



Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy
Clwydian Range and Dee Valley

Ardal o Harddwch Naturiol Eithriadol
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Our Picturesque Landscape



Pontcysyllte Aqueduct © The Waterways Trust

A Brief Project Outline

Our Picturesque Landscape is an exciting new project that centres on the landscape of the Dee Valley and the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site. It takes as its themes the inspirational journeys that have and continue to be a feature of the area which is cut by the canal, Telford's A5 and the River Dee. Visitors have drawn inspiration from this beautiful valley in art and poetry since the 18th century and it continues to draw tourists in search of the sublime.

But this is a landscape under extreme pressure with high numbers of visitors drawn to what are often our most fragile sites. The communities on its doorstep, born from the industrial endeavours that shaped it, are now less connected to the benefits the landscape offers. The project will invest in the resilience of key visitor sites and engage communities in its appreciation and management while reinterpreting this rich landscape for a new generation.

Early Tourists

The story perhaps starts in 1771 when Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, influenced by his earlier grand tours of Europe, set out on one of the first domestic excursions around his estates of North Wales, accompanied by artist Paul Sandby. Sandby published XII views of North Wales and Sir Watkin commissioned two views of

Dinas Bran from Richard Wilson, revealing a most picturesque and sublime landscape. Other artists and commentators followed.

Around the same time the ladies of Llangollen, Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, from their home at Plas Newydd were establishing the Dee Valley as centre for picturesque appreciation. They were great champions of the romantic and society became fascinated by their lives. They played host to numerous visitors, particularly writers including William Wordsworth and Anna Seward.

Many of the original paintings have been reproduced by artists following in the footsteps of the early landscape painters. JMW Turner in particular visited the Dee Valley a number of times and depicted the river Dee at Corwen and Valle Crucis and Castell Dinas Brân

Illustrated books of the area include "Wanderings and Excursions in north Wales" (1836) by Thomas Roscoe, which includes a painting of Valle Crucis. Henry Gastineau produced "Wales Illustrated" in 1830-31 including paintings of Dinas Bran, Valle Crucis and the Llangollen area. George Borrow also included the Dee Valley on his tour of Wales in the 1830s.

Great engineering structures at the time such as the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, the Horseshore Falls and the Chainbridge also seemed to have an eye for the aesthetic indicating that grand engineering advances could take their place in the landscape and complement nature.

By the early and mid 19th century the popularisation of the landscape of the Dee Valley combined with other factors to begin to establish them in our consciousness as iconic landscapes.

The A5 and the railway became tourist routes, bringing visitors to north Wales in numbers and putting Llangollen and Corwen even more on the excursion map.

Project Background

The Our Picturesque Landscape is a partnership project developed by the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site, Wrexham County Borough Council, Denbighshire County Council, The Canal and River Trust, Natural Resources Wales, Cadw, Cadwyn Clwyd, Aqueducts and the Friends of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley. All partners are represented on a project steering group and are actively engaged in the development of the project.

The Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded a Stage One Pass to the scheme funding a 14 month Development Phase. Progression to Stage Two / Delivery Phase is subject to a further application although HLF have allocated the funds for Stage Two - £1.3 million, over 5 years.

The Project Aims

1. Protect the natural and historic heritage features through conservation and access management.
2. Reinststate the iconic and defining views of the picturesque movement.
3. Interpret the heritage significance of the picturesque landscape to people.
4. Engage with target audiences to share and increase awareness and understanding of the special qualities of the landscape.
5. Connect and reconnect local communities with the landscape.

Next steps

The Project Application identified activity under 3 themes which will need to be reviewed and developed through a Landscape Conservation Plan, delivered by the Development Phase of the Project:

Engaging communities

A number of projects are proposed to engage individuals and groups from targeted communities within Denbighshire and Wrexham, provide new community access to the heritage of the area, develop circular, waymarked and interpretive trails linking to key gateways sites and the production of educational resources.

Accessing the Picturesque Landscape

New interpretation is proposed at sites that are tied closely to the production of key artworks from Richard Wilson, Turner and Edward Pugh, providing opportunities to walk in the footsteps of these artists. The project will develop a programme of events that celebrate the industrial heritage and artistic associations of the area and encourage people to explore further afield along the World Heritage Site and surrounding landscape.

Conserving the Picturesque Landscape

The project aims to restore and preserve key views both from and into the World Heritage Site including views from Pontcysyllte, Chirk and Llantysilio. Volunteering activity will be promoted through the restoration of the Dell at Plas Newydd. The project will also seek innovative solutions to reducing congestion, access and erosion issues.

