

DIAMONDS ON THE SOLES OF THEIR SHOES...

THE GWYDYR MOUNTAIN CLUB 1999-2019

By Dave Gray



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INTRODUCTION

This is an account of the Gwydyr Mountain Club between 1999 and 2019. The “GMC” was founded in March 1967 as a Wirral based hill walking club with a wide remit to “promote an interest in mountains”. The story of its birth and earlier years is told in a book entitled “The Gwydyr” written by founder member – and my great friend – the late John Huxley.

This work is in some senses a sequel; and in many ways I have aimed to follow the pattern that made “The Gwydyr” so successful and readable; in particular drawing on voices of Club members through interviews and their contributions to our magazines and newsletters.

That said there are differences between John’s book and this work. At the level of the Club itself this is a story less of beginnings, more of “continuity and change” – a phrase beloved of the less imaginative history textbook authors of my youth! While telling the story I’ve sought to draw out how the Club has developed, changed and grown over the past 20 years, and has succeeded in fulfilling its potential and giving so much to its members and friends. And to cover its activities, and the passage of the years, in a balanced and even way.

Thinking about what counts as the Club’s activities, I’ve taken on board John’s statement in his book that “the members are the Club and the Club consists of the members.” One of the great benefits of the GMC is that people have used relationships forged, and skills acquired, on Club-organised activities to go off together and do their own thing in and around the mountains. For most of the book therefore I’ve taken the line that these sorts of trips “count” and are included; the main exception is walking in the parts of the UK closer to home where that approach taken generally would be prohibitive on grounds of space.

Over 20 years with around 100 members, we’ve had so much fun -and also our normal share of controversies, differences, and disputes. This book deliberately stays silent on those latter areas and also seeks to show us at our best; and therefore follows movie director John Ford’s advice to “print the legend”.

Several people asked me whether I’d follow John Huxley’s lead and include a list of all Club members. I haven’t, principally on grounds of length and because I could not guarantee to capture everyone in the Club over so many years. Rather, I’ve assumed readers know who the “existing” – 2019/20 -members referred to in the story are. If not please ask! Where I refer to former members who may not be so well known, I’ve given a short factual account of who they are or were in the first Appendix.

Where people’s names have changed I have tried to use the one which most people will recognise as of today, and

I've tried to handle changes of name sensibly.

The book is divided into sections intended for you to dip into – it may be better to do that than tackle it all at once! Because it's published initially in electronic format I've worked to keep the actual text of each section reasonably short – aiming for the equivalent of ten pages of written text at A5 size as a ceiling – to try to make it alright to read on line. Conversely, online publication has allowed me to include plenty of photographs. Space has naturally meant that content has had to be selective – sorry if I've had to miss your favourite trip or incident!

Please note that I have edited quotes on grounds of space, and occasionally inserted a few words in square brackets to try to make the detail easier to understand long after the event. What is in the book is a function of the sources I was able to consult. Where a quotation is cited from an old paper magazine it carries the tag "magazine", otherwise the newsletters cited by date alone are available on the Club website.

Apart from a couple of specific areas not covered by John, and in order to complete the Appendices, I've not reached back before the end point of his book, roughly 1998.

I have assigned the copyright in this work to the Gwydyr Mountain Club. Any views expressed in the work are those of the writers concerned and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Club.

That's probably enough intro – here goes!

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank all the members and friends of the Club who have helped and encouraged me in writing this history.

Thanks go first to all who have written articles and contributed photos for Club magazines, newsletters and other documents that I've used throughout as my main sources and have quoted from.

And so particular thanks too to the people who edited and produced those documents – particularly Christine Smyth; Pete Mann, David Lane-Joynt, and most of all to Allan McDonald who was midwife I think to the greatest number and most detailed of these works.

I had great personal encouragement from Geoff Brierley, Andy Chapman, Glenn and Helen Grant, Janet Harris, Allan McDonald, and Christine Smyth in getting off the ground with my writing.

Thank you too to everyone who read over the history either in full or in individual instalments and/or provided extra copy by phone or email. That list includes Margaret Blakeborough, Andy Chapman, Nuala Dunn, Glenn and Helen Grant, Sonja Grigor, Chris, Janet and Katie Harris, Roger and Judy Hughes, Lin and Paul Jensen, David Lane-Joynt, Hew McDermott, Allan McDonald, Tom McEvoy, Teresa Peddie, Barbara Richards, Kay and Richard Smith, Christine Smyth, Sue Taylor, John Watson, and Jane Webster. I am sorry if I have forgotten anyone – and errors of course remain down to me! One advantage of on line publication is that we can correct any serious errors in the work, so please let me know of any!

On the theme of online a huge thank you to David Lane Joynt, for doing so much hard creative work – we are talking weeks - producing the book online and placing it within the Club website. David made many valuable suggestions to improve the work as we went along.

Finally thank you to everyone who has made my own time with the GMC such fun.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATIONS

An apology – at this distance of time I have not been able to track down who took many of the photographs, so photos are not (with the exceptions below) credited I'm afraid.

Photos in the body of each section are captioned where necessary. Where knowledge, picture quality, space and layout permit captioning names, people are captioned left to right unless noted otherwise.

The photos appearing at the front of each section are not captioned on the pages for reasons of layout and are as follows:

This section. Signpost near the Devil's Elbow, my 2015 Munro trip with Bryan and Mike Gilbert. And then...

1. Party on Mark Barley's day walk, Darwen Moors, 2018.
2. In the tent at Altanour lodge in the south Cairngorms, David Lane-Joynt's and my basepack, 2013.
3. 2019 "CLM" group in the Lakes – Adele Blakeborough, Adrian Samuel, Katie Harris, James Bamforth, Chris Harris, Glenn Grant.
4. Climbers on Souwester Slabs, V Diff, Rosa Pinnacle, Arran. Climbed by Allan McDonald and Bethan Hines, 2013,
5. Summer evening at Tan y Garth, 2019.
6. Oggie 8 2015 – finishers Kev McEvoy, Chris and Katie Harris
7. Fireworks over the River Moselle, my train travel and hill walking trip to Germany with the Gwynne family, 2010.
8. In camp below Sulven, possibly "King of the Grahams". A basepack with Mike Dagley and Tara O'Reilly, 2009.
9. Below A Mhaigdean, arguably remotest of the Munros. Taken on a basepack with David Lane-Joynt, 2014.

10. Tara O'Reilly and Mike Dagley pack my car – “The Mighty Agila” - for our Suilven-Canisp basepack, Garve Station, 2009.
11. Cloisonne ceramic colour powders, Beijing 2009.
12. The Rimpfischorn, Western Alps. Forepeak climbed by a party led by Richard Kinsman. (Photo credit - from camptocamp.org)
13. Ama Dablam, Himalayas. Climbed and guided by Andy Chapman. (Photo credit - from spotlight.it-notes.ru)
14. The Sikkim party arrive at Bagdogra airport, Northern India to be welcomed by organiser Gopal of Adarsh Tours. Left to right: Pete Smedley, Glenn Grant, Gail Smith, Helen Grant, Chris Harris, Mike McEneaney, David Lane-Joynt, Alan Thomas, Gopal, Janet Harris, Adele Blakeborough, Richard Smith (kneeling)
15. Mount Elbrus, highest peak in Europe. Climbed by Bill Sutherland, and a future possible Club target...(Photo credit – from mountainplanet.com)

Appendix I. Judy Hughes with former members – Brian Bernard, John Huxley and Les Fowles, Yorkshire Dales.

Appendix II. Tryfan and Glydyr Fach - key stages on the Welsh 3,000s.

Appendix III. Andy Chapman on Everest summit, 2011 (Photo credit – courtesy of Jagged Globe: Andy has done much of his guiding work for that company)

Other Photo credits by Section:

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