

Preface

This book was written to answer a deceptively simple question: what is Wales made of?

Not in a political or cultural sense, but in the most fundamental way possible. What geological processes created the mountains, valleys, coastlines, rivers, and rock formations that define Cymru today? Why does the landscape vary so dramatically from region to region? And how did events that occurred hundreds of millions of years ago help shape the country that would eventually become Wales?

The answers begin long before the appearance of people, kingdoms, languages, or even the land itself. They begin in deep geological time, when the rocks that form modern Wales lay beneath ancient oceans, tropical seas, volcanic landscapes, and vast forests. Over immense spans of time, continents collided, oceans closed, mountains rose and eroded, climates changed, and life evolved. Each left its mark upon the land, creating the geological foundations upon which every later chapter of Welsh history would unfold.

Geology is often treated as a subject separate from history, concerned primarily with rocks, minerals, and technical processes. Yet geology is not simply background scenery. It is the foundation upon which everything else depends. The distribution of rivers, soils, habitats, natural resources, transport routes, and settlement patterns all owe something to the geological inheritance of the landscape. Understanding Wales therefore begins with understanding the forces that created it.

This book approaches geology as a continuous narrative rather than a catalogue of rock formations. It follows the story of Wales from its earliest geological origins through changing oceans,

volcanic eruptions, mountain-building events, tropical forests, ice ages, and the gradual emergence of the modern landscape. The aim is not to overwhelm the reader with technical terminology, but to explain the processes that shaped the country in a clear and accessible way. Throughout the book, landscapes are treated not as static features, but as the outcome of long sequences of cause and effect operating across deep time.

A central idea runs throughout *The Cymru Cycles*: the history of Wales cannot be separated from its landscape. Mountains influenced movement and communication. Rivers shaped settlement and trade. Coastlines connected communities to the wider world. Mineral resources transformed economies and industries. Long before Welsh culture emerged, the physical framework within which that culture would develop was already taking shape. To understand the story of Cymru, it is therefore necessary to begin with the land itself.

Like every volume in this series, this book is intended as a framework rather than a catalogue. Geological knowledge, like historical knowledge, continues to evolve as new discoveries are made and new evidence emerges. The interpretations presented here reflect the current understanding of Wales's geological development while aiming to provide a coherent structure through which that story can be explored and understood.

This volume ends at the point where geology hands the story to people. By the close of the last Ice Age, the broad outlines of modern Wales had emerged. Mountains, valleys, rivers, coastlines, and resources were in place. The stage upon which human history would unfold had been prepared.

What follows is the story of how people interacted with that landscape. The remaining books in the *Natural Cymru Cycle* explore the resources created by these geological processes and the ways in which generations of Welsh communities adapted to,

utilised, and were shaped by the land beneath their feet. This book exists to ensure that journey begins with an understanding of the foundations upon which everything else was built.

Nathan Williams

The Cymru Cycles