



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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Forest Laws

The area of Carmarthenshire known as Brechfa Forest and Llanllwni mountain stands on the site of the ancient forest of Glyn Cothi which became a Royal Hunting Forest.

Offering rich habitats for wildlife and forest trails enjoyed by walkers, cyclists and horse riders, the landscape owes much to the laws and charters that governed ancient forests. These laws decided the punishment for offences against both 'venison' and 'vert' and defined common rights for local residents.

The 'Robin Hood' version of forest history and the 'Norman yoke' view that forests were reserved for royal and aristocratic recreation with high fences and harsh penalties for peasants who set foot in them are both common misunderstandings of the history of our ancient forests. Even the view that forest is a heavily wooded area is informed by the recent trend of industrial forest management.

Traditionally a forest was an area covering both open grazing and woody cover where wild animals and birds could thrive. Trees grown for building were fenced off for protection from the deer and were known as woods. The hunting was not just for the royal table and sport, soldiers used to repress uprisings and support kings in battle had to be fed. Venison was easy to preserve by salting and to transport. Up to a 1000 soldiers were stationed in South West Wales throughout the centuries between the Norman conquest of South West Wales and the War of the Roses.

Penalties for local residents caught hunting deer were severe. Dwellings could be searched for venison, skins or nets with the presumption of guilt if any were found. Protection was extended to rabbits, woodcock, snipe, quail and corncrake in 1831. The Deer Act of 1963 and the Theft Act of 1968 ended the special legal protection of deer.

Charters to create markets and fairs could not be granted in forests, which is why forests did not support the development of towns. However, many small settlements were established around the edge of a forest as local residents had rights in common to graze animals, pick fruit and berries, mine and take wood from the forest.

There were a large number of layers of profitable official posts overseeing hunting and timber production, used by royalty and parliament to secure the loyalty of influential people in distant places. From the point of view of the local commoners, this provided room for

conflict of aims and incoherence between the officers, all of which gave the local population 'room to manoeuvre'.

The forests also had a system of courts which are the oldest form of self-determination, the courts enabled the local residents to protect common rights over grazing, pannage, fuel and other resources. The Woodmote, also known as the Verderers Court met every 40 days and could investigate and fine those who damaged the forest or recommend the case to a more senior court. The Swanimote was held at least three times a year. September 14 - for agistment - the accepting and payment of fees for cattle to graze in the forest; November 11 - for pannage - the fees for pigs; June 9th the beginning of 'Fence Month' - when pasturing other animals and hunting were banned so that the deer could fawn undisturbed. The Swainmote could also investigate more serious cases and either acquit or send to the Justices in Eyre, who were appointed by the King, for sentencing.

We owe the protection of the wide range of wild vegetation on our common land to the forest laws. Modernisation that applied to agriculture was illegal within forests. Landlords could not interfere with free movement and sustenance of deer, clear wild vegetation or plant crops. When royalty or parliament raised money by selling off areas of the forest, a proportion of the land was given to the local people as common land to continue their historical rights.

The Verderers Court and Swainmote existed for this forest into the 1920's when the Forestry Commission took over the management of the forest and renamed it Brechfa Forest.

Until automation of forestry in the 1980's, management of the forest was a major source of employment in the area, with over 100 people working out of the Forestry Commission offices in Brechfa.

