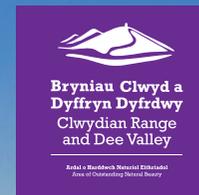




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Wales



# RUABON MOOR

Site Guides for Recreation

Protected Landscapes of Wales



## 3. RUABON MOOR



## Introduction

Ruabon Moor is an area of upland moorland to the west of Wrexham. On the northern fringes are the mountains of Minera and Esclusham, at the southern edge the limestone cliffs of Creigiau Eglwyseg overlook the River Dee and the Vale of Llangollen. On the western side the moors reach their greatest height of 565m at Cynr-y-Brain with Llandegla Forest, a large conifer plantation, covering the north-western side.

Ruabon Moor lies partly in Wrexham County Borough and partly within Denbighshire County. It makes up the northern part of the Berwyn and South Clwyd Mountains SAC, which is the largest area of blanket bog and European

dry heath in Wales spanning a total of 27000ha.

The range of hills known as Llantysilio Mountain, along with Ruabon Moor, Eglwyseg escarpment, Minera caves and areas of grassland to the north and west of Minera are designated as the Ruabon, Llantysilio Mountains & Minera SSSI which sits within the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB. The primary purpose of the AONB is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty which includes not just the landscape but also flora, fauna and geological features. The area has been identified as a Geological Conservation Review site (GCR) for its important geological features.

## Designation

The European Union have identified the most important sites for wildlife in Europe as the Natura 2000 sites. There are two types of Natura 2000 sites:

**Special Protection Areas (SPAs)** - designated because of rare or migratory birds and their habitats.

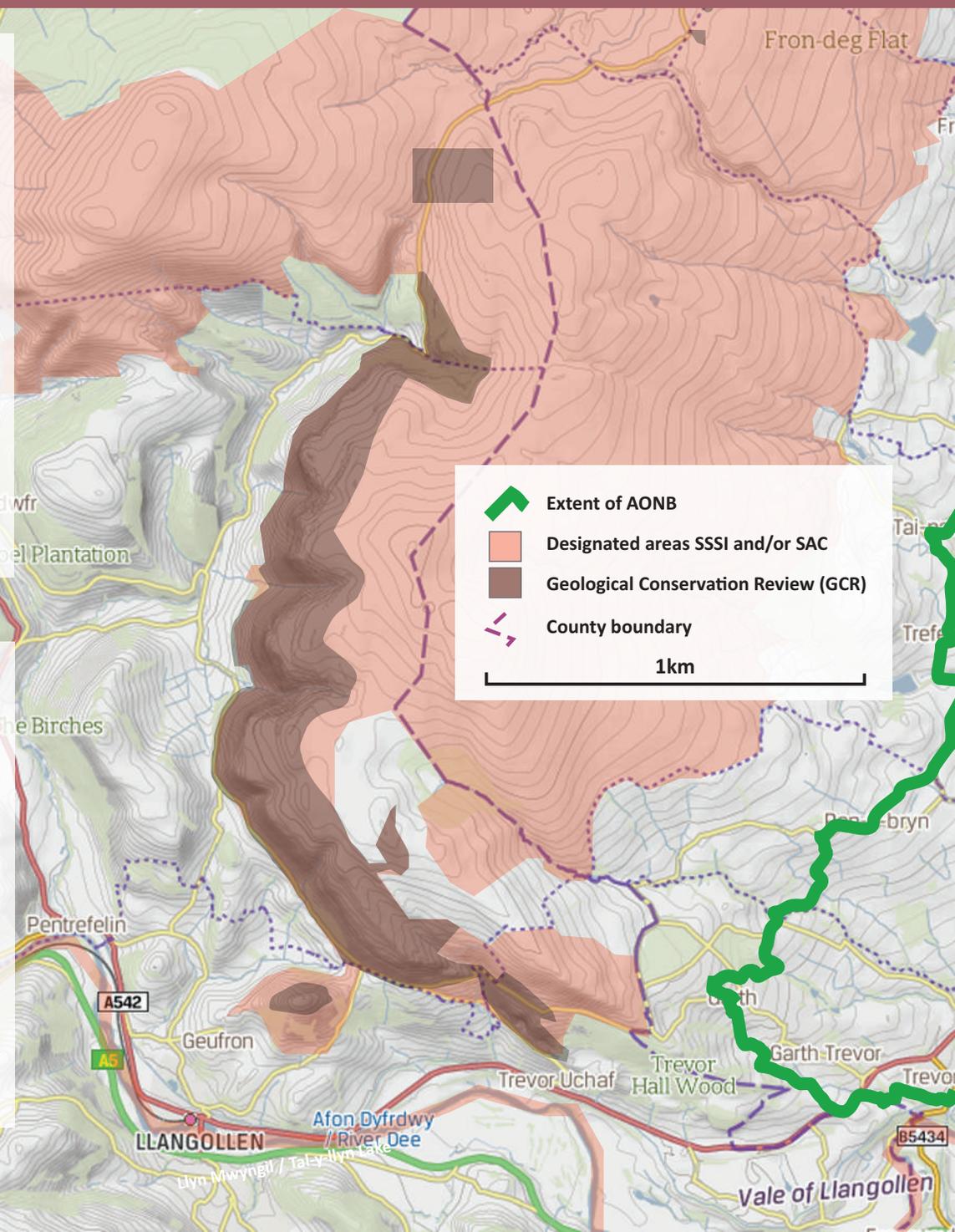
**Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)** for a wide range of habitats and species other than birds.

In addition to these international designations there are UK conservation designations:

**Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)** are the most important sites for Wales' natural heritage and are legally designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

**National Nature Reserves (NNRs)** are designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, or under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.

*See back cover for more information on designations.*



- Extent of AONB
- Designated areas SSSI and/or SAC
- Geological Conservation Review (GCR)
- County boundary

1km



**Red grouse** *grugiar goch* in Welsh, are native to Britain and make a very distinctive call that sounds like 'Go back! Go back! Go back' as they fly fast and low above the heather, sometimes at speeds of up to 70mph. Their flamboyant mating ritual in the spring sees the males leaping into the air and gliding downwards whilst calling.

**Red grouse shooting** is a major land use of upland moorlands and is an important source of income for many rural communities. Owned by the Wynnstay Estate, the moor has always been a stronghold for red grouse, where numbers have been on the increase since their decline in the late 1990s. It is the only moorland left in Wales with a full time gamekeeper carrying out the management needed to sustain these birds species. Grouse 'butts' can be spotted across the moor where shooters wait for passing birds.

**Cotton grass** *ply'r gweunydd* in Welsh, is actually a sedge which grows in acidic wetland and is an important source of food for grouse. The fluffy white 'cotton' was once used to stuff pillows as an alternative to goose down.

**Blanket bog** Ruabon Moor contains areas of peatland known as a blanket bog, which is recognised for its international importance in supporting wildlife. Typified by wet peaty soils carpeted in lush sphagnum mosses and plants such as cross-leaved heath and bog cranberry; it is one of the only habitats entirely fed from above by rain water and snowmelt, as opposed to ground water. Historical evidence such as wooden structures, organic artefacts and even human remains have been found stored in chronological layers of peat preserved by constant water logging and acidic conditions.

**Adders** -the only wild venomous snake in the UK, can sometimes be found on Ruabon Moor basking on footpaths or rocky ledges. It is said that scurvy and bad skin conditions can be cured by letting live adders slither over the afflicted areas!

**Lizards** Grouse 'butts' provide the ideal habitat for the common lizard, known in North Wales as *gennau goeg* ('goblins'). They are unusual among reptiles for appearing to give birth to live young with their eggs breaking open as they appear.

**Heather moorland** is a unique environment in that it is globally rarer than rainforests. Grouse eat up to 50g of tender, young heather shoots a day but nest and shelter in the old heather. Today the moor is carefully managed through seasonal burning and cutting to encourage new growth to help increase the grouse populations. Skylark, curlew and golden plover all benefit from this management.



▲ **Black grouse** At the end of the 20th century black grouse, *grugiar ddu* in Welsh, were on the edge of extinction in Wales. Ruabon Moor led the way in their recovery and now hold around 80% of the Welsh population. On the Red List of UK Birds of Conservation Concern, male black grouse can be spotted performing their elaborate courting rituals called leks, where they puff out their throats and tails, make distinctive calls and dance to attract females. Did you know? Black grouse young eat spiders and insects, where as adult birds are primarily vegetarian.

► **Moorland management** The Wynnstay Estate, with support from NRW and the RSPB, carefully manage the moorland by cutting and clearing large rectangular shapes in the heather. Grouse like to feed on shoots of fresh young heather and need taller, older vegetation to breed and avoid being detected by predators. Legal control of predators such as foxes, stoats and crows is also a feature of grouse moor management. This management has contributed to rescuing the iconic black grouse species from the brink of its disappearance from Wales.

**Peaty soils** contain more carbon than any other soil type, thus they lock up carbon which could contribute to climate change. Damage to the soil can not only prevent this locking-up process but also result in the release of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses to the atmosphere.

**Offa's Dyke National Trail** follows the English/Welsh border for 177 miles crossing the scree of the Eglwyseg escarpment, before going over the remote Ruabon moorland into Llandegla Forest. The trail takes its name from the 8th century, hand-dug bank & ditch built by King Offa to divide his Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Mercia from rival kingdoms in what is now Wales.



▲ **Hen harrier** The majestic hen harrier, *boda tinwyn* in Welsh, whose aerobatics in the sky are an awesome spectacle of nature, are scarce and rarely seen. They nest on the ground amongst the heather and bilberry of upland moorlands and winter in the lowlands. They are currently the most endangered breeding bird of prey in the UK. Male birds are a ghostly pale grey colour and fly with their wings held in a shallow 'V' gliding low in search of food.

► **Curlew** During the summer months curlew, *gylfinir* in Welsh, move from their lowland coastal feeding grounds to upland areas to breed. They are the largest European wading bird recognised by its long, down-curved bill, long legs and evocative call. The Welsh breeding population of curlew has crashed by over 80% since the 1990s. There may be fewer than 400 breeding pairs left in Wales resulting in this species being included in the Red List of UK Birds of Conservation Concern.





## Geology, History & Myth

▼ **Geological contrasts** The rolling heather moorlands of Llantysilio and Ruabon contrast with the dramatic limestone escarpments, screes and disused quarries of the Eglwyseg valley. The landscape and biodiversity of the area are strongly controlled by the underlying geology. Creigiau Eglwyseg is made of Carboniferous limestone laid down in shallow tropical seas rich in corals and other sea creatures some 350 million years ago. Limestone is characterised by spectacular escarpments, natural cave systems, screes and limestone pavement. In contrast the rolling moorland of Ruabon is underlain by Carboniferous millstone grit which was deposited by ancient rivers 340 million years ago.



► **Caves & bats** The caves at Minera form one of the most extensive integrated cave systems in North Wales. Ogof Dydd Byraf, was the first major limestone cave to be explored and mapped in Wales. It is connected to Ogof Llyn Du & Ogof Llyn Parc by a series of short passages, now choked with sediment. Numerous species of bats hibernate and roost within the cave's passages, including daubentons, brandts and the endangered lesser horseshoe bat. They are very susceptible to disturbance whilst hibernating, any arousal from hibernation will result in increased use of stored body fat, which may increase the risk of death before spring.



**Mineral extraction** Areas of limestone and millstone grit are important natural resources and often have a long history of mineral extraction. The numerous quarries, tramways, inclines and limekilns along the escarpment bear testimony to the importance of the area for limestone aggregate and the production of lime for agriculture. On Ruabon Moor and towards Minera, mineral veins rich in lead and zinc were mined from at least the 13th century. before closure in the early parts of the 20th century. At their peak they were one of the most productive lead mines in Britain.

**Cares y Bwlch** 'Girlfriend of the Gap' tells the story of a giantess, Cares, who lived on the moor at Bwlch Rhiwfelen terrorising local villages. The monk, St Collen, challenged her and sliced off her right arm, unfazed she picked it up and beat him with it, before he sliced off her left arm and slaughtered her. St Collen proceeded to wash his sword in the Old Church in Llangollen, the town to which he gave his name.

**Burial mounds** There are a series of Bronze Age burial mounds scattered across the moor, often on ridge tops or hill escarpments. It is thought that the monuments, a stone circle or stone cairn, may have been a social focal point of the local communities between 3500 and 1500 BC.

▼ **What's in a name?** Some say the name Ruabon comes from the anglicised form of 'Rhiw Mabon'. *Rhiw*, meaning slope; *Mabon* the name of a Welsh saint who lived here. Others, think it took its name from its physical aspect, being situated on a slope near a stream called Afon; hence called Rhiwafon. It is suggested the surrounding hamlets of Eglwyseg, took its name from the Latin of 'churchlet or chapel', referencing the Valle Crucis Abbey nearby. Another reference is to Elisedd ap Gwylog, who was the great grandson to the 9th century King of Powys, Cyngen ap Cadell. It is thought he erected the 'Pillar of Eliseg' in his honour.





▼ **Llangollen whitebeam** is an internationally endangered species and the world's entire population is centred on Eglwyseg. It grows on the limestone cliffs, and can be identified by its powdery grey-green foliage. It flowers in May before producing red berries in the autumn, also known as 'chess-apples'. Two other whitebeam species can also be found on the cliffs: the widespread rowan and the more uncommon rock whitebeam.



**Harebell** During the summer months the limestone calcareous grassland of Creigiau Eglwyseg can be carpeted in a riot of colourful, specialised flowers. Plants such as early-purple orchid, devils-bit scabious, wild thyme and harebell grow quickly - and colourfully - to attract pollinators such as the small, pearl bordered fritillary butterfly. It is said, a concoction of harebell, *clychau'r eos* in Welsh, can be drunk or used as a wash for the treatment of sore eyes.



**Limestone screes** Creigiau Eglwyseg contains one of the most important sets of limestone screes in Britain. They form at the foot of the craggy limestone escarpment and consist of millions of angular fragments of limestone loosened from the cliff above by frost-action, a glacial process. The majority of these deposits were formed during the cold, hostile conditions towards the end of the last Ice Age about 11,000 years ago but the screes are still moving and developing today.

## Limestone cliffs & screes



## CREIGIAU EGLWYSEG



**Peregrine falcons** in this area appear to nest slightly earlier in the year than in other areas, therefore a voluntary seasonal restriction is in place between 15th February - 15th July inclusive. The nests are located between red and green markers placed by the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB and supported by the BMC, at the base of Craig Arthur, Monks Buttress and the Trevor Area. The nest site is usually located between the two markers. Climbers are asked to be alert for the obvious shriek of an alarmed peregrine, and to retreat from the area if heard. See back cover for more info.



**Rock climbing** The limestone escarpments at Creigiau Eglwyseg contain some great cliffs for traditional and sport climbing. From World's End across to Craig Arthur and southwards past the Twilight and Pinfold areas to Monk's Buttress, Dinbren and the Trevor area. Climbers are asked to refrain from using tree belays or abseil points at Creigiau Eglwyseg due to the nationally rare Llangollen whitebeam tree which only grows here, and to avoid disturbing the screes.

◀ **Trevor Rocks** The most popular crag for group climbing sessions is the Trevor Rocks Area. There are 10 limestone walls and buttresses, all single pitch up to 17m high. Climbers are asked not to clear vegetation or rocks or drill for bolts due to the sensitive nature of the site.

● **Independence Quarry** The heavily worked but now abandoned, Independence Quarry, is a sunny spot contained in a small 'amphitheatre', with around 20 routes in the higher grade. There is a seasonal climbing restriction due to nesting peregrine falcons covering all routes on this crag.



## Maps

- OS Landranger map: OS117: Chester & Wrexham, Ellesmere Port
- OS Explorer map: OL256: Llangollen & Berwyn, Ceiriog Valley/Glyn Ceiriog

Many Welsh names describe in detail types of terrain, habitats and identifying features. Some place names refer to historical events or people, or are associated with local legends. Welsh names help to better understand, respect and value the heritage and culture of the sites in which we work. More information can be found on the last page of this document.

## Parking and Access

To access the Trevor Rocks area follow the Eglwyseg valley road from Llangollen until you reach a turning on the right, signposted 'Panorama'. Follow this for a mile, ignoring a side road dropping off to the right. Continue until a large lay by is reached on the left. For Trevor Quarry, approach is made via the steep scree slope above the lay by. Note: further up the road from the lay by there is a hairpin bend with a track leading to Trevor Quarry. Do not take vehicles up this route, the farmer uses this area for sheep grazing.

### Points of contact:

If you have a legal interest in the site or require designation information contact NRW enquiries: 0300 065 3000

For all other enquiries contact Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB on 01824 712795

The following section refers to best practice guidance for those less familiar with the upland environment for you to share with your groups.



### Off-Road Driving

**Off-Road Driving** Illegal off-road driving causes damage to foot-paths and trails, as well as risking the safety of other people and disturbing wildlife. To report any off-road driving, please call 101 and ask for the North Wales Police Rural Crime Team.



### Managing Scree

**Managing Scree** Walking on scree slopes should be avoided at all costs. Some rocks have taken thousands of years to reach their present low altitude, further rockslide can cause irreversible damage to the micro environment as well as damaging fragile habitats for rare plants



### Ground Nesting Birds

**Ground Nesting Birds** The nests of meadow pipits, skylark & stonechat are sometimes just a scrape in the earth, which can leave them vulnerable to predation & disturbance. Dogs running free can have significant detrimental effects to their breeding success. Under the CROW Act, dogs on open access land must be kept on a short lead between 1 March to 31 July to prevent disturbance to livestock and ground nesting birds.



### Litter

**Litter** Litter in the mountains is an increasing problem. Add into your session a discussion on the impact of littering and as a group carry out all litter you find. Communicate that there is no 'acceptable' waste, not even that which is biodegradable, such as banana peels and apple cores. It takes 2 years for an orange peel to biodegrade!



### Be tick aware

**Be tick aware** Some tick bites can result in infection such as Lyme disease so check for and remove ticks as soon as possible using a pair of fine-tipped tweezers. Contact your GP promptly if you begin to feel unwell with flu-like symptoms or develop a spreading circular red rash. Remember to tell them that you were bitten by a tick or have recently spent time outdoors.



## CONSERVATION DESIGNATIONS

The European Union have identified the most important sites for wildlife in Europe as the **Natura 2000** sites. There are two types of Natura 2000 sites:

- **Special Protection Areas (SPAs)** - in Wales are areas that have been designated specifically to conserve wild birds that are listed as rare and vulnerable in the Birds Directive. They also include the sites in Wales that migratory birds use as stop-off points on their journeys across the planet.

- **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)** - have been chosen to make a significant contribution to conserving habitats and wildlife species other than birds, named in the EC Habitats Directive.

In addition to these international designations there are a number of UK conservation designations:

- **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)** are the most important sites for Wales' natural heritage and are legally designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. They help

conserve and protect the best of our wildlife, geological and physiographical heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.

- **National Nature Reserves (NNRs)** are designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, or under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Wales has 76 NNRs that help protect a wide range of wildlife and landscapes. All NNRs in Wales are legally protected as SSSIs. Most are also declared under the EU Habitats Directive as SACs, SPAs or Ramsar (wetlands).

## OTHER RESOURCES

**Green Guide for Climbers** - [www.bmcshop.co.uk/products](http://www.bmcshop.co.uk/products) (bit.ly/2nbkAiF)

**Welsh heritage** - [www.anturenwau.com](http://www.anturenwau.com) and [www.mudandrout.es.com/get-to-grips-with-welsh-names-on-your-map/](http://www.mudandrout.es.com/get-to-grips-with-welsh-names-on-your-map/)

**Wild Camping Code of Conduct** - [www.snowdonia.gov.wales/visiting/walking/where-can-you-go/wild-camping](http://www.snowdonia.gov.wales/visiting/walking/where-can-you-go/wild-camping) ( bit.ly/2k2RjJ6 )

**NRW Countryside Code** - [www.naturalresources.wales/media/1369/the-countryside-code.pdf](http://www.naturalresources.wales/media/1369/the-countryside-code.pdf)

**Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB** - <http://www.clwydianrangeanddeevalleyaonb.org.uk/> (bit.ly/2BnHPLN)

**The British Mountaineering Council** - Regional Access Database [www.thebmc.co.uk/modules/RAD/](http://www.thebmc.co.uk/modules/RAD/) (bit.ly/1mAC1Sj)

## CREDITS

**Landscape:** cover, heather moorland & Eglwyseg escarpment & rock climbing - ©Raymond Roberts, limestone scree - Andrew, [www.bit.ly/2z1MzZ5](http://www.bit.ly/2z1MzZ5), CC BY 2.0, Aerial heather cuts - ©Chris Davies **Other:** Red grouse, cotton grass, peregrine - [northeastwildlife.co.uk](http://northeastwildlife.co.uk), adder & curlew - ©John Beatty, [www.johnbeatty.uk](http://www.johnbeatty.uk), black grouse - Mark Andrews, [www.bit.ly/2B40r6B](http://www.bit.ly/2B40r6B), CC BY-SA 2.0, hen harrier - Rob Zweers, [www.bit.ly/2yfAhc3](http://www.bit.ly/2yfAhc3), CC BY 2.0, lesser horseshoe bat - Jessicajil, [www.bit.ly/2nnWvG3](http://www.bit.ly/2nnWvG3), CC BY-SA 2.0, Pillar of Eliseg - Michael Day, [www.bit.ly/2rVqGJI](http://www.bit.ly/2rVqGJI), CC BY-NC 2.0, Llangollen white beam - ©Dr Tim Rich

This guide has been produced by Snowdonia-Active (2018) in collaboration with the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB.