
DYFFRYN TANAT

TANAT VALLEY

Landscape description

The River Tanat and its dendritic tributaries dominate this narrow valley landscape running east to west in north Powys. The Tanat separates the Berwyn Mountains, to the north, from the rolling Montgomery Hills, to the south. It occupies a valley less than 1km wide whose floor is nowhere more than 150m above OD and with both sides rising steeply to about 300m above OD.

Cwm Rhiwarth and Cwm Pennant, the source of the River Tanat, are two deeply glaciated valleys cut into the south eastern slopes of the Berwyn Mountains. From their confluence at Llangynog, the River Tanat flows east through a broader valley surrounded by low hills. The Berwyn Mountains, which rise to 827m above OD at the summit of Cader Berwyn, present a formidable barrier to communications to the west, and as a result, the area has closer links with the borderlands to the east. The influence of man in this area has been present from prehistoric times and has not been confined to the valley floor. Consequently, the area presents a landscape of great historic diversity with evidence of land use and settlement patterns from several periods and of varied nature.

The earliest evidence for occupation in the valley consists of a series of Bronze Age monuments now only visible from the air as crop-marks. The individual sites are often small and discrete, but together they comprise one of the best surviving groups of this type of archaeological evidence in Wales. They include a probable henge and pit circles at Meysydd and ring ditches, and ploughed out burial mounds, at Banhadla. More tangible remains survive from the later prehistoric period in the form of two large and impressive Iron Age hillforts at Llwyn Bryn Dinas and Craig Rhiwarth, each dominating the visual prospects of their respective halves of the valley. Excavations at the former have revealed evidence for early metalworking and might suggest that the size and location of the fort is the result of the importance of local ore which was more fully exploited during the 19th century. The remains of prehistoric workings can also be seen at the upper end of Cwm Orog, north of Craig Rhiwarth hillfort.

The principal historic settlements of the area, Llanrhaeadr-ym-mochnant and Pennant Melangell, are both the result of medieval religious foundations. Pennant Melangell, located in a secluded and tranquil valley, is associated with the 8th century legend of St Melangell. The existing church, which in parts can be dated to the 12th century, was supposed to have replaced a nunnery founded by Melangell, and contains the remains of a shrine which may once have held the saint's remains. Llanrhaeadr was an important ecclesiastical site and a clas foundation (a unit of administration based on monastic settlement) dedicated to St Dogfan. It is one of the 'Welsh churches, with the villages and churchyards' burned by the English in 1165, as recorded by Giraldus Cambrensis, and was the incumbency of William Morgan when he completed his Welsh translation of the Bible in 1587. Earlier medieval, secular

settlement in the valley is evidenced by the mottes at Cefn-coch, Cefn Glaniwrch and Maerdy.

While the landscape of much of the valley is the result of medieval and post-medieval agriculture, the upper reaches of the valley around Llangynog bear the marks of an industrial past. The mining of lead, phosphate and slate, together with granite quarrying had a significant effect on the landscape and economy of the area. The early origins of mining around Llangynog have already been mentioned, and it is possible that similar workings existed during the Roman period. However, it is not until the 16th century that the main period of exploitation began and continued until relatively recent times. Today, the remains of the mine workings are still evident, consisting of ruined buildings, levels, tramways, inclines, filter beds and spoil tips, much of which is readily identifiable. The mines and quarries were served by the Tanat Light Railway which was in operation from 1904 until 1960. The track has been removed, but much of the line and the ruins of the stations are still discernible.

SUMMARY

Ref number	HLW (P/C) 1
Index map no.	34
OS map	Landranger 125
Former county	Powys, Clwyd
Unitary authority	Powys (Denbighshire)
Principal area designations	The north western side includes part of the Berwyn National Nature Reserve. The area includes: Craig Rhiwarth hillfort Scheduled Ancient Monument; Llangynog, Llanrhaeadr-y-Mochnant and Penybontfawr Conservation Areas.
Criteria	3, 4
Contents and significance	A narrow lowland river valley situated between the Berwyn Mountains and the Montgomery Hills, containing diverse evidence of land use from prehistoric to recent times. The area includes: significant crop-marks of hidden prehistoric ritual and funerary sites; large, well-preserved Iron Age hillforts; prehistoric to recent mining remains; medieval mottes, settlements and Pennant Melangell Church.

Selected sources

D.E. Bick, *The Old Metal Mines of Mid Wales*, 5 (The Pound House: Newent 1978).

C.R. Musson, et al, 'Excavation and Metal-working at Llwyn Bryn-dinas Hillfort, Llangedwyn, Clwyd', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 58 (1992), 265–283.

C.J. Spurgeon, 'The Castles of Montgomeryshire', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 58 (1966), 1–59.

W.J. Wren, *The Tanat Valley: Its Railways and Industrial Archaeology* (Augustus M. Kelley: New York 1968).