



Viewpoint

## Not bog standard



Time: 15 mins

Region: Wales

Landscape: rural



### Location:

Cors Caron National Nature Reserve,  
near Tregaron, Ceredigion, Wales

### Grid reference:

SN 69350 62979

### Getting there:

The main car park is on the B4343 from  
Tregaron (Grid reference SN 69206 62517)

### Keep an eye out for:

The wooden remains of ancient fish traps  
(known locally as putchers) at low tide

Deep in the valley of the River Teifi is Tregaron Bog - or Cors Caron as it's more poetically known ('cors' is Welsh for bog).

This is a landscape that refuses to be tamed. Encompassing two thousand acres, it's the biggest area of bog in Britain. It's also the most intact surviving example of a raised bog in the whole of the United Kingdom.

How did 2,000 acres of squelchy bog save  
a species on the brink of extinction?



Our story begins around 15,000 years ago during the last Ice Age when most of Wales was covered by a vast ice sheet...

When temperatures rose and the ice sheet retreated, glaciers were left behind trapped in the valleys. On melting, the Teifi glacier deposited a mound of rock and debris known as a 'moraine' which formed a ridge across the valley. This ridge dammed the River Teifi and a lake formed behind it.

The level of the lake got so high that it overflowed the moraine. As a result, much of the water drained away and the lake filled with mud and plant life, turning it into a swamp. As the plant life in the lake died, it formed into layers of dead vegetation. Lack of oxygen in the water stopped the plant matter decaying and over time formed peat. Species including cotton grass, heather and bog mosses filled in the swamp, creating a bog.

The surface of the bog gradually formed into five gentle hummocky domes which rise upwards from the land like gentle cushions.

## Edge of extinction

Keep an eye and ear out for the distinctive red kite. Listen for its high-pitched whistle and see if you can recognise their graceful hovering silhouettes and v-shaped forked tails. If it wasn't for wild places like Cors Caron that have been left to return to their natural state, the red kite would be extinct in the UK.

During the Middle Ages the red kite was a valued scavenger however, by the 16th century a bounty was placed on its head and it was hunted as vermin. By the 1930s, this species was virtually extinct in the UK, surviving only in the remote valleys of mid Wales, where less than a dozen individuals and a couple of breeding pairs had survived.

Thanks to the commitment of land owners and local communities these few rare birds were protected and today Wales has now over 600 breeding pairs. Today it has few predators and a bountiful source of prey that inhabit the bogland.



Red kite © Hansueli Krapf,  
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

## A floating railway

For many years the bog was seen as wilderness standing in the way of progress. In the mid-19th century there was a proposal to extend the Manchester and Milford railway between Lampeter and Aberystwyth which meant crossing the bog. It was a huge challenge for the engineers.

Just how do you build a railway across a bog? David Davies, a local industrialist and engineer, came up with the idea of using bales of wool tied with twigs to soak up the water and effectively 'float' the railway across the bog. It's said that Davies bought up all the local farmers' wool and every sheep was shorn!

The plan worked and for 100 years the line carried passengers safely across the boggy terrain. The railway line was closed in the 1960s and the bog returned to its peaceful, quiet state once more.