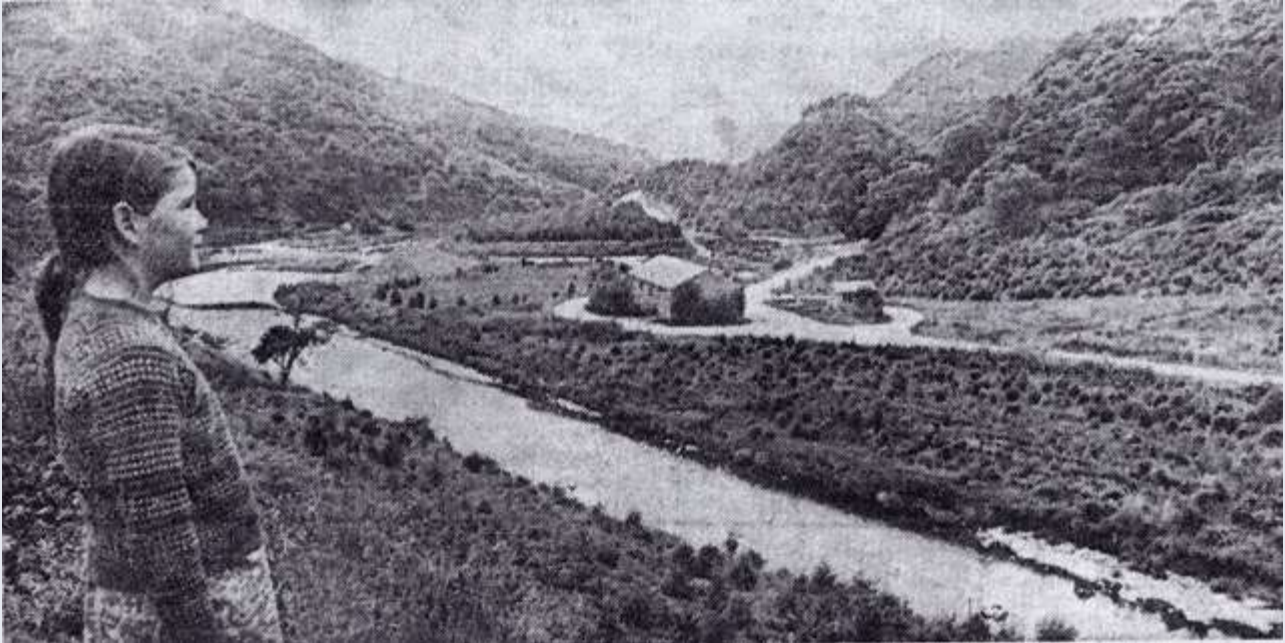


# Men start to wipe out valley

● Eight-year-old Catrin Davies, daughter of the Rhandirmwyn village schoolmaster, enjoys a view that will soon be lost as the last summer runs out in the upper Towy valley—the site for a £13½m. reservoir.

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Workmen and bulldozers today start cutting the foundations for a £13m. reservoir in one of Wales's most peaceful and secluded valleys - but many people are still convinced the planners made a big mistake.

Why, they ask, do they have to destroy this valley paradise in the upper reaches of the River Towy - near the tiny Carmarthenshire village of Rhandirmwyn - when they could have chosen a site about four miles upstream for the Llyn Brianne Reservoir.

By building a dam further up river, the planners would have created a lake suitable for boating and water-ski-ing, faced little or no opposition and saved an area renowned for its rare wildlife and unique plant samples, say the objectors.

Yesterday *News Focus* visited the site, about 12 miles north of Llandovery, before the workmen, bulldozers and heavy machinery start opening up the valley and constructing the 300ft.-high dam - the biggest in Britain.

Two orange posts perched high up on the mountainside above the river mark the top of the massive dam, which will drown several well - known beauty spots under the four- mile-long reservoir when the scheme is completed in 1972.

## NEWS FOCUS

Contractors have already put up their huts in the green valley where the last summer is at its heights. Another firm has moved in its bulldozers to widen roads and surface forestry tracks. But while the work gets under way the controversy continues - although the objectors to the scheme fought and lost at a public inquiry 18 months ago. It has been described as an "act of vandalism" and "madly conceived."

The start ends a nine-year search by eight West Glamorgan local authorities - including Swansea and Neath - for a reservoir site to satisfy an urgent and ever - increasing demand for water.

Llyn Brianne - named after a small stream which flows into the Towy at the site of the dam - will satisfy this demand until the year 2000.

As a regulating reservoir it will enable the authorities to take 86 million gallons of water a day from the river at a pumping station at Nantgaredig - 30 miles away.

Opponents of the scheme - farmers, residents, tourists and countryside lovers - still contend that the West Glamorgan Water Board, which represents the local authorities, should have used the Upper Towy site, although the yield would have been less and the cost greater.

They are angry that the issue should have been decided on economic grounds. They say the damage to amenities would have been far less if the upper site was used, and they think the authorities should have been prepared to make this compromise.

At the upper site the dam would have cost an extra £500,000, and the yield would only be enough up to 1985, but the opposition said it would have been sufficient until 1993 if the water board retained its existing Cray and Usk reservoirs. It was suggested at the inquiry that these two reservoirs might be transferred to the Usk River Authority, but a spokesman for the authority told me yesterday that although they were still interested in the idea, no final decision had been made.

The Llyn Brianne scheme will drown more than 500 acres of land, affecting nine farmers. Two hundred acres of it belongs to the Forestry Commission, much of it planted with young trees. The upper site is virtually all forestry land.

### **Tragedy**

Mr. David Davies the Rhandirmwyn schoolmaster who has lived there for 10 years, is secretary of the Upper Towy Valley Defence Committee, which raised £800 - much of it from England - to fight the scheme.

The committee was joined by the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, naturalist and botanical societies, the Youth Hostels Association and the Cyclists Touring Club in the battle against the scheme.

Mr. Davies told me, 'The drowning of the valley is a tragedy. It is as valuable as an Old Master.

This is an act of vandalism. A precious piece of Welsh heritage is being destroyed.'

Mr. Louis Hurley, an Abergavenny architect who owns a holiday cottage near the valley, said "One can never fight an authority on amenity grounds in this country, only on economic grounds.

"If economic values are the only values, everything will go. For detailed river scenery you will never find another valley like it in the country,"

### **Landscape**

He said there were proposals to landscape the lake and use it for recreation.

'But this is doubtful.' he said. "I believe it will be fenced off, because the sides are steep and in high summer there will be a fringe of mud at the edges."

The general secretary of the Farmers Union of Wales, Mr. I. Emlyn Thomas, who represented several farmers at the inquiry, said, "If they had used the upper site they would have had a wider lake, which would be a good recreational centre."

It would have been a good tourist attraction for boating and water ski-ing, and would have given a much needed boost to the local economy, he said.

Capt. H. R. H. Vaughan, the new chairman of the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales who lives at Rhandir-mwyn said if the reservoir had been sited up river there would have been no objections.

"We should not have to judge things strictly by cost," he said. "Townsppeople visit the valley for their mental health - if they do not have places like this to come to they will go off their heads."

A member of the *News Focus* team drove along the rough forestry track which penetrates the valley, well-known as one of the few remaining homes for the polecat and red squirrel.

High up on the mountain-side the Forestry Commission have built a new road, which will be just above the water line of the reservoir. It has cut through one of the few nesting places of the red kite.

News that the valley will be flooded has brought scores of visitors this summer, and it has become a paradise for walkers. But as the last summer draws to an end the "bed and breakfast" signs are appearing in the locality to cater for the workmen.

A beautiful oak wood used to teach children outdoor studies will also go, together with the deep river pools and impressive rock formations.

The river bed is also a famous spawning ground for salmon and sewin. These, too, will disappear, although an alternative scheme has been devised to trap the fish below the dam and transport them seven miles by road to new spawning grounds above the lake. Afterwards the fish will be returned downstream.

This scheme has been described as dangerous, unsatisfactory, extremely difficult to operate, cumbersome, expensive and doubtful.

But a spokesman for the West Wales River Authority told me, "It is not a cheap scheme, but there is little doubt that it will work. The authority is satisfied it will protect the fisheries. There is nothing novel about carrying fish by road."

Before the area is flooded, wildlife and botanical surveys will be carried out and the valley will be photographed in detail. Mr. Davies told me, "It will be a record for future generations to show what this generation has destroyed."