

*Alliance
for
National Parks
Cymru*



*Cynghrair
Parciau
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Cymru*

National Parks – not just pretty places!

Things get taken for granted, as in *The Life of Brian*: *'All right, but apart from the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, a fresh water system, and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?'* National Parks can also be taken for granted, and if we lose them, they're not replaceable.

The Alliance for National Parks Cymru is a new organisation which hopes to work with the Welsh Government to ensure that with all the changes to legislation which are currently being considered, the National Parks in Wales will continue to be protected by appropriate legal and management arrangements because the fact is they are National Treasures.

They are every bit as important as the castles or the Millennium Stadium. They are the spectacular landscapes that project Wales onto the world stage. Twelve million people visit our Parks each year, many are local or from just across the border whilst others bring in foreign exchange; between them they spend £1billion creating and protecting thousands of local jobs.

Parks are not just pretty places, they are full of natural and cultural heritage, not tucked away in a PLEASE DO NOT TOUCH museum, but part of the living landscape. Walking past enormous standing stones in the uplands you can imagine your bronze-age ancestors, maybe hunting deer or on a pilgrimage to Stonehenge. You can almost hear the tramp, tramp, tramp, of a Roman legion marching between forts, or the calls of the drovers as they move livestock to the markets in England.

Geology comes to life in an easy to grasp way with text book examples of how the rocks and mountains were formed. No wonder the vocabulary of geologists around the world is dominated by Welsh names such as Cambrian and Ordovician. Wildlife which has disappeared elsewhere survives within our Parks; an early summer's walk in the Brecon Beacons or Snowdonia is a great opportunity to see rare Arctic alpine plants in full bloom.

For many the Parks are playgrounds to pit their wits against; the sorts of rock faces you might train on before Everest, maybe kayaking through gorges of white water or just mucking around on a beach. For others they are escapes into tranquillity or sources of inspiration with Pembrokeshire rated as one of the top two coastal destinations in the world by National Geographic. It's difficult to measure but there must be huge benefits from visits to Parks in terms of health, productivity and well-being; places which make you feel good to be alive.

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The Parks cover 20% of Wales but they make up a much larger percentage of the nation's essential life support services, such as drinking water, and locking up huge stores of carbon to slow the rate of climate change.

Since 1951 and creating the first National Park in Wales, the UK population has grown by twelve million, the number of licensed vehicles has risen from four to thirty four million and the world population has more than doubled from three to seven billion. In this increasingly crowded planet the role of National Parks has never been more important and perversely, never so threatened.

Global threats such as climate change or population growth, with the consequent pressure for housing and food production, are self-evident and relentless. There are also threats when economic imperatives are seen to be in conflict with the need to retain the qualities which make these areas special. Sustainable development requires that a careful balance between these objectives is drawn. Our three National Park Authorities have huge experience in making these difficult decisions as was acknowledged in the recent Report to the Welsh Government by the Commission on Local Governance and Delivery (the Williams' Commission). It rejected the idea that the National Park Authorities should lose their independence and be absorbed within Local Authorities which are already overstretched in so many ways.

People love their Parks as places for adventure, inspiration and relaxation; when surveyed, 95% of people in Wales consider National Parks to be important to them and three quarters of the Welsh population visit them each year. If we love the Parks so much we need to care for them.

Notes for Editors

The Alliance for National Parks Cymru was formed recently by the Brecon Beacons Park Society, the Friends of Pembrokeshire National Park, Cymdeithas Eryri Snowdonia Society, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales and the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Its purpose is to coordinate and represent the views of the voluntary sector in Wales about changes which may affect the position of the National Parks. It is currently heavily engaged in responding to Welsh Government legislative and policy proposals which could have significant effects on the future of the National Parks.

The interim chair of the Alliance is Paul Loveluck whose career includes being Chief Executive of both the Wales Tourist Board and the Countryside Council for Wales, both of which organisations had considerable involvement with the National Parks.

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