



## Mynydd Iltyd Factsheet

Mynydd Iltyd Common is an area of common land which covers 256 hectares and includes a Site of Special Scientific Interest (Iltyd Pools S.S.S.I), Scheduled Ancient Monuments (S.A.M.) and a Brecknock Wildlife Trust Reserve.

The Common is located at 335m above sea level and plays an important role in the economies of the farms around the common. Generally this is through grazing sheep, although some ponies are grazed and bracken is cut for bedding in the autumn.

The Common is an important recreational facility, which is estimated to attract 25,000 visitors a year. The National Park Visitor Centre (The Mountain Centre) attracts between 140,000 and 170,000 visitors a year.

The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (NPA) owns Mynydd Iltyd Common and seeks to implement a management plan in line with its statutory purposes:

1. To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of National Parks.
2. To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of those areas by the public.

Also the National Park Authority has a duty to *"seek to foster the economic and social well being of local communities within the Park."*

### **TOURISM**

Tourism is increasingly important to the economy of the National Park generally. The NPA has approved a Sustainable Tourism Strategy that seeks to encourage appropriate use of the Park by tourists in order that they can support the local economy.



## **RECREATION**

### **The Common as a Recreational Resource**

The main recreational value of the site is the combination of easily accessible common land close to the more formal facilities of the National Park Visitor Centre, known more commonly as the Mountain Centre. Visitors to the area are able to enjoy the refreshments, shelter, car parking and information provided by the Mountain Centre as well as exploring the local, wilder countryside. It is the range of the experience available at a single destination that will be attractive to many people.

### **Visitor Numbers**

The annual number of visitors attracted to the Centre fluctuates between 140,000 and 170,000. Most people visiting the common also visited the Mountain Centre. The annual number of people visiting the common may be estimated as between 20,000 and 25,000.

## **ARCHAEOLOGY**

38 sites are recorded on the common and most periods from the Bronze Age (about 4000 years ago) appear to be represented. Some of the sites on the common are among the best examples of their type in the Park.

## **ECOLOGY**

Traeth Mawr and Traeth Bach are part of Illtyd Pools Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). They are low lying marshy areas under which are saucer-shaped depressions, scoured from the bedrock during the last Ice Age.

### **Vegetation**

The Countryside Council for Wales considers that the vegetation communities at Traeth Bach and Traeth Mawr contribute towards making Illtyd Pools SSSI an

outstanding site, one of the best in Wales for bog vegetation. However a survey carried out in 1989 found the Illtyd Pools SSSI to be disappointing. This was due to the site drying out during a long dry spell and heavy stock grazing on the accessible parts of the bog.

### **Nesting birds**

Traeth Mawr was once a key breeding site in Powys for lapwing, water rail, spotted crane and snipe. Unfortunately ground-nesting birds are now more or less extinct here, though why this should be is not entirely clear.

The spread of birch and willow across the raised bog will have provided more cover for foxes and perches for crows and magpies, each of which will eat eggs in unprotected nests. Also recent changes in grazing patterns - more sheep and fewer ponies - have allowed bracken and gorse to invade the dwarf shrub heath, possibly reducing the number of other suitable nesting sites. Disturbance by walkers and their dogs and changing conditions on surrounding farmland may have contributed too.

Traeth Mawr attracts flocks of wintering teal (50 or so) and more recently short-eared owl has been recorded.

So far, 357 different species of animal and plant have been recorded on Mynydd Illtyd since 1965. This includes 13 species of lichen, 55 different mosses, 129 plants (including 10 species of UK conservation concern and one nationally scarce species), 11 different dragonflies and damselflies (all of UK conservation concern), 18 different beetles, 34 different flies, 50 different spiders, 8 different mammals (2 UK priority species and 2 of UK conservation concern) and 14 different birds (including 6 UK priority species and 3 of UK conservation concern).

## **FARMING**

Slightly less than half of the 34 registered commoners still exercise their rights on a regular basis. This is mostly through grazing sheep, although some ponies are grazed and bracken is cut for bedding each autumn, mainly on the eastern half of the common. The common plays a significant role in the economies of the farms adjoining the common.

### **Bracken**

Bracken is cut by a small number of commoners for use as winter bedding for livestock. The usual practice is for the bracken to be cut in October when it has died back, it is then dried and baled. Commoners value the bracken growing on the common as it provides shade for both stock and grass during the summer.

### **Sheep**

The usual pattern of grazing sheep is for ewe lambs, yearlings and dry ewes to be turned out to the common in Mid-April, followed by ewes and lambs in mid-May. The sheep population stays at a high level throughout the Summer and Autumn. The common is virtually clear of sheep during November when the ewes are tugged (mated with a ram) but a few sheep may be turned back to the common for the rest of the winter.

Each flock of sheep, if undisturbed, will normally graze within a particular area traditional to that flock, this practice is known as hefting. The high level of visits made to the common is certainly disturbing this pattern and increasing the difficulties of grazing the common. This problem is made worse by the fact that the area around the Mountain Centre coincides with the narrowest section of the common. Sheep are driven through this narrow section towards Twyn-y-Gaer and tend to stay at the Western end rather than move back.

## **Diseases**

Hydatid disease is a major concern. This disease is common in Wales, and is caused by a tapeworm which lives in infected dogs, sheep, cattle and other animals. The tapeworm may infect dogs scavenging on infected sheep remains, the worm eggs then being spread in dog faeces. Humans and dogs can pick up the worm eggs from the infected area, and more importantly, humans may contract it directly from the dogs. The concentration of stock, dogs and visitors (including a significant proportion of children) provides the potential for this disease to increase. There is currently no specifically designated area for dogs to relieve themselves and no advice to dog owners about how their dog should be controlled in this respect.

## **Other problems**

Commoners cite a number of other problems associated with visitors, these are: feeding of sheep and ponies - which draws them to the road side; the presence of litter which can be a hazard to livestock; damage to ground and suppression of grass; worrying of stock by uncontrolled dogs.

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