



The hilltop of Moel Findeg is one of the best views in Denbighshire.

The story of Moel Findeg

Part I

Moel Findeg is a place of winding paths and hidden treasures. Evidence of old quarries and lead mines now lie hidden within the woodland and heathland. Tony King describes the struggles for ownership of this local jewel over the past 320 years. In the next issue he will remind us of the more contemporary fight to save the mountain from becoming just another quarry resulting in the establishing of the Local Nature Reserve.

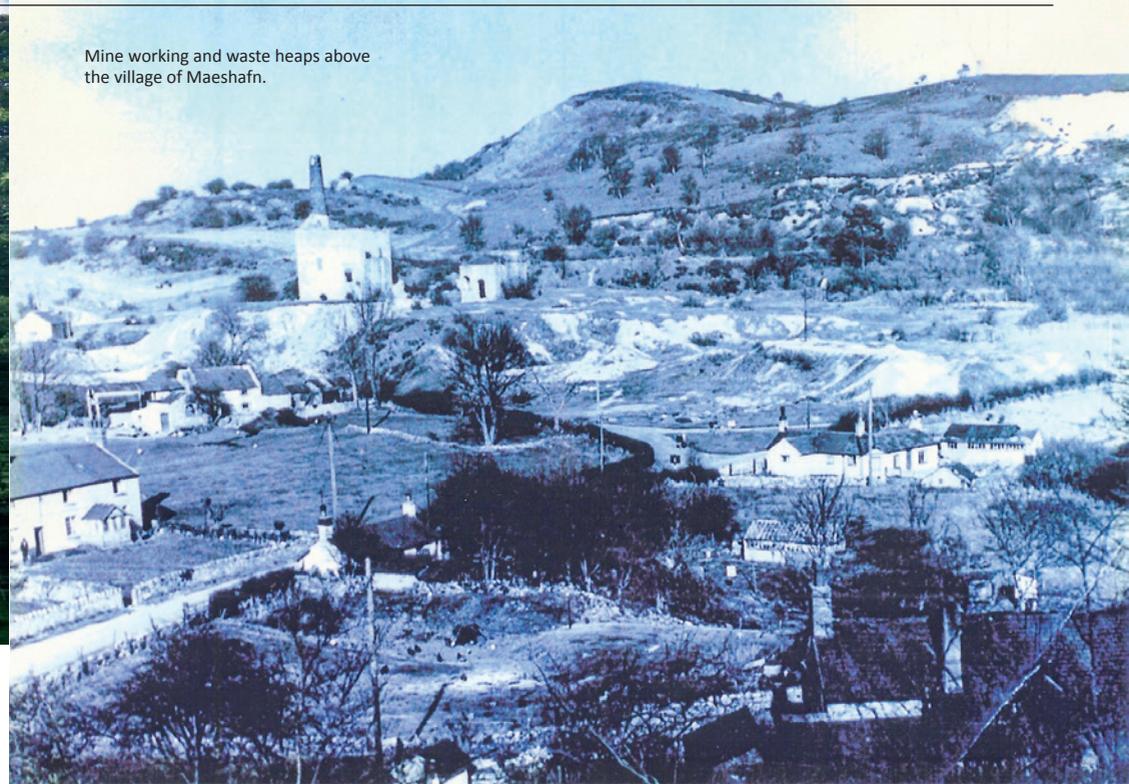
Moel Findeg is an attractive mountain that straddles the border between the counties of Denbighshire and Flintshire. It dominates the village of Maeshafn. The first known mention of the mountain (as Moel Windeg) is in E Lhwyd's "Parochialia" of 1699. The next significant mention was during the celebrated boundary dispute between the Grosvenor family and the Lords of Mold during the 18th cen-

tury. The disputed boundary lay between the parishes of Llanferres and Mold. At that time the mountain was the Common Waste of the two parishes. This meant that parishioners had certain common rights on the land - for example for grazing animals, and taking timber and stone. The area of the mountain in Llanferres parish was enclosed following the Llanferres Enclosure Act of 1793. This resulted in the parishioners losing their

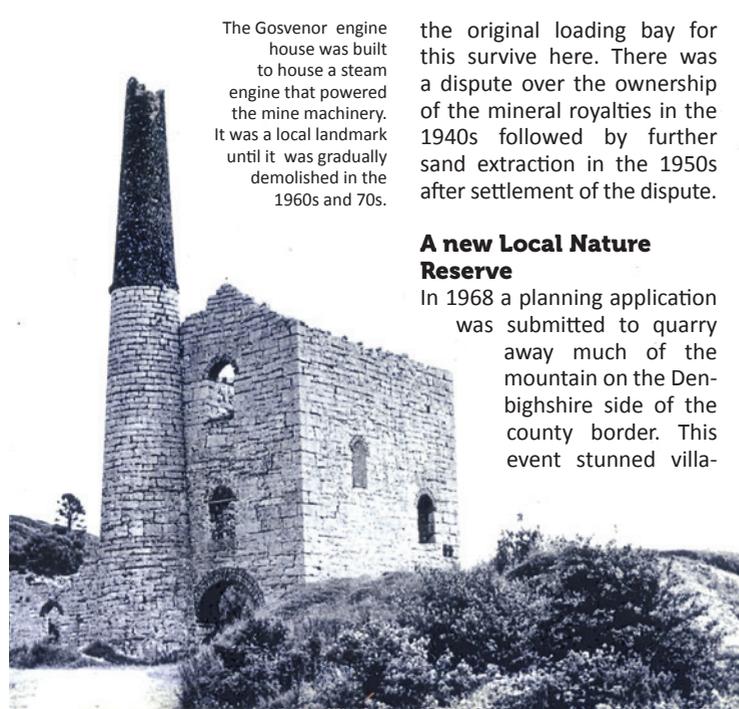
common rights over this land. Ownership of this part of the mountain then eventually passed into the hands of the Colomendy Estate.

Miners land

At the beginning of the 20th century several leases were issued for the extraction of silica sand for industrial purposes: but it appears that they were not executed. However during the 1930s and 1940s sand and stone was extracted on a regular basis. For example over 2,000 tons were removed in 1943. The resulting sand pits can be seen today, albeit covered with vegetation. The largest workings were on the west side of the mountain facing the village of Maeshafn. There was a smaller working on the south side facing the road leading to the former Youth Hostel. The remains of



Mine working and waste heaps above the village of Maeshafn.



The Gosvenor engine house was built to house a steam engine that powered the mine machinery. It was a local landmark until it was gradually demolished in the 1960s and 70s.

the original loading bay for this survive here. There was a dispute over the ownership of the mineral royalties in the 1940s followed by further sand extraction in the 1950s after settlement of the dispute.

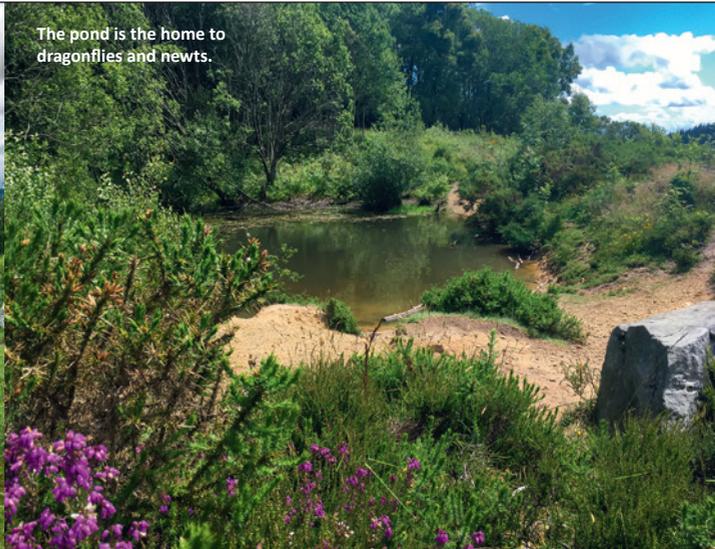
A new Local Nature Reserve

In 1968 a planning application was submitted to quarry away much of the mountain on the Denbighshire side of the county border. This event stunned villa-

gers as there were already two active quarries nearby at Aberduna and Burley Hill.

Eventually the mountain came into the ownership of Denbighshire County Council in 1999. The mountain was then designated as a Local Nature Reserve under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 in December 1999. The reason for the designation was that a large part of the area is covered by a Lowland Heath which is a rare type of wildlife habitat. The Nature Reserve covers an area of about 53 acres (21 hectares).

The then Countryside Council of Wales drew up the first of a series of five year



The pond is the home to dragonflies and newts.



The Common spotted-orchid.



The Welsh mountain ponies grazing on the hill in 2018.

► development plans. The Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust was commissioned to carry out two surveys of the mountain in 1999 and 2006. The first was a general archaeological assessment which revealed that there were the remains of a series of mine reservoirs together with the water channels (leats) that fed them. (The workings of the Maes y safn lead mine lies under the Re-

serve.) The second assessment was a detailed topographical survey that recorded these details. Extensive wildlife surveys were also carried out.

A fragile ecosystem

Practical work has been carried out on the mountain using contractors, Denbighshire County Council staff and volunteers from the village and elsewhere. The boundary walls

on the north and south sides, built following the Enclosure Act, were rebuilt. Contractors installed fencing so that the vegetation on the heathland could be managed by grazing Welsh mountain ponies. The woodland along the southern boundary was thinned and invasive birch and conifer trees removed from the heathland. This latter work continues today. It is now proposed to install fencing around the Molinia mire in the south east corner of the reserve to prevent the ponies from completely eliminating the purple moor grass that they find so palatable!

The Reserve is well supplied with water. There is a natural spring on the east side which fills a small reservoir and a deeper pond resulting from the planning battle further north. Newts and dragon flies are often observed at the latter. There are also slow worms and adders on the site.

The author has seen a hare, but only on one occasion. Early in 2003 the heathland was set on fire by an arsonist (there were several other unexplained fires in the area about this time). This action disrupted the management

plan which aimed to provide areas of heather with a varying age structure. It also led to a noticeable increase in the amount of gorse on the heathland. The Reserve has become very popular with visitors, many

of whom are regular dog walkers. The management plan is under continual review. Nowadays most of the work on the mountain is carried out by Denbighshire County Council staff and Denbighshire Countryside Volunteers.



Firemen fighting the heathland fire in 2013.



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