

BASIC FACTS ABOUT THE NATIONAL PARK

2012

National Park Administration

The Brecon Beacons National Park was established in 1957, under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949. It was the tenth area in Wales and England to be given such status. The two statutory purposes of the National Park Authorities, as defined in the 1995 Environment Act, are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park and to promote opportunities for the enjoyment and understanding of its special qualities. The Act also gives the National Park Authorities a duty to “seek to foster the economic and social well being” of their local communities “without incurring significant expenditure in doing so”.



BRECON BEACONS
NATIONAL PARK

**One of Fifteen National
Parks in the UK**

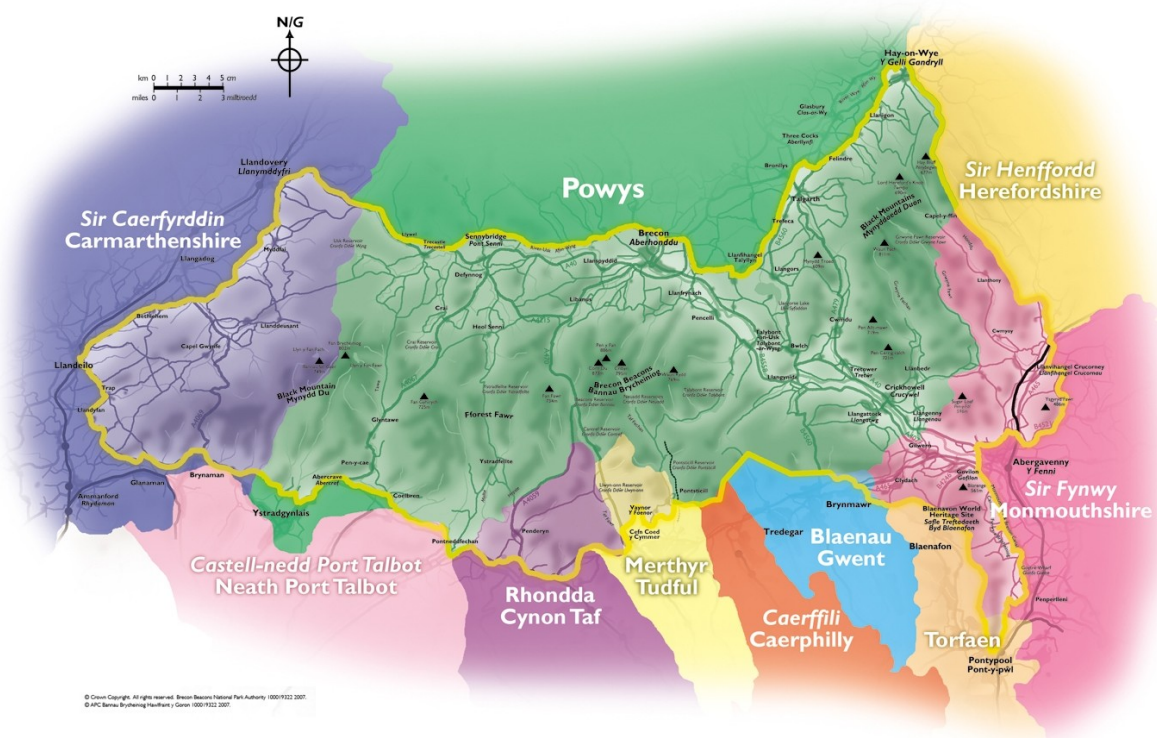


In April 1996, the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority came into being. It replaced the former Brecon Beacons National Park Committee which had managed the Park since 1974. The National Park Authority has 24 members: 16 appointed by the Unitary Authorities and 8 appointed by the National Assembly for Wales. This arrangement maintains the previous convention for managing the National Parks in Wales and England of using 2/3 local councillors and 1/3 Secretary of State appointees (in England the formula includes Parish councillors).

Nine Unitary Authorities have responsibilities for larger or smaller parts of the 520 square miles of the National Park. The table below shows that two of them together have only 4 hectares within the Park, whilst Powys Council takes in 66 per cent of the area. These differences have to be reflected in the financial contribution they make towards the Park's expenditure and the number of members they have on the Park Authority. Caerphilly and Neath/Port Talbot decided that their interests were so limited that they would not take up any direct involvement in the Authority. Membership and responsibility is therefore divided between the remaining seven Unitary Authorities, as shown on the following page.



Unitary Authority	% of Park area	% of National Park population
Powys	66.1	70
Carmarthenshire	16.7	5
Monmouthshire	11.1	21
Rhondda Cynon Taff	3.9	3
Merthyr Tydfil	1.8	1
Blaenau Gwent	0.2	0.1
Torfaen	0.1	0.1
Neath Port Talbot	negligible	0
Caerphilly	negligible	0



Members

The National Park Authority is composed of 24 members, 16 councillors appointed by the following local authorities who have land in the National Park. These authorities also make a financial contribution to the running of the Park.

What do the members do?

The members of the National Park Authority:

- Act as advocates of the National Park Authority and its purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area;
- Make decisions and oversee performance through participation in Authority meetings, committees, advisory groups and working groups, applying the principles of National Parks and sustainable development to all decision making;
- Represent the interests of all residents of the National Park;
- Represent the National Park Authority on outside bodies;
- Promote and support open and transparent National Park Authority services;
- Promote and support good governance of the National Park Authority and its affairs.

The Landscape

The Brecon Beacons National Park covers 520 square miles, a high proportion being upland; two-thirds of this area is comprised of Old Red Sandstone rocks. The sandstone forms four distinct blocks of hills which are cut through by major river valleys. In the east of the Park, towards its Herefordshire border, are the Black Mountains with a high point of 811m at Waun Fach. The Afon Honddu rises along the flanks of Darren Llwyd and then flows through the beautiful Vale of Ewyas to join the River Monnow near Pandy on the Park boundary. In the centre of the Park, dominating the skyline beyond the town of Brecon, are the Brecon Beacons proper. A distinctive north-facing escarpment rises to 886m at Pen y Fan, the highest point in southern Britain. Skirting the Beacons is the Usk Valley where the neatly hedged green fields contrast with the windswept moorland of the hills above.

To the west of the Beacons lies the third sandstone massif – Fforest Fawr. This area sweeps from the Afon Taf Fawr across to the Afon Tawe as a series of hills – Fan Fawr, Fan Dringarth, Fan Nedd, Fan Fraith and Fan Gyhirych. Between these hills rise the headwaters of the River Neath. Pretty streams and rivers dash southward, plunging over spectacular waterfalls as they go.

The most westerly block of sandstone is Y Mynydd Du, the Black Mountain. A fine escarpment rises from the floor of the



Tawe Valley reaching a height of 802m at Fan Brycheiniog. Two enchanting glacial lakes – Llyn y Fan Fach and Llyn y Fan Fawr – are evidence that ice shaped this dramatic landscape.

The Old Red Sandstone rock exposures vary in colour from red to a light grey-green. The predominant colour, however, is the dark burgundy red which not only colours the escarpment but also the very soils which overlie the rocks.

Along the southern edge of the National Park the geology alters, and outcrops of limestone and Millstone Grit occur. The limestone scenery is very different from that of the Old Red Sandstone. At the surface there are ridges and screes, and in some areas the land is pockmarked with hollows known as shakeholes or swallow holes. Beneath the surface there are magnificent caves and passages often adorned with stalagmites and stalactites. The Upper Swansea Valley and the Llangattock hillside are famous for their cave systems and cavers come from all over Britain to explore them. The Millstone Grit produces a tough, rather sombre landscape which is often waterlogged. It is in this gritstone scenery that the splendid waterfalls are found.





Fforest Fawr Geopark

In 2005 the Fforest Fawr Geopark was established, the first European Geopark in Wales. This area was recognised for its scientific

quality, stunning landscapes, educational value and historical and cultural interest. The geology tells the story of ancient climate change, mountain building and sea level changes. The hills and valleys are marked by glaciers from the Ice Ages. Local culture is largely based on farming, but many

communities grew up to satisfy the demand for minerals which supplied early industrial developments in this area. The main objective of the European Geopark Network is local economic development based on geo-tourism in local communities.

The rocks and landscapes of Fforest Fawr Geopark record significant events in the Earth's history and help us to understand the geological evolution of Wales, the British Isles and Europe. There is evidence of ancient seas which came and went, and of mountains that were raised up as continents collided.



Where is the Geopark?

It comprises of the western half of the National Park stretching from Llandovery in the north to the edge of Merthyr Tydfil in the south and from Llandeilo in the west to Brecon in the east. Well known features in these areas include the Brecon Beacons, Fforest Fawr and Black Mountain.

Fforest Fawr (the name translates as 'Great Forest' in English) is a swathe of upland country which was included within the Brecon Beacons National Park when it was designated in 1957. These uplands lie at the heart of the Geopark although it extends beyond them to include much surrounding countryside.

In fact Fforest Fawr Geopark's 300 square miles / 763 km² includes mountain and moorland, woods and meadows, towns and villages, lakes and rivers and a great deal more besides.



History

The landscape of the Brecon Beacons National Park is not a wilderness; it is best referred to as a “cultural” landscape because it is the product of human intervention stretching back over many thousands of years.

Around 5500BC in Middle Stone Age times, hunter-gatherers cut down scrub and burned the aftermath in an attempt to create small grassland areas to encourage the grazing animals which they hunted.

In the New Stone Age farming was introduced to the area and, by the close of the Bronze Age, significant forest clearances had occurred.

During the Iron Age, Celtic peoples settled in the area bringing increased sophistication to the farming processes. They erected hill-forts of which impressive banks and ditches remain today. The area was later conquered by the Romans and Normans: the former would seem to have had little lasting effect, but Norman land-use produced patterns which are still evident.

The Middle Ages saw the consolidation of the Norman manorial system, that was later affected by the cataclysmic episodes such as the Black Death and the Glyndwr Revolt. From the end of the fifteenth century onwards industries began to be set up in and around the Park area – industries such as ironmaking, charcoal burning, limestone extraction and coal mining. There is a rich industrial archaeology to be found to the south and east of the Park. Some hillsides, such as those above the Clydach Gorge and at Cribarth, have been considerably altered by industrial operations which continued into the twentieth century. More recently there have been many profound changes: urban expansion, road building, construction of reservoirs, erection of power lines, planting of large conifer plantations and changes to agricultural

practices are some examples.

Thus there is no true wilderness left in the Brecon Beacons nor has there been for many hundreds of years. What we do have though, are some “wild” areas where it is still possible to escape from the hustle and bustle of urban life.

Patterns of settlement

A glance at the map (found on following page) will show that when the Park boundary was drawn, the large industrial towns to the south were excluded as were the larger market towns of Abergavenny, Llandovery and Llandeilo. Surprisingly, perhaps, the settlements of Brecon, Crickhowell, Gilwern and Hay are within the Park boundary.

The settlements named above contained about 46% of these inhabitants:

Brecon	7901
Crickhowell	2065
Gilwern	2320
Hay-on-Wye	1469
Talgarth	1233

The 2001 Census revealed 32,654 people live in the National Park.

The western part of the Park supports many scattered farmsteads and just a handful of villages – Llanddeusant, Myddfai, Gwynfe, Bethlehem and Trap.

In the central and eastern part the population is mainly concentrated in the Usk Valley, the Hay/Talgarth area, the Hirwaun/Penderyn area and the Clydach Gorge.

These patterns arise from a mix of traditional farming areas, mineral extraction, and more recent commercial, administrative and commuting areas.





Land Ownership

The National Park Authority owns about 13.5% of the land within the National Park – this

amounts to approximately 19,000 hectares. The land owned by other public bodies includes 7.7% by the Forestry Commission, 4.2% by Welsh Water, 3.7% by the National Trust and 0.8% by the Countryside Council for Wales.

Some 70% of the land within the Park is privately owned.

Commons make up 35% of the National Park. It is a mistake to think that common land is either truly natural or an ownerless waste. This might have been true many centuries ago but rights of ownership and use gradually became established. Today, ownership alone carries few economic advantages (but important responsibilities) while specified uses are shared by those who have legally registered rights “in common”. Usually these rights are attached to farms which surround the common, and the most important are for grazing sheep, ponies or cattle.

The public are free to wander over commons and other land mapped as ‘access land’ (shaded yellow on Ordnance Survey Explorer maps). Occasionally the right of access may be restricted to allow

for land management or for safety reasons – information can be obtained from

www.ccw.gov.uk, VICs or Access information points.

There are about 1250 farms within the Park. Most farms are mixed livestock enterprises (sheep and cattle). Many farms are part-time, with the farmer employed off the farm or running a non-agricultural business on the farm. An increasing number of farms are entering the Tir Gofal agri-environment scheme.

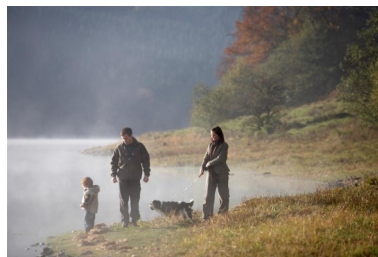


Visitors to the Park

People come here for the special landscape, for outdoor activities and for the great food and drink available locally. Of the more active pursuits walking is by far the most popular, but cycling, mountain biking, fishing and horse riding are all widely enjoyed. More specialist are caving, canoeing, sailing, hang-gliding and parascending.

The rich natural and built heritage of the Park is also a source of pleasure for the visitor who enjoys activities such as birdwatching, painting, photography, visiting archaeological and historical sites and shopping.

Tourism is important for the economy of the area. Hoteliers and caravan site operators, attractions managers and event organisers, shopkeepers and publicans all benefit from the tourist trade and the National Park Authority (NPA) is keen to work closely with them to ensure tourism does not destroy what visitors have come to see.



In 2007 the NPA adopted a Sustainable Tourism Strategy, the aim of which is to integrate tourism into local communities and the Park's sensitive environment. Emphasis is on environmentally-friendly activities like cycling and walking and on encouraging the tourism industry to be as 'green' as possible. In this the National Park Authority is working extremely closely with partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Educational tourism has been among the fastest growing tourism sectors. Many schools and colleges use the Park for their field studies (particularly for geography, environmental science and history). Outdoor pursuits such as walking, abseiling, canoeing and caving are also the reason for visits by many schools to the Brecon Beacons. In 1985, a brief survey revealed that 94 outdoor centres or operators used the Park; by 2009 a total of 135 centres or operators were using the Park.

Sometimes the activities of the various groups can come into conflict, for example:

- Anglers claiming disturbance by canoeists.
- Walkers claiming damage to paths by pony trekkers.

Conflicts also arise between recreational and other users, for example:

- Farmers claiming disturbance of stock by walkers.
- Naturalists claiming disturbance to wildlife by power boats.

The National Park Authority aims to monitor such conflicts and to implement initiatives for managing and minimising them. Recreational activities which involve the quiet enjoyment of the Park where there is no irreconcilable conflict with conservation, are encouraged.

Visitor Transport is another key issue for the area. It is said to be the biggest impact that the National Park has on the global environment and the NPA is working to

encourage more people to use the bus network or to walk and cycle. It runs its own network of buses on summer Sundays called Beacons Bus which goes high into the mountains as well as to key destinations within the area.

The National Park Authority itself is responsible for running three Visitor Centres. The National Park Visitor Centre, near Libanus, is well equipped with information and interpretation facilities, a lecture room, a small audio-visual theatre and a tea room. The views from the Centre are superb and not surprisingly, it is a very attractive venue for both holidaymakers and day trippers.

Craig-y-nos Country Park, in the Upper Tawe Valley, is a popular destination for local people out on short car journeys. The Park is comprised of the former grounds of a Victorian mansion and offers very pleasant riverside walks. The surrounding hills are well served with footpaths allowing the visitor to explore this beautiful area.

At YHA Danywenallt National Park Study Centre near Talybont-on-Usk, the National Park Authority runs residential education programmes for a wide range of education groups throughout the year. The centre is also used to host Interpretive Walking Courses, training courses and wildlife events.

The National Park Authority has a duty to foster socio-economic development within the constraints of its conservation purposes. One of the ways it does this is to work with partners both to develop those areas of tourism that fit within the National Park remit and to reduce the impact of existing tourism on the Park's environment. It is not a tourism promotion body as such – this is the role of the Visit Wales, the country's tourism agency, and the local Councils who promote economic development.

The National Park Authority offers a comprehensive service to visitors during their stay in the area. Two National Park Information Centres, Abergavenny and Llandovery, advise visitors on the local countryside, heritage and opportunities for recreation. Llandovery Information Centre also provides information on accommodation, attractions and touring. Visitors benefit from the complementary services provided by National Park Centres and local TICs.

For up-to-date visitor surveys and visitor number estimates, please visit the website at: www.businessinfobreconbeacons.com

Some functions of the National Park Authority

Forward Planning and Development Control: The National Park Authority is the planning authority for this area. Each year over 800 planning applications are determined by the National Park Authority. The vast majority are approved. The National Park Authority's local plan was adopted in May 1999. Work is ongoing to review and replace this document with a park-wide Unitary Development Plan to be adopted in 2006.

Conservation: The Authority has a duty to conserve the landscape. Specialist staff have responsibility for aspects such as farm conservation, ecology, buildings conservation and landscape architecture but Wardens (operating in three wardening areas) do a lot of ground work and local liaison. The National Park Authority's remit is a wide one, as the following examples of the tasks undertaken by Park staff indicate:

- Habitat Conservation
- Implementing the 'Local Biodiversity Action Plan'
- Removing litter and eyesores
- Advising over shop-front design
- Mapping archaeological features
- Helping with the development of school nature areas

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY: Much of the National Park Authority's work benefits the local community. The Authority employs a small Community Development team and as part of its commitment to sustainability supports a range of initiatives including appraisals, community events and working with groups to find ways and resources to address local needs. A National Assembly funded Sustainable Development Fund of £250,000 per annum is administered, with a Grants Advisory Panel of local representatives, to help develop ways of living more sustainably. The Authority works with a wide range of public, private and voluntary partners to develop projects to enhance the quality of life. The Wardens' work often enhances local amenities and an education service is offered to local schools.

ACCESS: The Park's public rights of way network was surveyed in 1990; 43% of rights of way links were found to be obstructed, with 10% being completely impassable. 56% were difficult to follow on the ground, with only 14% being signposted at the roadside and only 9% waymarked. In 2003 a 5% survey of public rights of way was undertaken which showed that 78% were clear and 73% easy to use. A survey undertaken in 2002 indicated that 56% were signed from a metalled road. A complete survey of the network is currently being carried out. There are over 2,800 rights of way within the National Park with a total length of 1983km.

We are continuing to work on the public rights of way network to improve the condition of routes. We have the delegated responsibility to maintain, repair and modify rights of way. The Authority, through the Environment Act 1995, acquired powers to divert, create, widen and close individual rights of way.

INFORMATION SERVICES: About 250,000 people use the National Park Authority's three Visitor Centres each year. The two information centres received a further 66,641 people in 2010/11, who were given help and advice to ensure an enjoyable stay in the National Park area. A range of leaflets, guides and maps are produced by the Information Section staff.

The number of school, youth and college groups which visit the Brecon Beacons each year is uncertain. A very rough calculation indicates that about half a million children and young people use the National Park for field studies, outdoor learning and outdoor pursuits and activities annually. Of these, around 30,000 actually visit one of the three National Park Visitor Centres.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE: Managing a National Park of the British model is no easy task. The National Park Management Plan 2010-2015 is the single most important document for the National Park. The Plan lays out 20-year strategies and 5-year actions by and for everyone delivering its purposes and duty, or concerned about the Park's future. The plan promotes coordinated implementation, monitoring and evaluation of activities collectively across a wide range of partners and stakeholders. In essence the plan creates a framework from which park management and guiding principles can be taken. Vision for the future of the National Park:

our vision

that the Park's landscape is managed sustainably* with widespread appreciation of its special qualities and where local communities benefit from its designation.

our aim

to achieve widespread understanding and support for the National Park as a protected landscape, which will be recognised as a valued local, national and international asset.

*Sustainably: Ensuring that all actions taken to meet our needs today do not compromise the needs of future generations.

PURPOSES AND DUTY

The statutory purposes and duty of National Parks as set out in the [1995 Environment Act](#)

Our Statutory Purposes

- to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park
- to promote opportunities for public enjoyment and understanding of the special qualities of the National Park

Our Statutory Duty

- to foster the economic and social well-being of communities living within the National Park

The Statutory Purposes and our Statutory duty form the basis of all the work we do. It is at the heart of our long term vision for the future and is the starting point for all the strategic documents which we produce.

**PARC CENEDLAETHOL
Bannau Brycheiniog**
Lle i enaid gael llonydd



**Brecon Beacons
NATIONAL PARK**
One of Britain's breathing spaces

5 Miles / Milltir
10 Kilometres / Cilomedr



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