

CYMDEITHAS MYNYDDOEDD CAMBRIA CAMBRIAN MOUNTAINS SOCIETY

Llywydd / President: Iolo Williams ● www.cambrian-mountains.co.uk

PRESS RELEASE

RADICAL APPROACH NEEDED FOR UPLANDS FUTURE

A possible solution to the social crisis facing the upland communities of Wales was outlined to members of the Cambrian Mountains Society last week during a talk on the Pumlumon Project given by Clive Faulkner and Iestyn Thomas of the Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust.

The Pumlumon Project is seen as a pilot for the whole of upland Wales, and encompasses 40,000 hectares, in which 400 farmers are stakeholders. The 15-year project is supported by government and other bodies including the Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency and Forestry Commission Wales, and has environmental and economic objectives, recognising that they are interdependent. Clive Faulkner said “We need to manage the countryside to ensure biodiversity. We need to keep farmers farming. Wilderness is out.”

He suggested that, with farm-gate prices continuing to fall, it is time to look beyond social payments such as agri-environmental grants for the farm “products” of the future. Why not pay farmers to manage their land so that its capacity to absorb water is maximised, preventing flooding of built-up areas miles downstream? Why not pay them to conserve their peatlands so that they can absorb and store carbon that would otherwise contribute to climate change? The set-up and running costs might be large, but would be dwarfed by the long-term savings.

Stock-rearing and grazing would be vital tools in managing the land, but farmers would now be able to concentrate on smaller numbers, and on premium products.

A major goal of the Pumlumon Project is the creation of a rich and diverse landscape and wildlife, which would attract visitors and create a demand for community based tourism provision.

Clive Faulkner welcomed the Cambrian Mountains Society’s proposal for an AONB, which would bring additional funding opportunities for the Project.

Earlier, Society members enjoyed a fascinating talk on low-flying activities over the Cambrian Mountains – an area which coincides almost exactly with the RAF’s “Area 7T” one of only three Tactical Training Areas (TTAs) in the UK, where flying as low as 100’ is practised.

Squadron-Leader Peter Sinclair explained that such training was vital to the RAF, and that because of its sensitive nature, it is tightly regulated. Flying times are scheduled and well-publicised, pilots must book their slots, and their activities are rigorously policed. There had been a large fall in activity in the last 3 years (from 36 to 14 hours) due to the RAF’s overseas commitments.

Asked whether there was any conflict between the TTA and windfarms, Peter Sinclair said that it was a problem, and that the MOD would have opposed Cefn Croes, had it been consulted earlier. He suggested that windfarms are in any case no more than “background noise” in the context of UK energy needs.

This was the last of a very successful series of Cambrian Mountains Society talks during winter 2006-7.

END

Notes for editors

The Cambrian Mountains Society is registered charity which works for a better future for the communities, landscape and environment of this unique upland area.

Website: www.cambrian-mountains.co.uk