The history of Pwllpeiran

Pwllpeiran has a long and unrivalled record of involvement with change and development in the uplands. In the eighteenth century it was host to the radical agricultural experiments undertaken by Thomas Johnes of the Hafod estate, then in the 1930's it became the centre of Sir George Stapledon's pioneering Cahn Hill Improvement Scheme developing methods of establishing productive hill pastures. Specialist machinery was used on derelict moorland to kill the bracken, tear through the matted turf and rushes, and carve open drains. The land was slagged and limed, sown with rape and ryegrass for speedy grazing by sheep, before being harrowed and resown with ryegrass, white clover and timothy as the foundation of a new sward. This was kept productive by regular fertilising and controlled grazing.

The result was a striking increase in the productivity of the pasture, in the density of the stocking, and in the quality of the lamb produced. Over the next 30 years Pwllpeiran increased its agricultural output dramatically and its systems were widely taken up by farmers. From 1955, Pwllperian was officially designated as an Experimental Husbandry Farm. During the following forty years, work at the farm achieved substantial improvements in the quality and quantity of lamb and beef produced, but by the turn of the millennium the emphasis of agricultural policy was turning away from increased livestock production and towards the development of environmentally sensitive farming systems, and research priorities changed. After decades of management by MAFF and then ADAS, Aberystwyth University took over the lease for the site (which is owned by the Welsh Government) in 2012.

Pwllpeiran today remains a centre for the study of upland farmed ecosystems. Just over 50% of utilised UK agricultural land is classified as less favoured area, and within Wales this figure rises to 80%. These marginal areas will inevitably play an important role in ensuring future food and energy security. Upland regions are also vital in delivering a wide range of other ecosystem services; e.g. water management (including provision of drinking water and flood mitigation), carbon management (including soil carbon conservation and sequestration), and landscape and heritage management (including tourism, recreation and educational access).

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