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Arfon - disgrifiad cryno

Arfon, yn llythrennol, yw'r diriogaeth sydd "ar", neu "gyferbyn â" Môn. Dyma'r tir isel rhwng Menai ar y naill law, a bryniau Eryri a'i dyffrynnoedd rhewlifol ar y llaw arall. O Benmaenbach yn y gogledd-ddwyrain i Fryncir yn y de, mae'n cynnwys bwrdeistref Eingl-normanaidd Caernarfon (â chastell a muriau'r dref, sy'n Safle Treftadaeth y Byd), a dinas Bangor â'i chadeirlan a'i phrifysgol. Mae'r llwyfandir glan môr hwn hefyd yn cynnwys castell ffug-Normanaidd y Penrhyn, o'r 19eg ganrif, sy'n amlwg iawn ac yn ganolfan ystâd sy'n ymestyn am filltiroedd o amgylch. Ceir hefyd dai bonedd a pharciau llai amlwg y

Faenol (sydd bellach yn fan cynnal cyngherddau a gydnabyddir ar raddfa ryngwladol) a Glynllifon.

Yn ogystal ag anheddau gwŷr cefnog a grymus gynt, dyma, yn anad unman, dirwedd y werin, pobl ddiwyd, flaengar a diwylliedig y fferm a'r tyddyn, y bwthyn a'r chwarel. Mae eu ffordd nhw o fyw, canlyniad gweithfeydd diwydiannol aruthrol chwareli llechi'r 18fed a'r 19eg ganrif, eto'n fyw, a dyma un o gadarnleoedd y Gymraeg. Mae ôl y werin ar y wlad, yn bentrefi, yn gapeli ac yn gloddiau caeau: ac yng nghynefinoedd unigryw'r chwareli llechi mawrion, sydd â'u ponciau a'u tomennydd mor amlwg yn nyffrynnoedd Ogwen, Padarn a Nantlle. Amlwg, hefyd, yw dyfnder hanes y fro, gyda chyfoeth mawr o olion archeolegol, a thraddodiadau hynafol y Mabinogi a chwedlau eraill.

Summary description

Arfon is literally the land which is ar-fon, 'against Anglesey', being the lowland area bounded on the one side by the Menai Strait and on the other by the Snowdonia foothills and the adjacent glaciated valleys that open into it. Extending from Penmaen-bach Point in the north east to Bryncir in the south, it includes the Anglo-Norman boroughs of Caernarfon (with its World Heritage Site castle and town walls) and the cathedral and university city of Bangor. This coastal plateau area also includes the 19th century neo-Norman Penrhyn Castle, which dominates the view and whose estate extends for many miles around, as well as the less apparent, gentry houses and parklands at Faenol (now an internationally-recognised concert venue) and Glynllifon.

As well as the dwellings of the once-wealthy and powerful, this is also pre-eminently the landscape of the Welsh gwerin, the industrious, progressive and cultured population of the farm, the small-holding, the cottage and the quarry. Their way of life, brought into being by the tremendous industrial slate quarrying workings of the late 18th and the 19th centuries, has far from vanished, and the Welsh language remains particularly strong. The landscape of the gwerin is everywhere, in the form of settlements, chapels, field-boundaries and in the unique environments of the great slate quarries, whose working faces and tips dominate the Ogwen and Nantlle valleys and the Llanberis-Llanddeiniolen area. The time depth of the area is also evident, in an exceptionally rich legacy of earlier archaeology, and in the rich traditions of myth and legend.

Key Characteristics
The Arfonian plateau – a broad, gently undulating lowland and valley land form, rising from the coast to about 200m and flanked by the much higher adjacent uplands of Eryri.
Menai Strait – the tidal channel separating Anglesey and the mainland.
Soft open coastline – at Morfa Dinlle with shingle and sand beaches and dunes, extensive mud and sand flats in Foryd Bay and at Traeth Lafan.
Extensive sheltered inter-tidal areas at Foryd Bay and Traeth Lafan, with high ecological importance.
A dramatic inland panorama of steeply rising mountains - with many views to well-known ridges and peaks, including Snowdon.
Deep 'U' shape valleys emerge from uplands into Arfon – and whose rivers then cross the area. The rivers include the Gregyn, Ogwen, Cegin, Gwyfrai, Seoint and Llyfni, and in the Llanberis area also include the ice-deepened lakes of Llyn Padarn and Llyn Peris.
Very extensive slate workings – on the flanks of the upland valleys, including associated old mines, levels, railways, waste tips and workshops. Many are at a spectacular scale.

'Gwerin' – landscapes associated with slate quarry worker's housing and smallholdings that encroached onto former commons, typically heavily dominated by slate walls and buildings, and in places (e.g. Nebo) tiny field sizes. Slate fencing in a few places (e.g. Mynydd Llandegai).
Pastoral land cover – predominates.
Wooded valley slopes – by rivers and beside the Menai Strait.
Lowland – upland contrasts – from the intimate, wooded, lush, soft, sheltered lowland and pastures to the exposed, open, heavily grazed, marginal upland fringes.
Prehistoric and funerary sites - a rich concentration of burial sites, hill forts and stone-built hut circles and their field systems, which often survive on the more marginal parts of the foothills.
Landed estates and their designed parklands - from the Medieval and post Medieval periods, such as Penrhyn, Faenol and Glynllifon, on the better land and often with designed parklands and scattered individual trees.
Settlement pattern relates to sites of strategic significance: river mouths and ports, coastal defensive, where the upland valleys emerge, and near slate workings.
Caernarfon Castle - World heritage site, and its associated Medieval walled town overlooking the Menai Strait.
The University City of Bangor – occupying a constricted site flanked by coast and wooded hills.

Visual and Sensory profile

Arfon comprises an undulating plateau dissected by a number of rivers, issuing from dramatic U-shaped upland valleys to the south-east and issuing more gently into the sea at either end of the Menai Strait. Within its relatively narrow width it is a transitional zone between coast and mountain, between lowland and upland, between industrial and agricultural and between urban and rural.

One of its most striking features is the rising panorama of angular and rounded mountains in the adjacent Eryri uplands. Where the two areas meet, the relationship is complex, particularly around the agricultural, settlement and slate quarrying land use patterns, and any boundary is necessarily generalised. Deeply cut 'U' shaped glaciated valleys emerge from these uplands into Arfon, including the rivers Gregyn, Ogwen, Cegin, Gwyfrai, Seoint and Llyfni, and in the Llanberis area also include the lakes of Llyn Padarn and Llyn Peris.

The western boundary of Arfon is coastal. Starting in the south, the exposed, open coast of Caernarfon Bay exhibits many well developed soft coastline features, behind which lies the sheltered Foryd Bay beside the entrance to the Menai Strait. This sheltered waterway is akin to a great tidal river, with both serene sections and more rugged sections with rock platforms and rapids. Much of its length is framed by woodlands or parkland. To the north, the Strait opens out into Traeth Lafan, with extensive sand and mud flats, often where thousands of birds gather.

Inland and onto the plateau the mosaic of small fields becomes apparent, primarily pastoral, bounded by combinations of hedgerows, cloddiau and stone walls, and interspersed with hedgerow trees and small coverts. On the lower ground there are more formal landscapes associated with parklands, such as Penrhyn, Faenol and Glynllifon, with designed woodlands and open pastures. The proximity of slate quarries on the nearby upland fringes has led to a liberal and diverse use of slate as a building material, extending in some areas even to slate fencing, notably at Mynydd Llandegai.

Of particular note are the rectangular enclosed 19th century 'gwerin' walled landscapes on marginal higher ground. Their domestic scale on the marginal upland slopes near Bethesda, Llanberis and Dyffryn Nantle contrast remarkably with the extensive adjacent open moorland uplands. Indeed some areas (e.g. Nebo, Dinorwic) exhibit clusters of the smallest field sizes anywhere in Wales, and where small stone cottages scatter across the hillsides. They sit, at times uncomfortably, close to the spectacular, industrial scale of slate quarrying and mining that has scarred the natural hillsides. These scars include arrays of quarry cliffs, giant holes and blue pools, waste heaps and all manner of railways levels, inclines, workshop buildings. Many of the quarries and their remnant infrastructure lay derelict today. In many ways these are fascinating visual and sensory landscapes, as well as industrial scars on the natural heritage.

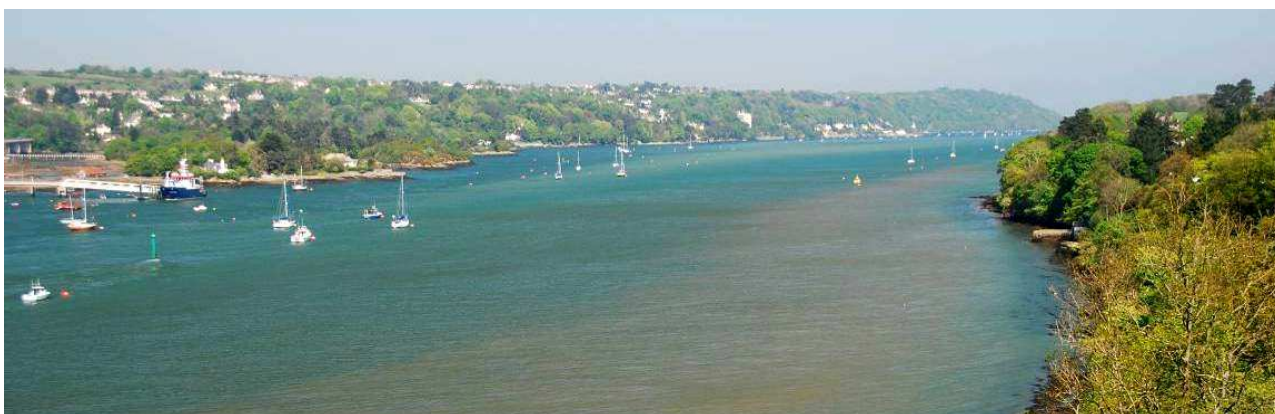
Rural Arfon is remarkable in having also having many small villages and dispersed scattered cottages and smallholdings in many parts. The cumulative effect of associated night lighting is remarkable when viewed from Anglesey.

In their very different ways, Penrhyn castle, the original college building at the University of Bangor and Caernarfon castle all dominate their surrounding areas, while the 300+m (1000+ feet) high Nebo transmission mast tower is widely visible over the southern part of the area.



A typical scene across the Arfon plateau, seen here from Ceunant (Llanrug), at the point where the ground starts to rise into the foothills of Snowdonia. Anglesey is in the distance.

© John Briggs



The Menai Strait looking north towards Anglesey, from Treborth on the Arfon side. © John Briggs



Extensive slate quarry landscapes, such as here at Nantlle, with associated settlements and small-holdings. © John Briggs



Characteristic slate post and wire fencing to small-holdings at Mynydd Llandygai, a legacy of the former Penrhyn estate and the easy access to nearby slate quarries. © John Briggs.



Looking over Penygroes, with the Menai Strait in the distance. © John Briggs



Evening sun picks out the extensive pattern of stone walls, small holdings and the terraced housing of the former slate quarry worker's village of Talysarn. © John Briggs

Geological Landscape influences

This area includes a thin coastal strip which extends west from the Afon Conwy and then to a broader area along the mainland side of the Menai Strait. The landscape is generally undulating in character, rising to a plateau of typically 200m, but with the highest hills on the fringe of the adjacent Eryri, including Cefn-du (441m), Moel y Ci (410m) and Moel Tryfan (427m).

The bedrock geology of Arfon is dominated by Precambrian, Cambrian and Ordovician rocks, with an area of Carboniferous rocks exposed along the mainland side of the Menai Strait. Precambrian rocks form two prominent north east to south west trending ridges, one

of which forms the higher ground around Bangor, and the other extending from Deiniolen, through Llanberis towards Penygroes. These Precambrian rocks belong to the Arfon Group and comprise a large thickness, possibly up to 4km, of volcanic ash which is interbedded with, and overlain by, clastic sediments (conglomerates and sandstones).

The Cambrian rocks include one of the most economically important geological formations in Wales, namely the Llanberis Slates Formation, extensively quarried over the last two hundred years. The softer Ordovician rocks of Arfon comprise a thick sequence of blue-grey mudstones and siltstones and form the low-lying ground that extends from Caernarfon, and much of the coastal plateau between Bangor and Conwy.

Much of Arfon is blanketed by glacial sediments and is rich in glacially related landforms, the legacy of the ice sheets that covered the area during the last Ice Age. The U-shaped glacial troughs of Nant Ffrancon, Llanberis and the Gwyrfaï and Nantlle valleys that open out into this area record the erosive powers of valley glaciers that originated in the core of Eryri massif to the south east.

Menai Strait itself forms a distinctive boundary to Arfon, being a channel of sea whose tides flow swiftly, separating Anglesey and the mainland. Outer, estuary-like character contrasts with river-like central sections with rapids flowing over scoured rock platforms and small cliffs, and muddy silts in sheltered areas. Soft open coastline areas include shingle storm beaches, and sandy lower beaches and dunes at Morfa Dinlle, and extensive mud and sand flats in Foryd Bay and at Traeth Lafan at either end of the Menai Strait. Some river terrace gravels in lowland coastal areas are a legacy of glacial activity which helped shape the broader area.

Landscape Habitats influences

Arfon is dominated by relatively low-lying, undulating improved pastoral farmland, overlying brown earth and surface-water gley soils. Areas of marshy grassland are also scattered throughout the area as are pockets of deciduous woodland, which together with the network of hedgerows adds ecological value.

There is noticeable contrast between areas of farmland; those on the lower-lying land closer to the coast are dominated by improved grassland whereas those on the higher ground are characterised by a smaller field pattern with a greater coverage of marshy grassland, semi-improved grassland and hanging deciduous woodland copses, all of which increase the ecological value.

The historic parklands and their associated stands of mature trees are a distinctive lowland feature at Penrhyn Castle, the Vaynol and Glynllifon.

A number of watercourses flow in a generally south east to north west direction through the area, to discharge into the the Menai Strai or Caernarfon Bay, the most ecologically significant of these being the Gwyrfaï SAC and SSSI, and the Seiont SSSI along its lower reaches. Llyn Peris and Llyn Padarn are other freshwater habitats of note. There significant areas of former quarrying at Dinorwic and Glynrhonwy, which are gradually being colonised by birch and scrub, and smallish areas of heath that impart a more upland character to this part of the area.

The Menai Strait has a varied shoreline of mud and rocky extents which are exposed at low tide, but otherwise hidden by the woodland that cloaks the steep coastal slopes right

down to the water's edge. At the eastern end are the extensive mud-flats and sand banks of Traeth Lafan (SSSI, SPA, SAC), which are of particular importance for wading birds and wildfowl, and at the western end are mud-flats and saltmarsh associated with the Gwyrfaï estuary in Foryd Bay (SSSI, SAC) adjacent to which is the Morfa Dinlle dune system (SSSI, SAC).

Historic Landscape influences

The area's historic landscape is rich and varied with evidence of prehistoric ritual activity, land use and settlement, whilst more discrete, Medieval monuments such as the 13th century Dolbadarn castle, contrast markedly with the widespread and extensive remains of 19th and 20th centuries slate quarries and their associated settlements and transport systems. The vast Penrhyn quarry near Bethesda was once the largest opencast excavation in the world, and is still in operation. The Dinorwic quarry at Llanberis shows to stunning effect the landscape scale of these huge galleried workings cut into the hillside, and its quadrangular former workshop complex at Gilfach Ddu is now the Welsh Slate Museum. As well as the cottages, terraced rows and villages created by the quarrymen and their families, the dwellings of those who owned the quarries and the lands around them survive, at Faenol, now an internationally-recognised concert venue, and in the neo-Norman Penrhyn castle, both of which are surrounded by high stone perimeter walls. Owing to differences both in geology and in historical landownership patterns, the beds of slate in the Nantlle Valley have been exploited in markedly different way to the other slate areas, in a series of pits, rather than in one major galleried hillside working.

Outside these areas, Arfon has a no less dense a concentration of archaeological features, from the prehistoric to the modern periods. On the outskirts of Caernarfon are the remains of the Roman auxiliary fort of Segontium, close to the parish church of St Peblig, suggesting a continuity from the Roman period into the Early Christian era, however, the centre of the present-day town is at some distance within the 13th century walls, and dominated by the Edwardian castle with its distinctive octagonal walls and banded stonework. Bangor was originally a religious settlement founded in the 6th century, but later developed as a staging point on the historic route to Ireland, a centre for processing and exporting slate from Penrhyn quarry, and later as an important learning and administrative centre. Traditional buildings are predominately of local stone or render with slate, in styles that from the 19th century onwards exhibit minor variations between the different landed estates.

Thomas Telford's Menai Suspension Bridge across the Menai Strait, and the London to Holyhead (A5) route through the Ogwen Valley form part of the master-work of one of Britain's greatest engineers.

Cultural Landscape influences

Cultural continuities are strong in Arfon. The city of Bangor dates from the foundation of the diocese by St Deiniol in the post-Roman period, and the cathedral occupies a site that has been an ecclesiastical centre from the 6th century. Caernarfon, the other urban centre is a comparative newcomer, an Anglo-Norman fortified borough of the late 13th century, built on the site of a native settlement near the ruins of the Roman fort of Segontium.

The area is rich in legend – so much so that the author of the Mabinogion folktales seems to have been a native of the area, or to have lived in it. Math vab Mathonwy tells of the rape of Goewin of Dol Bebin, of the youthful exploits of Lleu Llaw Gyffes at Dinas Dinlle

and his transformation by Gwydion back from an eagle into a man at Nantlle. The poet Robert Williams Parry in *Y ddôl a aeth o'r golwg* laments how industrialisation blighted this landscape where once these gods and heroes walked, but quarrying for slate in Llanberis, the Ogwen valley and Nantlle and for stone at Penmaenmawr gave a new cultural dimension to Arfon, creating a radicalised and Welsh-speaking working class. The strike at Penrhyn quarry from 1900 to 1903 polarised progressive and conservative opinion in Wales and beyond, and remains a potent cultural reference-point. Authors from the slate districts include Dic Tryfan, Kate Roberts, Caradog Prichard and T. Rowland Hughes. The landscape these writers described are still recognisable, and the quarry towns and villages are now recognised as outstanding examples of 19th century urban settlement.

Since the Victorian period, Arfon has undergone a slow transformation from an economy and a culture based on agriculture and mineral extraction to a society sustained by knowledge-provision and tourism. Whilst these have appeared at times to threaten the Welsh language, it is more likely that they have supported it, by cushioning the economic impact of decline in the traditional industries and providing new employment opportunities.



From the foothills of Snowdonia, the hamlet of Fron is set within a landscape that combines the 'gwerin' and slate quarrying. By contrast, the extensive woodland and parkland landscape at Glynllifon occupies the mid distance view, with the Caernarfon Bay coast beyond. © John Briggs