

Friends of the Brecon Beacons



Cyfeillion Bannau Brycheiniog

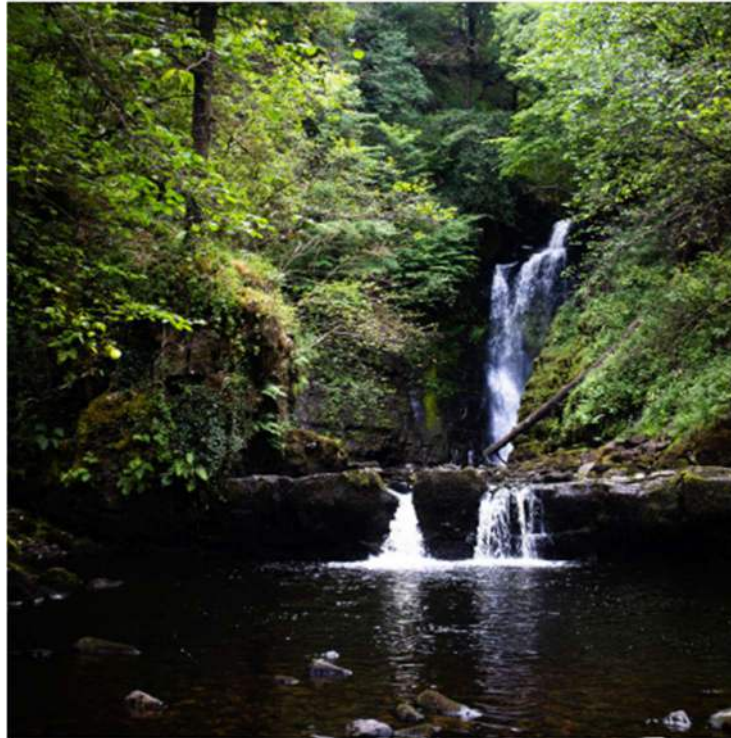
www.breconbeaconsparkociety.org

Society News

Edition 7
September 2024

Welcome to the seventh edition of Society News, our online quarterly newsletter aimed at keeping members informed about what the Society has been doing and plans to do. This is an expanded edition intended to take the place of this summer's The Beacon magazine as previously advised in the email sent to members in July.

If you have any articles you would like us to consider for publication or any comments on what you have read, please send them to <mailto:mailbox@breconbeaconsparkociety.org>



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

FORTHCOMING TALKS

See the website for more details and for how to book a place at one of our free monthly talks held at The Bear Hotel in Crickhowell.

25th September – The Wildlife of the River Usk. A talk by John Gibbs at The Bear, Crickhowell 7.30pm.

DARK SKY FESTIVAL 2024

Bannau Brycheiniog is holding its **Dark Sky Festival on Saturday 21st September** at the National Park Visitor Centre LD3 8ER. Various events are taking place throughout the day so please visit their website for full programme details and to book - www.breconbeacons.org/stargazing

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE NEWS AND VACANCIES

TRAMROADS PROJECT

If you are interested in this project and would like to volunteer please contact Roy Manning via:-

mailbox@breconbeaconsparkociety.org

NEWSLETTER CIRCULATION LIST.

If you have a family membership and would like this online newsletter emailed to others in your family, please contact us and provide additional email addresses to be added to our list. memsec@breconbeaconsparkociety.org and

LOCAL ACCESS FORUM - HAVE YOU VOLUNTEERED?

If any members have put forward their names to volunteer on the Local Access Forum we'd be pleased to hear from them. If you have, please contact Phil O'Shea by email at: -

philoshea51@hotmail.com

NEW EVENTS SECRETARY

Alun Flynn has resigned as Events Secretary as he has other commitments which make it difficult to fulfil this role.

In response to our recent call for a volunteer to fill the role we are pleased to announce that Ade Claughan has agreed to take it on. He will be assisted by his wife Ann.

He is now busy filling the programme for the remainder of 2024 and for 2025. If you have any ideas for talks or know someone who could give a talk of interest to our members, please contact Ade through the website.

PUBLICITY

We need volunteers to help with publicity for the Society – this includes the Newsletter, a revised format for The Beacon as well as Social Media. You would be part of a team promoting the Society.

Please contact us via

mailbox@breconbeaconsparkociety.org

WALKING IN ANDORRA

Helen Fletcher

Arrival

I first visited Andorra in 2011 when I began leading holidays for what is now called Ramble Worldwide. We flew into Toulouse and were driven south for 3 ½ hours, eventually winding our way up into the Pyrenees.

It was misty as we approached the tunnel at Pas de la Casa but we emerged into bright sunshine at the top of the Valira, one of the most developed alpine valleys in Europe. It was not 'love at first sight' as we drove past ski stations to our hotel in Encamp. We did get a glimpse though of a couple of beautiful Romanesque churches and the totally unspoilt side valley of Val d'Incles. Also, of a strange crop growing in many small fields: tobacco!



What I realised very quickly was that this is walking heaven!

History

Outside the main valley, with its ski stuff and duty-free shops, there remain small towns and villages dating back to the time of Charlemagne, who is said to have founded Andorra in AD 805. By the 11th century, control of the Principality had passed to the Bishops of la Seu d'Urgell, just over the Spanish Border. Then, during 13th century, its sovereignty was fought over with the Counts of Foix, on the French side. Nowadays Andorra

is still technically a principality with the Bishop of Urgell and the President of France as co-princes, but since 1981 has its own elected government. It is not a member of the EU but uses the Euro. It became the 184th member state of the United Nations in 1993. In addition to the historical buildings, mention must be made of the beautiful modern church at Meritxell, which manages to combine features of Islamic tradition with the Christian and brings the landscape into the heart of the structure.



Economics

Economically Andorra, sandwiched between France and Spain, existed with a certain amount of dubious trade. Every male adult is still legally required to have a gun and to be prepared to defend his country. Today the tobacco crop is not an important export. The big earners are now international banking and the ski industry. Day-visitors come to enjoy the duty-free shopping and many summer visitors now come for walking, though they are well spread-out.

Geology

The geology is complicated but can be divided into four distinct areas: a large area of granite in the south and east (giving scenery similar to the Scottish Cairngorms); dark gneiss to the north of the main road (giving narrow ridges more like the Cuillin).

The largest area is of shale and slate to the north and west and includes the highest peaks; in the centre is a large area of limestone. All of these were heavily glaciated, producing large, north facing cirques (Coma in Catalan) and an abundance of glacial lakes. This varied geology and landscape supports a rich selection of flowers, especially in the spring, but throughout the walking season.

Walking

Our normal walking programme offers a choice of Grade 6 walks (similar to energetic BBPS) and Grade 8 (tougher, involving occasional scrambling). The weather is usually excellent in summer without being too warm as we are always above 1300m. The Atlantic fronts have lost their force by the time they reach this eastern corner of the Pyrenees. There is also a noticeable difference in cloud cover and precipitation between the French side and the Spanish/Andorran.



From a base in Encamp or Ordino it is easy to access the whole of Andorra and to choose a wide variety of beautiful and unspoilt walking areas.

My first visit was in August and our walks ranged across the whole of the country. As soon as you leave the main valley towns, the landscape is beautiful and feels wild and remote. The Val de Madriu, to the SE of the capital (Andorra la Vella) is designated a World Heritage Site.

A walk up through forest brings you into a wide upland valley with a few grazing cows and horses. There are a couple of old farmhouses and an unmanned 'refugi' beside the stream, with mountains rising high on either side. The Pessons lakes are found near to the French border in the East.

The GR7 takes you past a chain of 9 lakes, set within a great glacial bowl, at the head of which rises an apparently insurmountable wall of rock and scree. The path does zig-zag up through the scree to arrive at the Pic de Pessons, a magnificent viewpoint.

The Val d'Incles is another protected site: carpeted with wild daffodils in the early summer and glowing crimson with 'alpenrose' later. From here you can climb up to the Juclar lakes in the NE corner of the country and cross over a pass into France, or go N and W towards the Cabana Sorda lake and high peaks above.

In July and August, when the ice has melted, all of these lakes provide a welcome opportunity to have a swim-break during your walk. These areas are all accessible at G6 level. The highest peaks of Coma Pedrosa (2942m) and Pic de l'Estanyo (2915m) require more effort and a good head for heights.

Nature

For a number of years, I was asked to lead the 'flower interest' week at the start of June. One is literally unable to avoid walking on gentians, orchids and the national flower, the wild daffodil, in the valleys. Higher up, a wealth of alpinists delights the amateur and expert.



There are rarities, if you know where to look, like ramonda myconi, growing apparently on bare rock in shady places.

In July and August we find a different, but abundant range of flowers. The absence of sheep from these mountains allowing such a floral profusion to thrive. There are animals- some domesticated horses and cows and wild boar and marmots. Eagles and vultures are commonly spotted.

Coronallacs

In addition to the normal programme, I was very fortunate in 2018 to be offered a chance to lead, with the support of a local guide, a hut-to-hut trek known as the Coronallacs. My certificate claims that I 'completed 92km, mingling with marmots and muflons. Climbing 6449m and enjoying views from a height of 2800m'. The Catalan text sounds more poetic! We stayed in four refuges (mountain huts) and walked for five days, sometimes for 10 hours a day.

I should mention a fellow leader, Alf Robertson, with whom I had the privilege to work in 2013. He has lived in the Spanish and French Pyrenees for many years and he wrote the Cicerone guide for Andorra. Much of my historical and geological background has been borrowed from him.



You may gather from this article that Andorra has a special place in my heart. It is the one place that I return to every year, never tiring of the beautiful scenery and the fascinating people.

Helen Fletcher

THE BEACONS WAY ART TRAIL-

8 STONES AND 8 ARTISTS

Alun Davies

Many readers will have walked the well-known Beacons Way from the Holy Mountain near Abergavenny to Bethlehem near Llandeilo, or at least part of it. It is 99 miles in length and provides some of the best views the National Park has to offer. It was first established in May 2005 by John Sansom and Arwel Michael, with help from Chris Barber. The route was updated and improved in 2016. It can be Walked in 6-8 days but go in summer, as much of the route is very muddy in winter.

The Art Trail Idea

Two years later William Gibbs had an idea for an art trail to follow the route of the Beacons Way. He knew of a similar project that saw walkers taking an object from a cache on that route, but the problem was how to replenish the caches. William thought of placing engraved metal plates, from which walkers could take rubbings as a souvenir of their visit. His proposal for an art trail along the length of the Beacons Way would also celebrate the

establishment of the route, and give it added interest and publicity. The idea for a Beacons Way Art Trail was then developed by the Brecknock Museum Art Trust and the Brecon Beacons Park Society.

The Beacons Way was originally divided into 8 sections and so the Art Trail has 8 relief images on metal, set into local stones. Each image shows the very different response of the artist to the landscape, its ecology and mythology.

Art in the Brecon Beacons

Art in the Brecon Beacons was nothing new at the time the Art Trail was set up. The wild uplands of the Brecon Beacons have appealed to artists since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The mountains, valleys, waterfalls, bridges, and medieval ruins attracted artists such as JMW Turner, Sir Richard Colt Hoare, and John Cotman. In the twentieth century, David Jones and Eric Gill were working at Capel y Finn producing some of their finest works. Eric Ravillious visited in 1938 and his wife Tizah commented: "We arrived in Wales by the late afternoon, the weather was damp, and the mountains strewn with rocks and patches of born dead bracken, the sheep on their sides jutted out, precariously attached to their surface by the force of gravity". Nothing has changed, you may think. Piper was a visitor of theirs and while there painted Llanthony Priory and several chapels in the area.

Other 20th-century artists who painted in the Brecon Beacons and Black Mountains were James Dickson Innes, Graham Sutherland, Cedric Morris, May Lloyd Jones, and Clive Hicks-Jenkins and many more.

The Art Trail Artists

To select the artists whose work would be used on the Beacons Art Trail there was an open invitation to all artists living and working in the Brecon Beacons National Park to enter a competition. There was a good response to this and, after shortlisting, a team of 8 artists was chosen. They were each given the task of preparing an artwork which could be turned into a relief image, each about the size of a sheet of A4 paper.

Two sculptors were given the task of turning the 8 drawings and paintings into plaster casts ready for bronze casting.

The plaques were installed along the Beacons Way by Panico Theodosiou.

An excellent book giving full details of the project was written by David Moore called "8 Stones 8 Artists". It includes sheets of tracing paper, and coloured crayons so that rubbings can be taken off the plaques. This book is readily available from The Tower Gallery in Crickhowell, Y Garn in Brecon and from the internet.



While walkers may not know that the sculptures were designed to be rubbed with tracing paper and crayon, they are ideal subjects for photographs to record a walker's progress along the Beacons Way.



Current Situation

Sadly, over the years 3 of the 8 metal plaques have been stolen leaving 5 to be seen today. Happily, plans are in hand, and funds are being found, to replace the missing images which will be installed more securely.

How to find the plaques

Anyone who wishes to see these artworks can either walk the Beacons Way and see them as they pass, or one can drive as close as possible before parking and walking the last stretch on foot. Each stone comes with a Grid Reference, but these are not entirely accurate, nor do they guide you directly to it. Rather those who set up the artworks incorporated a sense of intrigue in that you must cast about in the area to find the stone. This means that the stones are not all directly placed on the line of the Beacons Way. Some are as much as 20 metres from the track. I walked the whole way in June 2011 with a group of friends, some years after the artworks were installed, and we saw none of them. There is a view that in future a finger post might be put up to guide walkers to the stones. On the post, there could be a QR code giving details of the artist and the provenance of the piece.

Whether you decide to walk the length of the Beacons Way to spy the artworks along the route, or whether you choose to visit them individually by car and foot, it is well worth the effort. You will find full details about the artists and the locations of their works in the book, or you can find them online.

<https://www.breconbeaconsparkociety.org/beccaons-way-art/>



Thanks to David Moore author of “8 Stones 8 Artists” for allowing me to quote from his book.

The construction of the trail and the book “8 Carreg, 8 Arlunydd – 8 Stones, 8 Artists” were funded by the Brecknock Museum Art Trust, The Brecon Beacons Park Society, The Sustainability Challenge Fund, The Contemporary Art Society of Wales, The Usk Valley Trust and the Morel Trust.

Alun Davies

If you have enjoyed this edition of Society News, please consider giving some time to join our Publicity Team. The Society will only survive if members volunteer to help and there are always opportunities to contribute in some way, no matter how small. Please contact us at mailbox@breconbeaconsparkociety.org

GIVING NATURE IN NATIONAL PARKS THE LIFELINE IT SO URGENTLY NEEDS

Gareth Ludkin

When the first National Parks of England and Wales were created in the 1950s, the nation was still recovering the crisis of the Second World War. Now, in a time of nature and climate crisis we need these places more than ever. And it's not just us that needs them. Our National Parks are often the last refuge for many of our most threatened species of wildlife, such as curlew, hen harrier and cuckoo. But our Health Check report has found that, even in these special places, nature is struggling.

The report provides a detailed assessment of the state of nature recovery in all the National Parks of England and Wales. It's the first time anything on this scale has been attempted and we found it a major challenge just to get the data needed to properly understand the situation. Many relevant national datasets – on species abundance, water quality etc. - are simply not available at National Park level and we had to commission extra analysis just to understand some very basic details such as changes in woodland coverage.

But now the results are in, and our findings include that:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Only 6% of all land in National Parks is currently managed effectively for nature.• Only 19% of lakes in Wales' three National Parks achieved good overall status in 2021 and only 44% of the rivers.• Less than a quarter (23%) of Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in National Parks in Wales are in a favourable state for nature.• Woodland expansion across all the National Parks between 2015 and 2020 came to a total of just 8 square miles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In 2022 the amount of sewage released from storm overflows within the boundaries of National Parks in England and Wales totalled 7,367 days. The National Parks most badly affected (according to hours of spills) are Dartmoor, Eryri, Lake District, South Downs and the Yorkshire Dales.• Wales' three National Parks have the potential to hold 29,431,000 tonnes of carbon content, the equivalent of three times Wales' total CO2 annual emissions. But in 2019 the Welsh Government estimated that over 70% of Welsh peatlands were degraded.
---	---

We also looked at the Management Plans produced for each of the National Parks as the key documents which should set out clear targets and objectives for supporting nature recovery, but our analysis found significant gaps in the information they contain. For example:

- Four out of the 13 Plans include no baseline data on any of the three topics we focused on – habitats, species and water quality – making it impossible to understand the state of nature at the start of the plan period.
- Three out of the 13 Plans contain no specific, timebound targets on habitats, species or water quality.
- In most cases – 11 out of the 13 – there had been no assessment of progress published for the current Plan.

Why is so little progress being made?

1. NPAs have limited control over what happens on most land in National Parks, particularly where it is privately owned. The mechanisms for ensuring that landowners and other key partners support nature recovery are currently far too weak.
2. National Parks were designed for a different era. The world has changed a lot since the 1950s and the way they are run and managed needs to change if they're going to be able to deliver what society and the environment needs today.
3. The lack of resources available for National Parks. Put simply the funding available just doesn't match the national role that National Parks need to deliver on nature recovery.

What needs to be done?

Our report sets out a series of major reforms which are needed to address the scale of these challenges.

1. **Governments in both England and Wales need to provide stronger laws and additional resources, including a doubling of the core funding for NPAs. They need to make it absolutely clear that National Parks are nature designations as well as landscape designations. This will require a complete transformation in the way these areas are run to ensure there is a much greater emphasis on nature recovery in all the decision-making relating to them.**
2. **As well as better enforcement of existing laws in National Parks, such as those aimed at ensuring SSSIs are in good condition, we need new laws to crack down on wildlife crime and end damaging practices such as burning on peat.**
3. **Organisations such as water companies and the Ministry of Defence should be required to contribute to the costs of cleaning up the damage their activities cause to National Parks, and they should be required to do far more to prevent future damage.**
4. **All landowners should be incentivised to adopt nature friendly practices including through much greater levels of support for nature recovery in agri-environment schemes.**
5. **We also need to ensure that National Parks are places where everyone feels welcome and connected, so they can understand exactly why they are so important for nature's recovery.**
6. **Finally, bodies like Natural Resources Wales must make it far easier to get hold of the evidence needed to understand the state of nature in National Parks in future. This is something which could be put right very quickly, and which should be addressed as a matter of urgency.**

In Wales there are opportunities to drive change through the hotly debated Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) and the Environmental Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets bill. But with the SFS being delayed another year by the new Climate Change and Rural Affairs cabinet secretary Huw Irranca-Davies, it's clear that things are already beginning to slip, but nature doesn't have the time to wait if we are to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030.