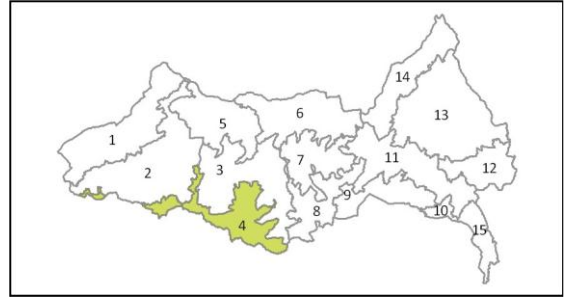


LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA 4: WATERFALL COUNTRY AND SOUTHERN VALLEYS**Broad Landscape Type: UPLAND VALLEYS****Description****Location and Context**

This LCA is located in the south of the National Park, adjacent to the National Park boundary. It includes the villages of Ystradfellte, Penderyn and Glyntawe, and comprises the enclosed limestone landscapes to the south of Y Mynydd Du and Fforest Fawr LCAs. It includes a small outlier of similar character to the west of Brynaman, and is partially intervisible with land beyond the southern National Park boundary.

**Summary Description**

The predominantly limestone geology of this LCA creates its characteristic rough texture and grey colour, appearing in the crags, walls and buildings of this enclosed and relatively settled pastoral landscape. Ancient woodlands surround the streams and spectacular waterfalls which are found in the south of the LCA, flowing in deep, fern-filled gorges. Between the valleys are ridges of higher land with a more open quality and long views. The dark green of the extensive blocks of conifers in the south of the area contrasts with the surrounding grasslands.



The Nedd Fechan river near Pont Melin-Fach has a popular riverside path and is designated SSSI and SAC

Historical Development of the Landscape

The relatively sheltered natural landform of this area has made it a focus for settlement, agriculture and transport for many centuries. Historic villages, farms, roads, bridges and fields are integral parts of this landscape. Evidence also remains in the landscape for Bronze Age settlement and ritual activity (cairns), Iron Age hillforts, Roman occupation (roads and camps) and later industrial activities including quarrying, lime burning, water-powered mills and a gunpowder factory. 20th century changes to the landscape included forest plantation and road improvements.

Distinctive Characteristics

- A complex underlying geology. Carboniferous limestone in the north with extensive cave systems. Elsewhere, predominantly sandstones and mudstones of the Marros Group and South Wales Lower Coal Measures.
- A dramatic landform of steep, enclosed valleys, separated by ridges of flatter, higher land.
- A series of fast-flowing, rocky streams and rivers running along the valley floors, often in shallow gorges. Numerous waterfalls – some spectacular- particularly at changes in geology. Many waterfalls are accessible, including the popular Sgwyd yr Eira (‘fall of snow’)
- Land use predominantly pastoral agriculture, but with extensive areas of forestry, particularly in the south of the area.
- Limestone walls and hedgebanks enclosing irregular fields in valleys, with some hedges (predominantly beech or hawthorn). Higher land less enclosed, with more use of post-and-wire fencing.
- A well-wooded landscape, with ancient broad-leaved woodland in valleys and along streams, with blocks of conifer plantation on higher land.
- Key Semi-Natural Habitats of Principal Importance to Wales including broadleaved woodland, wet woodland, a range of grasslands (calcareous, neutral and acid), fens, limestone pavement and wet heath.
- A range of historic features in the landscape giving the area a strong sense of time-depth and reflecting the LCA’s past use for settlement, agriculture, transport and industry.
- Settlements include villages of Ystradfellte and Penderyn, plus numerous scattered farms. Development concentrated in valley floors, particularly along the A4067 and A4059. Some intervisibility with settlements, roads and other development beyond the National Park boundary
- Limestone geology, field patterns and woodland creating a strongly textured landscape in the valleys, with grey and green the dominant colours. Higher areas are more open and simple in composition, with dark blocks of conifers contrasting in colour with the surrounding grassland.

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

Key Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas	Nedd Fechan and Mellte Valleys (O); Penderyn (M); Tawe Valley and Cwm Twrch (M); Upper Tawe Valley (H); Coed-y-Rhaiadr (M); Gwaun Hepste (M); Hepste Valley (H); Black Mountain Southern Slopes; Bryn Henllys Open Cast (L)
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

Settlement within this LCA is relatively limited, with small settlements including the clustered, valley floor villages of Ystradfellte and Penderyn, both with ancient church sites. Traditional buildings are usually stone built and painted white, with slate roofs. There are several settlements to the south (along the A4067 and A4109, outside the National Park boundary) which have a close visual relationship with this LCA. It provides their setting and backdrop when viewed from the south, and developments in these villages (which are generally linear in form, following the contours of the hillsides) are visible from the National Park.

Key Views

Long views across the area may be viewed from adjacent Upland LCAs, and from within the valleys themselves. Southern parts of the LCA (particularly higher land) have intervisibility with land beyond the National Park boundary, with long views southwards. Magnificent close-up views of waterfalls may be experienced from riverside paths.

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"> The combination of rivers, waterfalls, woodland and pastoral land against a rugged limestone backdrop gives the area high scenic quality and a strong sense of place. 	Changes in traditional land management, and introduction of incongruous features into the landscape
Landscape quality and integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuity of land use and restriction of development to the main roads along valley floors has generally enabled the LCA's landscape quality and integrity to be retained over the majority of the area. 	As above
Perceptual qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waterfalls paths stimulate many senses, with unique combinations of sight, feel, sound and smell. They also provide opportunities to experience closeness to nature; their enclosure and visual isolation enabling a sense of tranquillity. Parts of the LCA are within the core dark skies area. 	Loss of tranquillity due to visible or audible developments.
Rarity or representativeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contains some of the most dramatic and accessible waterfalls in the National Park. 	
Natural heritage features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High nature conservation importance, including numerous SSSIs covering woodlands, river systems, meadows, grasslands and other habitats. Three sites are also designated SAC for their variety of woodland and wetland habitats and the plants and butterflies they support. An important geological landscape, containing some of the largest cave systems in Britain. The area is within the Geopark and contains RIGS and geological SSSIs (exposures and limestone pavements). 	Changes in woodland and grassland management (e.g. changes in grazing practices). Cave systems are vulnerable to changes in surface conditions, e.g. denudation of peat bogs leading to increased groundwater flows.
Cultural heritage features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An historic landscape with a strong sense of time-depth. Scheduled Monuments and other archaeological sites and buildings reflect the survival of features in the landscape from many periods, including Roman roads, small traditional farms and industrial sites. The gardens of Craig-y-nos-Castle (home of opera singer Adeline Patti) are listed grade II* as an example of a romantic high Victorian garden in a spectacular setting. 	Decline in traditional hillfarming leading to loss of landscape features. Archaeological features vulnerable to natural processes (e.g. limestone solution; water erosion) as well as damage or neglect.

<p>Opportunities for landscape enjoyment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities include caving, canoeing cycling and walking, including the many accessible ‘Waterfall Country’ paths. These paths enable access to many waterfalls, including the iconic Sgwyd yr Eira and Upper Henrhyd waterfalls. 	
<p>Recreation provision and access</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A variety of recreation opportunities, with visitor infrastructure concentrated along main roads. Visitor attractions include Dan-yr-Ogof showcaves, Craig-y-nos Country Park, Porth-y-ogof cave entrance and Penderyn distillery. Accessible from main roads and from settlements outside the National Park to the south. 	

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

Principal ecosystem services include extensive pasture (food provision), woodfuel and timber and water resources. 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 accessible woodland at Coed y Rhaiadr. Other features of note are the tributaries of the Tawe, Neath and Amman, and their associated landscapes. There are a number of recreational, leisure and cultural heritage assets such as Craig-y-nos Country Park and the access to Dan-yr-ogof caves.



Ystradfellte village in its landscape setting



*Upper Henrhyd waterfall.
(Photo by Robin Lines)*



Bluebell woods in the Nant Cyw 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 mining of silica and gunpowder works in the Nedd and Mellte valleys.
- Past planting of extensive forestry plantations, particularly in the south of the area changing the composition of the landscape.
- Management of forests, especially as trees reach maturity.
- Decline in traditional hillfarming (particularly in more marginal areas) resulting in a loss of traditional practices such as common grazing, and landscape features such as dry stone walls. Economic pressures for farms to expand/ amalgamate, and to construct larger agricultural buildings.
- Loss/ alteration to vernacular domestic and agricultural buildings.
- Ongoing quarrying at Penderyn, adjacent to the LCA.
- Extensive existing opencast workings and a wind farm just beyond the southern boundary of the National Park are prominent in views, especially from higher land.
- Impact of light pollution on the area's dark skies.
- Recreation pressure (car parking, footpath erosion, litter, wild camping etc.) at popular sites, particularly along main roads.
- Localised 'urban fringe' issues such as fly tipping.

Future

- Continued decline in traditional hillfarming affecting the landscape and biodiversity of the area.
- Uncertainty over future agricultural grants potentially affecting stocking numbers and the maintenance of historic features such as walls and hedgebanks.
- Management of forests, particularly once trees have been felled.
- Tree loss due to disease e.g. *Phytophthora ramorum*.
- Continued implementation of the *Waterfall Country Management Plan*.
- Potentially significant impacts from future wind farm developments in close proximity to this area (TAN 8 areas E and F are close to the southern boundary of the National Park).
- Applications for further opencasting, quarrying, waste schemes and electricity schemes just beyond the southern boundary which would affect views from this area.



Forestry plantations and pylons in the south of the LCA, near the National Park boundary.



Afon Hepste quarry near Penderyn



Windfarm beyond the National Park boundary to the south, viewed from within the National Park.

Strategy

Overall Strategy

To maintain and enhance the special qualities of the landscape, in particular its historic features and magnificent waterfalls, resisting development which would impact on views from the area. Agriculture is supported, and traditional practices such as common grazing encouraged. Woodlands, rivers and other semi-natural habitats are well managed, as are historic features and their settings. The landscape is accessible to visitors and local people, with opportunities for appropriate recreation. Geological features, including caves, are in good condition. The special qualities of the area are not compromised by inappropriate development within or outside the National Park.

LCA-Specific Management Guidelines

Protect

- Protect (through appropriate management) **historic features** within the landscape, including those associated with **farming and settlement**.
- Protect the **built heritage** of the area, particularly **vernacular buildings**.
- Protect the **upland skylines** and occasional **long views** which form the backdrop to the area.
- Protect vulnerable **geological sites** such as limestone pavements.

Manage

- Manage **semi-natural habitats** such as grasslands and moorlands through appropriate management and grazing.
- Manage **farmlands**, encouraging a viable farming community which farms in a traditional way to maintain the landscape and biodiversity of the area.
- Manage broadleaf **woodlands** using traditional techniques (e.g. coppicing) to encourage age and species diversity.
- Manage **coniferous forests** to maximise biodiversity and minimise visual impacts and damage to archaeology, particularly following felling.
- Manage (and record where necessary) **archaeological sites**, particularly where they are at risk (e.g. 4x4 damage to Sarn Helen Roman Road)
- Manage **recreation**, encouraging visitors and local people whilst minimising impacts on the area's biodiversity, heritage and special qualities.
- Manage **cave systems** (and related surface vegetation and activities) to protect subterranean habitats and features.

Plan

- Plan for **community education and involvement** in the management of the area, developing links with the communities beyond the National Park boundary.
- Plan for the **creation, extension and linking of semi-natural habitats**, e.g woodland and grasslands.
- Plan to **reduce the visual impacts** of existing open-cast sites, windfarms, quarries and other 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.
- Plan **recreation** strategically across the National Park, reducing pressure on 'honeypot' sites.