
MYNYDD BACH FARMING & BIODIVERSITY

Newsletter # 2

Cors Nantcwnlle SSSI



Cors Nantcwnlle; July 2026, looking south, showing former peat cuttings. Credit. S. Spon

Q. Do you know the difference between topogenous, soligenous and ombrogenous? (Hint: see answer at the end!)

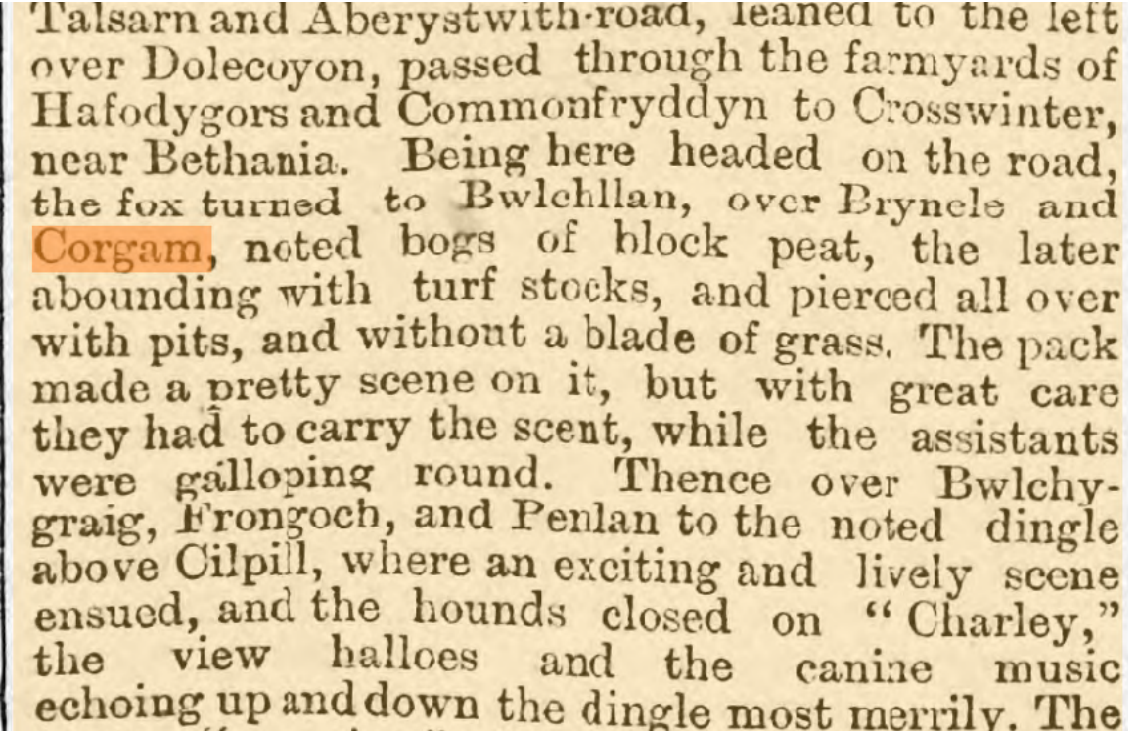
Cors Nantcwnlle SSSI is an approximately 38 hectare upland peatland bog. It lies at about 250 metres above sea level in the upper to mid-catchment of the Aeron River, in the Mynydd Bach region. It spills water into the Rhiwfallen tributary, which in turn flows into the Aeron.

It has a unique place in the history of this area; and although no formal records of peat-for-fuel exploitation exist prior to the early 19th century, it is most likely that this bog would have been cut over for peat since at the least the 16th century. Before the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836, local smallholders would have had the right to cut peat, and also rushes for making rushlights or for bedding, roof-covering and for adding to clay as reinforcement in building - in clom construction.

Some small isolated areas of the bog show hags or raised blocks, up to a metre and a half above the general surface level of the bog. These indicate the extent and volume of peat extraction, and the crucial importance as an energy source for heating and cooking for the local population, prior to the introduction of coal as a fuel.

There is oral evidence that the last peat extraction took place in 1960. That's because I knew the man who took the last cart of peat blocks to Felinfach railway halt. He was John Jones, of Bryngalem, Bwlchllan, and he was about 80 years old when I met him in 1978.

Contemporary newspaper reports which document the local fox-hunts from the end of the nineteenth century, mention the renowned Corgam bog, "*famous only for its abundance of peat and fuel*" and "*Corgam, noted bog(s) of block peat...abounding with turf stocks and pierced all over with pits, and without a blade of grass*", "as being very suitable for riding to hounds. Indeed, one intriguing report suggested that it was such fine hunting ground that the Princess of the Austro-Hungarian Empire would have relished it more than other much more renowned hunting grounds. "*We could wish if Her Majesty, The Empress of Austria, had been in it to witness a genuine Welsh hunt*". " (The South Wales Daily News and The Aberystwyth Observer & Merioneth News, January 21st, 1882.)



Talsarn and Aberystwith-road, leaned to the left over Dolecoyon, passed through the farmyards of Hafodygors and Commonfryddyn to Crosswinter, near Bethania. Being here headed on the road, the fox turned to Bwlchllan, over Brynle and **Corgam**, noted bogs of block peat, the later abounding with turf stocks, and pierced all over with pits, and without a blade of grass. The pack made a pretty scene on it, but with great care they had to carry the scent, while the assistants were galloping round. Thence over Bwlchy-graig, Frongoch, and Penlan to the noted dingle above Cilpill, where an exciting and lively scene ensued, and the hounds closed on "Charley," the view halloes and the canine music echoing up and down the dingle most merrily. The

A new 28 page report, commissioned last year by Natural Resources Wales, and undertaken by Dr Rob Low, in September 2025, has just become available, and it makes fascinating reading. This report, together with a comprehensive botanical survey carried out approximately 20 years ago, builds a very complete picture of the site's interest. It suggests that at its deepest, the peat body might have been close to 10 metres thick before cutting began. It is also suggested that what may lie beneath the quaking surface mat, in some of the more perilous areas of the bog, is a peat slurry, as opposed to a relatively homogeneous peat layer.

Over earlier past centuries, the combination of extensive peat extraction, and significant alterations to the outlets and the south-western and to a lesser extent, the eastern corners of the basin, have significantly modified the hydrology and by extension the ecology of the site. It provided vital services - peat as fuel for heat and cooking, and also as a water supply for the many small-scale water-powered mills in the area. Felin Rhydygroes was the best known example, but numerous other mills were built on local farms, Bwlchgraig and Corgam being two examples.

These earlier modifications have resulted in landscape-scale changes to the surrounding environment. Corgam comprises many acres of wet marshy grassland, and purple moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), as do other other farms on the periphery of the bog itself.

It will be interesting to explore what further monitoring of the site will reveal. Monitoring of the water table, using dip-wells and other devices, will reveal the extent of climate-change resilience. More accurate quantification of the peat body will reveal the extent and potential for carbon storage. Carefully-planned and small-scale hydrological interventions will result in positive environmental impacts on the flora of both the site itself and its periphery.

I have to admit to being a little proprietorial about ' Corgam bog ' !. My first encounter with the bog was in the harsh winter of 1982. All the local roads were blocked with deep drifts of snow. My neighbour at Tylau, Will Evans told me he knew a route which would be passable to Bwlchllan. At the time, Corgam had been uninhabited for about 20 years and being a bleak and open place, all the snow had blown off the fields and into the gullies, roads and hedges. The south eastern corner of Corgam bog, was frozen iron-hard, and so we were able to cross this ground on a tractor, to get to the village shop in the village. Stocks of bread had been delivered there!

Later, as the owner of Corgam in 1999, in a pre-emptive move to prevent damaging agricultural operations being carried out, I initiated what resulted in the declaration of the bog as a SSSI by the Countryside Council For Wales, as it was then called. So, the site was officially designated in late 2000, and this resulted in the protections associated with that designation.

Apart from its unique attributes ecologically, no-one who spends time in this place, in any season, and in any weather conditions, can fail to be affected by the beauty and quiet mystery of the sphagnum mosses, the ferns, the open placid stretches of water, and the shady glades amongst the birches and willows and other scrub growing here.

Peat has been forming on this site for several thousands of years, and it holds a memory in a way that our shallow agricultural soils do not, more frequently cultivated and cropped as they are. Possibly ten metres below the current surface mat of sphagnum mosses and grasses, is the rocky bed of a basin, where a lake formed after the last Ice Age. The peat that has formed, that has been extracted, that has been walked over, represents an archive that has been compiled by nature, millimetre by millimetre, year by year.

Now, in a contemporary context in its new guise, not as a direct source of energy, but as a place of history, perhaps this, and other similar landscapes, have something to impart to us, about the importance of safeguarding such an archive, about our place in the landscape, and resilience in the face of change.

Come and enjoy a walk here on the 2nd of August!

Answer: topogenous mires usually develop in a hollow or basin, where the base of the basin has impermeable drainage. Water fills the basin over time; from rainfall and seepage in-flows

Ombrogenous mires are generally fed mainly by rainfall falling upon the site. This affects the mineral content of the mire, as this is almost wholly derived from rainfall.

Soligenous mires are filled largely by water resulting from seepages and springs surrounding the mire. These will contain more minerals, derived from flows within the rocks and subsoils in adjoining land.

Corgam bog exhibits all three hydrological states; each with their associated features. In a relatively small site, it offers an extremely valuable opportunity for exploration of these increasingly rare environments.

Tim Strang, Corgam, July 2026.



Farm walks - August 2026.

Were looking forward to seeing you all on the 2nd and the 30th of august .

It's been a tricky year on many fronts up here on the hill. the livestock appear to have done very well, but then they are well tended.



The wild life has suffered in the heat as there has been a shortage of food in the breeding season.

The diversity of habitat on our farms has proved a god send for most creatures , with plenty of insects and seeds to feed upon.

I feel fairly confident that with coming autumn rain and the warmth in the ground we are well placed for an abundant end to the year .

The base line surveys on Crynfryn and Corgam have, as expected, shown a tremendous diversity of plants, birds, insects and mammals. It will be interesting to see how over the years this changes in response to global warming though I can see an inherent resilience within the habitats of our farms.

Woodland .

Despite the drought the trees that have naturally regenerated on our woodland margins have not died off, in fact appear to be doing rather well, probably because grasses and other plants have not competed so much with them. Given that we had another mast year it will be interesting to see how the multigenerational woods develop. Oh that we should live that long!

Social interaction and opportunities .

We are all minded as to how the land can provide opportunity for our children, grandchildren and future generations. And welcome all creative input on this level.

I feel proud of our kids and others that they have seen opportunity in the landscape of the Myndd Bach.

