

New lease of life for Pwllpeiran

Pwllpeiran, located in the heart of the Cambrian Mountains in West Wales, has been a centre for studying upland farmed ecosystems for decades.

The farm consists of 1,118ha of mixed grassland and heathland ranging from 265-625 metres above sea level. The next phase of the site's development as a research facility will be undertaken by Aberystwyth University's Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS), supported by a £2.5 million investment from the BBSRC.

History of improvement

Pwllpeiran has been linked with upland research since the 1930s, playing a crucial part of Sir George Stapledon's work into methods to establish productive hill pastures.

Back then, specialist machinery was used on derelict moorland to kill the bracken, tear through the matted turf and rushes, and carve open drains through bogs. The land was slugged and limed, sown with rape and ryegrass for speedy grazing by sheep, before being harrowed and re-sown with ryegrass, white clover and timothy. This was kept productive by regular fertilising and controlled grazing.

The results were a striking increase in the productivity of the pasture, stocking density and quality of lamb produced. Over the next 30 years, Pwllpeiran increased its agricultural output dramatically and its systems were widely taken up by farmers.

Restoring biodiversity

Pwllpeiran is also the site of long-term extensification plots established in 1994, funded by the Ministry of Agriculture to test the effectiveness of different management regimes on upland-fringe pasture.

The treatments were sheep grazing, hay cutting only, hay cutting and aftermath grazing; each with or without lime. The results show that species-rich grassland developed within ten years of starting these treatments and that the most effective one for restoring biodiversity was hay cutting with aftermath grazing.

ADAS has run a paddock-scale experiment at Pwllpeiran since 2002, assessing the effect of sheep and cattle grazing on degraded matgrass-dominated moorland. The aim is to restore a mosaic of heather and bilberry. Work so far has shown that ground disturbance and introducing heather seeds is most successful. This work is being funded by Defra until 2017.

Attracting new entrants

From 2015, the next phase in the platform's life begins, when two young farmer entrants will be allocated 100ha each to manage on a five-year farm business tenancy. The hope is that the platform as a whole will also attract researchers to come and exploit its unique scientific and agricultural resources.



Find out more information about the research platform [here](#)