

HEATHLAND ARISING CASE STUDY

Frenni Fach | Heath & Hedgerow

Site details

Frenni Fach is part of the Preseli Hills, situated close to the villages of Tegryn and Bwlchgroes in northeast Pembrokeshire. The site is recognised as being of historical importance with a Bronze Age 'round barrow' - a ritual or burial mound - on the peak. In recent history, the Frenni Fach was grazed with cattle and horses by neighbouring farmers and land owners. Members of the local Graziers Association maintain their commoners' rights. As across much of the Preseli Hills, the site hasn't been grazed since the 1990s. There has been ongoing land management with paths, firebreaks cut, and occasional managed burns. However, substantial growth increases the risk of wildfires and, if left to grow, will lead to significant changes in the local biodiversity.

Cwm Arian Renewable Energy (CARE) has been involved with the site for the past few years. In January 2022, they commissioned a Management Plan in collaboration with the Frenni Fach Graziers Association. The plan included a vision for Frenni Fach: “The common will retain its diverse wildlife into the future. The mixtures of heath, marshy grassland and scrub will persist. The development of scrub and woodland will be kept in check where it is sustainable to do so, but areas of scrub and woodland will develop elsewhere. If this mixture of habitats is conserved, then the characteristic species currently found here should continue to flourish.”

Through their Heath and Hedgerow project CARE has engaged with other local stakeholders to carry out work recommended in the Management Plan. These include Frenni Fach Graziers Association, Pembrokeshire Nature Partnership (PNP), Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA), Pantirion Farm, Plas Dwbl, Patch of the Planet and Glebelands Market Garden.





Aim

The Heath and Hedgerow project aimed to demonstrate how arisings could be cut, removed and used by local farmers, horticulturalists and smallholders on their land as well as to create products to be sold commercially.

The enterprise element is important to provide funding for the ongoing cycle of land management on the Frenni Fach and potentially more widely across the Preseli Hills.

Outcomes

Cutting of the firebreaks was funded and organised by PCNPA, and their removal and use organised and funded by CARE. Cutting happened in November due to bird nesting constraints. The land was very wet which caused some difficulties removing the arisings, with some materials remaining on the common until the land was drier.

Some cut areas were *Molinia* grass and proved very suitable for composting and mulch. However, in other areas mature bushes were cut and these were too large and woody to break down over winter. More details about use of arisings can be found in the case studies of Patch of the Planet and Pantirion Farm.

In addition to taking arisings from the Frenni Fach, PCNPA also gave permission for arisings from Mynachlogddu area to be used. Due to cutting mature growth in this area Mary Chadwick, PCNPA, has observed an increase in two wildflowers important for local biodiversity - whorled caraway and devil's-bit scabious. As Mary says, 'They're hard to spot in the photo because they're so small, but they wouldn't be there at all if it hadn't been cut.'

Fire Breaks on the Frenni Fach

The firebreak work on the Frenni Fach is an essential undertaking aimed at preventing the spread of wildfires and protecting the surrounding ecosystem. Firebreaks are strategically created clearings or barriers that are free from vegetation, designed to impede the progress of fires. In this particular case, the Frenni Fach area is being carefully cleared of flammable materials, such as dry vegetation and deadwood, to create a buffer zone. This helps to minimize the risk of fire spreading rapidly, allowing for better fire management and safeguarding the natural habitat. The firebreak work plays a crucial role in maintaining the balance between fire safety and preserving the ecological integrity of the area.

Learning

Cutting and removing arisings on the Frenni Fach in November was difficult due to weather conditions and would be easier earlier in the year. A bird survey could be carried out and if there are no late nesting birds cutting could be done in July or August.

A cycle of cutting different paths and firebreaks each year will allow different stages of growth across the Frenni Fach. This will maintain biodiversity and provide regular arisings for use locally and commercially.

Mature arisings could be made smaller, for example using a flail mower, to speed up the composting process.

Collaborating with different stakeholders was effective. Communication could be improved so recipients of arisings had a better idea of what they would be receiving.

PCNPA see benefits for managing more areas in the Preseli Hills in this way, however some areas are less accessible for large machinery (e.g. large rocks hidden in mature growth). The cycle of cutting maintains a balance of biodiversity and accessibility for people.



Next Steps

- Continue monitoring the use of arisings in existing trials
- Maintain relationships with stakeholders
- Conduct a bird survey to identify the presence of late nesting birds
- Cut different sections on Frenni Fach annually, following the management plan
- Further trials for use of arisings (e.g. animal bedding, biochar)
- Research the viability of creating a social enterprise around producing and selling biochar and composts while managing organic waste / biomass effectively and productively.