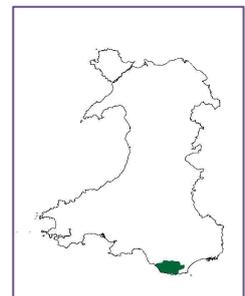




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Bro Morgannwg - Disgrifiad Cryno

Llwyfan carreg galch yw sylfaen y rhan fwyaf o dirwedd llawr gwlad nodweddiadol y Fro. Mae gwaddodion rhewlifol yn cyfrannu at natur donnog y tir. Defnyddir y tir mewn sawl ffordd nodweddiadol o gefn gwlad, gyda gwrychoedd trwchus, a gwigoedd a choed niferus, yn creu ymdeimlad o amgaeidigrwydd ac agosatrwydd. Hyn er gwaethaf agosrwydd trefi mawrion megis Caerdydd, Y Barri a Phen-y-bont ar Ogwr, a sawl nodwedd adeiledig fawr yn y Fro ei hun.



Ffin bendant y dirwedd hon yw clogwyni serth glannau'r môr. Mae ychydig draethau tywodlyd, a rhai graeanog hefyd: ond mae llawer o ddelweddau'n dangos daeareg amlwg y parth rhynglanwol, gan gynnwys haenau a phalmentydd. O bennau'r clogwyni gellir gweld ymhell tua Gwlad yr Haf. Un nodwedd amlwg sy'n effeithio ar ran o'r glannau yw gorsaf bŵer fawr, gyfoes, swnllyd Aberddawan.

Yng nghanol y Fro, mae pentrefi cryno, hanesyddol yn adlewyrchu ymdeimlad o hunaniaeth nodweddiadol y Fro, gyda datblygu cyfoes cyfyngedig. Eto, mae'r ardal wedi denu llawer o weithwyr proffesiynol sy'n cymudo i Gaerdydd neu Ben-y-bont, gan ychwanegu ar gymeriad mwy llewyrchus manau fel y Bont-faen a Llanfleiddan.

Lluniwyd cymeriad hanesyddol yr ardal gan ddylanwadau Eingl-normanaidd. Mae Cestyll Normanaidd, a phentrefi canoloesol wedi'u crynhoi o gwmpas eglwysi, yn nodweddiad allweddol. Mae tirwedd gofrestredig Llancarfan yn brydferth i'w ryfeddu, yn ogystal â bod yn enghraifft wych, gymharol ddigyffwrdd o esblygiad hanesyddol. Hyn oll, er gwaethaf bod yn gymharol agos at drefi mawrion.

Summary description

The Vale is a distinctive, gentle lowland landscape, largely comprising a rolling limestone plateau. Glacial till contributes to its undulating topography. A variety of rural land uses characterise the area, reinforced by thick hedgerows, frequent small woodlands and trees, which create a sense of enclosure and intimacy. This is despite the proximity to large towns such as greater Cardiff, Barry and Bridgend, and a number of large built features within the Vale.

The landscape terminates abruptly at the heritage coast with vertical cliffs. There are a few sandy beaches, as well as shingle, but many images depict the exposed geology of the inter-tidal area, including bedding and pavements. There are long distance cliff top views towards Somerset. A notable feature affecting part of the coast is the large, modern, noisy, Aberthaw Power Station.

In the centre of the Vale, compact and historic settlements reinforce the area's distinctive sense of place, but with limited modern development. Yet the area has attracted many professionals, who commute to Cardiff and Bridgend, adding to the more prosperous character of places like Cowbridge and Llanblethian.

The area's historic character was shaped by Anglo-Norman influences. Norman castles and medieval villages centred on churches are key features. The registered landscape of Llancarfan is astoundingly beautiful as well as being a relatively unspoiled gem of historical evolution. All this is despite the relatively close proximity to nearby large towns.

Key Characteristics
Lowland, rolling limestone plateau with glacial till.
Coastal cliffs – mark a sudden edge to the landscape. Species-rich calcareous, neutral and maritime grasslands are found on their tops. Layers of geology characterise their sides and inter-tidal platforms. Wide views over the Bristol Channel. Much is Heritage Coast.
Mixed agricultural land uses - with predominantly rural character
Small woodlands – mainly to the east. Few large woods.
Mixed field patterns and sizes - with hedgerows and hedgebanks, frequent hedgerow trees. Limestone walls define land above the cliffs in the west.
Norman castles and medieval villages centred on churches.
Predominantly still rural - with strong senses of enclosure by historic field boundaries.
A number of large built developments – including Cardiff International Airport and Aberthaw Power Station. Some areas with traffic noise, e.g. in the M4 corridor.
Commuter settlement - modern suburban housing extending but contrasting with historic settlement character.

Visual and Sensory profile

The area forms a distinctive plateau landscape, dissected by a number of rivers including the Ely, Thaw and Waycock. It still evokes a strong rural sense of place with a patchwork of fields, hedgerows and woodlands and trees and extensive open, lowland, farmland.

The most iconic image is that of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast, where the otherwise gentle landscape comes to a very abrupt and dramatic edge, with near vertical cliffs in places, shingle or rock pavement beaches, and the occasional sandy bay to the west. From here there are long views across the Bristol Channel to Somerset and Exmoor. The coastal hinterland is typified by windblown vegetation that has resulted from the prevailing south-westerly wind exposure.

Further inland, the Bonvilston ridge forms a strong landscape element running across the centre of the Vale, reflected in views southwards across the Vale and northwards and into the South Wales Valleys.

The Vale contains a number of historic thatched cottages, typically in rural village settings, historic farm houses, distinctive field patterns (for example around Llancafán, whose landscape setting is also picturesque). Hensol Forest is distinctive, with a strong sense of enclosure and solitude, despite the close location of the M4 motorway to the north.

Indeed background traffic noise intrudes into parts of the northern and south eastern edges of the Vale, as well as that from the general urban area of Bridgend. Whilst the character is predominantly rural, there are a number of visually prominent built features that contrast this. These include: the power station and adjacent cement works at Aberthaw; Cardiff International Airport to the west of Barry where the frequent movement of aircraft impacts upon the tranquillity of the area; the nearby Royal Air Force station at St Athan which is used for operational training purposes; and the trading estate at Llandow which occupies the site of a former Second World War airfield, including a racing track.



Glamorgan Heritage Coast. © TACP



Pendoylan Moors from Pendoylan. © TACP



Idealised rural scene in the Vale: the village pond at St. Brides Major. © LUC



Lower Thaw Valley (the power station chimney is on the horizon, left). © TACP



Lias slopes in the northern Vale, looking towards Bridgend. ©TACP



View north from near Gwarne-y-Steeple ©LUC

Geological Landscape influences

This broad tract of rolling lowland terrain is flanked to the north by the deeply dissected upland plateaux of the South Wales Valleys and to the south by the Bristol Channel. Higher ground, all under 140m altitude, includes the linear ridge of Cefn Hirgoed, north of the M4, Pantylladron near Cowbridge and St Hilary Down. The area is dissected by several rivers, including the Ely that drains south-eastwards into Cardiff Bay, and the Ogmore and Ewenny which drain south-west and are confluent at the coast near Ogmores-by-Sea. The central part of the area is drained by a network of water courses including the Kenson and Thaw which are confluent near the coast between East Aberthaw and West Aberthaw.

Bedrock geology is dominated by rocks that range from Lower Devonian to Lower Jurassic and record sedimentation in both terrestrial and marine environments. The oldest rocks comprise Devonian conglomerates, sandstones and siltstones which form part of the Old Red Sandstone and record deposition in alluvial fan and river environments. These rocks crop out in the core and northern limb of the Cardiff-Cowbridge Anticline where they are exposed at surface around Stalling Down and Maendy. The Upper Devonian rocks are conformably overlain by a thick sequence of Lower Carboniferous strata that comprise a range of limestone-dominated formations. These rocks form escarpments on both the northern and southern limbs of the Cardiff-Cowbridge Anticline and crop out westwards

along a broad ridge of high ground as far as Porthcawl in the adjacent Swansea Bay, and eastwards to the inliers east and west of Wenvoe in by Cardiff. Triassic rocks crop out extensively to the north-east of Bridgend and around Llanharry, as well as farther south in the vicinity of Pendoylan, Cowbridge and Bonvilston. These rocks include mudstones and sandstones. The overlying marine sequence of Lower Jurassic shales and limestones crops out over a large area around Bridgend and forms a broad, dissected table-land over much of the area to the south and west of Cowbridge. These rocks also form the spectacular coastal cliffs along the southern margin of the area, and one section between Pant y Slade and Trwyn y Witch is a geological SSSI.

Glacial landforms and deposits are mostly attributed to the last glaciation with the principal glacial deposit comprising a variable thickness of till (boulder clay) which commonly forms a characteristic hummocky topography of irregular mounds and ridges, frequently with intervening kettlehole depressions formed by the melting of buried ice masses. The till forms extensive spreads in the northern part of the area where it is generally regarded as forming part of a terminal moraine at the southern limit of a Glamorgan piedmont glacier. Sands and gravels outwashed from the melting ice front are preserved locally as terrace-like features in the main river valleys, for example in the Ogmere Valley between Bridgend and Ewenny, and in the Thaw Valley between Howe Mill Farm and Gigman Mill.

In post-glacial times, rising sea-levels have caused progressive erosion of the coastal cliffs. Evidence of relatively rapid cliff-line retreat is provided by the impressive hanging valleys of Cwm Mawr and Cwm Bach, as well as by partly eroded historical fortifications and the fallen blocks of Jurassic rock that litter the wave-cut platform and foreshore. The cliffs often contain a rich fossil assemblage, and display one of the classic British examples of lateral changes in ancient sediments.

Soils are mainly well drained silts or loams, with some deep clays fringing watercourses.

Landscape Habitats influences

The Vale of Glamorgan is dominated by generally low-lying, undulating farmland (both arable and pastoral) on generally well draining brown-soils. The arable element is noticeably more prevalent towards the south nearer to the coast. Hedgerows which in many cases are well treed together with in-field trees and smallish deciduous woodland areas provide more ecological interest to the agricultural landscape.

Marshy Grassland is notably absent from this landscape due to the well draining soils. There is, however, one concentration of this habitat in a linear feature north of the M4 towards the north-west at Cefn Cribwr, Cefn Hirgoed and Brynnau-Gwynion, the former of these areas being designated as a SSSI and SAC and the latter as a SSSI together with other valuable grassland areas.

There are very few large areas of woodland though smaller linear deciduous woodland areas follow watercourses, this being a particular feature towards the east, with Nant Whitton woods being particularly noteworthy due to SSSI designation. Some small blocks of coniferous plantation are also present on valley slopes but nowhere is coniferous plantation particularly dominant except in Hensol Forest.

A number of watercourses cross the area, the most significant being the River Ely towards the east. The settlement of Bridgend is a noteworthy feature, together with a number of smaller settlements scattered throughout the Vale.

Much of the west coast is designated as a Site of Special Scientific (SSSI), reflecting the coastal biodiversity. Habitats include species rich neutral, calcareous and maritime grassland, with a number of nationally rare species. The area at Dunraven Bay is additionally designated as a SAC due to the presence of the rare plant, Shore Dock. Further inland, the Carboniferous Limestone outcrop near St Bride's Major supports limestone heath and calcareous grasslands, containing considerable invertebrate interest. The East Aberthaw Coast SSSI on the south coast is also nationally valued for its range of coastal habitats including limestone cliffs, shingle spits, saltmarsh and relict sand dunes.

The land use is mixed – with dairy and sheep pasture, pony paddocks, arable and some pig rearing and rough grazing on the cliff tops in the west. The landscape in the south west is defined by large arable fields with little tree cover apart from occasional conifer shelterbelts around buildings. In contrast, the eastern half of the Vale contains frequent woodland clumps and in-field trees, along with riparian woodlands and small plantations on valley slopes. Added to the often thick hedgerows and frequent hedgerow trees, this creates the impression of a well-wooded landscape.

Historic Landscape influences

The rural landscape of nucleated villages surrounded by rich agricultural land has a distinctive historic character. Notably, in the centre of the coastal plateau, the Llancarfan Valley is recognised as a Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest, as one of the best surviving and complete examples of the defining historic character of the wider Vale.

The earliest archaeological features are prehistoric ritual and funerary monuments with round barrows, burial chambers and stone cairns. Iron Age hillforts, such as Castle Ditches east of Llancarfan, also provide evidence for early settlement throughout the area.

Today's historic landscape was greatly influenced by strong monastic and Anglo-Norman influences. The foundation stone for a 6th century monastery at Llancarfan survives, despite the monastery being destroyed by the Danes in AD 988 and possessed by the Normans in the 11th century. Llantwit Major was another Early Christian foundation of considerable note. Other Norman remains include prominent castles and moated sites, such as at Penmark and Bridgend.

Many of the settlements in the Vale are centred on large medieval churches, around which villages developed. The value of the land has long been exploited for agriculture, with whitewashed medieval farm buildings with pitched roofs and small windows being particularly distinctive. The area's small woodlands, hedgerows and trees are also of considerable age.

Today's settlement remains largely true to the area's historic pattern of development; with many villages focused on a church or village green. However, many of the Vale villages are remarkable for their expansion, marred by alien architectural styles of the 'executive housing' of the 1970s and 1980s. The settlements are linked by a network of rural lanes, which are often sunken at entry points to settlements. In addition to whitewash, traditional buildings are constructed of distinctive grey limestone or white/cream/coloured render.

Irregular and regular medium to large fields are bounded by a strong network of hedgerows, hedgebanks and frequent hedgerow trees. Cliff-top land in the west is enclosed by dry stone walls.

Cultural Landscape influences

The two largest towns, Cowbridge and Bridgend, differ greatly in cultural character. Astride the former Roman road, the historic core and architecture of the ancient borough and market town of Cowbridge survives largely intact but is becoming increasingly hemmed in by modern development. It has coalesced with Llanblethian, and together they have become an affluent settlement as if Wales' very own Home Counties, with semi-suburban residential areas, 4x4 vehicles, boutiques, upmarket restaurants and jewellers, being noticeably contemporary cultural phenomena. Vale villages and settlements are popular living places for those who commute to nearby Cardiff and other larger towns for work.

The historic origins of Bridgend are all but subsumed by late C20th growth, with large housing estates and industrial and business parks, a function of the town's proximity to the M4. A notable cultural development is the Macarthur Glen outlet park across the motorway from the Sarn Park services. To the north of the motorway, there is similar, though as yet smaller scale, development around Pencoed, Pontyclun and Llanharan. A wind farm forms a prominent skyline landmark along this stretch of the road.

In the north, Peterston-super-Ely is a commuter dormitory, whose modern character of extensive housing estates is contrasted by the planned but uncompleted Wyndham Park (aka Glyn Cory Garden Village). The once small historic village of Wenvoe is now a prosperous commuter settlement whose past embraces the Neolithic chambered cairn of St Lythans, late mediaeval field patterns and church, small farming village, farmsteads, limestone and haematite quarries, grand but uninspired castellated mansion now a golf club, disused civil airfield and the 750 ft. high Wenvoe TV and radio transmitter mast.

Llantwit Major was one of the first Christian settlements in Wales and a centre of theological learning. Today it's industrial estate, at its eastern edge, provides a very different centre of activity. However it remains a popular visitor destination for it's historic character, its maze of little lanes and old-world shops, narrow streets, picturesque stone cottages and ancient inns. The mediaeval St Illtud's Church dominates its immediate surroundings. The presence of Iron Age hill forts, a Roman villa, mediaeval grange and fine Tudor buildings combine to reinforce the richness of the large village's attributes.

In the south, there are a number of large scale contemporary features. They include Cardiff International Airport, the new railway station both serving it and reflecting the local authority's efforts to encourage alternative transport systems, and the development of the RAF St Athan base as a defence training academy and technical research establishment. Llandow Industrial Estate and Car Racing Circuit contrast with the prevailing cultural character, whilst the Vale Hotel, Golf and Spa Resort are expanding into the parkland of Hensol Castle, that itself is being converted into conference centre and hotel. Developments and associated roads and traffic act erode the rural landscape.

Dyffryn Gardens and house is a popular visitor destination. The Gardens (designed by renowned landscape practitioner Thomas H. Mawson) are being restored. Less visited is the designed landscape around the mediaeval castle of Fonmon.

The coastal settlements and beaches of Southerndown, Ogmore and St Bride's Major have long been popular for day visits from the principal local towns.