

English landscape names in Snowdonia National Park: some initial principles

Summary

- English names can be found on many of the landscape features of Snowdonia National Park. Sometimes, they exist together with Welsh names, but not always. Like all other names, they are part of the cultural heritage of the Park.
- Research suggests that giving more prominence to Welsh place names in the local landscape (and on maps, websites, etc.) could have a positive effect on the confidence of the local community in the Welsh language.
- A significant number of the English names for the Park's landscape features are 'secondary' names and are quite recent coinages. That is, they are the product of processes such as the translation of Welsh names; adaptations that have been made by taking elements of the Welsh names and coupling them with English elements; or the transferal of names from outside Wales. These processes – which are quite normal – have taken place over a considerable period of time and are still taking place today. They are not part of a deliberate effort to replace Welsh names, but - obviously - the examples are increasing. In the context of such names, it could be argued in favour of a decision to use only the Welsh forms of the names. Of course, the case for each individual name is different in terms of history, context and contemporary usage.
- Not every English name is a 'secondary' name. *Snowdon* and *Snowdonia* are the most obvious examples. Any decision regarding the use of these names would be a significant one and using only the Welsh forms would be a powerful statement that would elicit strong responses. It is fair to note that these names are extremely familiar in Wales and beyond and it is impossible to imagine a situation where a decision by the Park to use *Yr Wyddfa* and *Eryri* only (say for example) would lead to the disappearance of the names *Snowdon* and *Snowdonia*.
- The use of Welsh names can help create a unique experience for visitors from outside Wales. Work should be undertaken to ensure that very experience is positive one and inclusive which deepens the understanding of the Park and its culture.
- In its interpretation and promotion work, the Park can refer to the heritage of place names in every language. The fact that a specific English name - or a specific Welsh name for that matter - is not used for formal purposes today does not mean that that name and its history should not be presented when that is appropriate. For example, when discussing the history of tourism or any other industry the Park could introduce the English names coined in that context and acknowledge their importance and any contemporary use of them.

- Using creative editorial policy for social media, websites, billboards, leaflets, etc. can be a way to promote Welsh names without ignoring the existence of English names.
- There are some landscape features (especially climbs and other features associated with outdoor activities in the mountains) that do not have Welsh names, as far as can be seen. Some of these contain Welsh elements, but others are entirely in English. Coining Welsh names could be considered for the most obvious examples (eg those that can be seen on maps used by the public) and examples of coining of that type can already be seen. But it would be more difficult to use coinages like that instead of the English names, or to coin names for every example of an English name in every context.
- Adopting a creative and inclusive place name policy could be an obvious way to meet some of the aims and objectives of Eryri National Park.

Introduction

- 1 Welsh is the language of most of the place names in Eryri / Snowdonia National Park. But some locations have more than one name - one in Welsh and one in English. And there are a small number who only have English names. Furthermore, there is a strong perception that there is a growing tendency to coin new English names for features that already have Welsh names. The aim of this paper is to consider these English names in the context of the Park's intention to draw up a place names policy. Such a policy could consider the use of names in several contexts, eg signs, websites, social media, information boards, educational material, etc. Please also note that landscape features are considered here. Work on standardizing settlement names (eg villages and towns) has already been done by the Language Commissioner's Place Name Standardization Panel and published in the [List of Standard Welsh Place Names / Rhestr o Enwau Lleoedd Safonol Cymru](#).
- 2 This paper does not offer a complete analysis and does not take into account all relevant names. Its aim is to offer a starting point and highlight some key factors that should be considered when dealing with place names.

Background – why place names and their visibility are important

- 3 A name is not just a label on a location. The act of naming a site gives meaning to that site, and changes it from being part of a vague 'space' to being a specific 'place' (Azaryahu 2020). Every name, in whatever language, is part of the heritage of the area to which it belongs and can be an important part of local, regional and national.
- 4 Place names, when they appear on signs, become part of *the linguistic landscape*. In an influential 1997 study, Landry and Bourhis defined linguistic

landscape in terms of visibility and the prominence of different languages in a specific area: "[t]he language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration' (1997, t. 25). The linguistic landscape plays an important role in the identity of an area and its inhabitants. The idea of a linguistic landscape can be extended to include other spaces, including the web. In other words, the linguistic landscape is a relevant concept to virtual space as well (Ivkovic and Lotherington 2009).

- 5 Place names are by no means the only elements that contribute to the linguistic landscape. There are many other elements to be found, of course. But place names are very important as they will, as a rule, be the only Welsh words that appear on English signs, or on English parts of bilingual signs. Many of these names will be names of towns and villages, but a proportion of them will be names of landscape features. In that respect they are a significant part of the experience of non-Welsh English speakers who live in the Park or who visit them.
- 6 A linguistic landscape can fulfill two basic roles: an *informative role* (that is, conveying factual information about the relevant languages) and a *symbolic role* (Landry and Bourhis 1997, p. 25).
- 7 On an *informational level*, it is clear that the linguistic landscape of Eryri National Park conveys the information that there are two official languages: Welsh and English. But although official bodies usually erect bilingual signs with Welsh first, English is the dominant language on signs in many other areas (eg trade and tourism). There are few monolingual Welsh signs compared to monolingual English signs. Therefore, on an *informational level*, the linguistic landscape of the Park conveys the information that there are two main languages, and - considering the linguistic landscape in its entirety – that the English has the strongest position. In fact, English is the dominant language in the linguistic landscape in all parts of Wales.
- 8 There is also a *symbolic role* for a linguistic landscape which relates to its effect on different factions in the community. As Landry and Bourhis say, '[i]t is reasonable to propose that the absence or presence of one's own language on public signs has an effect on how one feels as a member of a language group within a bilingual or multilingual setting' (1997, p. 27). Likewise, when discussing the Sámi languages in northern Sweden, Daniel Andersson says that the symbolic role of the linguistic landscape includes 'the signals that the linguistic landscape sends to groups of people; for example, the presence of one's own language in the linguistic landscape positively influences that group's language and identity' (2020, p. 105). As they are an important part of the linguistic landscape, place names (in whatever language) contribute to this symbolic role.
- 9 So as stated above, the linguistic landscape is an obvious part of the tourists' experience when they visit the Park. The linguistic landscape can create an alternative experience for visitors from beyond Wales. Richard Coates has noted that visual use of the Welsh language 'alters' the linguistic landscape

for visitors to Wales, creating a different experience to what they are familiar with in their own areas. He suggests that this 'othering' could contribute to the economic benefits brought by tourism: '[Othering] the linguistic language for visitors to Wales [...] is presumably calculated to have a positive effect on receipt of tourist income' (2020, p. 40). The suggestion that this is not bound to happen without careful consideration of the nature of the visitors' linguistic experience should be noted.

- 10 Clearly, place name policy can contribute to shaping the linguistic landscape, especially when the names in question are ones that are important to the local community and to visitors. In Coates' view, the impact of a naming policy can be considered in more than one way: 'Naming policy therefore potentially faces two ways: normalising a particular aspect of identity internally (especially one which is threatened or contested) and presenting an Othered identity externally' (2020, p. 40). Names policy can therefore contribute to normalizing the use of a minority language such as Welsh, as well as creating an alternative experience for visitors.
- 11 We can summarise, therefore, by saying that the linguistic landscape of Eryri National Park (like all linguistic landscapes in Wales) conveys the fact that English is the dominant language. But on a symbolic level, increasing the visibility of Welsh place names in that linguistic landscape (eg by using only Welsh names on landscape features) could have a positive effect on users of that language, and create an alternative experience for visitors. As Puzey says, 'it is clear that the linguistic landscape plays an important role in the promotion of minority or indigenous languages, and especially with regard to toponyms belonging to these languages' (2009, p. 825).
- 12 In noting that, it is also important to ensure that any 'otherness' does not have a negative impact. But a policy that affects a relatively small number of names in itself would not come close to changing the status of English as the dominant language of the linguistic landscape. And it should not be assumed that support for using Welsh forms would be limited to Welsh speakers. It is already true that it is not uncommon to see 'Yr Wyddfa' or 'Llyn Tegid', say, in English texts. There was recently an opinion column in favour of only using the name 'Yr Wyddfa' in *The Daily Telegraph* (Davies 2021) and from a house style point of view, *The Sunday Times* was also seen prioritizing the Welsh name when referring to 'Yr Wyddfa' (Mount Snowdon)' (Collins 2022).

The wider context – what is happening in other countries?

- 13 Place names, including place names in minority languages, have been the subject of meaningful discussion at an international level for decades. That often happens in the context of standardizing names. The United Nations, for example, through a series of conferences on the standardization of geographical names, has stated the following: 'the preservation of minority and indigenous group culture is recognized as being an important aspect of the work of the standardization of geographical names' (United Nations 2012, p. 37).

Furthermore, when considering 'the recording and use of indigenous, minority and regional language group geographical names', it is noted that 'the promotion of the recording and use of such names is a valuable aid to the recognition, retention and revitalization of indigenous, minority and regional language group heritage' (United Nations 2012, p. 39). Therefore there is international recognition of the fact that place names have a prominent place in the context of language policy and planning.

- 14 Internationally, there are a large number of very obvious examples of changing naming policy in order to recognise minority or indigenous languages. One of the most famous is the use of *Uluru* rather than *Ayres Rock* (Australia). The [official record](#) about this name on the North Territory Place Names Register states the following: 'On 15 December 1993 the feature was officially dual named Ayers Rock / Uluru (where both names are equally as important and can be used either together or individually). Following a request from the regional Tourism Association, on the 6 November 2002 the order of the dual names was officially changed to Uluru / Ayers Rock.' Although both forms are still official, therefore, it seems that *Uluru* is now the norm in less formal English-medium contexts (eg *Uluru* is just the name of the entry on [Wikipedia](#) English).
- 15 As Andersson says, '[i]n the wake of strengthened minority policy globally, many Western countries today are striving to mend some of the damage that colonial place-naming practices have done, by acknowledging precolonial names and helping to revitalize their usage' (2020, p. 104). As a result, comparisons are sometimes made between names such as *Uluru* (and similar cases in countries such as New Zealand and Canada) and Welsh place names. But it should be emphasized that there are completely fundamental differences between these contexts and Wales' relationship with colonization and that such comparisons can be misleading if not harmful. Even so, and despite the basic discrimination, this again emphasizes that efforts to give new prominence to place names in minority languages is a global phenomenon.
- 16 More relevant to Wales, perhaps, is the situation in the Gaeltacht in Ireland. On the basis of [clause 32](#) of the Official Languages Act 2003 only Irish names are used on official road signs and on Irish Ordnance Survey maps. (This led to extended discussions and a change of policy in the case of the town of An Daingean / Dingle. But as already stated, town names are not under consideration in this paper. See further Puzey 2009, p. 825; and Moriarty 2012.)

Place names and 'special qualities' of Eryri National Park

- 17 In its Local Development Plan, Eryri National Park refers to the 'responsibility to protect and enhance natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage'. And in addition, it is 'that complex combination between people, life

wild and the environment which gives us, over time, the "Special Qualities" of Eryri which are so valuable to us today, and which contribute greatly to the quality of life of the Park's residents and the many people who visit the area' (Eryri National Park, p. 44).

- 18 When referring to the 'special qualities' of the Park, the Development Plan states 'The continued viability of the Welsh language as the main language of many social and professional circles. This aspect is evident in local place names which reflect the cultural heritage of the area' (p. 17). It can therefore be seen that the Park has already declared that place names are part of what makes up Eryri's 'special qualities'. Therefore, working proactively to protect and promote the place names is already a core part of the Park's mission.

Language and place names in the Park

- 19 Welsh is the language of the vast majority of place names within the boundaries of Eryri National Park. That is true in the case of settlement names (eg towns and villages) and in the case of the main landscape names (eg mountains, hills, valleys, cliffs, rocks, rivers, and lakes). Certain types of names derived from the context of the leisure and outdoor industries are the most obvious exceptions in this regard. For example, there is a tendency for names on climbs or paths in the highlands to be in English only as they are often coined by non-Welsh speaking individuals or groups. Very often, these are names for small features that would only be relevant to a specific group of users (eg climbers). But others appear on Ordnance Survey maps. There is sometimes a tendency to believe that names like this replace Welsh names. But often, there seems to be no record of any Welsh names on these features as they are climbs that did not exist as such before they were climbed for the first time. It is the act of naming it that creates them as 'places' (see §3 above).
- 20 It should also be noted that it is not usual for official bodies such as the Park to use every possible form of name. For example, although names such as *Pesda* (Bethesda) and *Llanbêr* (Llanberis) are familiar by word of mouth, it would not be normal for public bodies to use those names in most contexts. That does not mean that those forms should be devalued as their use is entirely suitable in certain contexts. So there is an important difference between choosing not to use a name or form of a name, and condemning that name. (There may be a few exceptions, such as the name *Nameless Cwm* [Cwm Cneifion], which evokes strong feelings as the name *Nameless Cwm* seems to make an erroneous statement - and offensive in some people's opinion - for the lack of a Welsh name. But such names are extremely rare.)
- 21 Although Welsh is the usual language for the names of the Park's main landscape features, there are also some English names. Very few of those go back to the Middle Ages, as do *Snowdon* (Yr Wyddfa) and *Pemblemere* (name of Llyn Tegid which is no longer used; Owen and Morgan 2007, p.

300). Several more were derived in the eighteenth century and especially from the nineteenth century, which is the period when tourism became an increasingly prominent part of life in the Park area. Other names come from more recent periods.

- 22 The Park's English names are also part of its heritage. When considering that, it also becomes clear that a great many of the English names are 'secondary' names. That is, they are not original coinages but instead they draw on Welsh names that already exist, or they are names that have been transposed from places others.
- 23 Names that are direct translations from Welsh are the simplest category. Here belong names such as *Swallow Falls* (< Rhaeadr y Wennol) and *Bearded Lake* (< Llyn Barfog). These, in their current forms, go back to the 19th century. (on *Swallow Falls*, see Owen and Morgan 2006, pp. 447–8). These English translations do not contain information or traditions that are not found in the Welsh names, although they sometimes favour one form or one specific interpretation of those Welsh names. *Swallow Falls* is a translation of Rhaeadr y Wennol , although there is a long-standing assumption (but difficult to justify) that Rhaeadr Ewynnol is the original Welsh form (Owen and Morgan 2006, p. 447). In the case of Llyn Barfog, it is probably growth on the edges of the lake that accounts for the word *barfog* , but note that John Rhys has proposed that *Barfog can be the name of an individual* in this case (Rhys 1901, p. 142).
- 24 There is another class of English names which are not translations, but rather coinages which name one landscape feature based on another prominent feature. In these names the usual pattern is a Welsh 'proper' name + an English common name. Examples of this are *Bala Lake* (Llyn Tegid), *Idwal Beach* (Y Ro), *Ogwen Falls* (Rhaeadr y Benglog), *Aber Falls* (Rhaeadr Fawr), *Vale of Ffestiniog* (Maentwrog Valley). Again, these are 'secondary' names formed on the basis of existing Welsh names.
- 25 Names transposed from other places or contexts are the last category of 'secondary' names. An example of that is *Happy Valley* (Cwm Maethlon), a name taken from Samuel Johnson's novel, *Rasselas* (1759) and which can be seen in several locations around the world, including one near Llandudno. In the case of *Happy Valley* (Cwm Maethlon), the name is also a semi-translation of the Welsh name Dyffryn Gwyn. Another example is *Fairy Glen* for Ffos Anoddun. There are several *Fairy Glens* in Scotland and in other countries too. *Devil's Kitchen* (Tyll Du, Cwm Idwal) may also be in this category. The first record of it can be found in the work of Thomas Pennant (1726–98). It is a name found in many places in England and North America, including one near Offa's Dyke in St Briavel's, Co. Gloucester.
- 26 There are few English names for features of substance that are not derived from the Welsh names. But there are some to be found, such as *Shell Island* for Ynys Fochras. This name conveys something about the site that is different from the Welsh name. But it could be argued that *Shell Island* is to a large extent a business name, which is the very large holiday field on the site. If so, differences could be made between the landscape feature (Fochras Island) and the holiday attraction on it (*Shell Island*).

Yr Wyddfa ac Eryri / Snowdon and Snowdonia

- 27 These names are, of course, the Park's most distinctive names and recently the use of them has been a hot topic. The history of these forms has been discussed in many places, and Michael Freeman's website ('[Early Tourists in Wales: 18th and 19th century tourists' comments about Wales.](#)') notes a wealth of historical forms. Essentially, the earliest example of *Snowdon* (or an equivalent form) can be found in 1095 and the example earliest of *Yr Wyddfa* (or an equivalent form) comes from 1284 (Owen and Morgan 2006, p. 443). That doesn't mean the English name is older, just that the first record is earlier. It is also interesting to note that the poet Llygad Gŵr called Llywelyn ap Gruffudd the 'eagle of Snawdwn' in a poem composed around the year 1258. The Latin form *Snowdonia* was used in the Middle Ages but was rarely used after that before Thomas Pennant popularizing the form in English in the eighteenth century. A form of *Eryri* is found in a Latin text compiled in the ninth century. It is therefore clear that these names have a long history, although it could be argued that ancient recovery is at the heart of the contemporary use of *Snowdonia*.
- 28 Accepting therefore that *Snowdon* is a significant and important name, would a decision by the National Park to use *Yr Wyddfa* alone endanger its existence? It would be very difficult to argue that as the existence of the name *Snowdon* is not dependent on the use of the Park. As Nick Livesey says (when stating his opposition to using only Welsh forms), 'I can't imagine that Yr Wyddfa will ever be adopted by the masses that climb it. The name Snowdon is etched into the British psyche as is Snowdonia, they are iconic terms' (Bailey 2021). There is truth in that and it is hard to imagine that name being 'lost' or 'disappearing' in any way.

Names that are in English only or originally

- 29 Few settlements have English names only. An obvious one is *Fairbourne*, which does not have a recognized Welsh name (Owen and Morgan 2006, p. 145).
- 30 However, there are a number of names associated with mountaineering and climbing that do not have specific Welsh names, or for which Welsh names had to be coined in response to the English names. Not all cases can be identified here (they are very numerous), but attention is drawn to some relevant examples. Ieuan Wyn notes that 'the Clogwyn y Geifr cliff in Cwm Idwal is called the "Devil's Appendix"' (2020). That could be converted into the formal name 'Crognant Clogwyn y Geifr', but it seems that would be a (partial) new name, rather than an existing name. The name *Mushroom Garden* is indicated on Ordnance Survey maps for a slope below Gerrig Gleision (Cwm Idwal). It is not clear if there is a Welsh name that corresponds *exactly*, although Coed Cerrig y Frân and Rhiwiau are in the same area. *Cenotaph Corner* is a climb on Ddinas y Gromlech (Nant Peris); it seems to have no Welsh name. The name Creigiau Cwm Graeanog has

been offered as a Welsh name on *Atlantic Slabs* (Wyn 2020). But the [Llechen Cytrolar](#) and [Creigiau'r Rowlar](#) can also be found locally. *Pillar of Elidir* is a name which on Ordnance Survey maps refers to part of Craig Cwrwgl (Elidir Fawr). Again, there does not seem to be a specific Welsh name.

- 31 There are a large number of names of these types to be found. Unless a process of translation or purposeful coining is developed, it is likely that many features such as these will only be in English forms. If there was a desire to have Welsh names, it could be argued that coining original names in Welsh would be the sensible step, rather than translating word for word from English.

Collections

- 32 When considering the importance of the visibility of Welsh names in the linguistic landscape (and in other visible areas, such as maps and the internet), there is a strong argument in favour of making more opportunities to use only Welsh names, eg on signs and in English-language texts. The place name policy could also encourage creative use of 'house styles' in order to prioritize the use of Welsh names eg on an English web page any English name could be entered in brackets the first time it is named, but only use the Welsh name after that. It should also be noted the importance of ensuring that the emergency services have complete lists of names of all types in order to ensure public safety.
- 33 It was observed that many of the English names used in the Park are 'secondary' (translations such as *Swallow Falls*; based on other Welsh names such as *Bala Lake*; or names transposed from other places, such as *Happy Valley*). It could be argued that using only the Welsh names in these cases would be a proportionate step and compatible with the Park's commitment to protecting cultural heritage. It could be argued in the same way for using a name such as Ynys Fochras (for example) as the name of a landscape feature, as the English name *Shell Island* has taken deep roots as a tourist site and is in no danger of being lost.
- 34 The most important case is *Snowdon* and *Snowdonia*. *Snowdonia* appears to be an eighteenth-century restoration, but it is as familiar throughout Britain as *Snowdon*. If the Park chose to always use the Welsh names, there would be no danger of these names - which are certainly an important part of the Park's heritage - being lost. Of course, careful discussion would be necessary before reaching a decision on such an important name and full consideration would need to be given to wider implications in terms of the image of the Park, tourism etc. But the research noted above shows that using Welsh names alone could have a positive effect on the perception of the language and also contribute to creating an alternative experience for visitors.
- 35 The English names (which have no equivalent Welsh names) which are often associated with mountaineering and climbing are a different category again. Some of these will, no doubt, be limited to climbing books or websites and so they won't be in visible to the vast majority of the population. But others appear on maps and signs and contribute to the sense that the linguistic landscape is gradually Anglicized. It would be possible to consider creating Welsh names for

the most prominent, but it is unlikely that such new names would replace the existing English names. Coining new names is not easy by a longshot, and the implications of that would need to be considered carefully.

DYLAN FOSTER EVANS

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