

**CYNGOR CEFN GWLAD CYMRU
COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES**

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

CARMARTHENSHIRE

CAEAU BLAEN-YR-ORFA

<u>Date of Notification:</u>	1988
<u>National Grid Reference:</u>	SN 575143
<u>O.S. Maps:</u>	1: 50,000 Sheet number: 159 1: 25,000 Sheet number: SN 51
<u>Site Area:</u>	3.4 ha

Description:

In Britain unimproved grasslands containing an abundance of the white umbelliferous plant, whorled caraway *Carum verticillatum*, appear to be most frequent in the Carmarthen Coalfield and its environs, with lesser concentrations in south-western Scotland, the Lake District and south-western England. The Carmarthen Coalfield grasslands show a continuum of vegetational variation, ranging from heathy swards with a somewhat restricted flora to more species-rich types on less acidic soils. The heathy variants are often characterised by purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and the species-rich by Yorkshire-fog *Hilcus lanatus*, but a good deal of floristic intergradation occurs between these two basic groups.

The enclosures at Blaen-yr-orfa are notable for their variety of grazed swards, which range from acidic fen-meadow communities dominated by purple moor-grass and meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum* to drier, more mesotrophic grassland characterized by common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*.

The fen-meadow enclosure has a characteristic appearance in summer due to the abundance of meadow thistle, whorled caraway, water horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile* and various sedges, *Carex* spp. Sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus* dominates the adjacent field, with much whorled caraway, common knapweed, several sedges (notably oval sedge *Carex ovalis*, common sedge *C. nigra*, carnation sedge *C. panicea* and flea sedge *C. pulicaris*) and two species of orchid - common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and southern marsh-orchid *D. praetermissa*. Devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* is frequent. These drier pastures on sloping ground nearby have, as grass dominants, Yorkshire-fog, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and crested dog's-tail, with much whorled caraway and yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* throughout the sward.

The floristic diversity of these coalfield meadows provides nectar sources and larval food plants for a wide range of invertebrates, including the localized marbled white *Melanargia galethea* and marsh fritillary *Euopdryas aurinia* butterflies. Glow worms *Lampyris noctiluca* occur on the drier grassland slopes.

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