

# As water reaches capacity level only memories remain

by Rhiannon Davies

## LOST

By last week, the water had reached its capacity level, and this part of our countryside was lost for ever.

The 300 foot high wall of grey rock stands unadorned, a monument to that which it has destroyed.

Ironically, the lake itself presents one of the most beautiful scenes in Wales. The huge expanse of water resembles a lizard in shape with 'arms' protruding up tributaries of the Towy.

To one who did not know the valley before its flooding, a trip along the precarious 'scenic road' with its hairpin bends will be more than repaid by the spectacular views of the lake.

Mountains which rise out of the lake are partly covered by trees, heather and gorse. The massive 'Carreg Clochdy' stands as a sentinel surveying its domain. It at least remains unchanged.

It is surprising how quickly one forgets and already memories are growing dim of the pools and rocks.

What will never be forgotten is the intangible feeling of peace that arose from knowing that there were no other people within miles, and that the only sounds were those of the river, the sheep and the occasional buzzard or raven.

These sounds are noticeable in their absence. Llyn Brianne lies silent.

Already a few wild fowl are discovering a new habitat and perhaps the day will come when flocks of ducks and geese will alight on the lake.

While those that are strangers gasp reverently at the beauty, those of us that knew the former glory stand a little sadly over the lake treasuring memories of days never to be re-lived.

A long four months followed during which the valley was treasured and photographed. The deep pools and the bouncing rivers gained the special beauty of that which seems immortal and everlasting but was suddenly faced with destruction. There was never to be another summer when one could walk for miles along the river bank savouring the sound of peace.

## A NEED

On June 19th, 1967, the report of the public enquiry was published and along with it the conclusion that there was without doubt a need for a reservoir.

A valley which should have been a heritage for future generations was irrevocably lost.

The bulldozers soon moved in and the valley was torn and battered beyond recognition. The village of Rhandirmwyn and the town of Llandovery also began to take on a new identity, as did the local people when they realised the change that was taking place.

Some people gave in to the attraction of high wages, only to be left disenchanted now that the dam has finished, leaving them to "live" on the comparatively small wages they now earn.

Others voiced their dissatisfaction and carried on living normally, only to find that their daughters were running away with the 'travelling men'.

Early this year the dam wall was completed, the valves were closed and water began building up.

It was a relief to watch the scars that replaced the dignity of the valley disappear. Work continued on the long slipway that would carry excess water and the bridges that would cross it.

kind, very little money, but abundance of dedicated enthusiasm, the Defence Committee went into action.

Letters were sent to various organisations with the object of co-operating towards the same end.

Both the Committee and various individuals sent objections to the Secretary of State for Wales and to the three Councils concerned.

## EXPENSIVE

Because of the opposition to the scheme from various bodies it was decided by the Secretary of State that a public enquiry should be held. This was obviously going to be expensive if the Committee were to be legally represented.

An appeal was sent out worded:

### "SAVE OUR VALLEY

The West Glamorgan Joint Committee of Local Authorities proposes to erect a reservoir near the Towy. Confidence. If this proposal is put into effect an area of great natural beauty and scientific importance will be inundated. Farmers likely to lose land, a host of friends and many national bodies concerned with the scientific and amenity value of the area are opposing this proposal."

It continued with an appeal for donations to defray the costs and expenses incurred during the collation and submission of evidence at the public enquiry.

## APEAL

The appeal was circulated and raised £300. On this very limiting sum a case was drawn up and a barrister and solicitor engaged.

Individuals who had objected prepared their evidence, ready for the opening of the enquiry.

It was thought that this would last for three days when it opened December 13th, 1966, but due to the number of objections put forward it lasted 10 days and cost the Defence Committee £760 in legal fees.

Cases were raised on amenity and scientific grounds; the disruption of the famous fishing in the Towy was hotly contested; disruption of the area as far as agricultural and forestry interests were concerned. All these points and many more were put forward in defence of the valley.

The 10 days that the enquiry lasted were stretched over two months, and ended on February 9th, 1967.

As the doors closed on the Defence Committee, fingers were crossed and goodbye's said to those that had stood briefly side by side, fighting for a common interest.

THIS week the Brianne reservoir reaches holding capacity, and a seven year saga comes to an end.

It all began when a public meeting was held at Rhandirmwyn School on November 22nd, 1965. It was decided to form a Defence Committee that would fight the water proposals of the West Glamorgan Joint Committee of Local Authorities.

This was the beginning of a long fight to save the spectacularly beautiful upper Towy Valley from the hands of the 'dam builders'.

The upper reaches of the Towy valley were known to few. The non-existence of tarmaced roads made the place inaccessible except to those who scorned the use of cars and visited the valley either on foot or horseback.

## MIRACLE

In years gone by there were only shepherds to appreciate the steep-sided valley whose sides blazed during the summer with yellow gorse and purple heather.

As time passed most of our countryside was opened up by roads to the tripper. It seems little less than a miracle that the valley was not turned into one of the soul-destroying monstrosities known as beauty spots, complete with picnic sites and litter.

The proposal to build a 300 ft. high regulating reservoir with a capacity of 13,400 million gallons, from which 86 million gallons a day could be extracted, almost made one wish that the place was a beauty spot.

With no experience of fighting a proposal of this