

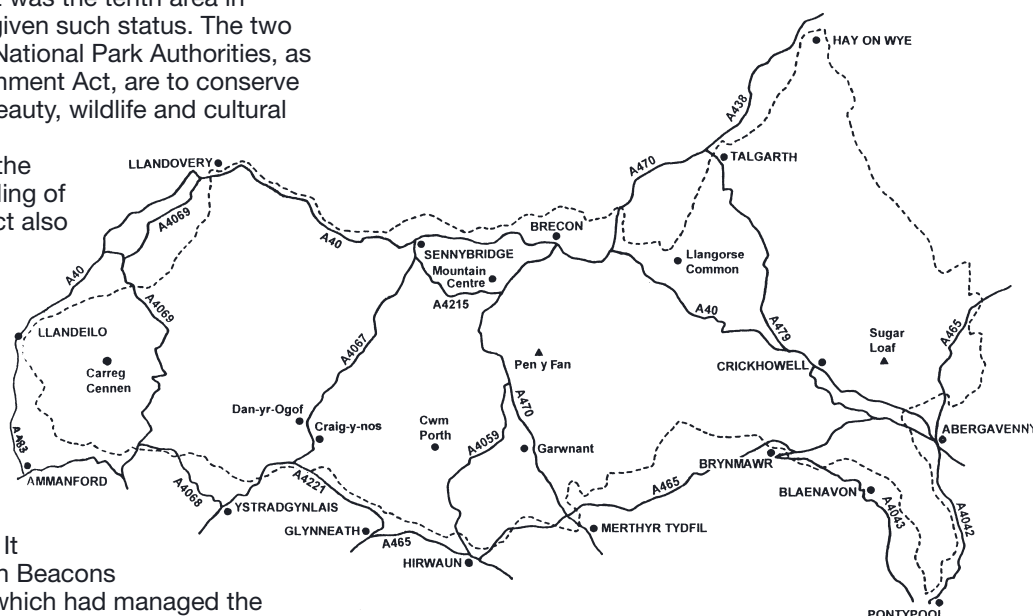
Basic facts about the National Park

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".

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 $\frac{2}{3}$ local councillors and $\frac{1}{3}$ 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



Staff work within four main sectional groups which collectively manage and administer the Park:

FUNCTIONS OF NATIONAL PARK STAFF SECTIONS



The work of the National Park Authority is financed mainly by a grant from the National Assembly for Wales on behalf of central government (i.e. by the taxpayer), with a contribution from the constituent Unitary Authorities (i.e. from the council taxpayer). The Authority's budget is therefore subject to approval by the First Minister for Wales each year, after consultation with the Countryside Council for Wales, and within overall guidelines from the Treasury.

The National Assembly for Wales provides approximately 75% of the Authority's approved net annual revenue and capital expenditure; the Unitary Authorities are levied for the remaining 25%. The National Assembly for Wales also funds the Sustainable Development Fund, which is administered by the Authority and provides £250,000 a year to help fund sustainable development projects in the Park.

The Park Authority obtains some additional resources from elsewhere, however. For example, special projects may attract money from the European Regional Development Fund, Countryside Council for Wales, Forestry Authority, Wales Tourist Board, Welsh Development Agency and Heritage Lottery Fund. Services and facilities provided for the public also produce income: as planning fees, for publications and refreshments at visitor centres, or for educational visits. These sources are important in reducing the net cost of the Authority's work.

Expenditure in the main categories of work undertaken varies somewhat from year-to-year according to the costs of the various projects; in 2004/2005 the breakdown was as follows:

2004/2005 EXPENDITURE

REVENUE EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2005:

Expenditure	£
Countryside	3,077,829
Conservation & Community	2,048,384
Corporate & Democratic Management	648,536
Strategy & Policy	189,759
Total	5,964,508

Income	£
Countryside	876,511
Conservation & Community	625,060
Corporate & Democratic Management	1,751
Strategy & Policy	0
Total	1,503,322
Net Spend	4,461,186

CAPITAL EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2005:

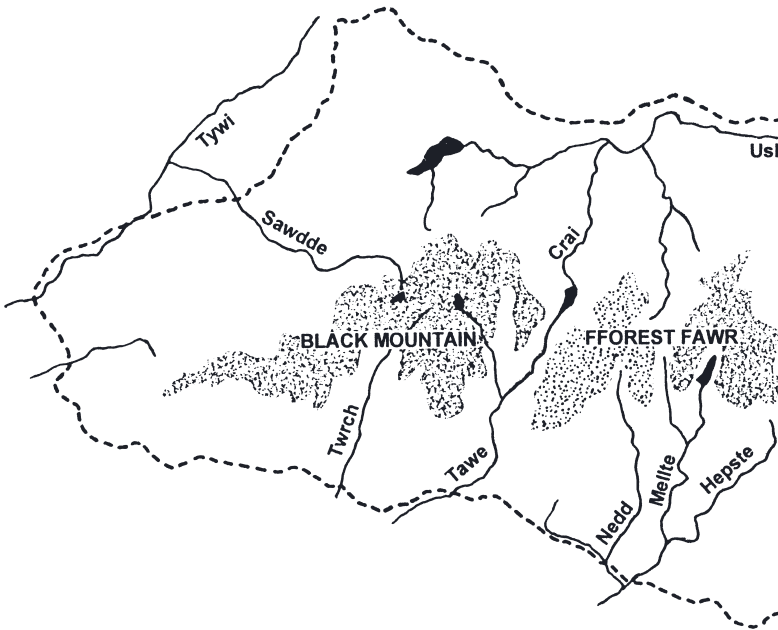
	£
Conservation & Community	3,720
Countryside	41,753
Corporate	0
Total	45,473

Funded by National Assembly for Wales grant (£44,673)
Capital receipts (£800)
The full statement of accounts for 2004/05 is available on the Authority's website (www.breconbeacons.org)

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. Afon Honddu rises along the flanks of Darren Llwyd and then flows through the beautiful Vale of Ewyras 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 – Forest Fawr. This area sweeps from Afon Taf Fawr across to 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.

In 2005 the Great Forest Geopark was established, the first European Geopark in Wales. This area covers the western Brecon Beacons National Park, including the Brecon Beacons, Fforest Fawr and Black Mountain, and was recognised for its scientific quality, stunning landscapes, educational value and historical or cultural interest. The geology tells the story of ancient climate changes, 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. For more information, see the accompanying leaflet or go to the Park website - www.breconbeacons.org

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 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, but there were 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 Cribarth Hill, 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 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.

From the 1991 Census we estimated that approximately 32,000 people actually live in the National Park. 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 Trapp.

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.

Employment

An extrapolation from the 2001 Census figures has revealed the following employment patterns:

All people aged 16-74 in employment - 14,626
working in:

Agriculture; hunting and forestry	7.2%
Fishing	0.09%
Mining and quarrying	0.36%
Manufacturing	10.84%
Electricity; gas and water supply	0.80%
Construction	7.12%
Wholesale & retail trade; repair of motor vehicles	14.43%
Hotels and Catering	6.50%
Transport; storage & communication	3.72%
Financial intermediation	1.65%
Real estate; renting & business activities	8.85%
Public administration and defence	8.81%
Education	9.37%
Health and social work	14.95%
Other	5.32%

Land used within the Park calculated from air photos of 1985 is as follows:

Pasture/Cultivated Land	39.7%
Common Grazings/Mountain Land	38.5%
Bracken	5.5%
Woods and Plantations	13.8%
Reservoirs and Lakes	0.6%
Buildings and Roads	1.3%
Mineral Workings and Dereliction	0.4%
Other/Unclassified	0.2%

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 access maybe restricted to allow for land management or for safety reasons – information 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

In 1994*, a firm of consultants was engaged to conduct an “All Parks Visitor Survey”. According to the findings of this survey, the estimated total number of visitor days to the Brecon Beacons National Park is 3.6 million. 53% of this total is made up of day visitors, 17% of holidaymakers actually staying in the Park and the remaining 30% of holidaymakers staying outside the Park. 23% of the holidaymakers were from the south east of England, 13% from overseas and the rest were from other areas of Britain. The vast majority of visitors (93%) arrived by private vehicle, with the A470 and A40 being the most common access routes. 61% of visitors cited ‘scenery and landscape’ as one reason for visiting the Park, and 30% said it was the main reason.

The single most popular activity for visitors is sightseeing by car. Of the more active pursuits walking is the most popular, but cycling, caving, watersports, trekking and fishing are also widely enjoyed. Over the past decade new activities have made an appearance, such as hang-gliding, parascending and mountain biking.

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.

The most popular sites in the National Park are visited by about the following numbers of people annually:

National Park Mountain Centre	169,980
Pen y Fan (National Trust)	120,000
Dan-yr-ogof Showcaves	90,000
Craig-y-nos Country Park	73,098
Carreg Cennen site and environs	100,000
Llangorse Common	75,000
Cwm Porth	30,944
Garwnant Visitor Centre	60,000
The Sugar Loaf mountain	28,000
Brecknock Museum & Art Gallery	21,000

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.

The National Park Authority has adopted a Sustainable Tourism Strategy, the aim of which is to integrate tourism into local communities and the Park’s



One of the waterfalls in the Ystradfellte area

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 1990 a similar survey showed that 111 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.

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 Wales Tourist Board and the Councils promoting economic development.

The National Park Authority offers a comprehensive service to visitors during their stay in the area. Three National Park Information Centres, in Abergavenny, Brecon 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.

*1994 is the most up-to-date survey figures.

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 around 700 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 with a target adoption date of sometime in 2005.

CONSERVATION: The Authority has a duty to conserve the landscape. Specialist staff have responsibility for aspects such as farm conservation, ecology, archaeology, woodlands, 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 protection
- Planting broadleaf woodland
- Providing conservation grants to farmers
- 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. There are 1,800 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. We have, 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 three information centres received a further 97,000 people in 2003, 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.

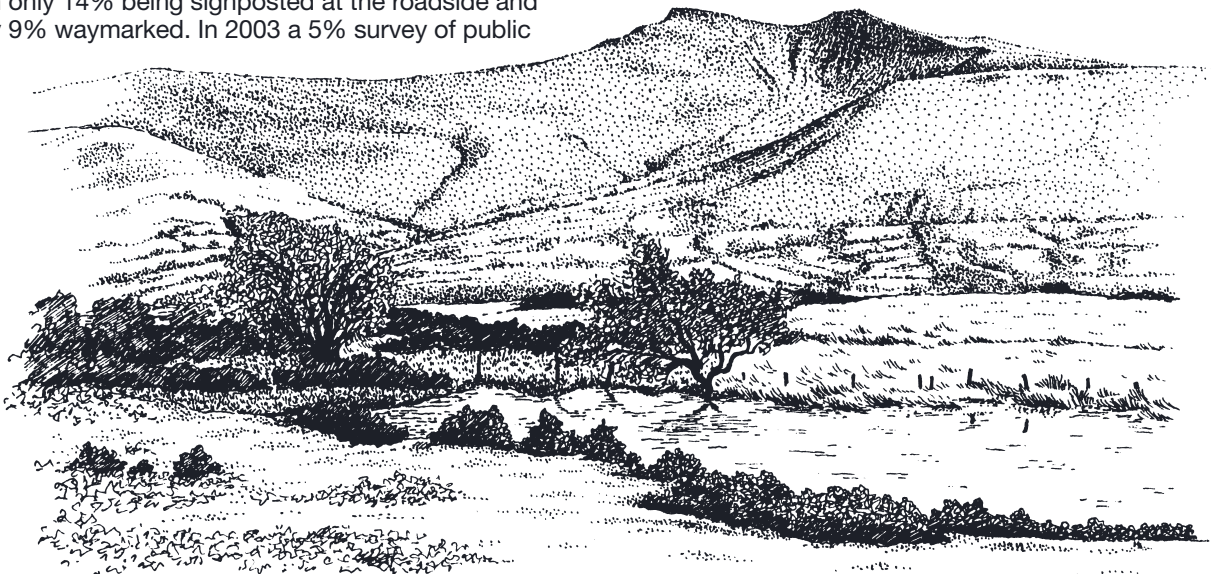
Ten Village Information Agencies were established in 1999, at locations spread throughout the National Park. This will provide a wider network of information provision, and help support village shops and Post Offices. Each Agency has a bilingual panel with information on the immediate area, and reference files containing National Park and tourist information.

The number of school, youth and college groups which visit the Brecon Beacons each year is uncertain. A very rough calculation suggests that about half a million children and young people use the National Park for field studies and outdoor pursuits 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 manner in which we should approach this management task is succinctly described in the Brecon Beacons National Park Management Plan 2000-2005 which expresses the vision for the future of the National Park as:

A partnership of all those who live and work in, enjoy or care for the Brecon Beacons National Park to conserve its beauty, character and tranquillity, its natural and cultural heritage and its way of life, both for their own sakes and in order that the Park may continue to be a source of inspiration and enjoyment for all.

For details of other education publications, contact Education Section, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, Plas y Ffynnon, Cambrian Way, Brecon, Powys LD3 7HP Telephone: 01874 620463 Email: enquiries@breconbeacons.org



The Beacons from Mynydd Illtud