans' works uphold the nobility and antiquity of the Welsh nation and



of the Anglican communion as the true Christian religion. The village of Llangeitho was for long a great centre of learning and of Protestant dissent, the 'Mecca of Methodism' from the time of Daniel Rowland (1713-1790) whose statue stands outside the now-closed chapel. Dr Lewis Edwards of Bala College (1809-1887) and William Rowlands (1807-1866), founder of the Welsh Calvinist connection in the USA, both spent some time at the school at Llangeitho.

Llandyfriog is associated with the cult of Briog (fl. 6th century), a native and evangelist of Corotica (Ceredigion) and of Brittany, where he is commemorated in the episcopal foundation of St. Brieuc as well as in Gloucestershire, Cornwall, and Brittany – a testament to the peripatetic nature of the Celtic church and of this area's links with the sea.

At Llanerchaeron, the National Trust looks after the magnificent 18th century gentry estate in which the hand of John Nash is apparent.