



The Essence

SECTION TWO

THE ESSENCE OF THE CLWYDIAN RANGE

1 WHY IS THE CLWYDIAN RANGE DESIGNATED AS AN AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY?

The Clwydian Range forms a 35km north – south chain of undulating hills extending to 160 sq.km and rising to 554 metres at the summit of Moel Famau in the centre of the area. The hills stretch from the Vale of Clwyd in the west to the foothills of the Dee Estuary to the east; from Prestatyn Hillside in the north to the Nant y Garth pass in the South.

Seen at its best from the Vale of Clwyd, the open heather moorland of the high ridge dominates the small hedged fields and coppice woodland of the lower slopes. In places limestone rock outcrops are exposed in attractive wooded escarpments and on the fringes of the area highly fertile farmland gives a soft pastoral foreground to the hills.

The AONB has traditionally been a day-trip destination from Merseyside and Cheshire, and receives large numbers of visitors, particularly at its two Country Parks of Loggerheads and Moel Famau. The Offa's Dyke National Trail follows almost the entire length of the ridge crest.



2. LANDMAP

LANDMAP is a landscape assessment methodology which has been developed by the Countryside Council for Wales to assess the value of Welsh landscapes in terms of their geology, biodiversity, visual appearance, archaeology & history and culture (five aspects). Individual aspect specialists categorise the landscape and map the information into a geographical information system.

LANDMAP contains a wealth of information that is used both within the planning system and to offer guidance for management of landscape features and character. Information from the five individual aspects has been coordinated to produce a Character Area Map.

A LANDMAP study has been carried out for the whole of Denbighshire and the AONB. A summary of this study, based on the Character Area Map, has been produced as the Denbighshire Landscape Strategy (2003). This document describes the different landscape types throughout the AONB and is used as the basis for the geographical landscape area descriptions that follow. Information held within the LANDMAP system will help and inform the management process within the AONB throughout the life of this plan.

2.1 Prestatyn to Rhualt

The northern, mainly limestone, section of the ridge has steep west facing scarp slopes topped with a limestone plateau of gently rolling farmland. There are wide views out to sea and west to Snowdonia.

It is more intensively cultivated than the remainder of the area and is interspersed with small plantations, coppice and hedgerows, with rocky outcrops. It has been affected in places by limestone quarries. Picturesque small villages such as Gwaenysgor and Llanasa add interest to the landscape and the Golden Grove Estate, a historic parkland, significantly adds to its quality to the east of Gwaenysgor.

2.2 Rhualt to Bodfari

This is the narrowest section of the Range, only just over 1km in width, and comprises areas of undulating upland. The ridge is lower here than further south and most has been agriculturally improved, characterised by irregular fields enclosed by hedgerows and occasional stone walls. The Wheeler Gap, with its small sand quarries, marks the southern boundary of this landscape area.

2.3 Bodfari to Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd

The Range is at its most impressive from the Wheeler Gap to Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd near Ruthin. Here the crest of the ridge is at its highest, with open heather clad hills and moorland bounded by drystone walls forming the dominant landscape. Moel Famau (554m), Moel y Parc (398m), Moel Arthur (455m) and Moel Fenlli (511m) dominate the scene. Down slope small fields with trees, hedgerows and woodlands are more in evidence. On the west steep spur slopes extend down into the vale of Clwyd but, to the east, the land is more gently sloping. The whole area is interspersed with small secluded valleys, whilst the larger River Alyn meanders through the limestone country to the east of the main Silurian ridge. Three small reservoirs on the eastern flank are minor landscape features and villages such as Cilcain and Llanarmon-yn-Iâl add variety to the landscape.

Loggerheads Country Park is located beneath steep limestone rocks next to the River Alyn. Liverpool City Council's Education Centre at Colomendy, set in historic parkland, is opposite the Country Park. The ridge line can be accessed by the Offa's Dyke National Trail and Moel Famau Country Park, where panoramic views are especially notable.

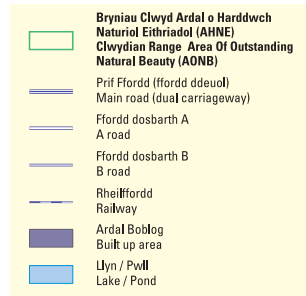
2.4 South of Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd

Here the hills decrease in height and the valleys become more wooded. The deep wooded cleft of Nant y Garth lies just inside the southern boundary of the AONB.

2.5 East of the Alyn Valley

The eastern most part of the AONB beyond the Alyn Valley is of Carboniferous Limestone and millstone grit, with typical rocky outcrops topped by extensive woodlands. The landscape of this area is affected by active quarries.

A vertical collage of five scenic images from the Lake District. The top image shows a butterfly on a flower. The second image shows a field of purple heather. The third image shows a man and child fishing. The fourth image shows a large stone house. The bottom image shows a field of red heather.



Map designed and produced by RJS Associates in association with Denbighshire Countryside Service.

3 HUMAN INFLUENCE

The landscape of the Clwydian Range has been influenced by human hands for millennia. At Pontnewydd Cave, less than 10 miles beyond the AONB boundary to the west of St. Asaph, remains of people a quarter of a million years old have been found, together with stone tools and animal bone. Since then human influence, particularly following the retreat of the most recent ice sheets around 12,000 years ago, is evident everywhere, shaping the short-cropped limestone grasslands, the heather topped hills, the enclosure and the more obvious built environment of villages, buildings and industry.

3.1 The Prehistoric Period

Evidence of settlement is limited but Bronze Age peoples may have used the sites of succeeding hillforts, as hinted at by the discovery of a Bronze Age hoard of axes at Moel Arthur and possible Bronze Age occupation at nearby Moel y Gaer Rhosesmor in Flintshire.

Important Early Stone Age sites are located within the Range, notably Cae Gwyn and Ffynnon Beuno caves at Tremeirchion, with material found dating from at least 18,000 years ago. These form an important stage in the understanding of hunter-gatherers in Britain.

Tools of Middle Stone Age peoples, made from chert from nearby Gronant, have been found scattered around the AONB. Late Stone Age stone tools were found at Gwaenysgor, and nearby Gop Cairn at Trelawnyd may also date from this period.



The Range contains many Bronze Age burial monuments, dating from about 2,000 to 800 BC. Evidence of settlements is limited but Bronze Age peoples may

have used the sites of succeeding hillforts, as hinted at by the discovery of a Bronze Age hoard of axes at Moel Arthur, and similar activity at nearby Moel y Gaer, Rhosesmor.

The Iron Age hillforts which crown the Range are the most obvious and best known archaeological feature of the area, forming a very significant part of the landscape of the central Range. Dating from about 800 BC to 43 AD, the six forts vary in size from the massive Penycloddiau to the more compact Moel Arthur. They dominate the landscape now as in the past. Their function, both defensive and as sites of display, probably varied from controlling centres for territories stretching down the Clwydian Range, across the Vale and up into the hills beyond; to tribal gathering places; summer grazing or sites of ritual.

3.2 The Roman Period 43AD – 410AD

There is little direct evidence of Roman activity in the Range, although the area is close to the major centre of Chester and the Range was no doubt crossed by the Romans. Roman sites are known at Prestatyn, St. Asaph and Ruthin and they possibly exploited the lead mines in Talargoch, Dyserth. A possible Roman road runs past Loggerheads Country Park.

3.3 Dark Age and Medieval Period

Much of the landscape pattern visible today of villages and isolated farmsteads date from this period. Churches of medieval origin lie in many of the villages within the AONB.



3.4 The Post Medieval Period to Modern

In more recent years the Range has seen the development of several large parkland estates including Golden Grove and Colomendy. Some developed following the accumulation of wealth built up from the expansion of local industries, particularly lead mining, and extensive remains of this mining activity are still visible in the limestone areas. Of the four remaining Cornish engine houses in Denbighshire, three lie within the AONB and the fourth lies just outside.

Throughout the range water was harnessed to provide power; for lead mining particularly on the Alyn, whilst the River Wheeler was used to power corn mills, tin plate works, paper mills and sawmills. It was at this time that transport within the Range began to change. Gradually a network of tracks both around and across the Range were replaced or superseded as the use of motorised vehicles increased. A railway crossed the Range to the north.

Wartime did not leave the Range unscathed. A decoy site, whose purpose was to draw fire away from urban centres and munitions factories of the north west, was located on the slopes of Moel Famau during the Second World War. The control centre still stands on Ffrith Mountain.





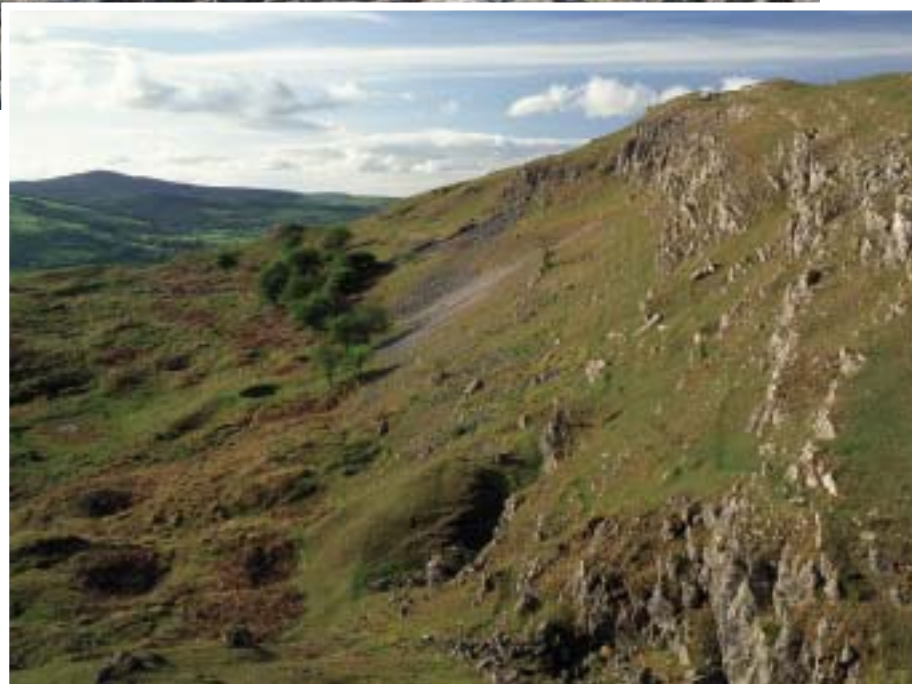
4 GEOLOGY

Geology is a major influence on the current landform which results from the effects of erosion on different rock types.

The central spine of the Clwydian Range is composed of ancient Silurian Wenlock Shales, consisting of highly folded shales and mudstones, interbedded with bands of sandstone. The formations vary in thickness, sometimes extending to many hundreds of metres. The distribution and mode of occurrence of the formations create variety in the landscape of the ridge which is terminated abruptly to the west by the Vale of Clwyd fault.

To the east and north is Carboniferous Limestone which gives a typical limestone topography of escarpments and incised valleys. The limestone has been extensively exploited, predominately for road-stone, but also for its inherent mineral veins of lead zinc and silver. The exposed rocks form a complex series of mixed, open and well wooded escarpments which add visual attraction to the landscape, particularly around Maeshafn and the Alyn Valley.

The overlying drift geology is a result of climatic fluctuations and associated glacial actions over the last 1.6 million years. This has resulted in the deposition of sands and gravels particularly along the eastern edge and the river valleys, which have also been extracted for use in the building industries.



5 BIODIVERSITY

The AONB has a rich and varied biodiversity. This diversity of vegetation and species is a result of the varied geology, topography and of past land management practice within the area. A range of 'semi-natural' vegetation occurs including heather moorland, limestone grassland, wetland and woodland.

There are numerous sites within the AONB that are of high nature conservation value. There are eight Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and one candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC). Other sites have been recognised and recorded in the schedule of County Wildlife Sites which are given protection through development plans. In addition there are four Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological sites (RIGS) within the AONB. These sites are valued for their education, research, historical or aesthetic importance.

