

# Hafod Lwyfog Farm

## An educational resource



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## Introduction

Hafod Lwyfog farm lies on the South East slopes of the upper part of Nant Gwynant valley to the south of Eryri (Snowdon). The farm is 218 ha and includes flat land adjacent to the lake Llyn Gwynant at the bottom of the farm, ranging up to mountain land at the top which extends almost to the top of Cerrig Cochion.

The name: Hafod Lwyfog refers to a summer farmhouse by the place abounding in elms. (Etymology: **Haf** = summer, **Hafod** = summer farmhouse; **llwyf** = elms + **-og** suffix for forming adjectives)

The farm was bought by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis in 1936 to preserve the farmhouse and to protect the farm from lakeside development. 103ha of land above the top mountain wall was donated to the National Trust in 1938, as part of Sir Clough's on-going campaign for National Parks in Britain. The entire farm now lies within the Snowdonia National Park.

The present owners are descendents of Sir Clough. His conservationist principles and belief that people benefit from experiencing the countryside, are important factors in our farm management.

Flat land at the bottom of the farm adjacent to the lake Llyn Gwynant is used as a seasonal campsite. The aim is to provide access to a beautiful part of Wales with minimal development and maximum educational benefit. We have recycling programs and environmentally friendly planting.

Other farmland is used for grazing sheep. This includes heathland, grassland and broadleaved woodland. Large areas of new woodland have recently been planted under the T'ir Gofal management scheme, and the invasive Rhododendron is being controlled. The numbers of sheep grazing the farm are carefully managed and limited to preserve the special nature of grassland habitats. Sheep numbers have been substantially reduced over the last 10 years as woodland is allowed to regenerate and new plantings completed.

## A Site of Special Scientific interest

The Nant Gwynant valley, including Hafod Lwyfog farm, has recently been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The area has geological interest as part of a glacial valley, and biological interest that comes from the high rainfall of the area, as well as from acidic soils.

### Geology



*The glacial valley - view up the valley towards pen-y-pass*

The Snowdonia area was one of the first in Britain to be investigated as the Glacial Theory was developed, with studies published in the 1840's. The Llanberis Pass was identified as a major glacial trough cut through the Snowdonia Massif. The Gwynant Valley, including Hafod Lwyfog farm, is a spectacular glacial valley. It forms a U-shaped trough into which ice from the Snowdonia Horseshoe flowed. This valley is separated from Cwm Dyli by an impressive rock lip, leaving what is perhaps best described as a "hanging cwm". The steep slopes of Gallt-y-Wenallt makes this one of the most impressive features of glacial erosion in North Wales.

### Biology

Ten thousand years ago, when the last ice age came to an end and the glaciers retreated, most of the uplands were covered with tundra-like vegetation. But as the climate warmed grasses, herbs and shrubs moved in. Trees were next, at first thin and scrubby but in time this primitive woodland turned into sessile oak forest. There are still stands of this ancient woodland today.

According to the SSSI designation: "The Atlantic woodlands of southern Snowdonia form one of the most important areas for woodland nature conservation in Europe". This is also known as "temperate rainforest" because of the damp, humid climate that supports an abundance of ferns lichens, mosses and liverworts. The Nantgwynant

area has one of the highest rainfalls in Snowdonia with over 2 metres of rain falling annually.

The southern parts of the farm have a thin acid soil. This is reflected in the woodland canopy that is dominated by sessile oak and birch. The sessile oak areas tend to have boulders with only a sparse layer of grasses, heath bedstraw and bluebells. There are also distinctive ferns, including several rare species. Moving up the valley, the underlying rock type changes around the Hafod Lwyfog farmhouse. The less acidic soils north of the house support ash-alder woodland. These tend to have abundant grasses, including tufted hairgrass, creeping softgrass and ferns. There is also wood sorrel, yellow pimpernell, sedges and creeping buttercup.

Sheep grazing can be a problem in these oakwoods. The thin acidic soils and the exposure to wind and rain mean the oaks can be often stunted and gnarled. Sheep can prevent the regeneration of young trees so that the woodland eventually dies out. However light grazing can be beneficial, at least to some organisms such as lower plants and fungi. The acid soils of the area have also been invaded by introduced Rhododendron in the last 40 years.

### **Some native trees you can see at Hafod Lwyfog**

#### **The alder:**



#### **The ash:**

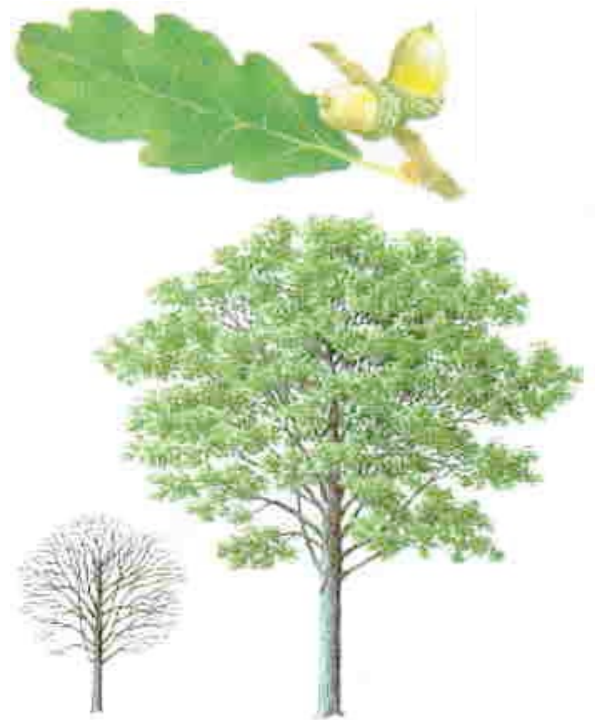


**Trees you can see at Hafod Lwyfog continued:**

**The rowan:**



**The sessile oak:**



**The holly:**



**The elm:**



## History

Most of the landscape and wildlife of this area of northern Snowdonia developed during and after the glacial periods, more than ten thousand years ago. The retreating glaciers carved out the u-shaped valley, and eventually sessile oak woodland developed. This area has been occupied since ancient times. The oak woodland was the source of fuel, charcoal, tanin from bark for preserving leather and other raw materials that were useful. Cleared land became farmed. There are also signs of earlier habitation if you know where to look.

### **Romans:**

The Romans had an overnight fortified camp at Pen y Gwryd, almost exactly over the area where the two roads meet - the edges of this are still visible. Several Roman walkways from this camp down the valley, one of which possibly passes through the Hafod Lwyfog farm yard.

### **Early farming:**

The word Hafod meant "summer farmhouse" originally (from the Welsh word "haf" for "summer"). In the past sheep and cattle would have been moved to the farm in summer, then taken back to the lowlands over winter. However a farmhouse was thought by some to be built on the farm as early as the 12th century, on the large stones still visible in one corner of the present house.

### **Later farming:**

The first written reference to the present house is apparently in 1536. It is known to be the birthplace of Sir John Williams who went to London at an early age, become goldsmith to James the 1<sup>st</sup>, and was responsible for rebuilding the old house in a style somewhat grander than other farmhouses of the area. Farm buildings and the basement dairy (unusual for the time) show this was a working farm.

### **In Cromwell's time:**

Later it was home to Ifan Llwyd (1600-78), also known by his English name of Evan Lloyd, a Welsh bard and 'hero of Eryri' who was High Sheriff of Caernarfonshire in 1670. He was responsible for alterations to the house and the beam in the parlour shows his English initials and the date 1638. Ifan Llwyd was a giant of a man, known as a "great fighter" but also as a very respectable man of good sense who was a "friend of the poor and oppressed". One story about him is that one summer's day in the mid 1600's a crowd of Cromwell's soldiers came past Hafod Lwyfog and entered the house to seek food and drink. Ifan Llwyd was out at the time and when he found these soldiers taking advantage of his house, with their swords and belts strewn all over his kitchen, he grabbed them all and threw them down the hill outside his house. He then returned indoors and with his bare clenched fists set upon the soldiers who escaped for their life through the door.

### **Recent times:**

Many families have lived in the house, and indoor and outdoor servants helped with the farming and the dairy work of making cheese. The farm was considered remote, and would have been self-sufficient in food. Sheep and cattle have been farmed in the past, and sheep still graze the land. The land at the head of the lake has been a camping site for nearly a hundred years, as the area has always been considered one of the most scenic in Wales.

## The Farmhouse



*The Hafod Lwyfog farmhouse: a Grade 2\* listed building*

Hafod Lwyfog is described as a “sub medieval gentry house, probably of 15<sup>th</sup> century origin... The siting and orientation of the house are typical of sub-medieval houses of this region and it would have been high above the original valley road before the new turnpike was created. The provision of the dairy/cellar below the parlour represents a departure from the conventional regional plan-form of the end-chimney storeyed house.” Particularly interesting is the interior of the house, in particular the “stopped-chamfered beams and grooved joists, and the original post-and-panel partitions and beams. “(Cadw)

The front door is not original. Inside is a lobby with the original pantry beyond now used as the kitchen. To the left of the entrance is the original kitchen or “hall” with slate flagged floor and huge chimney – according to some accounts this was known as “one of the best in all Wales”. Cooking was originally done here, as well as dining and indeed this would have been the most “lived in” room. On the other side is the former parlour, with a 18<sup>th</sup> century pine door with 17<sup>th</sup> century decorative iron hinges. The house is unusual in having a stone spiral staircase from the parlour to the first floor. Wooden stairs were later added to the right of the fireplace where originally there would have been “privy cupboards”.

The first floor has all four original post-and-panel partitions. Originally these may have been placed slightly differently, being changed when the new wooden staircase in the centre of the house was added. Originally there would have been two “main end chambers” but today the bathroom has been taken out of one of these. In the attic above the first floor, servants and farm workers would originally have slept. There is one tiny window by the chimney at one end, and “door way heads” have been cut out of the trusses.

The dairy below the parlour was where the milk was brought, and butter and cheese produced. There was at one stage a butter churn operated by a water wheel that drew water from the farm pond. Even after the war this was a fully functional dairy and there is an old lady living in Nant Gwynant who worked as a landgirl during the war, and spent much of her time working in the dairy!

## **Conservation schemes**

Hafod Lwyfog Farm has been under the Tir Gofal Management Scheme since the year 2000. The scheme is designed to protect, enhance and restore farmed land, and create habitats and landscape features. The special features and characteristics of Hafod Lwyfog Farm have been identified in our particular plan, and management practices have been determined that will make sure these are respected.

Some of the key projects undertaken on this farm:

### **Hedgerows**

Maintain existing hedges and restore derelict hedgerows to be living field boundaries. This maintains the character of the local landscape by retaining the historic field patterns. It also benefits a variety of wildlife including plants, small mammals and birds, as well as insects.

### **Dry stone wall restoration**

The farm has two major walls – the lower and upper mountain wall. These have had major work as part of the Tir Gofal scheme, and are stock proof today. The walls have been rebuilt in the traditional local style, to the original height and width.

### **Conversion of semi-improved to unimproved grassland**

The intention is to restore the typical species of unimproved grassland, on the lower fields, by taking a haycrop and lightly grazing the land afterwards

### **Establish streamside corridors**

Stock are removed from some stream boundaries so as to encourage development of a diverse wildlife habitat, and the growth of native trees, shrubs and tall vegetation. This provides cover for animals such as water vole and otter. It also increases the water quality.

### **Establish new broadleaved woodlands**

An extensive planting program has been undertaken to establish new broadleaved woodlands. Stock proof fencing and walling has also been necessary to protect the woodland, as has rhododendron and bracken control.

### **Rhododendron and bracken control**

Rhododendrons thrive on an acid soil, and the southern end of Nant Gwynant valley has been badly infested. Removing rhododendron is a very labour intensive task, cutting the trees or bushes, and poisoning the remaining stems. Bracken is also controlled in areas of tree-planting, by being cut.

### **Permissive access areas**

Access to areas of woodland, climbing areas and the lakeside is also part of the conservation scheme. Footpaths have been established, and “kissing gates” erected. Providing access to viewpoints, woodlands and water features is an important part of conservation.

### **Educational access**

Educational groups make visits to the farm, and we have devised for this purpose the following “educational walk”.

## **Outline of a guided educational walk for school and youth groups staying at the campsite. (approx 1 to 1/2 hrs)**

### **1. Starting at the stone bridge over the River Glaslyn at the NW corner of the campsite.**

- Discussion of the construction of the bridge – stone slabs are supposedly pre-Roman (refer to better example on south end of lake).
- River flow, flooding and Cwm Dyli hydro-electric power station a mile upstream – the hydro scheme
- Point out the archaeological dig going on the other side of the river a little upstream and mention “Prince Llwyellyn’s Palace”
- Point out the scree slopes under Gallt y Wenallt

### **2. Walk across the campsite to the lake shore**

- Point out the classic u-shaped glacial valley as you look up the valley, and the moraine heap at the bottom end of the lake looking down the valley
- Discuss the sand and gravel on the beach and the constant accumulation of it washing down from the slopes of Mt Snowdon and Cwm Dyli
- Point out the old barns and new buildings that have been built with mortar and lime made with sand from the beach and how this can be traced in the old buildings
- Talk about otters and other wildlife coming back into the river and lake
- Point out the different types of woodland that can be viewed from the valley floor – ash wood across the river and up the valley, oak/alder wood on the slopes of the Hafod mountain and the different soil types/acidity that give rise to this
- Discuss the taking of timber from the valley over the years and deforestation

### **3. Walk up through the hollow field to the barn**

- Discuss the traditional uses of the different buildings – shippon for wintering cows, dutch barn for storing hay etc
- Show the different construction techniques on the barns – dry stone walls, worked stone, mortar, re-use of stone from other buildings, slates etc, use of local resources
- Point out the “old” and “new” roads and discuss why the “new” road was put in around the 1830’s
- Point out where the Roman fort was up at Pen-y-Gwryd

### **4. Walk down through field to old sheep pens and dip**

- Talk about shearing sheep the old communal way and dipping sheep, the way shearing is done now with contractors, problems with dipping chemicals and effect on water quality in the lake
- Point out Rhododendrons and discuss control programme.

### **5. Cross road and walk up to first ruined cottage (Belan Wen)**

- Talk about how many families used to live on a farm like this to provide labour and how it changed over the years
- Discuss how stone was taken from old buildings like this to be reused
- Point out the tree planting that has been going on in this area and discuss protection of trees, tubes, pests etc

## **6. Walk up across small stream to second ruin**

- Show how the foundations are barely visible and discuss the family that grew up here with 11 children
- Point out the basic tree species found naturally here – oak, ash, alder, hawthorn, elm and some of the introduced ones – beech, sycamore, spruce
- Show examples of recently planted trees of these types and get the kids to take note of leaf shapes for quiz along the way

## **7. Go through gate and up through tree planting heading towards badger set**

- Point out some of the trees planted 20 years ago, and the natural falling down and decomposing of mature trees in this area as it reverts to a full life-cycle woodland.
- Talk about bracken and what it was used for in the old days

## **8. Approach badger set**

- Point out the various holes and how large an area it extends over
- Show old holes, areas where they crap
- Talk about their habits, food, how they go down to the campsite going under the road where the stream passes underneath

## **9. Walk up onto high point above badger set**

- take in the view up and down the valley and down over the campsite
- point out some of the high peaks – Yr Arran, Llwydd, Glyders etc and show where Eryri (Snowdon) is
- point out the hydro electric pipeline coming down Cwm Dyli
- show where the Roman paths were and the path over to Dolwydellen

## **10. Walk down towards Hafod Lwyfog farmhouse**

- Show the vegetable garden and tree nursery
- Point out old mill pond and where the water wheel used to be and how it was used to churn butter in the dairy
- Discuss the age of the house and some of its key features and history

## **11. Go down driveway and cross the main road into the Arles field**

- Point out the old track that went down to the barns before the main road was built
- Discuss the tree plantings that have been done in this field (alder and wetland areas) and how they differ from the planting back where we walked through
- Point out where the charcoal makers huts were and how they made charcoal

## **12. Walk down the hill and cross the old road into the rushy field**

- Talk about the mowing of these fields for hay, the reversion to rushes and the problems with drainage (handmade stone drains)
- Discuss the replanting of the hedge rows along the roadside and across the middle of this field

## **13. Return to campsite**

## The route of the guided walk

