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Llŷn – disgrifiad cryno

Penrhyn eang ac eiconig yw Llŷn, sy'n ymestyn allan i Fôr Iwerddon, a'i llawr gwlad arfordirol â chefnidir o fryniau sy'n cynnwys amlinell wych Yr Eifl: mynyddoedd sydd fel petaent yn plymio'n syth i'r môr. O bennau'r manau uchel hyn, ceir golygfeydd eang dros Fae Caernarfon i Ynys Môn, a thros Fae Tremadog at y Rhinogydd. Mewn tywydd clir iawn

gellir gweld, yn y pellter, arfordiroedd Sir Benfro a Cheredigion i'r de, a Mynyddoedd Wicklow dros Fôr Iwerddon i'r gorllewin.

Mae'r ardal yn cynnwys y rhan helaethaf o Ardal o Harddwch Naturiol Eithriadol Llŷn, ardal y mae rhannau helaeth ohoni'n Arfordir Treftadaeth. Mae'r ardal yn cynnwys Ynys Enlli, dros Swnt Enlli i'r de orllewin: ac y mae pobl yn byw ar yr ynys o hyd. Roedd anheddiad Cristnogol hynafol ar Enlli: mae llawer o seintiau'r Eglwys gynnar wedi'u claddu arni ac, o'r herwydd, fe ddaeth yn gyrchfan pererinion. Yn draddodiadol, cam olaf y bererindod hon oedd y daith o bentref Aberdaron, lle bu'r bardd Eingl-gymreig enwog R. S. Thomas yn ficer, ar un adeg.

Y pentrefi mwyaf yw Morfa Nefyn ac Abersoch, yr olaf yn boblogaidd iawn gyda thwristiaid a gwersyllwyr oherwydd ei thraethau tywodlyd cysgodol a'r hwylio. Ar wahân i'r mannau sy'n denu'r tyrfaoedd, mae gwlad Llŷn fel petai ar wahân i weddill Cymru. Mae'n ardal wledig iawn, ac yn un o gadarnleoedd yr iaith Gymraeg o hyd. Mae Canolfan Iaith a Threftadaeth Cymru Nant Gwrtheyrn yno, ar lan y môr mewn dyffryn diarffordd yng nghysgod yr Eifl. Ym mannau eraill, mae amaethyddiaeth eto'n ffordd o fyw, ac mae'r patrwm o bentrefi bychain, ffermydd a bythynnod wedi'u hadeiladu o gerrig, a'r rheini'n aml wedi'u gwyngalchu neu'u chwipio â gro, ac yn ymdoddi i'r dirwedd o'u cwmpas, yn debyg i rannau o dde-orllewin Iwerddon. 'Does fawr o ddatblygu arall.

Summary description

Llŷn is a broad and iconic Welsh promontory extending out into the Irish Sea, its coastal lowlands set against a backdrop of hills which include the spectacular profiles of Yr Eifl / The Rivals that appear to fall directly into the sea. These high vantage points afford panoramic views over Caernarfon Bay to Anglesey, and over Tremadoc Bay to the Rhinogydd. In very clear weather there are distant prospects south to the Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire coasts, and west over the Irish Sea to the Wicklow Mountains.

The area incorporates the greater part of the Llŷn Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which has large sections of Heritage Coast. The area includes Bardsey Island, across Bardsey Sound to the south west. Still inhabited today, Bardsey had an ancient Christian settlement, was the burial place of many saints of the Early church, and in consequence become a place of pilgrimage. Traditionally, the last stage of this journey was from the village of Aberdaron, whose one time vicar was the famous Anglo-Welsh poet R.S. Thomas.

The largest settlements are in the Morfa Nefyn and Abersoch areas, the latter being very popular with tourists and campers for its sheltered sandy beaches and boating. Honey pots aside, Llŷn feels physically remote from the rest of Wales. It is a very rural area, remaining a stronghold of the Welsh language. The Nant Gwrtheyrn Welsh Language and Heritage Centre is situated by the sea in a remote valley by Yr Eifl / The Rivals. Elsewhere, agriculture remains a way of life and the pattern of small stone-built villages, farms and cottages, often whitewashed or pebble-dashed and merging into their landscape, resembles parts of south west Ireland. There is relatively little other development.

Key Characteristics

A peninsula – Wales' longest, extending into the Irish Sea.

A northern spine of distinctively profiled, angular hills - formed of erosion resistant igneous rocks, some mountainous with an upland character, often with exposed rock and scree.

Rocky headlands and sandy bays - Igneous rock headlands and coastal cliffs form anchor points for smoothly curved shorelines and coves.
Very high cliffs – where the Rivals rise abruptly from the coast and form a prominent backdrop in longer distance views.
Coastal lowlands overlain with localised glacial deposits – some of which form soft cliffs on meeting the coastline.
Ecological interest of the coastline - is internationally and nationally recognised, as are the Cors Geirch marshlands, which occupy the site of a former glacial lake.
Glacial melt water-formed minor river valleys - such as the Afon Soch that dissects the area.
Soils - Seasonally wet, deep loam soils, with stony loams occurring on the hard igneous rocks.
Predominantly pastoral farmland in the lowlands - with geometric and occasionally irregular shaped fields set within a network of hedgerows or 'cloddiau' hedgebanks.
Sheep grazing and areas of open moor in the uplands - with stone walls and fences in localised areas.
A generally windswept landscape - especially in coastal areas, but with localised shelter in minor valleys and on lea slopes where there are occasional woodlands.
Prehistoric and funerary remains - are well represented with numerous ritual and monumental sites including chambered tombs, standing stones, cairns, ring ditches and Iron Age hillforts on the higher summits such as Tre'r Ciri, Carn Fadryn and Garn Boduan. Early Christian ecclesiastical sites such as St Mary's Abbey on Bardsey Island are also notable.
Settlement pattern - focuses around the coastline by sheltered headlands or river mouths, none larger than village-scale. Small villages and hamlets cluster around parish churches in the interior.
Tourism – recognised as an AONB with various popular 'honeypots' around the coastline including Nefyn, Aberdaron, Abersoch and Llanbedrog. Caravan and chalet sites are common around Abersoch. Watersports are very popular in the Abersoch area.

Visual and Sensory profile

The Llŷn peninsula has a reputation for different weather on each side. The coastline includes high cliffs, caves, stacks and islands, and a series of curved sandy beaches between protruding rocky headlands, all of which contribute greatly to its natural beauty and character. The marine influence ensures a mild climate; however, many parts are exposed to prevailing south westerly winds, to the extent that trees and hedges noticeably lean away, especially towards the end of the peninsula. The colours of the natural vegetation create a strong visual impression from a palette that varies according to the season. Some of Llŷn's most memorable characteristics include the lush green of its pastures, the purple of the heather on the hills and yellow of the gorse in the heaths and rough pasture.

Many isolated, steep sided, rounded or pointed, high hills with exposed rock and scree rise up across the area. The main range and the highest hills run in a chain close to the north west coast, where most dramatically at Yr Eifl / The Rivals they plunge down into the sea. Flanked by towering headlands and steep slopes on either side, and by the sea to the west, the narrow valley of Nant Gwrtheyrn is almost land- and sea-locked, creating a very unusual sense of drama and physical isolation. Dramatic vistas of the approaches to the hills of Llŷn are to be particularly gained from the A499 Caernarfon to Pwllheli road, as it is flanked by Gyrn Ddu and Yr Eifl / The Rivals.

Llŷn is a largely tranquil, peaceful agricultural area, although the volume of summer visitors, campers and water sports in and around the larger villages along the coast at Morfa Nefyn, Abersoch and Aberdaron enliven the area and its limited amenities considerably.



The angular skylines of steep sided rocky hills: Garn Fadrun © John Briggs



The windswept coastal fringe at Uwchmynydd: distinctive hedgerow patterns but very few trees. © John Briggs



Looking down Llŷn from Yr Eifl, showing the spine of angular hills and the lowlands. © John Briggs



The dramatic cliffs where the northern spine of uplands plunges into the sea. © John Briggs



Abersoch - rock headlands forming anchor points for smoothly curved shorelines and COVES. © John Briggs



Gryn Goch, Gryn Ddu and Moel-Pen-Ilechog from the slopes of Yr Eifl above Trefor village. © John Briggs

Geological Landscape influences

Llŷn forms a broad peninsula that extends a considerable distance into the Irish Sea. The alignment of the northern coastline follows a major geological fault system. The Precambrian rocks of Llŷn are overlain to the east by younger Cambrian and Ordovician sedimentary and volcanic strata, which in places have been intruded by igneous rocks that

form prominent steep, angular hills such as Carn Fadryn (371m) in the central zone, and a spine of hills along the north coast, the highest being Yr Eifl / The Rivals (564m).

Successive advances of glacier ice have left glacial striations and far-travelled boulders. Melt waters excavated impressive channels that are now either dry valleys or occupied only by small streams, such as Afon Soch and Afon Horon. The thickest deposits of drift occur in large embayments at Porth Neigwl, Porth Ceiriad and Aberdaron Bay. In northern Llŷn, mounds and ridges of sand and gravel banked against the seaward side of the hills are believed to have accumulated when the Irish Sea ice sheet became 'pinned' against the northern edge of the hills. Ice was still able to extend through a gap in the hills west of Garn Boduan to occupy the present wetland area of Cors Geirch. Melting ice left a series of ice-dammed lakes that became in-filled with sand and gravel terraces. Today, the various peat bogs, sand dunes, screes and alluvial fans of the post-glacial period across Llŷn are still visible.

The rugged tip of Llŷn and northern coastlines are characterized by short headlands separated by narrow embayments, the positions of which are controlled by variations in rock type and the presence of geological fault lines. The drift-filled embayments at Porth Neigwl, Porth Ceiriad and Aberdaron present narrow sandy beaches, flanked by long, erosion-resistant headlands backed by cliffs dominated by soft glacial deposits that contribute cobbles to the upper beach. The beaches face to the south or south-west, directly into the dominant south westerly Atlantic swell.

Landscape Habitats influences

Much of the area is enclosed pastoral farmland where hedgerows and hedge banks (including traditional 'cloddiau') provide both shelter for stock and ecological interest. This shelter is especially notable towards the end of the peninsula where there are prevailing south westerly winds and very few trees.

In contrast to this are a few sheltered small valleys where scrub and deciduous woodland occur, including those of the Afon Daron, Afon Horon, Afon Soch and Nant y Gledrydd. Woodland and scrub is also present in the shelter of some north east facing hillsides, such as on Mynydd Rhiw, and at Machroes and Llanbedrog. There are also various woodlands associated with country estates, such as at Nanhoron and Plas Boduan. Breaking these patterns entirely are a few isolated blocks of coniferous plantation, some of which even straddle exposed hillsides, notably at Garn Boduan.

Elsewhere there are a number of upland habitats associated with the hills. There is a distinct ridge of these running from the south to north coasts, characterised by acid grassland and dry heath habitats together with areas of bracken and coniferous plantation. Along the northern spine the upland areas are higher, more extensive and include Yr Eirl / The Rivals, Bwlch Mawr, Gyrn Ddu, Gyrn Goch and Moel Bronmiod, where heath habitats are more dominant. There are a number of other isolated hills with heath, including Mynydd Rhiw and Carn Fadryn. Exposed crags and screes on some of the steeper upland hillsides result in a notably limited vegetation cover.

Wet flushes add to the ecological interest of upland areas, whilst a small number of bog/mire sites are also present, most notably at Cors Llyferin (SSSI), Cors Geirch (SSSI, SAC, Ramsar), Aber Geirch (SSSI) and Cors Hirdre (SSSI, SAC). These sites are generally associated with poorly draining ground-water gley or peat soils and are of great ecological value, particularly in relation to rare plants and invertebrates.

Much of the Llŷn coastline is in the Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau SAC with SSSI covering almost the entire length of coastline. Bardsey Island (SSSI, SPA, SAC and NNR) and the hard cliffs that extend around the southern tip of the Llŷn (SSSI, SPA, SAC) are of particular significance for their breeding seabird colonies.

Historic Landscape influences

Llŷn's landscape exhibits a rich diversity of archaeological features ranging from Mesolithic settlements and hunting sites, Neolithic chambered tombs to Bronze Age farmsteads, funerary and ritual sites, and Iron Age hill forts. The area's proximity to Ireland may have played a formative role in the early settlement of Llŷn. There is little evidence for Roman settlement, but Medieval relics include ecclesiastical sites such as the 'clas' church at Clynnog Fawr, the chapel and well at Capel Anelog and the ruins of St Mary's Abbey on Bardsey Island, a site of Medieval pilgrimage that is steeped in myth and legend. Historic parks and gardens including Cefnamlwch and part of the landscape setting of Boduan are significant landscape elements.

Settlement pattern is represented primarily by compact nucleated coastal fishing villages such as Aberdaron, Abersoch and Morfa nefyn, which today are much sustained by tourism. Nefyn was founded as a Medieval borough in the 13th century. Local stone and slate are much in evidence, and walls are often rendered with whitewash. Trefor, the workers' village at the foot of The Rivals granite quarry, and Nant Gwrtheyrn nearby are the only industrial-era settlements here, although Nant Gwrtheyrn has found a new lease of life as the Welsh Language and Heritage Centre. Settlement is otherwise confined to isolated whitewashed cottages and clifftop villas, though modern buildings merge less well as they are often of standardised designs, estate and caravan site developments fitting poorly with the long-established historic landscape.

Cultural Landscape influences

Traditionally this has been, and remains, a last embattled bastion of Welsh identity and tradition, remote from centres of authority, though well situated on the Celtic seaway between Britain and Ireland, and as such known to classical antiquity. Bardsey, the monastic island near the tip of the peninsula, also touches a pre-Christian Celtic past in its evocation of the magical other-world island in the setting sun. The 20th century artist Brenda Chamberlain celebrated Bardsey in Tide Race. Influence from Ireland is suggested in Llŷn's prehistoric archaeology, though modern scholarship discounts the suggestion that the name Llŷn is cognate with Leinster. More recently, in the contest to establish a reliable route to Ireland at the beginning of the 19th century, the southerly route via Porth Dinllaen lost to Telford's northerly route across Anglesey to Holyhead.

Llŷn's long sense of separation even from the rest of Wales and its remoteness from centres of authority is reflected in the way in which Catholicism survived, and Puritanism grew, even in neighbouring gentry houses in the 17th century. More recently the work of the priest-poet R.S. Thomas, one time vicar of St Hywyn (Aberdaron) with St Mary (Bodferi), and rector of Rhiw with Llanfaelrhys, has celebrated the traditional Welsh-language culture of the area, and its strong identity. This is reflected also in the establishment of the Welsh Language Centre in Nant Gwrtheyrn. Tourism is nevertheless an inescapable part of the modern cultural landscape.