Cambrian Mountains – The Heart of Wales

Developing a Strategy for a Sustainable Future

CAMBRIAN MOUNTAINS SOCIETY
Registered Charity no. 1113037

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Written and designed by members of the Cambrian Mountains Society

The Cambrian Mountains Society was formed in 2005 and its objects are:

1. To promote, for the benefit of local communities, and of the wider public, measures which will sustain or enhance the landscape, natural beauty, biodiversity, archaeology, scientific interest, and cultural heritage of the Cambrian Mountains.
2. To advance the education of the public in the landscape, natural beauty, biodiversity, archaeology, scientific nature, cultural heritage and geodiversity of the Cambrian Mountains.

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I. Introduction

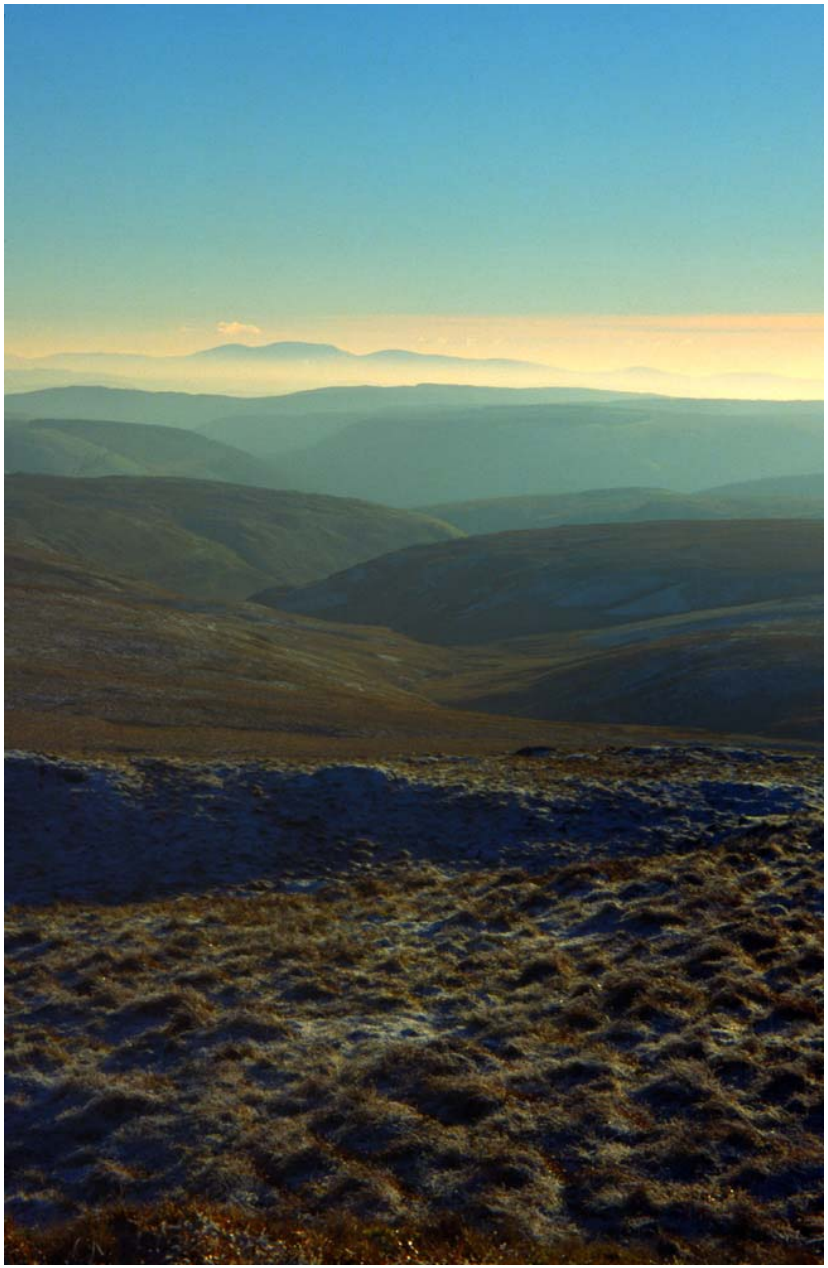
The Cambrian Mountains of Mid Wales are one of Britain's outstanding landscape areas, the product of thousands of years of interaction between an upland environment, and the remarkable and unique communities which have succeeded in creating their livelihood in these remote hills. In the global economy of the twenty-first century, those communities, and the landscapes they have helped to shape, face unprecedented challenges.

The publication of *Cherished Heartland*[1] by Professors Midmore and Moore-Colyer draws attention to the problems of agriculture in the uplands of Wales, and to the likelihood that decline will continue. In the past, this issue has generally been addressed in ways which are inadequate in two respects:

- They fail to recognise the diversity of the different upland regions of Wales (and in particular the special characteristics that are possessed by such an area as the Cambrian Mountains).
- They fail to address the problem in a way that integrates the needs of agriculture, tourism, society, landscape, biodiversity and geodiversity – despite the fact that many farm households are already pluriactive and so depend on these other characteristics.

The *Rural Development Plan for Wales*[2] (covering the period 2007-2013) might have been expected from its title to address these issues, but, constrained as it is by the exigencies of EU policy, its approach is limited. Whilst it refers to the "Environmental Situation" it generally treats the environment as a problem rather than an opportunity.

The Cambrian Mountains Society (CMS) is concerned with the issue of rural development in a specific part of Wales – a part which has many of the usual problems of the uplands, but which also has particular cultural connotations and in addition has exceptional natural beauty. CMS believes that the key to resolving the problems of the area is the recognition of the need to treat agriculture and tourism and the rest of the economy in a way that integrates them with landscape, culture and society – to recognise that all these things are interdependent rather than alternatives. CMS seeks to promote forms of economic development that *depend* on landscape, environment and culture, and which therefore *require* their conservation.



II. The Cambrian Mountains in 2050 – a vision statement

- The landscape is widely recognised as being of outstanding value, and is protected by national, European and international designations.
- There is a community-inclusive strategic approach to development across the whole area, aimed at sustaining the unique landscape, environment, heritage, communities, and culture.
- The special qualities and features of the area are well-managed, to ensure that the distinctive character of the area is maintained and where possible enhanced. The remote, open and extensive character of the core area of the Cambrian Mountains has been safeguarded. Action has been taken to ameliorate or reverse past damage, and to maximise biodiversity.
- The communities of the Cambrian Mountains are economically viable and confident, and young people can see that there are worthwhile careers for them locally, and wish to stay and work after finishing school. Well-designed affordable housing is available, and local services and facilities are excellent. The Welsh language is widely used.
- Farming and other land-based activities are valued for their contribution to sustaining the area's special qualities, and to the area's economic well-being.
- Residents are proud of where they live, and of being able to help others to appreciate and enjoy the special qualities of the area. They strongly support measures which sustain the landscape, environment and archaeology of the Cambrian Mountains, and many gain their livelihoods from enterprises such as tourism which are founded on the reputation the area enjoys for its high quality environment and landscape.
- "Cambrian Mountains" is a distinctive and effective marketing brand for quality products, available both within and beyond the area.

III. Achieving the Vision

For as long as the special qualities of the Cambrian Mountains have been recognised, efforts and proposals have been made to conserve and enhance them. Yet despite all this, the Cambrian Mountains are today facing a crisis, due in large measure to a decline in prosperity and purpose of its communities. What are the options for halting and reversing this decline?

- **Do nothing**. There is no reason to suppose that the existing uncoordinated plethora of national, county, and local designations, plans, and grant schemes which apply to the Cambrian Mountains will be any more successful in the future than they have been in the past. As Powys and Ceredigion County Councils observed in their recent submission[3] to the Big Lottery Fund Living Landmarks programme: *"…. the status quo is not an option for the Cambrian Mountains."*
- **National Park**. A Cambrian Mountains National Park was proposed and rejected in the 1970s. Designation brings long-term planning, strong centrally-supported funding, a high tourism profile, and a special planning authority, but is very unpopular amongst landowners, creates tensions between Park Authorities and the overlapping "counties" (unitary authorities), and has the potential, demonstrated in some existing NPs, to create conflict between the conservation and recreational objectives of designation.
- **Special project funding**. The recent bid by Powys and Ceredigion County Councils to the Big Lottery Fund Living Landmarks programme is an example of this approach. The major drawbacks of such projects are (1) they may not secure any funding; (2) however well-intentioned, they focus on outcomes which will be measured over the life of the project, not on lasting benefits.
- **Special area-based agricultural support measures**. The Cambrian Mountains have been an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) since 1986, entitling farmers within the area to grants for maintaining or adopting agricultural practices which conserve or enhance the environment. ESAs are being phased out, but a new "top tier" of agri-environmental grant scheme is expected to apply to large scale areas: the Cambrian Mountains could be particularly appropriate.
- **Unofficial local designation** aimed primarily at creating a tourism "brand" e.g. "Cambrian Mountains *Natural* Park" has been mooted in recent years. Such an approach is narrowly focussed, and ignores the need for a strategy encompassing all aspects of the Cambrian Mountains.
- **A new Welsh designation**. There is a strong case for the creation by the Assembly Government of a new designation specially adapted to the needs of Wales, which explicitly includes landscape, environment, sustainable socio-economic development and recreation in its purposes. Such a designation could replace existing National Parks and AONBs, and could also be applied to other undesignated areas - such as the Cambrian Mountains - where a strong case exists for inclusion. However, a new designation might take years to develop, and the needs of the Cambrian Mountains are pressing.
- **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**. The Cambrian Mountains Society believes that – properly interpreted – the concept of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) can make a significant contribution in the Cambrian Mountains to integrating the needs of land use (mainly agriculture and forestry), landscape, biodiversity, culture and economy. We suggest that AONB status can achieve this goal in a way that reflects the interests of local people, by involving and empowering them, through community participation at all stages and levels of AONB creation and management, and in the creation and implementation of a *Strategy for a Sustainable Future for the Cambrian Mountains*. Our proposal also integrates well with the increasing spirit of co-operation between local authorities in the area and offers a framework within which that co-operation can continue in the long term, with minimal disruption to existing local authority structures.

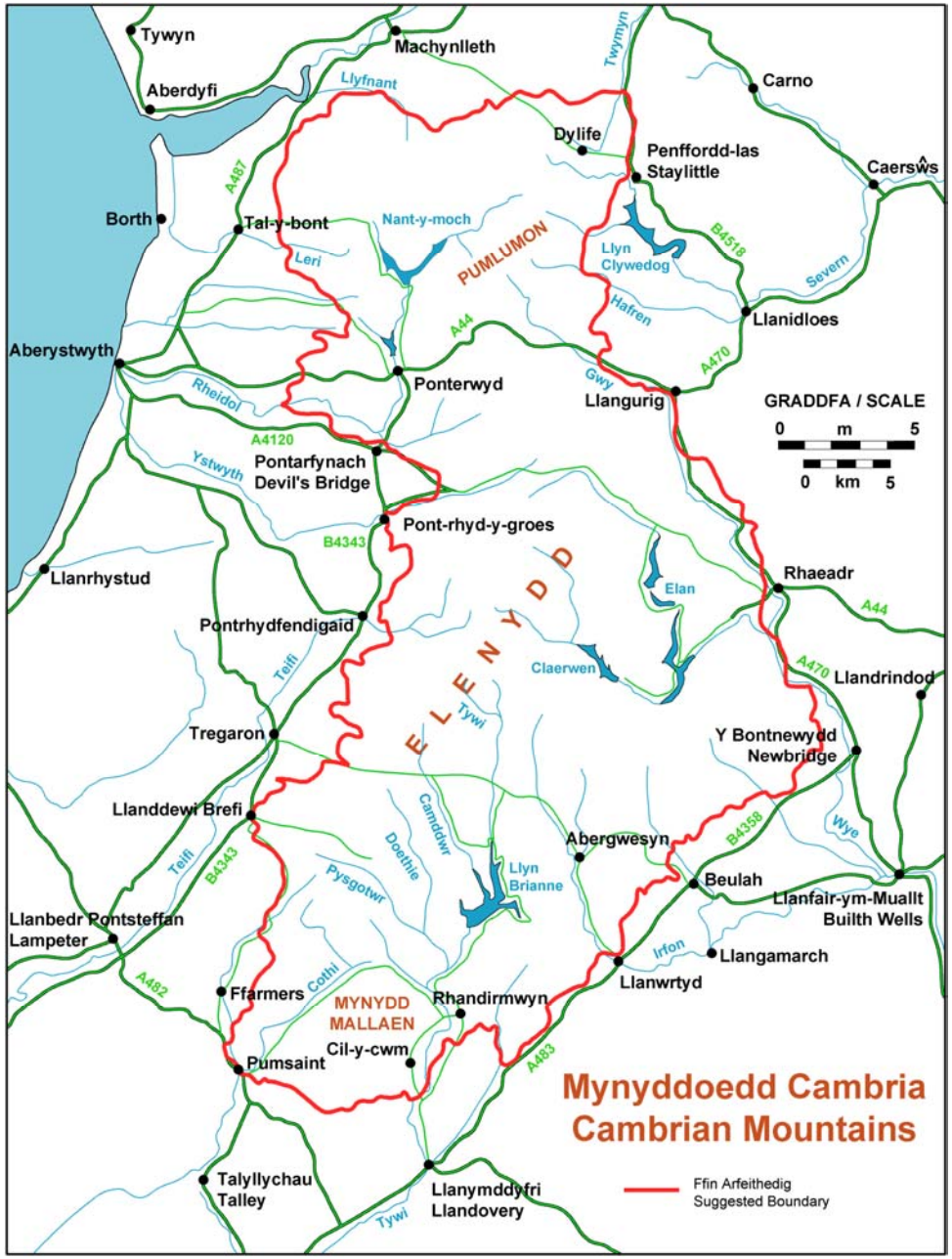
IV. The Cambrian Mountains defined

Originally the term "Cambrian Mountains" was applied in a general sense to most of upland Wales. Since the 1950s, its application has become increasingly localised to the geographically homogeneous Mid Wales uplands of Pumlumon, Elenydd, and Mynydd Mallaen, and it is to that area that this document refers (see map on right).

The suggested boundary is based on a combination of several criteria, including integrity and distinctiveness of landscape quality, land use, and socio-economic and cultural factors. The area within the boundary is largely moorland over 300m high, with the boundary itself near the base of the steeper hillsides.

The area contained within the boundary is 1210 km^2 (467 square miles). The area includes parts of the unitary authority areas of Powys (50%), Ceredigion (40%) and Carmarthenshire (10%), and of 17 electoral wards, whose total population is 30,000 (2001 census) though it is likely that the number of people living within the proposed AONB area is only around 10% of that figure.

The predominant land uses are agriculture (85%) – mainly hill sheep farms - and forestry (~15%). Only relatively small areas are occupied by other land uses such as settlements, reservoirs, quarries, and old mines. The highest point in the Cambrian Mountains is Pen Pumlumon Fawr (752m/2468').



V. Context: the need for a Strategy for a Sustainable Future for the Cambrian Mountains

In 2006, the Cambrian Mountains face major challenges, arising from fundamental changes in agricultural support mechanisms, and from pressures which stem from the needs of those who live far from Central Wales.

The Welsh Assembly Government's *Wales Spatial Plan*[4] includes a Vision and Strategy for Central Wales, and sets out a list of Propositions and Actions. Naturally it treats Central Wales at a regional level, and in so doing largely ignores the plight of thinly-populated problem areas like the Cambrian Mountains.

We believe that survival of the distinctive and interdependent landscape and communities of the Cambrian Mountains area depends on the development of a separate **Strategy** for its sustainable future.

The central purpose of this Strategy would be to safeguard and enhance cultural, biological and landscape diversity within viable programmes of social and economic development.

The Strategy would establish a programme to bring real social and economic improvements for the people living in, and near to, the area, whose energies and culture have done so much to shape the landscape character. To achieve this, the Strategy would need to integrate easily with the prevailing institutional and organisational framework of the region.

The Strategy would build on successful initiatives, create new ones and seek to reinforce strong links between economic development and environmental management – the key to a sustainable future.

The Strategy would aim to establish certainty - that steps will be taken now to address the range of pressing key issues both for conservation and development; and for local communities and visitors, confidence that the range of sometimes conflicting interests will be harmonised to the greatest extent possible, such that local communities can be confident that they will share the economic benefits; and visitors can have a memorable experience.

The Strategy would be underpinned by two principles – **partnership** and **sustainability.**

Partnership

Local people, local communities, local authorities and all the main agencies and organisations with an interest in the area would be active partners in the strategy–making process, and its delivery. This would reflect the policies of other agencies and organisations and seek to secure a real measure of commitment to the main policies. The Strategy would not be inward looking.

The central involvement of local people/communities in the preparation of the Strategy would be critically important. Without the support and cooperation of local people, the Strategy objectives would not be achieved.

The Strategy would have a high profile and be a flagship document. It would represent the major policy document and provide a lead and a framework for other plans and programmes relating to the Cambrian Mountains. It could be used to support applications for funding from a wide range of national and EU sources.

Sustainability

The Strategy would remain effective only if it is subject to continuous performance review. It would establish a baseline for this review and for monitoring and evaluation.

Structure of the Strategy

The Strategy should be inclusive, based on a partnership approach of **collaborative management** between the main parties and key interest groups, and enabling local people and communities to take advantage of new opportunities.

From the outset the Strategy should be based on wide ranging involvement. A key aim would be the preparation of a **management plan** illustrating how partnerships will be developed by breaking down barriers, to find new practical ways of working together. New partnership initiatives would build on local community aspirations.

The **management plan** would be a central part of the Strategy, and should include:

- a strong and clear vision for the area,
- a profile of the area, and
- a set of key policies.

The management plan would be the basis for development of **action plans**, which would set out working policies aimed at addressing the various issues across the Cambrian Mountains, and work programmes. Each action plan would be subject to a sustainability appraisal.

The Strategy should be environmentally responsible, culturally equitable and economically viable. This would call for tough decisions based on a consensus view and a collective spirit.

VI. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)

A. What is "Natural Beauty"?

Natural beauty has recently been defined by the Countryside Council for Wales[5]:

> *"Natural beauty", when used both generally and specifically as in the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act and other legislation, is a complex and multifaceted concept that is concerned with landscape in its broadest sense. It relates primarily to unspoiled, but not necessarily extensive, rural landscapes that are largely free from the effects of disfiguring development or urbanisation. Although the legislation makes clear that it includes flora, fauna, geological and physiographic features, it applies not only to landscapes where nature is dominant but also to those which have been shaped and nurtured by human activities. People perceive and appreciate "natural beauty" through all their senses, responding to many different aspects of the landscape, including its distinctive character, its aesthetic qualities, the presence of wildlife, its cultural and historical dimensions and its perceptual qualities such as, for example, tranquillity, remoteness and a sense of freedom. Perceptions of, and preferences for "natural beauty" are informed by people's personal characteristics, cultural backgrounds and individual interests. "Natural beauty" occurs, to varying degrees, in many, though by no means all landscapes. Some places may, however, be judged to display "natural beauty" to an outstanding degree and may as a result be recognised as warranting a national level of protection.*

B. What is an AONB?

AONBs represent some of England and Wales' finest landscapes, which for generations have been considered special. The interaction between human communities and their environment has created landscapes that are not only visually stunning, but are also a physical record of human activity.

The size and character of AONBs vary enormously, from the Isles of Scilly at just 16 square kilometres, to the 2000 square kilometres of the remote North Pennines.

The first AONB, the Gower in Wales, was designated in 1956. Since then 37 AONBs have been designated in England - the Quantock Hills the first in 1957 and the Tamar Valley the most recent in 1996 - and a further 4 in Wales, with the Wye Valley straddling the two countries.

In Wales, the government provides core funding through the Countryside Council for Wales, based on the AONB Management Plan. The priority for funding is the setting up of AONB partnerships, staff units and the delivery of core functions for which grant aid of up to 75% is available. Local authorities normally make up the remaining 25% of costs.

C. Purposes of AONB Designation

The primary purpose of AONB designation was defined by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, and confirmed in a policy statement *(Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A Policy Statement. 1991, CCP356)* which also identified three subsidiary purposes.

1. Primary purpose

To conserve and enhance natural beauty.

2. Subsidiary purposes

(a) a socio-economic purpose:

'account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries, and the economic and social needs of local communities';

(b) a purpose to have regard to the principles of sustainable development:

'Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment';

(c) a purpose to have regard to the needs of recreation:

'the demand for recreation should be met insofar as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty'.

With respect to purpose (c), it should be noted that, although many AONBs are important areas for recreation, AONBs are not obliged to promote recreation – a significant difference from National Parks.

D. Criteria for AONB selection

This extract from S87 (1), of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949, sets out the criteria for selection for AONBs:

[The designating authority – now the Countryside Council for Wales] "may, by order made as respects any areas in England and Wales not being a National Park, which appear to them to be of such outstanding natural beauty that it is desirable that the provisions of the Act relating to such areas should apply thereto, designate the area for the purposes of this Act as an area of outstanding natural beauty . . ."

In 1973, the Countryside Commission refined the criteria for designation in its Review of Proposed AONBs, Paper 73/21: These criteria, in order of importance, are:

1. Quality of landscape, natural beauty, unspoilt or special quality (e.g. remoteness), of national significance;
2. Extent in terms of both area and continuity;
3. Unusual character in the sense of having unique characteristics.

Special Qualities:

The 'special qualities' referred to in 1. above can be summarised as those qualities which set the proposed AONB apart from the surrounding countryside. They are therefore those qualities which give the AONB its national significance.

Special qualities are usually the result of a number of landscape features or landscape character areas combining or contrasting with each other to contribute to a continuous, area-wide and distinctive sense of place. They would include qualities such as tranquillity, remoteness, sense of openness/grandeur/intimacy, etc.

E. Management of AONBs

In landscape terms, AONBs are considered as important as national parks. Their importance was recognised in Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which consolidated and strengthened earlier legislation concerning AONBs, reaffirming the purposes of designation, and confirming the powers of local authorities to take appropriate action to conserve or enhance the natural beauty of AONBs.

The most important difference between national parks and AONBs is in their management. National parks have their own National Park Authorities, which are local authorities in their own right and have their own planning, development control functions and other executive powers.

AONBs, on the other hand, are managed within the context of existing local authority structures, usually through "Partnerships", which bring together interested parties and encourage a strong sense of ownership to care for the area. Partnerships include

- the relevant Local Authorities;
- Countryside Council for Wales;
- "Section 85 Organisations" – statutory undertakers, private utilities, and government departments/agencies;
- land owners and managers – farmers and foresters, recreation and tourism providers, conservation managers, commoners and their associations;
- business, commerce and industry;
- voluntary organisations – community groups and organisations with an interest in landscape, wildlife, history and archaeology, recreation and access, rural economy and development.

AONB structures include mechanisms – typically a Standing Conference or Forum – that enable a much wider range of interests and individuals / organisations to be engaged with the management of the AONB.

Each Partnership is legally required to prepare an AONB Management Plan, which is implemented by a dedicated Staff Unit.

The Welsh Assembly Government has emphasised that natural heritage should be integrated with the local needs for economic and social well being, and the present proposal for a Cambrian Mountains AONB stresses the importance of community participation at all stages and levels of AONB creation and management.

VII. Benefits of a Cambrian Mountains AONB

1. Sustainable Socio-Economic Development

The fundamental benefit of designation would be that it would contribute to the socio-economic development of the whole of the area to the advantage, above all, of the local community. It would achieve this in the following ways:

- It would treat the economy and landscape as interdependent rather than alternatives, i.e., it will seek and promote forms of economic development that depend on the environment and which therefore require its conservation.
- It would recognise that the core activity on most of the land is agriculture and furthermore that, despite the decline over the years, agriculture is still a significant source of employment. It would recognise that "environmentally sensitive methods of cattle and sheep farming are essential to maintain the landscapes and wildlife that we treasure in the uplands[*]". It would seek to maximise support for sustainable farming, encouraging and helping farmers to develop and market environmentally sound products (though there is as yet no automatic agri-environmental weighting in Welsh AONBs). It would also help farmers develop supplementary sources of income, and be an additional source of supporting evidence for appropriate applications for external (e.g. EU Objective 1) funding.
- It would have as part of its task the promotion and support of other forms of sustainable socio-economic development, e. g., appropriate recreational use of the area with support for those providing services in such activities. The "knock-on" effects of such developments have been clearly quantified in other parts of Wales and have been shown to be very significant.
- It would attract outside financial funding, e.g.
    i. Funding from outside agencies which the AONB would use to create its own grant schemes e.g. to support environmental, socio-economic, or recreational projects which further AONB aims;
    ii. Resources only afforded to designated areas in Wales e.g. for management and policing of off-roaders; proper management of public access[†] (70% of the Cambrian Mountains are covered by open-access designations);
    iii. Core funding to set up and support the AONB's own staff unit i.e. direct jobs.

AONB status would instil certainty and confidence in the communities of the Cambrian Mountains, and a better understanding and appreciation of what farmers and land managers contribute to the economy. Farming and other land-based enterprises would once more be seen by young local people as rewarding careers, contributing to the conservation of landscape, wildlife and historic features.

2. Environmental Benefits

Use of direct and indirect AONB funding to conserve and enhance the landscape of the Cambrian Mountains through promotion of sustainable socio-economic development, could also deliver environmental benefits.

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[*] Derek Morgan, Chairman Farmers' Union of Wales (FUW) Hill Farming and Marginal Land Committee, in FUW press release dated 8/2/2006

[†] e.g. In a press release dated 2/2/2006, the FUW stated that "The lack of a co-ordinated wardening service in some areas does little to reassure the landowning community that access legislation 'balances the needs of farming'."

AONB status, and the funding which an AONB would seek to further its work, would:

- increase the area's environmental integrity, by encouraging and supporting consideration of issues at a catchment or landscape level, and a holistic approach to the management of land in the Cambrian Mountains, regardless of administrative boundaries or other designations;
- help to deliver Biodiversity Action Plan targets for habitats and species;
- offer remedies for environmental and archaeological damage caused by past activities such as blanket afforestation;
- safeguard the remote quality which is one of the most distinctive features of the Cambrian Mountains, and encourage UK residents to value and experience that quality, rather than seeking it overseas at a cost to the global environment.

3. Perception

The benefits identified below would be associated with (and partly stem from) significant changes in perception of the Cambrian Mountains – both internally and externally.

- Internal Change in Perception
    i. Designation would confer status and importance on the Cambrian Mountains, recognising that they are a significant and unified entity.
    ii. Designation would be a clear demonstration of the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to its responsibilities under the European Landscape Convention:
        a) to recognise landscapes in law, as an essential component of people's heritage, identity and surroundings;
        b) to establish and implement landscape policies aimed at landscape protection, management and planning;
        c) to establish procedures for public participation in the definition and implementation of landscape policies;
        d) to integrate landscape into its regional and town planning policies and in its cultural, environmental, agricultural, social and economic policies as well as in any other policies with possible direct or indirect impact on landscape;
        e) to protect, manage and plan landscapes.
    iii. It would ensure a consistent and co-ordinated approach to landscape & environment throughout the Cambrian Mountains, regardless of planning authority boundaries, and avert problems such as current proposals by Powys County Council to remove Special Landscape Area status from its western uplands, whilst Ceredigion retains SLA status for its adjoining eastern uplands.
    iv. It would place local people at the heart of planning for the future of the area.
- External Perception
    i. It would raise the tourism profile, increasing opportunities for small-scale sustainable enterprises. Benefits would apply not just to the Cambrian Mountains, but also to the communities round the fringes.

ii. It would permit the creation of a Cambrian Mountains "brand" for local food and other products sold within and outside the area – wild, natural, green etc.

4. Confidence

The creation of an AONB in a previously neglected area would raise self-confidence and encourage the development of latent entrepreneurial skills within the local population.

5. Delivering a Strategy for the Cambrian Mountains

The Cambrian Mountains Society believes that an AONB would provide an appropriate and clearly defined framework and structure within which a Strategy can be quickly developed and implemented.

- The purposes of AONB designation mirror the needs of the Cambrian Mountains.
- AONB status is familiar, widely recognised and understood, and provides over 40 existing examples, and 50 years of experience, from which Best Practice can be extracted and applied in the Cambrian Mountains.
- AONB management structures provide a ready-made but flexible template, in which the roles of all stakeholders are recognised. Following AONB designation, rapid progress could be achieved in setting up these structures.
- The critical importance of a Management Plan is given statutory recognition within AONB status.
- Long-term core funding - for the setting up and running of Partnerships and other representative bodies, and of a Staff Unit, and for preparation of the Management Plan – would automatically become available as a result of AONB designation. Funding would not be dependent on short-term, project-orientated grants.
- An AONB would give clear public recognition to the importance of the Cambrian Mountains, by defining a geographical area, which would be marked in such widely-used publications as road atlases, and on the ground by road and other signage.

6. Contributing to the fulfilment of national and sub-national plans and strategies

A Cambrian Mountains AONB would contribute to the realisation of outcomes set out in strategy documents prepared at national, regional and local level.

Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007-2013 (WAG)

Promises support for actions that increase environmental sustainability, e.g.

- Managing the environment as a whole, taking account of its distinctive characteristics;
- Contributing to sustainable development by protecting landscapes, enhancing habitats…
- Encouraging spatially targeted integrated programmes that deliver environmental and economic benefits and conserve natural resources;

- Contributing to strengthening rural communities and the viability of rural businesses through sustainable agriculture and forestry.

Wales Spatial Plan (WAG)

The WSP vision for Central Wales:

"High-quality living and working in smaller-scale settlements set within a superb environment, providing dynamic models of rural sustainable development, moving all sectors to higher value added activities."

Environment Strategy for Wales (WAG)

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to improving and safeguarding a high quality Welsh environment:

- that contributes to the economic prosperity, cultural heritage and the quality of life of the people of Wales
- where real improvements in biodiversity are visible
- that recognises and protects what is special about the Welsh environment and its contribution to Wales' distinctive identity

Realising our Vision for Welsh Landscapes (CCW)

"… our landscapes make important contributions to our lives ecologically, environmentally and socially, and constitute a resource whose protection, management and planning helps sustain jobs and promote economic development."

Ceredigion 2020 (Ceredigion Community Strategy)

"Effective protection of the environment and prudent use of natural resources are essential to achieving sustainable development…."

Carmarthenshire Community Strategy

"Ensure the natural and built environments are conserved and enhanced and … value the local environment."

Powys Community Strategy

Seeks: "To create, for the benefit of local people and visitors, an economy that is robust enough to sustain our aspirations and to strive to protect and improve our environment."

VIII. The Natural Beauty of the Cambrian Mountains

Introduction

The natural beauty of the plateaux, valleys and gorges of the Cambrian Mountains is equal to and often greater than that of some British national parks. Although politically distributed among three counties – Powys, Ceredigion & Carmarthenshire – the Cambrian Mountains are geographically one area, and form the main watershed of Wales. The rivers Severn, Wye, Elan, Irfon, Tywi, Cothi, Teifi, Ystwyth, Rheidol, and Twymyn all have their sources here.

The Cambrian Mountains are one of the few remote areas left in Southern Britain, have the least light pollution, and are one of the few places where one can escape from the sound of traffic. The A44 is the only main road crossing the area, much of which is inaccessible by vehicle, and thinly populated.

From the high ground in the Cambrian Mountains can be seen apparently endless vistas across the plateaux, which are jewelled with small lakes, such as the Llynnoedd Cerrigllwydion, Llyn Carw, Llyn Gynon, Llyn Gwyngu, Llynnoedd Fyrddon and Llyn Du. It is these extensive plateau views which are the hallmark of the Cambrian Mountains landscape.

A different kind of natural beauty is to be found in the valleys, such as those of the Afon Gwesyn and Rhiwnant, with their numerous striking waterfalls, the equals of many "world famous" waterfalls in this country; Cwm Arban and the upper reaches of the Irfon and Tywi; and the serene tranquillity of the Doethie and Pysgotwr valleys - places where time stands still.

In the Cambrian Mountains, it is still possible to experience harmony with nature and the natural elements, and to find solitude and "escape" in our crowded country: *"Quite simply, there is nothing in Wales to compare to the wilderness and sense of utter solitude that surrounds these vast empty moorlands.[6]"*

It is the special quality of remoteness which characterises the area and makes it of national significance. It has a strong sense of openness, and those modern features which do occur, such as wind turbines on exposed summits, are intrusive elements in an otherwise unspoiled and rugged landscape.

Despite giving the impression of wildness, the Cambrian Mountains are a "living landscape"; their natural beauty is the result of interaction between natural forces and human activity. The landscape and its beauty are maintained by the local communities, landowners, farmers and estate managers who look after them. These people have helped mould the landscape for centuries, and this continues today.

*

The remainder of Part VIII describes the major elements which combine to create the natural beauty of the Cambrian Mountains.

1. Geodiversity and the landscape

The rocks of the Cambrian Mountains provide the framework and backcloth for the unique landscape, society, wildlife and history of the Cambrian Mountains; in addition their direct exploitation has had considerable local impacts.

The rocks of the Cambrian Mountains were laid down 500-400 million years ago, and consist of marine sedimentary rocks, which were deformed by earth movements, resulting in the folding of the rocks, which can be clearly appreciated on the ground in such locations as Pumlumon. Older Ordovician rocks outcrop along the south-eastern edge of the Cambrian Mountains, whilst the rest of the proposed AONB is composed mainly of Silurian rocks. Fossils from Mid Wales dating from the Silurian period helped more than a century ago to unravel the time sequence of rocks in Wales and to establish principles now applied globally.

The mineral veins (lead, zinc, copper and silver) of North Ceredigion and North-West Powys were formed 390 to 220 million years ago, during phases of hydrothermal activity.

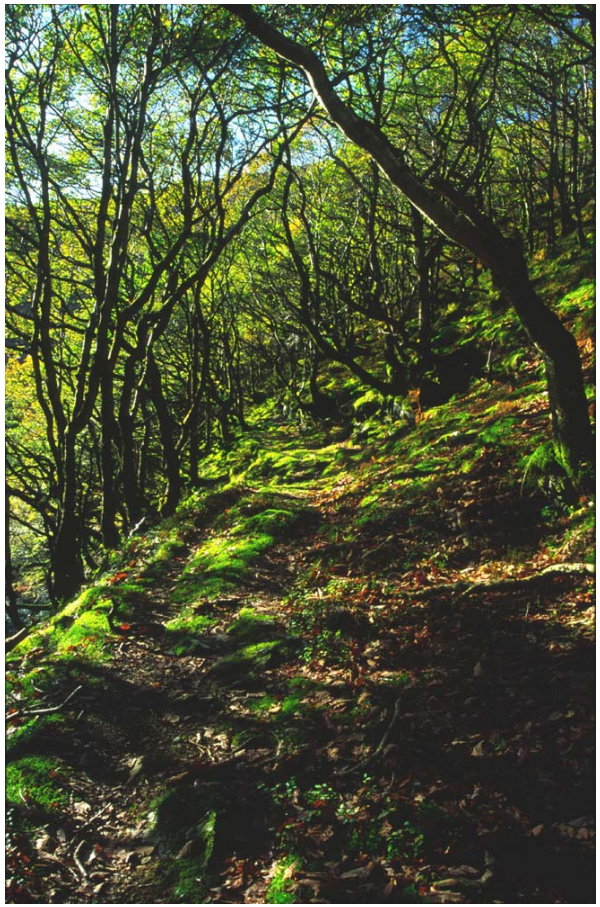
One of the most significant events to affect the landscape was a series of ice ages. The first of these started around 2.4 million years ago, but the most recent ended only 12,000 years ago. During these periods, the Cambrian Mountains were covered by a deep sheet of ice, several thousand feet thick, large ice-caps formed on the Welsh mountains, and glaciers occupied the valleys. The glaciers carved deeply into the rocks to give the landscape its now familiar appearance. Pumlumon is a fine example of a landscape sculpted by glacial ice; Llyn Llygad Rheidol on the north slope of Pumlumon is a moraine-dammed lake occupying a corrie gouged out by ice, and the Elan & Claerwen valleys also owe their origins to this period.

The Cambrian Mountains, partly because of the uniform character of their rocks, appear as a dissected plateau broken only by glacial gouging and by the deep clefts of the river valleys. The spectacular gorge and waterfall at Dylife was formed by the deep-cutting headward erosion of the Twymyn-Dyfi to capture the uppermost Clywedog-Severn valley. Similarly, the Teifi was first diverted by rapid headward erosion of the river Ystwyth along the line of the Ystwyth fault, and then the Ystwyth headwaters in turn were captured by the Rheidol. The shortened route to the sea from Devils Bridge (10 miles compared with the previous 50 miles to reach the coast at Cardigan) caused the Rheidol to deepen its bed very rapidly, creating the famous waterfall and gorge at Devil's Bridge.

The creation of an AONB would encourage a better understanding of the geodiversity of the Cambrian Mountains.

2. Biodiversity - Habitats and Species

The 1210 square kilometres (467 square miles) of the Cambrian Mountains includes a wide range of habitats from the bogs, heather moors and lakes of the upland plateaux down to the native woodlands of the valleys and the tumbling streams and rivers below. A large proportion of the blanket bog in Wales is found here as well as very significant areas of upland and lowland wet and dry heathland and some fine examples of the classic atlantic oak woodlands clinging to the hillsides. Also there are still some superb wet woodlands of willow and alder and a variety of fen habitat types. In all some 15 Priority Habitats are found which are included in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and on the List of Habitats of Principal Importance in Wales.



These habitats are rich in wildlife with over 100 species of breeding bird recorded, 35 mammals, 30 butterflies, 20 dragonflies and damselflies, 350 species of lichen, 300 of mosses and liverworts, 30 ferns, 450 flowering plants, 40 hoverflies, 10 ladybirds and 15 different dung-beetles! Many are rare in Wales and within the UK and some are of international importance. In all 35 are on the UK and Wales Priority/Principal Lists including the golden plover (nearly all of the Welsh population are now found in the Cambrian Mountains), black grouse, otter, the climbing corydalis weevil and several rare fungi and upland lake water plants. The higher hills have merlin and dunlin breeding as well as a few hen harriers and ring ousel. There are still a few red squirrels and the polecat is a widespread species. Many other plants and animals found in the Cambrian Mountains are included on Red Data lists of threatened and endangered species.

The Cambrian Mountains were the last refuge of the red kite in the British Isles – down to just a single breeding female in the 1930s. It was the wildness of the area and a few local enthusiasts and farmers who saved it from extinction within our shores. Even thirty years ago you could travel all day in mid-Wales and not see a red kite but today following the widespread appreciation of this magnificent bird, and its struggle to survive the pressures of the 19th and 20th centuries, it is now thriving in Wales and has been reintroduced to several parts of England and Scotland with great success. The red kite was voted overwhelmingly as "Bird of the 20th Century" by members of the British Trust for Ornithology and the RSPB. Without the red kite's survival in the Cambrian Mountains, it is likely that the reintroduction project might never have happened and *boda wennol* – the swallow-tailed hawk – would have been long forgotten.

The importance of the wildlife of the Cambrian Mountains is nationally recognised, with more than fifty Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and from an international perspective by the designation of six European Special Areas of Conservation, totalling over 13,400 hectares, and the Elenydd-Mallaen Special Protection Area, which extends to over 30,000 hectares.

The creation of a Cambrian Mountains AONB would encourage a holistic appraisal of these many designations, and could make available new resources to further wildlife conservation.

3. Man's relationship with the Landscape

a) Prehistoric

The Cambrian Mountains provide a rare example of a surviving, largely intact prehistoric landscape.

Broadleaved woodland became established over all except the higher peaks of the Cambrian Mountains following the end of the last glaciation about 12,000 years ago. Today's predominantly grassy heathland was created by woodland clearance from the earlier prehistoric period onwards, combined with climatic change which at high altitude gave rise to blanket peat formation.

The large numbers of cairns, individual megaliths, stone rows and stone circles may well be associated with the early exploitation of upland pastures during the Bronze Age, 5500-3500 years ago. The fact that many are sited high on horizons indicates that they were meant to be seen from long distances, possibly for territorial marking, for commemoration of special individuals or for use as foresights for astronomical alignments.

Peat bogs are a most important archive documenting human activity in the Cambrian Mountains. Despite their archaeological importance, they are an undervalued and diminishing resource, with many hectares having been lost only recently, during construction of Cefn Croes wind power station.

The archaeology of the Cambrian Mountains is relatively well preserved for the very reasons that make the area special – its remoteness and lack of human disturbance - but there are many aspects which are not yet fully understood. AONB management would preserve the archaeological record in its landscape context for future research.

b) Middle ages to the twentieth Century

By the late 12th century, extensive pastures were being grazed by herds of cattle and large flocks of sheep which provided the Cistercian abbey at Strata Florida with its principal income.

Much of the area continued to be sparsely populated throughout most of the year, being exploited during the summer months by small dairy farms which began to encroach upon the margins of the uplands in the later mediaeval period, by peat cutting for fuel, by a handful of small lead and zinc mines and stone quarries and by several drovers' roads taking cattle to markets in the English Midlands, all at their heyday in the 18th and 19th centuries.

One-third of the area of the Cambrian Mountains is registered in the historic landscape register for Wales[7]. In addition, the Cambrian Mountains contain 80 individual Scheduled Ancient Monuments. AONB management, with its landscape focus, would by definition respect and enhance this important heritage.

c) Agriculture in the last hundred years

Apart from that land which is covered by water, the physical landscape of the Cambrian Mountains was, until the 1940s, almost exclusively given over to agriculture. Agriculture it was therefore that shaped that landscape, by clearance of scrub, by drainage, by grazing and by human occupation. The changes that have taken place since the war – and the changes that threaten in the future – are largely associated with the decline of agricultural prosperity and employment.

These changes include:

- Forestry. In the post war years it was thought that in such "marginal agricultural" areas as the Cambrian Mountains the need for and financial viability of forestry products outweighed the requirement even for food. The massive expansion of coniferous forestry was often resented by farmers but they lacked the support of the rest of the community. Now, the expectations of financial viability of that forestry are known to have been misplaced, whilst its damaging visual, social and wildlife implications have become obvious for all to see.
- Depopulation. One of the most obvious features of the physical landscape is the abandoned farmsteads. Visually they are often attractive, but behind that attraction lies the human story of decline and abandonment, with its corollary of the disappearance of schools, shops and community.
- Changed farming systems – in particular the expansion in sheep numbers and the contraction or disappearance of other agricultural activities, especially cattle and pony grazing, with consequential implications for wildlife diversity.

Expectations are that financial pressures on agriculture will be at least as intense in the future as they have been in the past; in particular, there is uncertainty about the future of the Tir Mynydd agricultural support scheme for farms in Less Favoured Areas. Farmers don't willingly abandon their way of life, but, as in the past, they may have little choice. Their search for ways of making a living may force some of them to look for alternative activities. Some of these activities (e.g. windfarms or motor racing) may seem to provide a solution for a few landowners, but they will not be available to all or even to most. Worse, these solutions may be positively counterproductive to those other landowners seeking other solutions (e.g., to attract tourists to see the birdlife or the archaeological remains or to walk in the peaceful surroundings of the Cambrians).

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) scheme, introduced in the 1980s, encompassed most of the Cambrian Mountains area, but is now being phased out; this scheme, like the more recent Tir Gofal and Tir Cynnal policies, goes some way to encouraging the kind of development favoured by the Cambrian Mountains Society, but such schemes need underpinning if the dangers noted in the last paragraph are to be avoided.

These are the reasons that the Cambrian Mountains Society seeks ways forward that will place the environment at the heart of economic development, making economy and landscape interdependent rather than alternatives, and seeking solutions that will benefit the whole rural community.

d) Welsh language and culture

The Cambrian Mountains have been an immensely important factor in the survival of the language and culture of Wales. Welsh place–names establish a strong sense of place, and give an insight into the history and traditions of the area. Substantial areas of the region are predominantly Welsh speaking, and indigenous Welsh culture survives in all areas. The life and culture of the farming communities of the Cambrian Mountains over the last 150 years are superbly portrayed in the writings of the shepherd, Erwyd Howells.[8]

The region also contains a number of sites of considerable historical, linguistic and cultural importance, such as Strata Florida Abbey, Capel Soar y Mynydd and Hyddgen.

The language and culture of the communities living in and around the Cambrians are integral elements of the region's distinctiveness, and an essential part of what makes it worthy of protection. As such, the issues facing the Welsh language and Welsh culture in the region are indivisible from those facing the wider environment. Socio-economic change has served to erode the cultural and linguistic security of indigenous communities over recent decades, and a future continuation of this trend would result in an incalculable loss to the culture of the British Isles.

The Cambrian Mountains are one of the heartlands of Welsh language and culture; their communities and way of life are inextricably linked to land use and management. AONB designation would confer status on the landscape, affirm the value of work which sustains that landscape, and promote socio-economic development which uses and respects the unique environment. An AONB would promote a sustainable future for these heartland communities.

e) Mining

With the exception of the museums at Llywernog (lead) and Dolaucothi (gold), the abandoned and often isolated metal mines of upland central Wales have been allowed to decay naturally, and are generally little more intrusive features in the landscape than are the ruins of *lluestau*. Like them they afford communion with a way of life that survived to living memory yet now seems much more remote. In particular, the many reservoirs and watercourses built to serve the mines are major achievements of Victorian, and in one case Roman, engineering, and add both human interest and biodiversity along their routes.

Mining was widespread but sparsely distributed. With few exceptions the mines worked lead and zinc deposits of quite high grade in narrow lodes underground. Surface remains are thus seldom extensive. Pumping and crushing were water powered. Ore concentrates were exported via pack trail or rural roads. No smelting was done on-site. Tips are thus small in comparison with those of the slate industry and essentially of the local rock; there are no slag heaps and no unsightly scars of opencast quarries. Loss of woodland in the region was largely due to agricultural pressure, not mining.

The lead mines of Cwmystwyth are exceptional in the Cambrian Mountains for their enormous scale, accessibility, and age – the workings on Copa Hill are amongst the oldest in Europe.

With conservation and protection, fostered within the framework of an AONB, the mines are an asset to a landscape, on which their impact has been surprisingly small, though there is much potential for education about, and interpretation of, the mining legacy.

f) Water and energy resources

The water resources of the Cambrian Mountains are abundant and valuable, and their exploitation by humans - to assist in lead-mining, and more recently to provide water and energy to remote towns and cities - has had a major impact on the Cambrian Mountains landscape.

Nature's scattering of small lakes was augmented in the 18th and 19th centuries by ponds built to store water used by miners in hushing and ore-dressing, and later to power machinery via a system of dams, leats and waterwheels.

The coincidence in the Elan valley of dramatically glaciated valleys, high rainfall, and low population resulted in Birmingham's remarkable Elan Valley reservoir scheme, started in the 1890s. Construction of the dams and waterworks had a huge local impact, with the building of a village for workers, railways, and new roads, as well as the flooding of older settlements; further changes followed during the construction of the Claerwen dam in the 1950s. The presence of the reservoirs has greatly influenced land use within the Elan catchment.

Llyn Brianne was completed on the headwaters of the River Tywi in 1972. Described as a regulatory reservoir, its purpose is to supplement flows in the Tywi during dry periods, as compensation for water supplies abstracted some 40 miles downstream at Nantgaredig, near Carmarthen, and destined for West Glamorgan.

Nant-y-moch and Dinas reservoirs were built in the late 1950s as part of the Rheidol hydro-electric scheme, which can generate 55MW from its four generators. More recently, six hydro-electric generators were installed in the Elan Valley dams (total capacity 4.8MW) and three in Llyn Brianne dam (total capacity >4.3MW). Both these schemes have minimal landscape impact, since the turbines are hidden in the dams, and the cables laid underground.

In contrast, the Rheidol (2.4MW installed capacity) and Cefn Croes (58.5MW) wind power stations, and their associated power lines, are sited to maximise power output, and with little consideration for their landscape and environmental impacts: Cefn Croes power station stands astride a high plateau in the very heart of the Cambrian Mountains.

The last hundred years in particular have shown that the needs of towns and cities far distant from the Cambrian Mountains can have a major impact on this remote landscape, and all the developments noted above have eroded the area's natural beauty, in return for a better quality of life elsewhere. Ultimately such demands could destroy the special qualities of the Cambrian Mountains. AONB status would ensure that all resources that are valued by modern society – water, energy, natural beauty, remoteness – are given due weight when developments are considered.

g) The historic built environment

The foundations of the earliest-known buildings within the Cambrian Mountains are Roman, and have been excavated within the fort at **Pumsaint**. For the thousand years thereafter, little is known of settlements in the area, let alone buildings, probably due to the very hostile soil conditions and still limited archaeological methods.

Strata Florida Abbey is the best-known mediaeval building, and has inspired poetry in both national languages since its foundation by the Cistercian order in the mid-twelfth century. The Abbey's great west doorway invariably attracts attention, as does the collection of original mediaeval tiles in the chapels of the south transept.

House platforms believed to date from mediaeval times are commonplace throughout the area. Because there is some documentation, the best-known settlements occupied Monastic grange lands. They probably date from the later twelfth century, and it is likely that a number of the house platforms surviving along and within the proposed AONB boundary relate to the early granaries and subsequent sheep farms administered from Strata Florida and possibly Abbey Cwmhir before the Dissolution of the monasteries in the mid-sixteenth century.

Evidence from the surviving buildings on either side of the main east-west watershed suggests slightly differing mediaeval and later building traditions. On the western side, stone and mud were the main materials for buildings roofed with a minimum of timber. Conversely, the eastern side had a relatively timber-rich construction industry, notable for its skilled employment of hardwoods in elaborate house-frames as well as extremely durable roof structures. Many have survived, particularly in or on the edge of the uplands, owing to economic regression, and the need to 'make-do-and-mend' rather than improve or demolish/rebuild.

A recent study of Radnorshire houses shows how peasant hall-houses probably developed into animal-sharing timber-framed long-houses during the sixteenth century, how some grew into minor gentry houses thereafter, and the relationships between socio-economic functions of dwellings on lower ground with 'summer houses' on the upland pastures. A particularly good example is **Nannerth-Ganol** and its historically-related holdings in Cwmddeudwr.

There are relatively few eighteenth-century houses within the area, but the sites of **Cwm Elan, Dderw, Dolaucothi, Hafod, Llwyn Madoc, Nantgwyllt, Neuadd Fawr (Cilycwm)** and **Rhydoldog** deserve mention. Although five are now derelict or demolished, three (Dderw, Dolaucothi and Hafod) are registered as gardens or historic landscapes on the Cadw/ICOMOS Register.

The important Wilderness Picturesque landscape movement grew in the Cambrian Mountains after 1783, from the vision of Thomas Johnes at Hafod. This landscape philosophy is probably best seen as a major antecedent to the wilderness vision underlying John Muir's imperative to establish American National Parks.

Lying largely outside major settlement nuclei, the Cambrian Mountains encompass only a handful of parish churches. The earliest of these is most spectacularly mediaeval, at **Cilycwm**. Those at **Abergwesyn, Ysbyty Ystwyth, Caeo,** and **Ysbyty Cynfyn** are all either nineteenth century re-modellings, or Victorian erections on new sites. **Eglwys Newydd** is notable for its Hafod associations, and for Chantrey's poignant monument to Mariamne Johnes. Neglect has already effected considerable damage to the graveyards at Abergwesyn and Ysbyty Cynfyn, where the most spectacular pebble graves which survived complete until about 1980 are now rapidly disintegrating through plant growth and tree root invasion.

There is also a sprinkling of chapels here, some only just surviving in quite remote areas; **Soar y Mynydd** is remotest and best-known; it has become a place of pilgrimage for its Sunday afternoon services in the summer season. Founded by Ebenezer Richard, father of the "Apostle of Peace", this homely chapel was built to serve the scattered pastoral community that has farmed in these mountains for

generations. **Capel Ystrad Ffin**, near Llyn Brianne, once belonged to Strata Florida abbey. A neglected chapel-of-ease at the county border, it made a convenient meeting place for the early Welsh Methodists.

Most surviving chapels are under threat of total abandonment as attendances drop, and there are particular problems about adaptation for re-use, since residential conversion may be disallowed, either by covenants or by the feelings of their communities.

Finally, the architectural value of the vernacular and industrial houses and farm buildings of the Cambrian Mountains should not be underestimated. Sadly, many of mid-Wales's protagonists (in both local and national government) have, over the last century, seen the Welsh peasant and farmers' built vernacular past as something to be swept away in the name of 'progress'.

The future survival of the varied and important historic built environment of the Cambrian Mountains is largely dependent on the survival of their communities, and of the skills they possess to maintain these buildings and their settings. AONB designation, rooted in the principles of sustainable socio-economic development, would energetically promote that survival. It would also be an appropriate celebration of the role played by the Cambrian Mountains, at eighteenth-century Hafod, in spawning the interest in landscape which ultimately led to such designations as AONB.

h) Historic routes

Man's presence in the Cambrian Mountains can be traced back at least 5000 years, and many of the paths and tracks in the Elan Valley are associated with Bronze Age cairns, standing stones and stone circles.

The Cambrian Mountains are criss-crossed by roads engineered by the Romans, east-west and spinally north-south. These routes were defended at strategic locations by marching camps, of which nearly a dozen have been identified, thanks to the relatively low level of human disturbance of these uplands. Fresh discoveries continue to be made from the air.

The Cistercian abbey at Strata Florida Abbey was the centre of a large mountain estate with granges throughout the Cambrian Mountains. Paths would have been established based on the requirements of visiting pilgrims, the need for monks from the abbey to travel to chapelries on the remoter parts of their estate, and with their sheep to the outlying granges. There were also the routes used by the monks to access fisheries. Many of these paths would have been in use previously, and later the long distance cross-country routes became drove roads.

The degree to which the granges were accessed by maintained routes is uncertain, as without clearer documentation and structural examination, dating such features is very difficult. Some of the most important routes associated with Strata Florida Abbey which still survive on the ground are[9]:

- The Monks Trod - an ancient route linking the abbey with the granges of Nannerth and Cwmdauddwr in Radnorshire, and with its sister abbey of Cwmhir.
- The route from Strata Florida to the chapelry at Ystrad-ffin and the grange of Nant-y-bai, via Soar-y-mynydd.
- The route from Strata Florida SE to Nantystalwyn.
- The route from the abbey to Llyn Gynon and the Teifi lakes for fishing.
- Lôn Lacs[10] – the old route from Strata Florida to the fishery at Aberarth.

Drovers' routes across the Cambrian Mountains may have existed since before the Roman occupation, and these routes became increasingly important in the 18th and 19th centuries, until the coming of the railways. Sheep, cattle and geese were transported along the ridgeway and valley routes of the Cambrian Mountains to markets in England. The routes would originally have developed to provide the quickest and easiest route over the mountains from the various collecting points, often using already existing tracks, subject to availability of overnight accommodation at farms & inns on the route. Other cross-country routes evolved in the 18th century to avoid paying tolls when the Turnpike Trusts were set up. The main routes across the Cambrian Mountains were:

- Tregaron – Abergwesyn
- Ponterwyd - Llangurig – Rhayader
- Devil's Bridge – Llangurig
- Devil's Bridge - Rhayader
- Ffair Rhos – Rhayader
- Strata Florida and then to join the Tregaron - Abergwesyn route
- Pumsaint - Dolaucothi – Caeo – Cilycwm and then on to Llandovery
- Llanddewi Brefi - Cilycwm and then on to Llandovery

Mining lead, copper and gold in the Cambrian Mountains can be traced back to the Romans, but lead mining peaked in the mid to late 19th century. Many of the mines were high in the hills, and paths became established which led from the villages to these mines.

The Hafod Estate in the western foothills of the Cambrian Mountains, has many recreational paths created by the owner, Thomas Johnes, in the late 18th century to show off his estate to distinguished guests, such as Turner, Coleridge and the Duke of Bedford. Most still survive and are maintained. The Victorians also popularised the tradition of climbing mountains, and routes up Pumlumon would have been well-known at this time.

Many of the historic routes of the Cambrian Mountains have survived largely because of the remoteness of their setting, and the absence of intensive human activity, two of the important special qualities of the area, for which AONB designation is deserved, and which AONB status would help to conserve and enhance.

i) Cultural associations

The natural beauty of the Cambrian Mountains has for centuries inspired artists, and writers in both Welsh and English.

The landscape is resonant with deep Welsh language cultural history, and with the mythology of King Arthur and the Mabinogion. Wales' best known mediaeval poet, Dafydd ap Gwilym, is purportedly buried at Strata Florida - his poems are evocative of the environment of his surroundings.

Several writers working through the medium of English have associations with this area – P.B. Shelley at Cwm Elan; R.S. Thomas at Eglwys Fach; T. Harri Jones at Llanafan Fawr; Ruth Bidgood at Abergwesyn. All of these poets used the inspiration of the natural world around them in their writings.

Contemporary artists find inspiration in the history and landscape of the Cambrian Mountains. Mary Lloyd Jones, born at Pontarfynach is an internationally recognised painter who interprets many sites in the landscape in an energetic, abstract, visionary style.

Due recognition and sensitive management of the natural beauty of the Cambrian Mountains will go hand-in-hand with greater knowledge and understanding of past artists and writers, and will provide continuing inspiration for their successors.

j) The Wider Context

The Cambrian Mountains:

- were the first area in Wales to be proposed as a National Park, in 1936[11];
- were proposed in the 1947 Hobhouse Report as a "Conservation Area". They are one of very few such inland areas in Wales and England which have not subsequently been designated AONBs;
- are so special that they were designated as a National Park in the 1970s (though the designation was not confirmed).
- were designated under the Agriculture Act 1986 as one of the first Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) in Wales.
- were assessed in great detail for the Countryside Commission in 1990[12], a process which confirmed the area as a (UK) nationally important landscape.

These events are strong supporting evidence of the importance of the Cambrian Mountains to society as a whole.

IX. Conclusion and Recommendation

This proposal is a response to need – the pressing need of the communities, landscape, and environment of the Cambrian Mountains for a **Strategy** which recognises their importance and interdependence, and which will give them the assurance of a sustainable future, creating benefits within the immediate area, and for society as a whole.

We have stated our vision for the Cambrian Mountains in 2050, have considered options which might be available to achieve that vision, and have concluded that AONB designation would be an appropriate and widely acceptable structure within which to formulate and carry out a strategy for achieving that vision.

We have advanced compelling reasons why the Cambrian Mountains merit AONB status.

We have enumerated the benefits which we believe would flow from AONB designation.

We believe that the need for a **Strategy for a Sustainable Future for the Cambrian Mountains** is imperative.

We suggest that AONB designation would be a suitable and effective way of ensuring that such a strategy is developed without delay.

We therefore recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government should establish an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the Cambrian Mountains, to safeguard, develop and promote its special landscape, biodiversity, communities, and way of life, and as part of a sustainable strategy for agriculture, tourism and other economic activity in the area.

X. Questions and Answers

1. Would an AONB restrict the freedom of farmers to develop their businesses e.g. by diversifying?

An AONB does not involve any new planning authority. Planning and building rules would continue to be interpreted and enforced by the existing local authorities, which would however take account of AONB Management Plan policies, and other guidance issued by the AONB. In practice, AONBs attempt where possible to balance their responsibilities to conserve and enhance natural beauty on the one hand, and to promote sustainable socio-economic development on the other, by influencing siting and design, rather than by seeking to prevent development.

2. Would an AONB restrict the provision of affordable housing?

The Cambrian Mountains, as defined in this document, exclude most sizeable settlements, which are scattered round the fringes. Development in these towns and villages would not be directly affected by AONB objectives and policies, and proposals within the boundary would be handled as outlined in the previous answer.

3. Would there be any financial benefits to landowners and others in an AONB?

An AONB would have at its disposal a Sustainable Development Fund – funded by the Welsh Assembly Government - to support organisations and individuals across the AONB in action for sustainability, e.g. innovative products or initiatives connected to land management, renewable energy schemes, sustainable transport projects.

Perhaps more importantly, the AONB staff unit would be able to seek out and secure other appropriate funding streams, some of which are only available to designated areas.

4. Is this proposal just a ploy to stop windfarms?

The objects of the Cambrian Mountains Society, and the vision statement presented in this document, demonstrate clearly that we seek a better future for the Cambrian Mountains, and for the communities which live in and around them. A key element of the proposal contained in this document is that economic development should be interdependent with the high quality landscape and environment of the Cambrian Mountains. Our AONB proposal carries (a) the implicit hope that an AONB would oppose developments that would be significantly damaging to landscape quality; and (b) the assumption that such a policy would be in the interests of all those farmers and others whose livelihoods depend on that quality.

Our major concern is that the Cambrian Mountains may be abandoned as a working landscape within one or two decades, and that its fringe settlements will become clusters of holiday homes, rather than viable communities. The biggest threats to the Cambrian Mountains are:

- drastic vegetation change resulting from ranch-style land management and the withdrawal of cattle grazing;
- loss of the expertise needed for effective management of the uplands;
- an ageing population;
- the declining viability of public service provision to upland communities.

Our vision is of self-reliant communities making the critical decisions about their own futures, and maintaining themselves through their own sustainable economic activities, rooted in the unique beauty of their environment and landscape.

5. What would an AONB cost?

The North Pennines AONB is nearly twice as big as the Cambrian Mountains, but in other respects is closest in scale and character and, like the Cambrian Mountains, spans three counties. Its 2004-5 budget was (in round terms) £450,000, of which £265,000 came direct from central government, £65,000 from the local authorities, and the remaining £120,000 from EU, lottery and other funds secured by the AONB.

AONB creation would be the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government, so it is reasonable to assume that central funding to local authorities would be increased to reflect their new responsibility, and to minimise any upward pressure on local taxation.

6. What will the Society do if an AONB <u>is</u> established?

We see establishment of a Cambrian Mountains AONB as an important step towards achieving our vision. But it is only a first step, and the Cambrian Mountains Society will continue to seek to influence the activities of any organisation – including an AONB – which has a stake in the area, with the goal of realising our vision.

XI. Executive Summary

- The Cambrian Mountains are defined as the geographically homogeneous Mid Wales uplands of Pumlumon, Elenydd, and Mynydd Mallaen, within the unitary authority areas of Powys, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire, an area of 1210 km^2 (467 square miles). The predominant land uses are agriculture (~85%) and forestry (~15%).
- In 2006, the Cambrian Mountains face major challenges, arising largely from (1) fundamental changes in agricultural support mechanisms; and (2) pressures which stem from the needs of those who live far from Central Wales. The Cambrian Mountains Society asserts that the survival of the distinctive and interdependent landscape and communities of this area requires the development of a Strategy for its sustainable future.
- A Vision Statement for the Cambrian Mountains in 2050 is presented. Several options for achieving that vision are considered, and it is concluded that creation of a Cambrian Mountains Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) would provide an effective framework within which a strategy for achieving the vision can be developed and implemented.
- Over forty Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty have been designated in England and Wales, with the purposes of sustaining and enhancing natural beauty, and of promoting sustainable socio-economic development and recreation. Since the passing of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act in 2000, the status and management of AONBs has been greatly improved.
- The benefits of establishing a Cambrian Mountains AONB would include:
    i. promotion of sustainable socio-economic development, through direct and indirect funding, by increasing confidence within the area, and recognition and awareness outside the area;
    ii. environmental benefits.
- An AONB would provide an appropriate and clearly defined framework and structure within which a Strategy for a Sustainable Future for the Cambrian Mountains can be quickly developed and implemented. AONB status is widely recognised and understood, and provides 50 years of experience, from which Best Practice can be extracted and applied in the Cambrian Mountains. With AONB designation, core funding would automatically become available for the long term, and would not be dependent on short-term, project-orientated grants.
- The "natural beauty" of the Cambrian Mountains is the result of interaction between natural forces and human activity. The landscape and its beauty are maintained by the local communities, landowners, farmers and estate managers who look after them. The many components of this beauty combine to create the special qualities for which AONB status is deserved - qualities which AONB status would sustain and enhance, at the same time as recognising the value of the work done by those who manage the land.
- The development of a Strategy is crucial to the sustainable future of the Cambrian Mountains; this proposal argues that AONB designation would be a suitable and effective way of ensuring that such a strategy is developed without delay.
- **It is recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government should establish an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the Cambrian Mountains, to safeguard, develop and promote its special landscape, biodiversity, communities, and way of life, and as part of a sustainable strategy for agriculture, tourism and other economic activity in the area.**

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