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The Story of Beavers in Wales

Wales is a country steeped in history and legends, from the arrival of the first humans over 230,000 years ago through the influx of Celtic culture, the Roman invasion, Viking and Norman settlement, to the rise of the Tudor Dynasty as well as the later industrial revolution and, most recently, devolution from England. However, there is one topic that pops up throughout Welsh history, about which relatively little is widely known. That is the beaver. Beavers are a well-known topic of conversation and debate these days when it comes to discussing rewilding or ecological restoration – some people are for their return and others are not. There are many reasons why some do not want to see beavers back, with some citing that beavers have been absent for too long, but beavers have played a significant role in Welsh culture and the landscape, and may not have been gone for as long as some may think!

During this presentation we will uncover the history of beavers in Wales following the work of Bryony Coles. Bryony is formerly a professor of Prehistory at the University of Exeter and for a large part of her career she has had an interest in beaver archaeology. Her recent work has focused on Wales and we will look at some of the earliest archaeological evidence, the first mention of beavers in Welsh literature, their brief resurgence in the 19th century, their link with folklore and whether we will see beavers back in the Welsh landscape once again.