

John muir award

Media project
(assessment 2)

JOHN
MUIR
WILDERNESS
INYO

Discovering a wild place

Place chosen:

LLYN BRIANNE

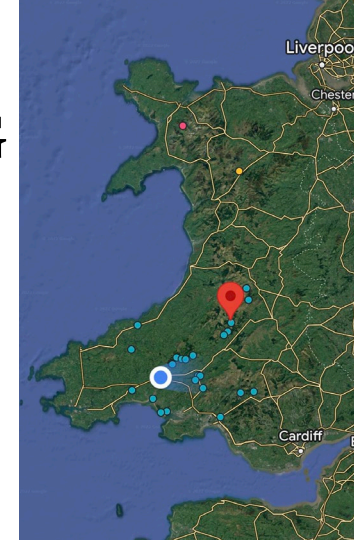




Location:

Rhandirmwyn, Llandoverly, Carmarthenshire, SA20 0PG
Hidden in the upper Tywi Valley and borders between north-east Carmarthenshire, southeast Ceredigion and western Powys.

Grid reference: SN 793 484



What I like about this place:

Llyn brianne is south wales' largest body of water covering over 500 acres of water and hundreds of acres of forestry, the surrounding scenery is absolutely amazing. This also means you can always find a quiet place to relax and admire the scenery. I have visited this area numerous times and I especially like how you feel immersed in nature. This was my favourite spot to visit when coming to Wales from London to escape the large crowds and feel still and calm, especially at night-time star gazing. I have enjoyed many hiking and camping adventures here.

I also enjoy watching and photographing the wild range of wildlife including red squirrels, red kites and I have even seen a pine marten there. I have found this area to be great for mushroom foraging which is one of my favourite things to do so it's easy to say I love this place even more because of that. Due to the large areas of pine forests and small footfall I have found rare mushrooms in abundance.

Why is Llyn Brianne special and worth special attention? & exploring its wilderness



It is a dark sky discovery site (DSDS)

There is Little to no light pollution, meaning nocturnal animals can thrive.

DSDS's are used for astronomical observations, astronomers, astronomy enthusiasts and photographers. I have thoroughly enjoyed photographing here and have captured my best pictures here of the night sky.

They can be used to teach or learn about constellations and planets to gain a better understanding of our world and galaxy.

Inspires awe and getting out to appreciate the beauty of nature.

Today less than 10% of the UK population can enjoy a view of our own galaxy, the Milky Way. Put another way, more than 90% of the UK population is now denied a view the sky which was taken for granted for almost all of human history – a view which has fired the imagination of generations of people and in the process inspired countless artists, poets, musicians, mathematicians, scientists and philosophers. Without the night sky acting as a source of creativity and questioning, some of the most important scientific discoveries may not have been made nor works of art produced. (Dark skies in the high Weild AONB)

It's a reservoir!

- Llyn Brianne is Wales' second largest reservoir (water volume) and supplies water to the regions of Swansea, Neath and south Wales valleys. (waterson, 2021)
- Because the reservoir provides water to such a large area of Wales its important to respect the restrictions of water sports, fishing and sustainable camping, For example leaving no trace.
- If rubbish gets dumped around the areas it causes many implications including harming wildlife and cause imbalances, as demonstrated: "Because of the increasing anthropogenic pressure, the amount of solid waste discarded in water is growing considerably. It can affect aquatic organisms, modifying their distribution and abundance." (Czarnecka et al., 2009)
- not allowing others to enjoy the area as you have and, in my opinion, most important: anthropogenic pressure. This leads to a build-up of plastics in the reservoir which break down, generating microplastics which then flows into the river Towy and provides houses with drinking water... Yummy microplastic water!! I realise this is already a widespread problem however limiting the amount of waste that gets into the reservoir by simply taking your rubbish home around water resources is imperative. This is backed up with a study on the effects of dams on river transport of microplastic pollution which found that " microplastic concentrations in sediment within reservoirs was significantly higher than in sediment above the dams.

These results show that the sediment collecting behind dams is one sink for microplastics in river systems at long timescales" (Watkins, Mc Grattan, Sullivan and Walter, 2019)

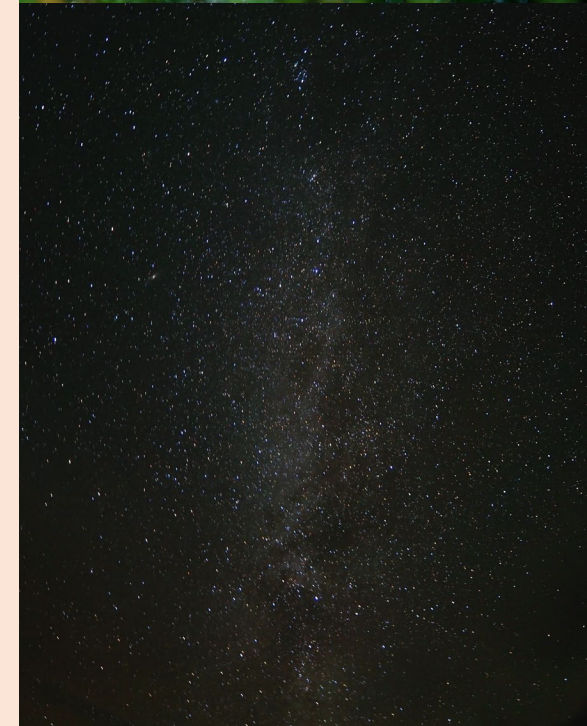
Natural characteristics

- Llyn Brianne is a manmade reservoir, however it used to be a mining town until the early 1970's when the dam was created. The remnants of the town still lie underneath the reservoir, but the memory remains of the town alongside abandoned slate quarries and the name of the area: Rhandirmwym means 'land of minerals' in Welsh
- "The reservoir lies at almost 300m (990ft) above sea level. It holds over 64 million cubic metres of water contained by a 91m (300ft) stone-built dam and is the largest of its kind in Europe." (visit mid wales)
- The reservoir is surrounded by spruce and pine forestry on three sides and rugged moorland on the other.



What have I done to get to know the site?

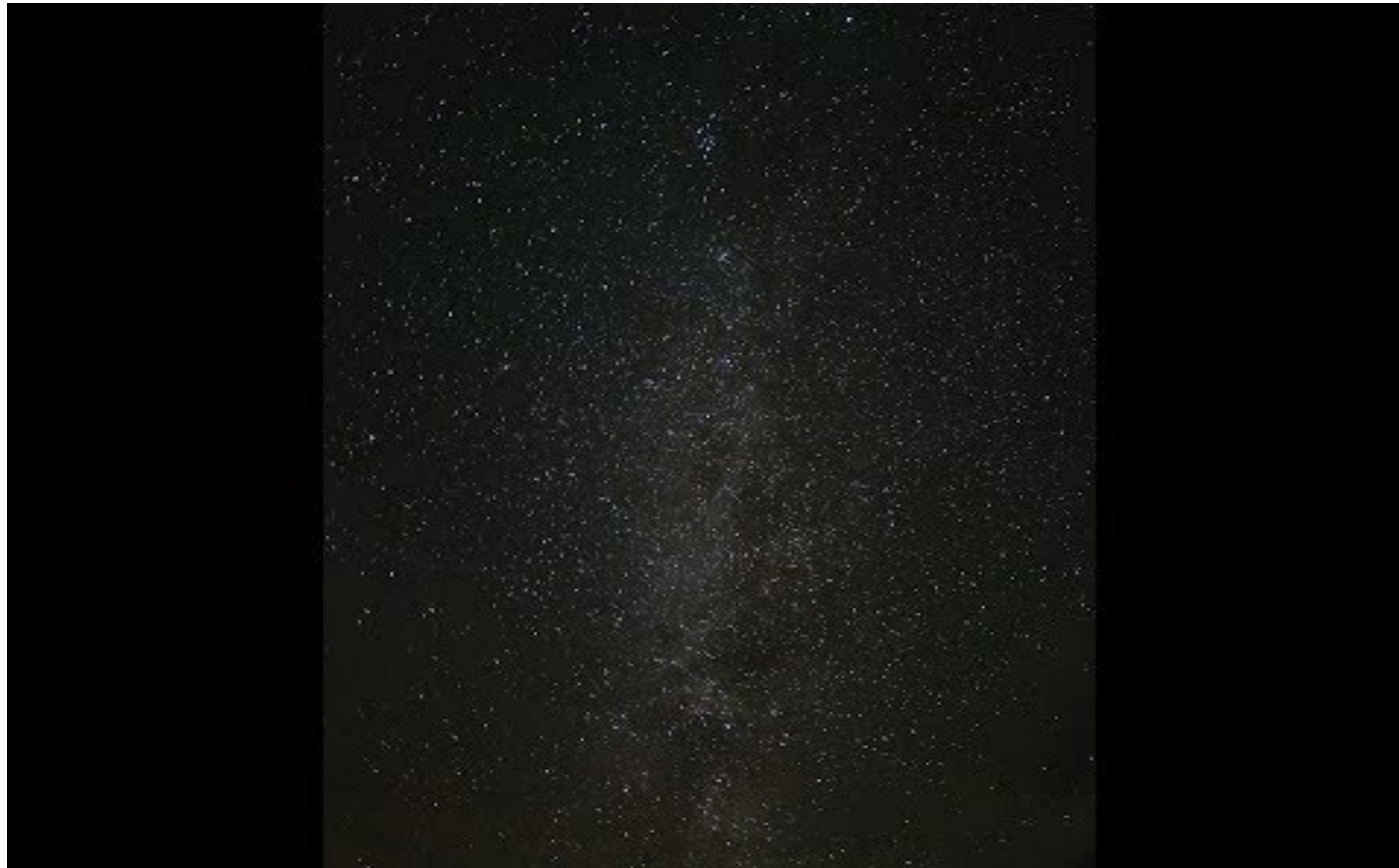
- I have visited this site numerous times whilst living back home as previously mentioned but since moving to university I decided to plan a trip ahead of completing the John Muir Award to remind myself of its beauty and check out the conditions of the site for rubbish.
- Gus and I wild camped overnight and saw that there was a lot of rubbish. I picked up a few bits to stop it entering the water but planned to make the trip within the next week to return and do a full litter pick ASAP as part of the John Muir Award.



Evidence of visiting site

enjoy the video I have made documenting our litter pick mission

- <https://youtu.be/SYoke-LmR9w>



Conserve/take responsibility

Practical measures taken to promote and preserve llyn brienne

We conducted a four-hour litter pick. This consisted of stopping at multiple places along our trip to gather rubbish we saw. Most of our time was spent at two main places at llyn brienne including 'Fannog farmhouse' north of the reservoir and an unnamed car park to the east.

We found these two sites to have the most rubbish as it is clearly where people have been camping and gathering around having campfires and leaving their rubbish. We gathered two full bin bags and when back home split it into rubbish and recycling and glass waste.

My main concern was to pick up all the plastic that had been discarded, especially in areas very close to the water to limit it going into the water to minimise the plastic and microplastic problem like mentioned in slide 7.

Another focus for me was to clean the forest area as I travel there to forage for mushrooms. Waste and especially plastic can disrupt the mycorrhizal network, and alter plant growth and the soil around it. This can lead to altering soil structure and water transport. This means that alterations will be seen in reproduction rates and lifespan of many plants and eventually trees. So, I therefore tried to clean the plastics to prevent the breakdown of microplastics into the network. I will share my knowledge and passion for mushrooms and how we can do our bit to care about this vital part of our ecosystem!

- I kept some small bits of rubbish and am currently working on a stop motion video to raise awareness surrounding litter pollution and encouraging others to 'leave no trace'. I will upload this to my Instagram. I think this would be beneficial as I have quite a large following of camping and outdoor enthusiasts.
- I have also messaged resources for Wales enquiring about litter pollution and if they have a plan to tackle it. I put forward ideas of having a rubbish bin which is community led where you take it in turns to take the waste home and dispose of it.

reflection

- I thoroughly enjoyed the practical element of getting out and doing a clean of a place I love going to so much. I have picked up rubbish there before but not to this extent and therefore deepened my connection with it. Despite this, I feel like just doing a clean-up isn't sufficient. It's like fighting a losing battle as you will never be able to pick up all the rubbish that has been there and the fight with microplastics feels awful. I realise however, that we did our part that day, significantly enhancing the aesthetics of the area. People visiting after us wouldn't have an eye sore with the surprisingly large amounts of rubbish scattered around a seemingly wild and reclusive place, so for that I feel satisfied.
- I will be participating in and organising more clean ups to improve the area we live in and use. To make my next clean up easier I will dedicate separate bags for their suitable wastage method, as we discarded all of the rubbish into the same bag and took a long time to sort out afterwards.
- I want to help further by making a video to share the importance of 'leaving no trace' and camping etiquette to inspire others to treat these beautiful places with respect, and the consequences of not doing so. (mentioned in previous slides)

- I have always had a deep respect for the outdoors and ensuring I don't leave any rubbish behind me and my adventures, so that hasn't really changed after this project, however I have realised the importance of community in tackling issues. And how working together we can live in a more sustainable world for adventuring and life in general.
- The John Muir project inspired me to look for places to volunteer towards a good cause and I now spend one day a week volunteering on Glasbren farm in Carmarthen. Glasbren is a non-profit organisation which focusses on growing food and using that food as medicine, regenerative living and sharing nature connection.
- This has made me realise that sustainable practice is about building a community of likeminded people and preaching to others about it, to inspire and make a difference as a collective. By ourselves we cannot make a huge difference, but together we can.

Own sustainable practise

In the future I would like to create content for companies that care about the environment and therefore connect my work to my personal values.

Brands I am particularly interested in currently include patagonia as the founder Yvon Chouinard has just transferred all ownership and profits to the Patagonia purpose trust which aims to protect the planet, this could be around one hundred million a year! This is a huge amount and a great statement to other businesses that they can all play a part in helping the planet.

Second brand is fjallraven. Goretex products are environmentally damaging as they rely on the continuing extraction of fossil fuels, alongside the use of dangerous chemicals. The garments are extremely durable, meaning they will take centuries to break down. However, fjallraven focusses on using natural materials such as recycled wool, organic hemp, and recycled polyester. To make the garments waterproof they simply advise using organic beeswax which is a natural waterproofing material. I like this approach as this is what we always used to do prior to Gore-Tex being invented. There are no dangerous chemicals involved and the garments will break down a lot faster and easier making the entire process a lot more environmentally friendly.

I am therefore sure to be mindful about what kit I buy in the future for my adventures. I will recycle and hand down all my old or damaged kit and share with people that companies offer repairs and have many recycling points.

- Implications of geotagging
- Tag thoughtfully, avoid tagging or geotagging specific locations. Instead tag a general location if any at all. While tagging may seem innocent it can lead to significant impacts on certain areas. (Leave no trace pp.1)
- This is not such an issue for me right now with a small following on social media, but I now do not tag exact locations of pictures. And it is a promising idea for me to never to do this in the future, being in the adventure film sector. If someone wants to know where it is I have been they can ask me directly, and if I know they are responsible in the outdoors then I'll obviously tell them. I have seen people expose quiet and hidden places around where I lived and it had become extremely exploited, never the same again. The same goes for all places around the world. And gatekeeping special places will help preserve them.

- The John Muir project was definitely worthwhile. I have learnt a lot about dark sky discovery sites and the importance of them, anthropogenic pressure around natural sites (especially areas around water) and the importance of community in being more sustainable in adventure practises.
- I will use this information to only work with brands in the future that share the same values as mine and create my own content which will bring focus to sustainable practise. Due to covid, the amount of people exploring the UK has increased and I hope that I can share information about how to ensure that other generations can enjoy the things and places we have experienced.
- I used to feel quite depressed about the ideas surrounding climate change and plastic pollution however I realise that I can dedicate my work and time to making a difference. Starting with my smaller community and areas, hopefully leading to larger differences as I gain more connections with people and companies.
- I will make videos on the importance of the ecosystem and how things can effect it, eg microplastics. And share my passion and knowledge for mushrooms as they are a vital part of the ecosystem and not largely recorded or filmed.

references

- Czarnecka, M. *et al.* (2009) "The role of solid waste materials as habitats for macroinvertebrates in a lowland dam reservoir," *Hydrobiologia*, 635(1), pp. 125–135. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10750-009-9905-7>.
- *Dark skies in the High Weald AONB, Welcome to the High Weald*. Available at: <https://www.highweald.org/look-after/dark-skies.html> (Accessed: December 13, 2022).
- Waterson, Luke (2021) *Llyn Brianne: South Wales' biggest body of water is a true recluse, Undiscovered Wales*. Available at: <https://undiscovered-wales.co.uk/2020/01/02/llyn-brianne/> (Accessed: December 10, 2022).
- *Llyn Brianne Reservoir & Dam* (no date) *Llyn Brianne Reservoir & Dam - Llandovery - Visit Mid Wales*. Available at: <https://www.visitmidwales.co.uk/things-to-do/llyn-brianne-reservoir-and-dam-p1735481#:~:text=Llyn%20Brianne%20did%20not%20exist,and%20South%20Wales'%20largest%20lake>. (Accessed: December 14, 2022).
- Leave no trace (2020) *'leave no trace and social media.'* Available at: <https://lnt.org/sites/default/files/Leave%20No%20Trace%20and%20Social%20Media.pdf> (Accessed: December 14, 2022)