

Sychryd Gorge

Protected Wildlife Habitats

The woodlands and geology here are of great significance nationally and internationally. They are protected by being designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) under UK law whilst the woodlands have also been designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under European law.

The land in the SSSI and SAC is owned by the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA), Forestry Commission Wales (FCW) and several private land owners. BBNPA and FCW are keen that people visit, enjoy and understand this special place but they also have a legal responsibility to conserve it and ensure that it continues to be available for future generations to enjoy.

Activity groups entering the area are also bound by the conservation legislation and this code will help you comply with that law.

Access

On the map overleaf there is no public access to the land under private ownership except on the path marked on the Afon Melte northern section. Other parts of the area have been dedicated as Open Access land for the purpose of public access on foot (not including commercial activities), but it should be noted that if SSSIs become degraded as a result of Open Access activities, closures can be introduced to prevent further damage and to allow sites to recover.

Code of Conduct

The South Wales Outdoor Activity Providers Group, BBNPA, FCW and the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) are working together to minimise the impact of gorge walking whilst still allowing it to continue. It has been agreed that gorge walking should be focussed in the Craig y Ddinas/Afon Sychryd area and the Code of Conduct shown overleaf aims to minimise the impact of the activity and allow damaged areas to recover. Monitoring will be put in place to measure the effectiveness of this code.



Rhytidiadelphus subpinnatus
(Scarce Turf-moss)
Waterfall Country is the British stronghold for this nationally rare species. It tends to grow in vulnerable places such as just above the floodzone by rivers and by footpaths.



Tunbridge filmy-fern
(Hymenophyllum tunbrigense)
A scarce, fragile species found only in the most humid sites. It is particularly vulnerable to damage through abrasion.



Dermatocarpon miniatum
is a scarce species of lichen that grows on limestone rocks and is easily dislodged.

Gorge Walking in Waterfall Country



Waterfall Country has become an increasingly popular place to visit over recent years. This has resulted in much wear and tear to the natural fabric of the woodlands, waterfalls and gorges. Gorge walking is mostly undertaken away from the footpaths and therefore adds significant pressure on the wildlife of the area. A programme of footpath repairs is helping with erosion but the Code of Conduct overleaf addresses the impacts of gorge walking in the Craig y Ddinas/Afon Sychryd area.

This poster will help leaders:

Plan activities by showing the parts of the area in which gorge walking is allowed.

Brief groups about the environmental sensitivities.

Minimise the impact on wildlife, habitats and geology, and to allow damaged areas to be restored.

Gorge Walking & Wildlife

The rare plants that grow on river banks, rocky outcrops, boulders, trees and fallen logs throughout the gorge and river channel, cannot cope with being regularly trampled or dislodged by passing feet, hands and trailing ropes. So-called 'Dry Gorge Walking' can be particularly damaging, as walkers go from rock to rock.

In the woodlands, pressure from gorge walking groups (as well as the general public) can damage vegetation and prevent it recovering, eventually resulting in soil erosion. If bare rock is exposed, then the woodland may lose its ability to regenerate. Therefore group management in the woodlands, particularly when accessing the gorge, needs to be carefully planned and executed. If managed responsibly however, further damage can be avoided and habitat that has already been affected can be restored to its former glory. The map overleaf gives details of the access/egress routes that have been agreed - please help protect the area by avoiding other paths.



Lepidozia cupressina
(Rock fingerwort)
This uncommon species is at the southern edge of its British range in the Waterfalls area.



Nowellia curvifolia
(Wood-rust)
Large logs that fall on the woodland floor are very important for a range of bryophytes, invertebrates and fungi. This log is a red colour due to the abundance of the tiny liverwort.



Lepidozia cupressina
(Rock fingerwort)
This uncommon species is at the southern edge of its British range in the Waterfalls area.

Wildlife & Geology

Waterfall Country lies within the Brecon Beacons National Park where the Nedd Fechan, Nedd, Sychryd, Mellte and Hepste rivers drain the upland areas of Fforest Fawr and Manor Mawr. The effects of geological activity and erosion have created steep-sided river gorges and a series of wonderful waterfalls. These processes are still active, continuing to slowly change the position of rocks and cliff faces and the river valleys.

Oak, ash, hazel and alder woodland has developed along these gorges. Due to the difficult nature of the terrain, this has remained largely untouched and now supports some of the country's best ancient and unmanaged woodland.

Uncommon plants occur throughout the site, often in situations that are vulnerable to trampling such as on riverbanks, rocks and in seepages. Several geological features of national and international importance are also present and all these can be damaged by recreational pressure.

Mosses, Liverworts, Ferns and Lichens

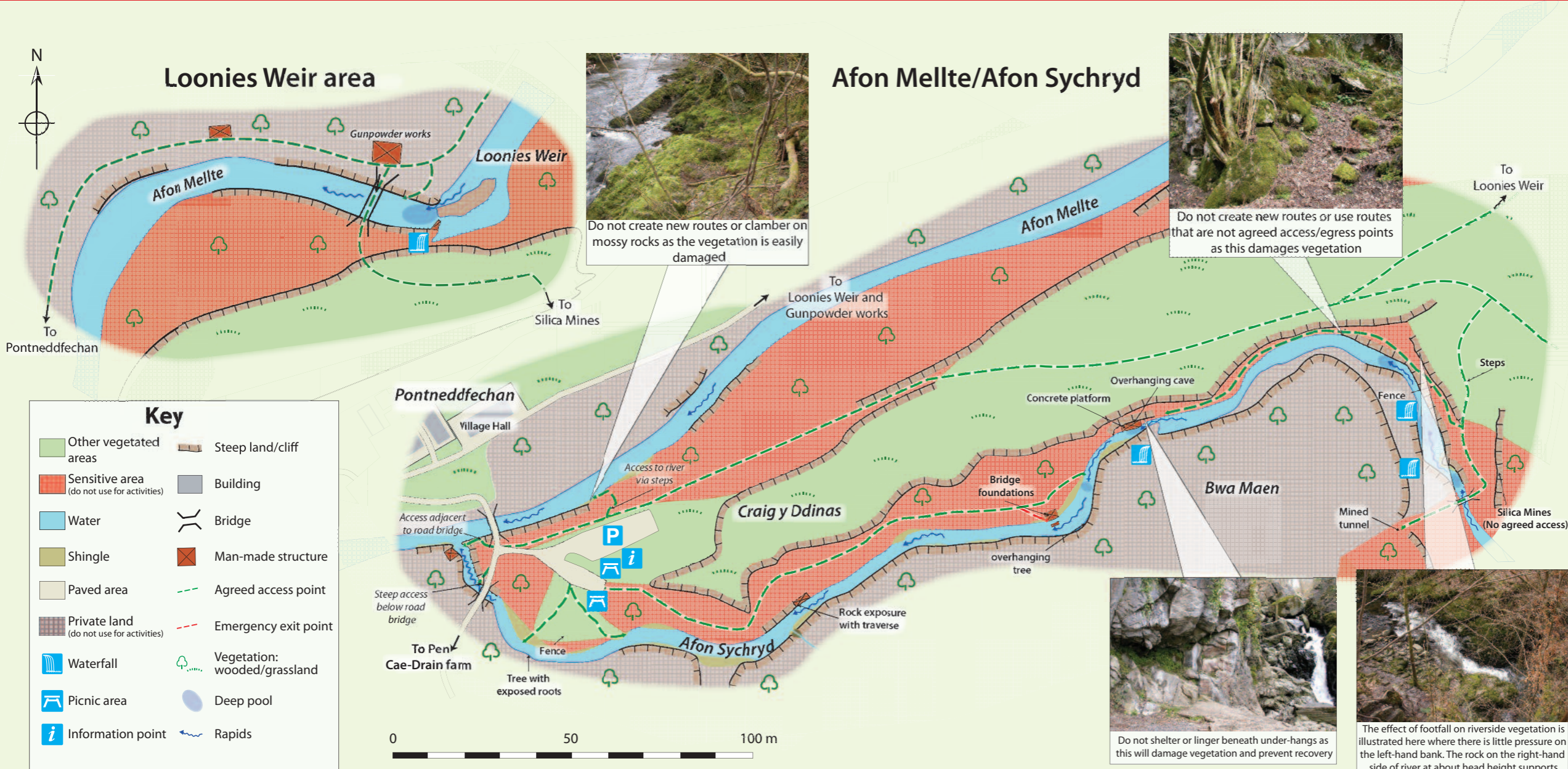
Steep gorges, a long history of tree cover and geographic location combine to form a sheltered, humid environment that is ideal for some of our simplest and most ancient plants. Different substrates and aspects allow a wide range of species to find a home, whatever their individual requirements.

Some of the species found here are restricted to just one or two rock exposures, a rotting log, an oak trunk or are found over just a small area of woodland floor. Others grow on rocks and boulders both within and on the edges of the water courses. A number only exist at a handful of sites in Wales and the UK, or are right at the edge of their geographical range.

The life history of many of these plants is not well understood - many appear to grow slowly or have a poor ability to reproduce. They therefore can be slow to recover from damage and can be vulnerable to local extinction.

Access Map and Code of Conduct – Craig y Ddinas/Afon Sychryd Gorge

The Afon Sychryd gorge is part of the Coedydd Nedd a Mellte Special Area of Conservation a legally protected site under European law because of its high nature conservation value



Gorge Walking Code of Conduct

Following this code will minimise environmental disturbance within this protected site.

Brief your groups

When participants understand the fragile nature and protected status of the gorge, damage can be avoided as individuals assume a personal responsibility for protecting the area. Be sure to brief every group, including any parents, teachers or observers not actively participating. The Countryside Council for Wales has produced a short DVD on gorge walking; if possible offer your group the chance to see it before visiting the area.

Keep to footpaths and the agreed access points and routes as shown on the map

The agreed access routes and access points can accommodate groups of different abilities, and also take account of different water levels - high and low. Ensure you know which access point to use and avoid using any that are not shown on the map. Do not create new routes and access points. Groups should follow unsurfaced paths in single file to avoid widening pathways.

Stay in the watercourse

By keeping in the water flow you will ensure that you and your group are doing least damage. However, avoid moss/vegetation-covered rocks, boulders and tree bases within and by rivers, or any vegetation away from agreed routes and access points.

Avoid the marked sensitive areas (red hashing) for activities and stops

The entire gorge environment is very sensitive to disturbance and continued use of some areas prevents recovery. This is why most of the gorge is marked on the map as sensitive. Avoid conducting activities, group briefings and breaks in these sensitive areas. Break stops and group briefings can be particularly damaging as it concentrates damage from feet into one area. Therefore please conduct briefings in the car park.

This map is to be used to:

- minimise environmental disturbance within the Craig y Ddinas/Afon Sychryd by following the agreed Code of Conduct and keeping to agreed access routes/points.

This map is for the use of:

- Activity providers who have signed up to the Concordat between the South Wales Outdoor Activity Providers Group and Forestry Commission Wales.

The Concordat and Code of Conduct is required:

- to ensure that providers and landowners comply with environmental legislation
- for providers to gain permission to enter FCW land for gorge walking

This Concordat governs access for agreed outdoor activities in Waterfall Country. Any provider not signed up to the Concordat does not have FCW permission to access their land. For details on how to sign up see the BBNPA website www.breconbeacons.org/environment/waterfall-country or enter Gorge Walking into the Search box.