

A Day in the Dyfi Biosphere

The Dyfi Biosphere is an area of over 81k hectares surrounding the Dyfi National Nature Reserve (NNR) and is home to a special and interesting range of habitats ranging from the beautiful coastal sand dunes of Ynyslas, to the estuary of the Dyfi river and bog marshes of Cors Fochno.

The Dyfi Biosphere offers visitors plenty of things to do, and depending on how you're feeling you can be as adventurous or as laid back as you like! Whether you want to connect with the local landscape and wildlife, get on your bike and explore the area, or kick back and watch the world go by, there's something for everyone.

Whatever the weather here there are plenty of wonderful things to do and places to explore – why not take a look for yourself and find out why the Biosphere is such a special place in Mid Wales?

With trains, a regular bus service between Machynlleth and Aberystwyth, as well as the seasonal Bws Bioffer bus, getting around couldn't be easier, so why not ditch the car and make the most of public transport for the day?

The Bws Bioffer runs during the summer months from the 31st July and throughout August, running on Wednesdays and Sundays. It stops at major points along the way including The Dyfi Osprey Project, RSPB Ynys-hir Nature Reserve and Ynyslas Visitor Centre and sand dunes, and there are scheduled activities at each stop to coincide with bus timetables. This is your perfect opportunity to leave the car behind and enjoy a car-free day.

(Tickets for the Bws Bioffer need to be purchased before hand by contacting tel 01654 703 965. Those with limited mobility, or families with young children needn't feel excluded as the bus is suitable for wheelchair users as well families with pushchairs, meaning that everyone can enjoy this experience.)

There are so many potential options for a car-free day in the Dyfi Biosphere.

Here are a few suggestions:

Leave the car in Machynlleth and take the train to Borth.

The train line goes alongside the Dyfi estuary giving some of the most beautiful views you'll ever be likely to see from a train. It's an especially beautiful journey around sunrise or sunset in later months of the year. Even though you're chugging along in comfort you can still feel close to the nature of the Biosphere – in fact, the train goes straight past one of the osprey nests at the Dyfi Osprey Project's Cors Dyfi Nature Reserve so keep your eyes peeled!

A great way to explore the area is to take your bike on the train to Borth and then cycle back to Machynlleth, stopping off at points along the way wherever you fancy.

While in Borth

At Borth you can take a stroll along the beach and fill your lungs with some sea air before hopping on board the Bws Bioffer with your pre-booked ticket.

Borth is home to the Animalarium. This is a small zoo which is home to some very unusual creatures – not the sort of things you'd usually expect to see in Mid Wales but certainly worth a visit if you're not scared of getting hands-on with snakes! The Animalarium holds daily activities which include reptile shows, meercat encounters and bunny grooming. You might even get the chance to smile at a crocodile with crocodile feeding among other activities. In the summer you can also enjoy pony rides at an additional charge.

Borth is also home to a submerged forest which is usually hidden under a layer of sand and can only usually be seen at times of exceptionally low tides. It has been suggested that the forest may well have been preserved from as long ago as 3000BC!

Head off to Ynyslas

From Borth it's a short journey north following the Wales Coastal Path to the sand dunes of Ynyslas.

The Ynyslas Visitor Centre is open from Easter to September, but the reserve is open all year round. There is a charge for parking but access to the Visitor Centre is free. Don't forget your kite on windy days as the dunes are an excellent spot to send your kite soaring.

You can continue to follow the Wales Coastal Path here and take a walk along the estuary to Machynlleth. You'll be rewarded with fantastic views and there's no better way to get closer to the stunning nature and wildlife of the area. The area is rich in woodlands, unusual fungi and rare mosses. Visiting the dunes at Ynyslas will also mean you might be in with a chance of seeing some beautiful marsh orchids.

You'll be limited by how many stops you can make if you're using public transport, but if you've decided to bring the car, or brave it by bike you can visit as many sites on your return trip as you wish!

Get close to nature – it's easy at Ynys-Hir!

Next, why not call in to the Ynys-Hir Nature Reserve, an RSPB run reserve close to the village of Eglwys-fach. Here there is a mixture of Welsh oak woodland, grassland and saltmarshes, which is an idyllic haven for birdlife. The changing seasons vary what species you might see, but there is always plenty to explore, do and see from the reserve's seven bird hides. By now you'd probably enjoy a much deserved snack from the Visitor Centre's small café.

The reserve is open from dawn to dusk, with the visitor centre itself open daily from 9am – 5pm from April to October, and 10am – 4pm from November to March. Members are able

to gain free entry, although for non-members there is a charge of £5 per adult, £2.50 per child or £10 per family.

Stop off at Cors Dyfi of course!

Next, why not stop off at the Cors Dyfi Nature Reserve, home to the Dyfi Osprey Project.

This beautiful reserve, made famous by its feathered residents and the BBC programmes Springwatch and Autumnwatch, is a mixture of wet woodland, bog and swamp. Despite its boggy nature, the reserve is brilliantly accessible to buggies and wheelchair users, with only one element, an elevated bird hide, being inaccessible.

Ospreys first bred here in 2011 and once you've visited you're sure to be hooked on knowing the ins and outs of every nest and the ups and downs of osprey life. You could even compare it to your favourite soap opera!

Here there are over 300m of boardwalks to explore, with more under construction to widen your experience of the reserve. If you're ready for lunch there's the Visitor Centre café where you'll be sure to get a tasty bite to eat.

The reserve is open all year, 24 hours a day but the Osprey Project is open from April to September, 10am – 6pm. During opening hours there is a suggested donation scheme (£2.50 per individual, £5 per family and £10 for a season ticket), although entry is free at other times.

Fill up in town

Once back behind the wheel, on the bus, or on your bike you can head back to Machynlleth. If you haven't already eaten, you can get a delicious meal at any number of cafes and hotels in the town.

The Wynnstay Hotel in the town is home to an award winning pizzeria – voted Best Pizzeria in the UK for 2 years running by The Times! If pizza isn't what you fancy, the hotel also offers bar and restaurant meals using locally sourced produce from local suppliers. Here you can get a taste of Mid Wales right on your plate!

If you're after a quick bite to eat there are plenty of local cafes dotted throughout the town, each providing delicious hot and cold food to suit every taste and budget. Why not try out some chips from the award winning fish and chip shop, Hennighan's. This chip shop shouldn't be missed as it's recently been crowned Best Chip Shop in Wales, ahead of their submission to the National Fish and Chip Shop Awards, 2014!

If you need some retail therapy now's your chance. Or perhaps the children might want to have a run around at Y Plas children's play area while you re-group for the afternoon's activities.

If your visit happens to be on a Wednesday you can take a stroll around the town's weekly market. There's something for everyone with a wide variety of traders selling anything from local produce to crafts. The town has a wide selection of interesting independent shops offering a unique shopping experience.

Head off for an ‘alternative’ afternoon

From Machynlleth you can head off to the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT), a short drive, bus trip or cycle from the town. (If you’ve made your way to Machynlleth by train CAT like to support sustainable transport, and will offer a 50% discount on their entry price on production of a valid train ticket! If you arrive by bike or foot you will receive a £1 reduction off the entry price.)

The Sustrans National Cycle Network, Route 8, passes through Machynlleth and will take you up to the entrance of the CAT Visitor Centre. Bikes are available to hire in the town centre from the Holey Trail bike shop if you would like to make the 30 minute cycle ride.

The Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) is a treasure trove of information and interactive displays showing you practical examples of how to live sustainably. You can find out more about renewable energy, organic gardening, environmental building, woodland management and much much more besides!

You’ll be impressed before you’ve even entered the site. Everyone arrives in style here as, to access the site, you will get the chance to use one of the steepest cliff railways in the world. Carriages are accessible to wheelchair and pushchairs.

The centre is open 7 days a week and has a remarkable 7 acres of interactive displays. You’ll also find an eco-shop, vegetarian restaurant and green bookshop on site together with beautiful gardens and children’s play areas. There’s plenty to see for all the family!

The Visitor Centre is open 7 days a week, from 10am – 5pm. Details of opening times after November can be accessed at the website.
<http://visit.cat.org.uk/opening-times>

Prices range from £8.50 per adult to £4 for children over 5 but check the website in advance for reductions. If you book online, arrive on public or person-powered transport you will get a reduction in your entry fee.