



Brechfa Oil fields

Brechfa has been referred to as the Texas of Wales as it was a major source of oil!

Brechfa also supplied explosives and timber for the trenches during the First World War.

Fforest Glyn Cothi Cultural Heritage Project

The Fforest Glyn Cothi Cultural Heritage Project set up by the Brechfa Forest and Llanllwni Mountain Tourism Cluster raises awareness of the traditional lifestyle of forest dwellers and the built and natural heritage sites within Brechfa Forest, Llanllwni Mountain and the communities which encircle them.

You can find information about famous local figures and about spiritual, religious and tourism sites in our literature and on our website:

www.roam-brechfaforest-llanllwnimountain.co.uk

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Brechfa Forest was one of the major sources of oil and explosives for a number of centuries leading up to the 1920's, yet there are no signs of drilling for oil! This was an ingenious industry extracting every possible benefit out of making charcoal.

At the 'chemical works' (powered by a water wheel) Oak saplings extracted from the forest were cut into three foot long lengths and stacked into ovens. It took twelve hours of controlled burning to turn them into charcoal. During this process the vapours from the ovens were piped through a pond which acted as a condenser. The vapours condensed into tar, water and oil which were collected in sumps (tar-wells).

Wood tar had many uses, such as providing a universal source of grease and glue, insulation for buildings and ship hulls, as skin and wood preservative and for traditional medicines.

The watery oil was pumped into vats and mixed with lime. The mixture was churned until there was a froth on top and then allowed to settle before being transferred into a boiler. When it was boiled the vapour produced was taken by pipes into a cask in the naphtha room. Solvent naphtha has a higher flashpoint than paraffin. It was used in blow lamps to burn old paint off wood.

More processes were applied to the residue before it was left in a series of barrels to settle with part producing a light oil to lubricate machinery.

Charcoal from other trees had different uses. Charcoal from the Alder wood was used for making gunpowder and this was an important source of explosives for the First World War. Black powder for "sooting" was made from Birch. Ash and Hazel charcoal was also produced.

Another side product of the charcoal industry was lime salt (Calcium acetate), which was used to make vinegar for pickling.

Both women and men were employed at the works. Women took the bark off Alders because if the bark of an Alder was burnt the charcoal was spoilt. The men employed at the works before the First World War were paid 2s. 6d (12.5 pence) per day.

There is nothing on the ground at the site of the works anymore. These closed after the First World War and the site is now a private house.

