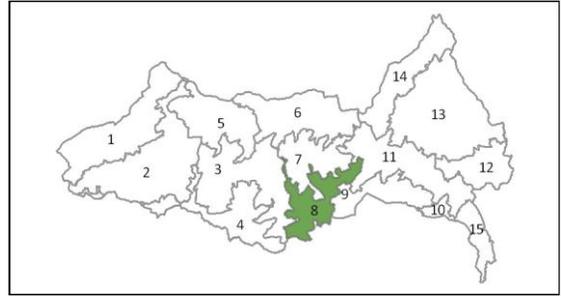


LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA 8: TALYBONT AND TAFF RESERVOIR VALEYS**Broad Landscape Type: UPLAND VALLEYS****Description****Location and Context**

This LCA is located in the south of the National Park, and abuts its southern boundary near Merthyr Tydfil. To the north is the Central Beacons, to the west Fforest Fawr and to the east Mynyddoedd Llangatwg and Llangynidr, and the Eastern Usk Valley.

**Summary Description**

This LCA is characterised by its reservoirs, surrounded by steep sided, dark green forested valleys. Between the reservoir valleys are more open ridges of upland moorland which have long views across the reservoirs and their surrounding forests. This LCA is easily accessed from Merthyr Tydfil and the A470, and is a popular recreation destination.



The Talybont Valley

Historical Development of the Landscape

The landscape was dramatically altered in the early to mid 20th century, when strings of reservoirs were created through the damming of steep valleys. There are three reservoirs in the Taf valley, four in the Taf Fechan valley, and one large one in the Talybont valley (Glyn Collwn). All are surrounded by extensive conifer plantations and have associated water treatment works and other structures. Pockets of fields, farms and woodland remain (for example around Vaynor) which give an indication of how the valleys would have looked prior to their flooding. The area has strong links with the towns to the south; providing natural resources such as limestone and water, and also acting as a transport corridor. A Roman road, turnpike road (now the A470), industrial tramways, and the Brecon and Merthyr Railway (now forming part of the Taff Trail) all run through this LCA.

Distinctive Characteristics

- Mostly underlain by Devonian age sandstones of the Brownstones Formation, with small areas of the upper Old Red Sandstone Grey Grits and Carboniferous Limestone in the south, and Twrch Sandstone on the southern margin.
- A series of steep V-shaped valleys separated by flatter uplands. The Taff valleys have a strong north-south orientation and drain southwards, whilst the Talybont valley lies broadly north-east to south-west and drains into the Usk.
- Chains of artificial reservoirs occur in valleys, linked by rivers. Mountain streams (and occasional waterfalls) flow down the steep valley sides, sculpting sandstone and limestone rocks.
- Coniferous forestry is dominant land use, plus reservoirs, pasture and open moorland.
- Surviving field boundaries usually stone walls, occasionally patched with post and wire. Some former field boundaries still visible within forestry plantations.
- Extensive coniferous forests, with some larch and patches of more mixed deciduous woodland (for example on the western side of the Llwyn-onn valley). Deciduous trees also associated with watercourses.
- Semi-Natural Habitats of Principal Importance to Wales including modified blanket bog, marshy grassland, broadleaved and coniferous woodland, flush/ spring and acid grassland.
- Many historic features lost under reservoirs and forests. Surviving features include farms, field boundaries and Vaynor church. Parts of the Brecon and Newport Railway survive, including Pont-sarn viaduct, the opening of the tunnel which connected the Talybont and Taff valleys, and some track (now the Brecon Mountain Railway) and station buildings.
- Very limited settlement within the LCA (Llwyn-onn, Pontsticill and occasional farms). Other built development includes housing for reservoir workers, large-scale water treatment works below dams, and former limestone quarries.
- Recreation provision e.g. car parks, picnic areas, trails, Garwant Forest Visitor Centre, watersports.
- Generally a simple landscape composition, with large blocks of forest in simple valley landform. Forests appear strongly textured (especially where they include deciduous trees) and contrast in colour with surrounding open moorland.

Landmap Components (See Appendix 3 for components of all LANDMAP Aspect Areas)

Key Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas	Vaynor Uplands (H); Penmoelallt (M); Carnafell Valley and Talybont Forest (H); Upper Taf Fechan Valley (H); Taf Fawr Valley (H); Beacons Reservoir (M); Upper Taff Fawr (M); Taff Fawr (H); Vaynor Farmlands (M); Taff Fechan (H); Ponsticill and Pentwyn Reservoirs (O); Ponsticill Reservoir (O); Brecon Beacons (O); Talybont Reservoir (O); Upper Neuadd Reservoir (H)
Key to Landmap evaluation criteria: (O) Outstanding: of international importance. (H) High: of regional or county importance. (M) Moderate: of local importance. (L) Low: of little/no importance	

Settlements

Settlements within the LCA limited to the village of Pontsticill, hamlets such as Llwyn-onn and scattered farms. These include some traditional stone-built buildings, but also more modern development, including housing for reservoir workers. There is some visual connection with the towns to the south, particularly area of elevated modern housing, including the northern edge of Merthyr Tydfil.

Key Views

Key views include the attractive compositions of water, trees and distant hills which can be seen from many lakeside viewpoints. Higher ridges have views across the reservoir valleys, into the surrounding LCAs, and also encompass land beyond the National Park boundary. There are views across this LCA from surrounding uplands including the Central Beacons, and from popular summit viewpoints such as Pen y Fan.

Evaluation**Special Qualities**

The natural beauty and recreational factors that make this landscape special are summarised in the table below, along with examples of their sensitivities to landscape changes:

Criteria	Special Qualities for this Landscape Character Area	Sensitivities
Scenic quality and Sense of place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waterbodies, forests and landform combine to create a distinctive character, high scenic quality and strong sense of place, which is heightened by views to the Central Brecon Beacons and other high land on the horizons. 	Changes in the composition of the landscape and views from the area.
Landscape quality and integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A well-managed landscape, with forests and other land generally in good condition. 	Neglect/ poor management of forests and farmland. Changes to grazing patterns of upland areas.
Perceptual qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extensive forests create a sense of tranquillity and relative remoteness, despite this LCA's proximity to urban areas. The enclosure experienced within the forests contrasts with the openness and long views experienced across lakes and from higher land. Parts of the LCA are within the BBNP core dark skies area, which enhances the sense of tranquillity. 	Loss of tranquillity as a result of visually intrusive/ audible developments beyond the National Park boundary.
Rarity or representativeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This LCA contains some of the largest forests and waterbodies in the National Park, giving it a unique character and recreational opportunities. 	
Natural heritage features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Particular geological interest, with the western part of the LCA in the Geopark. Also several geological SSSIs associated with the limestone (including Nant Glais Caves) and RIGS near Pontsticill. Accessible conservation sites include bird hides at Talybont Reservoir SSSI, and a Local Nature Reserve at Penmoelallt ancient woodland. This LCA also contains rare whitebeam trees and hawkweeds. 	Caves are sensitive to surface conditions (e.g. changes in vegetation and water storage capacity).
Cultural heritage features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A range of cultural heritage sites, including Scheduled Monuments dating from the Neolithic to Medieval periods, Vaynor church, and surviving industrial archaeology relating to the Brecon and Newport railway, including the Pont-sarn viaduct and tunnel openings. Extensive prehistoric sites survive on higher land. 	Archaeology vulnerable to natural processes, damage and erosion, including during forestry felling operations. Standing buildings (e.g. surviving railway buildings) vulnerable to neglect and vandalism.

<p>Opportunities for landscape enjoyment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wide range of outdoor recreation within a high quality landscape, including Nature Reserve and bird hides, Garwnant Forest Visitor Centre (with trails, low ropes course, children’s play area, café, visitors centre etc.), and water-based recreation including fishing and sailing. The landscape can also be experienced from the Brecon Mountain Railway from Pontsticill Station. 	<p>The forested nature of the landscape in this area gives it a relatively high carrying capacity for recreation, but it must be managed to ensure that the area’s special qualities are not affected.</p>
<p>Recreation provision and access</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exceptionally good access and infrastructure for recreation, including car parks, picnic sites, trails (including a wheelchair accessible trail at Taf Fechan forest), the Taff Trail cycle route, Beacons Way long distance route and numerous other paths. This LCA is a gateway into the National Park from the south, and is also a popular access route into the Central Brecon Beacons (LCA 7). 	<p>Potential impacts of recreation on reservoir water quality.</p>

Contribution to Ecosystem Services and Green Infrastructure (refer to sections 4.6 & 4.7 for terminology)

Extensive plantations aid in climate regulation and provide timber. The various reservoirs provide fresh water, support wildlife and regulate water flows, whilst small areas of farmland support food production. In common with the rest of the National Park, this LCA also contributes to cultural services such as spiritual enrichment, cultural heritage, recreation and tourism and aesthetic experiences.

Green Infrastructure features include the extensive woodland plantations and reservoirs which support leisure and recreational pursuits. This LCA includes a variety of visitor attractions such as the Brecon Mountain Railway, river corridors and mountain moorland.



Pontsticill Reservoir with the Brecon Beacons on the horizon



*Garwnant Visitor Centre, Llwyn-
onn Reservoir*



Water-eroded rocks in the Taf Fechan valley

Forces for Change in the Landscape

Local Forces for Change and Their Landscape Implications

(See also the general forces for change described in section 6.0)

Past and Present

- Past construction of reservoirs and plantation of straight-edged forests, significantly altering the previous character of the landscape.
- Construction and upgrading of main Brecon- Merthyr road (A470) through the area with associated heavy and fast-moving traffic.
- Past quarrying of limestone leaving scars in the landscape.
- 'Urban fringe' influences of adjacent urban areas and high visitor numbers (e.g. litter, fly-tipping, 'police operation' notices, evidence of car break-ins etc).
- Land uses just beyond the southern boundary associated with adjacent development, e.g. golf clubs, derelict quarry etc.
- Water quality issues in reservoirs.
- Ongoing management of forests, particularly where trees are reaching maturity.
- Impacts of *Phytophthora ramorum* pathogens, particularly on larch trees.
- Decline in traditional hillfarming, particularly in more marginal areas, and associated impacts on traditional common grazing of upland areas.
- Loss/ damage/ neglect of archaeological and historic sites and buildings and their settings (including during forestry felling operations).
- Changes in surface conditions and management affecting underlying cave systems e.g. through impacts on groundwater flow.

Future

- Long-term management of forests to improve their biodiversity and fit within the landscape, and to ensure minimal damage to archaeology.
- Development proposals beyond the National Park boundary to the south (including open cast coal extraction, windfarms (TAN 8 area F is close to the southern boundary) and waste schemes) potentially affecting views southwards, particularly from higher land.
- Designation of the Talybont Reservoir as a Local Nature Reserve.
- Continued decline in grazing of upland areas affecting upland habitats and the open appearance of the landscape in these areas.
- Continued loss of archaeological and built heritage features.
- Climate change potentially resulting in increased storm damage to forests, new pests and diseases and changes in tree species to those more tolerant of altered conditions.
- Climate change effects on water quality and supply.



Vaynor Quarry, skirted by the southern boundary of the National Park.



Phytophthora felling and information poster near Storey Arms Centre



The main A470 near Cantref Reservoir

Strategy

Overall Strategy

To sensitively manage forestry, water resources and recreation to ensure the long-term enhancement of the area's biodiversity and special qualities, and enhance views of the area from adjacent higher ground.

Forests and woodlands are well managed to increase biodiversity, improve their fit within the landscape, encourage recreation and protect archaeology, particularly once trees reach maturity. People are encouraged to visit and enjoy a wide range of appropriate recreation within the landscape, but it is managed to minimise impacts on sensitive habitats and water resources. Archaeological and built-heritage features are protected, and recorded where necessary. Upland commons are in good condition.

LCA-Specific Management Guidelines

Protect

- Protect (through appropriate management) **historic features** within the landscape, including industrial archaeology, and prehistoric sites on higher land.
- Protect the **upland skylines** and occasional **long views** which form the backdrop to the area.
- Protect vulnerable **geological sites**.

Manage

- Manage **coniferous forests** to maximise biodiversity, minimise damage to archaeology, and enhance views from surrounding uplands, particularly following felling.
- Manage **upland habitats**, (including through encouragement of appropriate levels of grazing) to retain and enhance biodiversity and environmental conditions in underlying cave systems.
- Manage **recreation**, encouraging visitors and local people to enjoy the landscape whilst minimising impacts on the area's biodiversity, heritage and special qualities.
- Manage **archaeological sites**, recording where necessary and respecting their settings.
- Manage pockets of remaining **farmland**, encouraging a viable farming community which farms in a traditional way to maintain the landscape and biodiversity of the area.
- Manage remnant **broadleaf woodlands** to encourage age and species diversity.

Plan

- Plan to **work closely with landowners** in the area (specifically Forestry Commission Wales and Welsh Water) with regard to forest and reservoir management.
- Plan for the **creation, extension and linking of semi-natural habitats**, e.g deciduous woodlands and grasslands.
- Plan **recreation** strategically across the National Park, reducing pressure on 'honeypot' sites and encouraging recreation in areas with relatively high capacity.
- Plan for **community education and involvement** in the management of the area, developing links with the communities beyond the National Park boundary.
- Plan to **reduce the visual impacts** of existing extraction/ development beyond the National Park boundary, and **resist applications** for future development which would **harm the special qualities** of the area.
- Plan to retain the area's **dark skies** and reduce incidence of light pollution.