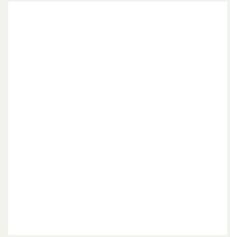


Radnorshire Wildlife Trust

Exploring Gilfach

March 2019 Evaluation Summary

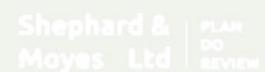


Sir Faesyfed
Radnorshire



For the Heritage Lottery Fund

Darylle Hardy, 'Exploring Gilfach' Project Manager
and Joan Payne, RWT Volunteer



PLAN
DO
REVIEW



Exploring Gilfach

‘What a wonderful place – stopped for a picnic and just couldn’t leave without a longer look.’

Aims & Achievements

Gilfach nature reserve is an old hill farm on the edge of the Cambrian mountains in the old county of Radnorshire in Powys. Set in a scenic landscape, it is rich in wildlife and history. Radnorshire Wildlife Trust (RWT) bought the farm in 1988 and over the last 30 years has restored the longhouse and barn, improved management of the farmland for wildlife and set up facilities for visitors including interpretation and a network of footpaths.

The nature reserve has a rich biodiversity and a strong cultural heritage. Over 2,400 species have been recorded at Gilfach, many uncommon, but the reserve is particularly noted for its variety of rare and scarce lichens. Its cultural heritage spans 3,000 years. There is a bronze-age cairn circle along with routes used by Roman soldiers, 12th century Cistercian monks and more recently the old mid-Wales Railway.



‘We have stopped at the nature reserve by the entrance on several occasions but this is the first time we walked the trail past the sculptures to the farm. Fabulous walk.’

‘What a wonderful discovery – have driven A470 for 30 years and suddenly found you!’

Gilfach received funding for the project from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Natural Resources Wales, The Bernard Sunley Foundation, the Oakdale Trust and the local community. The funding helped realise the aim of raising the profile of Gilfach as one of Wales’ best nature sites and created opportunities for a wider range of people to explore Gilfach.

Gilfach has new interpretation and its heritage is better recorded.



A wider range of people visited Gilfach and enjoyed themselves.



Lots of people volunteered time and learnt new skills.



Capital Works - Key Achievements

The Exploring Gilfach project has made considerable improvements to the site as a result of the investment.

New Interpretation

Capital works to improve the interpretation of the site and give it a consistent style, and build a welcome hub, the 'Caban'.

There were also improvements to the footpath network and to lighting, toilets and working space in the visitor facilities in the Old Farmyard.

Creating virtual access

There is now a strong online presence with several films about Gilfach available to watch both on site and from home on the YouTube channel. The site's social media profile has also grown.

Improved visitor facilities

Work to the listed buildings in the Old Farmyard included repairs to the septic tank soakaway, improvements in water and light economy, and the creation of more useful spaces for activities and office functions.

Improved disabled access

Gilfach now has defined disabled parking spaces, an improved easy access path with turning circle and large text for interpretation posts. The Caban, Byre and Barn are all accessible for wheelchair users.

Upgrading the Byre

This is now the primary source of information about Gilfach. The interpretation uses interchangeable seasonal panels, with capacity for table displays and posters. The new interpretation is flexible, durable and easily cleaned, reflecting the practicalities of an area shared with bats and swallows.

Broadening the range of interpretation

The project has created lichen spotter guides, a butterfly leaflet, new postcards and bank of photographs that can be used to promote events and in future literature.

Improving the footpath network

The site now has clear signage and way-marking and a route map that ties in with this. The map is available to download from the Wi-Fi zone as well as the RWT website.

New footpaths

A new and challenging high level footpath has been created giving magnificent views over Gilfach, and another path has been developed as a 'Walk through Time' focussing on Gilfach's cultural heritage.

AS A RESULT OF THIS INVESTMENT:

3/4 of visitors to the Caban said the information had encouraged them to explore Gilfach.

Visitors are more likely to explore Gilfach compared to the baseline in 2014.

MORE WALKERS ARE MAKING USE OF THE TRAILS.

92% of people attending training courses think the Barn is a good training venue.

327M of footpaths have been improved to create a wider choice of paths across the site.



'The new Wyloer Walk is splendid.'

'Whole place is gorgeous – we think what you've done here is wonderful.'

Activity Programme – Key Achievements

Alongside the capital works, the project funded a programme of activities to attract a wider range of people to Gilfach. This programme also aimed to build the capacity of staff and volunteers to better record and look after the site's heritage, and to raise awareness of the less charismatic but vitally important species in Gilfach.

Supporting access to disadvantaged families and adults
Throughout the project, staff and volunteers have worked with local organisations to raise awareness about the site and to encourage its use. The programme included special activities, guided walks and talks.

Staff and volunteer roles

Gilfach now has a new volunteer team called the Gilfach Rangers, that meets regularly to engage with visitors and conduct biodiversity surveys.

Training for staff and volunteers.

The project provided 16 formal training sessions for volunteers and staff using a variety of outside experts. They included amongst other topics training in oral histories, film making and managing tricky situations with visitors.

Developing Gilfach's resources.

There is now a bank of well organised materials to use in future interpretation and in future activities. A digital photographic library has been created along with a common species compendium and a botanical herbarium.

Species monitoring and survey work.

The project provided the capacity and impetus for more survey work. There is now a schedule of species survey work that means surveying work will continue long after the project comes to an end.

Life under the lens training days.

The main aim of this stand of work was to raise awareness and knowledge about the smaller species in Gilfach including mosses, lichens and invertebrates. 12 formal species training events took place along with follow up events and support.



'I am over the moon with my visit today.'

INVESTMENT IN THE PROJECT RESULTED IN:

100

volunteers giving time to the site, including 30 new to RWT.

23 activities for organisations which support disadvantaged adults and families, with 234 attendances.

4,369 ATTENDANCES AT SESSIONS.

Training for over half of the project's regular volunteers.

774

people visiting Gilfach for the first time.

184 ACTIVITIES

247

people attending talks on Gilfach.

8 connections and visits with local secondary and higher education establishments.

57 EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS ENGAGED

'The project has improved facilities at the reserve and made it more interesting and attractive for visitors. It's been very satisfying to have been part of it.'

'Brilliant day – lots of activities and helpful informative staff.'

Conclusions & Next Steps

Exploring Gilfach has been an enormously successful project.

It has helped make the site more accessible and has opened up the site to new groups and users. It has also helped raise the profile of the less charismatic but vitally important mosses, lichens and invertebrates that reside there.

The capital work has not been without its strain. The project has helped RWT develop its understanding of capital delivery and more realistic time frames and costs will be included in future bids. RWT has shown the value of investing in sites like Gilfach because of the substantial good will and resources

the community can provide to help with its ongoing maintenance and management.

Exploring Gilfach has showcased the value of investing modest amounts of money in a local community. It has shown how it can mobilise volunteers in the community, protect the local biodiversity by building up the surveying skills of the community and help connect more diverse groups to a unique and special site.



RWT will continue to seek investment for Gilfach especially in funding dedicated staff to engage with visitors and work with volunteers. The successful delivery and impact of this project shows why funders should continue to support RWT in this aim.