

SECTION 3:

“Bedrock” III: Weekend Walking Meets - “With a roof on”



Oh – it’s raining! Quick, let’s get a roof over our heads and look at weekends involving accommodation that actually keeps you dry!

Our Hut at Tan y Garth (aka “The Chapel” as it’s a conversion), in Capel Curig, is a fine base for the hill and we’d need a whole book to cover all we have done from there. Apart from the Welsh 3000’s I think my own “best day” was in September 2005 when Geoff Brierley, Reg Cromer and I placed cars with a really early start, and did the whole greater Glyders ridge, Capel Curig to Bethesda on a glorious sunny day.

Strangely though for many of us, the Chapel is at its most atmospheric in the winter. Geoff describes in “The Gwydyr 17” magazine how...

“We rounded a corner and there it was, every window glowing with light...in a prominent position when viewed from the road with the Cottage next to it. I thought then as I do every time I visit, how wonderful they look and indeed how very lucky we are...”

Geoff’s party went on to have a day of perfect weather ice climbing in Trinity Gully. But again, paradoxically, the Hut often comes into its own as a comfy base when the weather’s bad. For example, Allan McDonald writes in the September 2011 Newsletter:

“The following weekend was a club chapel weekend and the usual suspects were present. Saturday proved to be a particularly foul day weather-wise though Allan [McDonald], Neil (Metcalf), Fiona [Langton] & Bethan [Hines] braved the strong winds and torrential rain to ascend Moel Eilio. Dave Gray, Carol Boothroyd, Margaret Blakeborough and Graham James made their way to Dolwydellan from the Chapel. Dave managed to outflank the pub on the walk much to Carol’s consternation though Margaret and Graham were made of sterner stuff and enjoyed a nice beer in the aptly named ‘Y-Gwydyr’.

A pleasant evening followed in the pub and Chapel before Sunday dawned almost as wet and windy as the Saturday. Fiona and I were joined in Llanfairfechan cafe by Neil, Teresa [Peddie] and Bethan and we were considering a local walk when it dawned upon me that I’d left my house keys in the Chapel... and after driving back to the Chapel all enthusiasm for a walk disappeared and so we just drove back to Liverpool.”

Given Snowdonia’s rainfall levels a big plus about the Chapel is that we have access to fine low level walks nearby—my favourite is Llyn Sarnau to Llynau Glangors and Bogynedd— for when the weather is bad. It isn’t as bleak as say Ogwen or Llanberis can often be.

Allan mentions pubs, and our regular local is the Tyn y Coed. Nothing better than to sit in its garden after a hill day in the sun. As the Chapel has been further improved (of which more later) while we use the pub a lot the temptation is there too to stay in for the evening’s celebrations: the noisier scene in the kitchen is my favourite, or you can have the comfort of the fire and leather sofas in the lounge. The same improvement factor has meant that

over these years we've tended following requests from members to have more meets at the Hut.



Hut hill days – on a Carneddau circuit, February 2016



And on Crib Goch in May of the same year

How about Other People's Huts? Well we've used quite a few over these years very successfully. That said, I think we all loyally agree that while these huts are great, and some might have aspects that are better than ours, taken overall none quite matches Tan y Garth.

I'm not going to go into details on that side of things, because only Jane Austen in "Pride and Prejudice", via the immortal Mrs Bennet's review of potential accommodation for stropky Lydia, can really sum up Other Clubs' Huts in comparison with ours:

"Haye Park might *do*' said she 'if the Gouldings would quit it – or the great house at Stoke *if* the drawing room were larger; but Ashworth is too far off!...And as for Purvis Lodge, the attics are *dreadful*."

One hut we've used consistently over all these years from at least 1998 right through to 2018 is the George Starkey Hut at Patterdale.

Kev McEvoy has organised most if not all of these trips. He writes about our visit in July 2013 in the newsletter of that date:

"Fifteen members and three prospective members descended on Patterdale on Friday afternoon ready for a weekend of fun. Saturday dawned with clear skies, half the group went up Helvellyn via Swirral Edge and over Raise descending into Glenridding in very hot weather. The other group took the easy option (don't tell Vanda [McEvoy] I said that) and caught the ferry steamer to Howton and took the lakeside path back to Patterdale. Saturday night saw the group in the White Lion, and after a hearty meal and a few pints some of the party went to the Patterdale Hotel for a nightcap and a bit of dirty dancing!!

Sunday morning I rose early and went up Helvellyn via Striding Edge, I saw nobody until I reached the summit, it was great to have the ridge to myself. After breakfast most of the group went up Place Fell. Myself, Vanda, Andy [Odger], John [Austin] and Brenda [Turnbull] decided to mess about in a motor boat for the day." (see next page)



Kev goes arty on Helvellyn

Kev also took us to the Coniston Coppermines Hut in the Junes of 2012 and 2014. While George Starkey is right by a main road, the Coppermines is very remote set well above the village – guess what – in the mines! The best day of the 2014 weekend was the Saturday when twelve of us did a round of the Furness Fells from Wetherlam over the Old Man of Coniston and taking in Dow Crag.

A Lakes Hut I'd like to revisit very much would be the High House Hut in Borrowdale owned by K Fellfarers that we used in March 2014. It's well placed for walks from the

door; walks included - despite mixed and very windy weather - Base Brown and Green Gable ridge, Carrock Fell and High Pike, plus the dale itself. Teresa Peddie was organiser and we had at least seventeen there.



“Turn the bloody motor on!” Kev, Vanda and Andy on Ullswater in July 2013

Similarly well placed is the Wayfarer’s Robertson Lamb Hut bang in the middle of Langdale, where we’ve had several meets and usually had great weather. This is the oldest hut in the Lakes and is very atmospheric and all wood-panelly. As it’s owned by a male only club, women – and their male partners – sleep in the annexe which on our visits at least was also atmospheric but not wood-panelly. In the immortal words of Andy Odger: “Live the Dream, Live the Annexe”.

Remote Bryn Hafod in Cwm Cywarch in the Arans was the venue for a Ray Baines weekend meet, and in the October 2011 Newsletter Bethan Hines tells the tale:

“Andy [Odger], Neil [Metcalf] and Beth [Hines] set off for Bryn Hafod with not only a grid reference and an OS

map but a postcode for the Sat Nav, spare clothes, food, drink and even pillows...what could possibly go wrong? A Sat Nav is always best used in the car that you are driving rather than in the car left at home!! An OS map is not always easy to read in fading light! Result? checking out the next valley en route!!!

So...all was well, all parked up as the sun finally set and apparently it was only a short walk to the hut, in fact we could see the welcoming lights in the distance!...Three very laden down members of the GMC complete with sleeping bags, paella, scary spicy pumpkin soup for Halloween, a 'few' beers and 'just enough wine', hill food and pillows...set off up a very dark and muddy track with a couple of dodgy head torches!! Could we maybe have travelled a little lighter??? Reg [Cromer], Ray [Baines], Lindsey [Fooks], Martin [Woollons], and Mike McEneaney were already at the hut and the fire was lit, so a bit of food and a few drinks later and we were settled for the evening. Late arrivals Dave Lane-Joynt and Dave Chadwick were greeted by an old lady at the door informing them that the hut was a further mile up the road...old lady?...Mr Metcalfe!!! Much giggling could be heard from the others and they weren't quite convinced that they were in the wrong place!!

Everyone managed to walk on Saturday despite drizzle turning into heavy rain and winds nearly blowing everyone away on the tops. Andy shared his navigation skills with Neil and Beth up Glasgwm in the mist!! The others had set off a little earlier and it transpired that our way up was their way down...no wonder we never caught them up. A few beers at the Llew Coch in Dinas Mawddwy followed courtesy of Doc Martin and his expanding car that seated seven!!!...and then a very wet walk up the muddy hill back to the hut for a bit of 'socialising' around the fire. Sunday was a much better day and both groups again managed to walk. Beth, Andy and Neil went up Waun Goch and Pen yr Allt Uchaf which offered much better views of the Arans in the Autumn sunshine. The rest of the gang managed a walk en route home. All in all a great weekend in a hut in a brilliant setting.....just travel light!!”

My memory of my time in the Club suggests using Youth Hostels wasn't big in the earlier days, perhaps because of their then uneasy relationship with beer and wine! Our visits during this period as far as England and Wales goes started right at the top of the range.

Christine Smyth and I had a trip to Black Sail, an old shepherd's house set high above Ennerdale far from the public road as long ago as October 1999. It's a magical place; you backpack in. It's very small so best to book dinner B&B. We were there again in August 2004 and in “The Gwydyr 21” magazine John Huxley summarises that trip:

“Sue [Taylor] and Neil [Harris], Paul and Lin [Jensen], Dave [Gray], Christine [Smyth] and Helen Beddows spent an unusual weekend at Black Sail...The Warden proved to be something of an entrepreneur: not only did he provide a wine list, he also offered two real ales and a range of bottled beers as well as doing a fine curry. After a good day on Dodd Fell, Red Pike, High Stile, and High Crag, the group gathered round a fire outside in the evening. On the Sunday Brandreth and Grey Knotts were done to complete an excellent weekend.”

The best remark I heard from a very tired person on that trip was “I don’t care who I sleep with as long as I get a bottom bunk!”

We were back again in August 2009, the party being Christine and Paul Smyth, Bryan Gilbert, Helen Brady, Sue Taylor, Reg Cromer, Mike Dagley and me. We walked in over Fleetwith Pike. The previous warden had apparently been far too much fun for the YHA so things had changed, we still had good laughs though!



Reg and Christine at Black Sail

At the other end of the Youth Hostel spectrum is probably YHA Wooler in Northumberland. Comfortable enough but looking like an old army camp – although since our trip it’s been enhanced by bijou Marie Antoinette “shepherds’ huts”. It was a handy base though for me, Paul and Lin Jensen in May 2004, allowing us to ascend all the 2000’ summits in the Cheviots in a long weekend in good weather. The summits were the Cheviot, Comb Law and Hedgehope Hill in one group; Bloodybush Edge, Cushat Law in another and Windy Gyle all on its own. I liked this vast wild hill area which was new to me and my log talks about the rich birdlife of this area.

We’ll return to more recent use of hostels when we slip north of the border and look at our Scots adventures.

In contrast to the Hostels picture, the use of self-catering accommodation more generally is a long tradition in the Club that continued during these years.

Pretty much every year we have a trip, usually in the autumn, to a venue with a higher standard of accommodation than the likes of huts and hostels. From time immemorial it’s been called the Chairman’s Luxury Meet, for reasons lost in the proverbial mists.

Gradually over the years the standard has got plusher, which reflects an important trend of people demanding higher standards in accommodation generally as social change means many people’s own houses become better appointed. Getting this meet off the ground takes a lot of organisational work: for many years John Huxley did it, in recent times Lin Jensen, Margaret Blakeborough, Sue Taylor, and Glenn and Helen Grant have been the main people involved.

For many years, we’ve done at least one evening with a big communal meal on a “bring a dish” basis. In the Oct/Nov 2012 Newsletter, Chris Harris writes:

“The meal turned into a superb Tapas experience [being]:

- Posh Nibblies selection; Soup – caramelized French Onion
- Pasta with chorizo; Salmon en croute; Stuffed vegetables with garlic and rosemary potatoes; Chilli chicken with salad and bread
- Forest fruit crumble with custard or cream; Baked Apples with custard or cream; Cheese (of all colours) and crackers
- Port; Amaretto; Coffee and Mints

All washed down with large amounts of wine and beer.”

Venues have ranged far and wide. We went to lodges at Garthmyl near Welshpool in the wet autumn of 2000, and during the first decade had a couple of visits to Jerry and Ben’s ice cream parlour sorry Lodges in the Dales. 2010 saw us in the Marches again at Upper Onibury Cottages near Ludlow. More recent venues included in 2014 Low Briery at Keswick, in 2016 Eden Lodge at Bardsea, and in 2018 the Old Homestead, Lorton; the latest in 2019 being Greenbank Country House in Borrowdale.

I for one particularly appreciated the Lakes trips just noted, because they took me to areas of Cumbria I’d seldom or never visited. From Keswick we did an unusual circuit of the remote Deepdale and Matterdale Common with a

party of nineteen including Mike and Joyce McEneaney – who were per my log “newly engaged”. The Bardsea highlight was finally getting 2/3rds of the legendary view from Black Combe summit (just England, Scotland, Wales



Heather and Milly near Burnmoor Tarn
On the Eskdale 2012 Chairman’s Luxury Meet

and the Isle of Man as Northern Ireland and the Republic were out of sight). Adele Blakeborough, Janet Coates, Dave Edwards, Chris and Janet Harris, Adrian Samuel and Sue Taylor shared the magic. On the Lorton trip in contrast, I was alone for my first ascent of the Lord’s Seat hills.

Similarly, Heather Bliss’s weekends based in lodges in Bellingham in Northumberland have opened up new and unfamiliar ground. The first of these was in August 2011 when we had 21 participants, and had a very varied programme: walks at and a full cycle circuit of Kielder Water; a visit to Vindolanda museum and walks along Hadrian’s Wall; to the torrent and waterfall of Hareshaw

Linn, and an 11 miler along Simonside Fells. On the last of these the six of us lived in fear of meeting and being led to our doom by the Guardians of the Dwarf Kingdom, for, as the loremasters of Wikipedia reveal:

“The Simonside Dwarfs, also known as Brownmen, Bogles and Duergar, are a race of ugly dwarfs, particularly associated with the Simonside Hills...their leader was said to be known as ‘Roarie’” (“Ghosts of The North Country”, Henry Tegner, 1991)

Last but not least in the portfolio are Camping Barns, which are what they say on the packet, effectively stone tents, some of very high quality. The record suggests that our women members were the pioneers in May 2000 on one of those “girlie meets”. In “The Gwydyr 17” magazine Joy Mills sums up key advantages of the Fab Six’s Loweswater accommodation at Swallow’s Barn:

“We booked a YHA barn, being a compromise between the relative comfort of a hostel such as a roof and showers and the independence of camping with no warden to answer to and no other guests to embarrass ourselves in front of.”

More basic was Dinah Hoggus barn in Borrowdale where I organised a weekend in November 2001. The big hill day – for Brian Bernard, Dave Chadwick, Christine Smyth, Milly Wright and me - was a fine traverse in sunny blazing autumn colours, from Rosthwaite over Glaramara and Allen Craggs and all the way down Langstrath. Unfortunately we ran out of daylight in the valley and had a trying headtorch descent of the final rough mile or two, the only one of my GMC career to date! Dave Chadwick’s calm and skilful micro night navigation was instrumental in getting us back safe.

If Dinah Hoggus was a bit bleak, we achieved and have since maintained Camping Barn Nirvana at St John’s in the Vale, which has a superb location, that ideal balance described by Joy, plus a great open fire and a friendly welcome from the farmer’s family. And the much missed Trevor the Turkey.

Early visits were in Spring which could be bitter outside – I remember a fine ascent of Helvellyn from the east when we became encased in frost and ice a la Game of Thrones. So later we moved what became pretty much an annual weekend to the autumn.

Allan Mc Donald, in the October 2011 Newsletter, captures the fun in the barn:

“Dave Gray, Reg Cromer, Ray Baines, Kevin McEvoy and I arrived early on the Friday afternoon/evening and once the wood stove was going it seemed a good idea to have a game of Monopoly. I bought from the US a few years ago a special ‘Mountaineering’ edition...the players can buy Mountains and charge rent etc. Instead of houses and hotels one has little tents and base camp tents...it’s great fun.

I won’t dwell on this too much but certain people are more competitive than others and while cheating is a strong word there was more than an element or two of such shenanigans and while the loss of the rules didn’t help

much I thought there was a distinct lack of fair play!

The Ladies [Helen Bartlam, Carol Boothroyd and Bethan Hines], arrived later (after that staunch supporter of Capitalism – Reg Cromer - had won Monopoly) and a few glasses of wine led to a comfortable night's sleep with a hope of a good day on the hill in the morning."

Sadly that weekend was too wet for the high hills, but Allan and Kev went climbing. Other visits gave hill walks including Carrock Fell, High Pike and the Knott on the way in, mighty Blencathra, Skiddaw, and the High Spy-Cat Bells ridge.



Das Kapital – St John's



St Johns – a quiet night in

In the Oct/Nov 2012 Newsletter Allan reported on the year's visit:

"Sadly at the last minute four of the eight had to cancel so it was, so I am told, a manly affair on this occasion with much machismo and testosterone bandied about ahhhhmmmm."

It was Ray Baines, myself, Hew McDermott and Kev McEvoy who were Men Without Women on that occasion. Inspired by the Rat Pack, and inflamed no doubt by wine and approaching middle age, and to the raucous cheers and laughter of the others, I cried "Let's send out to Keswick for broads and hookers!" Of course none arrived - or so we thought!

Next morning driving through Keswick a frail old lady of immense age stepped out immediately in front of the car causing a full emergency stop. "Who the F&%K was that!" I howled crushed against the seatbelt; Ray's dry reply came straight back "Kev's hooker!"



From St John's - Ray Baines on Lonscale Fell

A chastened foursome we had a fine, bright and sunny day over the same Glaramara circuit route that benighted the 2001 party.

Our October 2019 party at St Johns, organised by Sonja Grigor and Barbara Richards, saw them joined by Carol Boothroyd, Steve Birch, John Driver and Lindsey Fooks, plus Barb's neighbour "Mike the Monk" a prospective member. Barbara recalled that:

"Sonja and I got lost on Friday on the way up– yes in broad daylight... nothing new there! We drove down a closed road, tried to turn round and then the workers then wouldn't let us back, even fluttering our eyelashes failed! So, after a very long detour to the barn, we abandoned the original plan of a little 5 miler round Derwentwater and we went to the pub instead!

But on Saturday we all had a good walk in reasonable weather – Helvellyn from Thirlmere, the rain stayed off but

it was cold on top. On Sunday the rain was battering down, Birchy took us on a two hour walk up Walla Crag, we'd great views and I would love to go back in better weather. Flapjacks, coffee and Bailey's on top helped a lot!"

Back in March 2019, by popular demand we had a second camping barn weekend at the Mandale Reckoning House above Lathkill Dale in Derbyshire. The slightly sinister name? It was where local lead miners went to receive their wages. It was a comfortable barn.

On the way out Reg Cromer, Sonja Grigor, Barbara Richards and myself had a very windy day indeed over Mam Tor



Sonja and Barbara on Mam Tor

along to Hollins Cross and back by Mam Farm, taking in the amazing wreckage of the old A-road that I'd never seen before. The demanding aspect of Saturday was rain, although we escaped the really heavy downpours on an early walk in deep shelter in east Lathkill Dale.

The downpours came back though to bite us on the Sunday! This saw Reg and myself along with Glenn and Helen Grant, Nicky Hickin, Hew McDermott, Angela Price, Mike Wallis and Ruby the dog going down Lathkill Dale in strong sunshine to Youlgreave and returning via Bradford Dale. The river Lathkill was in full spate and the Dale was flooded right over the path so we were up to our knees in water – Nicky and I with our boots off!

So you **can** escape the rain under a roof – but maybe not for good!

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