



The Gwydyr Mountain Club Newsletter

December 2018

Editorial by David Lane-Joynt

This month we have something different

In the article below we have what I hope will be the first of a series of articles on the history of the Club, which will be of interest to us all. Mike McEneaney is one of our very early members, and he describes how they found and purchased our current hut in 1972.

At that stage the members were young and none of them had any money so in the next newsletter Roger Hughes will tell us the amusing tale of how they managed to raise the money.

As promised we also have Dave Gray's account of his trip to the Island of Colonsay in 2015, and his suggestion that this would make a good idea for a future Scottish meet.

I now have several articles for future newsletters, for which I thank the contributors. Please keep them coming, and I will try and keep up with producing the newsletters.

Finally Happy Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all

PROMOT-

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Beautiful autumn colours for the St Johns in the Vale meet

How we acquired the Club Hut by Mike McEneaney

From the very outset of the Club it was always the members' ambition to own a property, preferably in North Wales.

With this goal in mind, whilst out walking/climbing, we always kept alert to possible buildings that might be suitable. I recall viewing a Forestry Commission cottage above the "Ugly House" on the A5 (too expensive) and some ruins beyond Dolwyddelan (too remote).

In 1972, shortly after we had been served notice to quit our temporary hut in Llanwrst, a group of us were descending Moel Siabod by the north ridge, through the farm down to the back lane leading to what is now our Hut. We noticed an empty church on our right (now converted into a house). "This may be suitable" we all thought.



It just so happened that we then spotted two nuns in the window of the cottage next door. We knocked and enquired about the empty church. "Go and speak to the vicar, he lives in a cottage on the A5, just beyond the bus stop". This we duly did. He thought we were talking about the chapel which is now the Hut.

He gave us the keys and off we went to explore. Despite a large hole in the roof the chapel was just what we were looking for. Would the church be willing to sell? The vicar said he would enquire on our behalf.

The response was "not to a mountaineering club". Shortly afterwards the church put the Chapel up for sale.

A friendly solicitor in Colwyn Bay, a close friend of the "mother" of the Club, advised us how to proceed. Purchase was by tender in writing. We submitted, "£100 above the highest bid received". Needless to say this was not admissible.

Our solicitor enquired how the bids had gone. No other bids had been received, the church really wanted to sell to a Youth Organisation, but none appeared to be interested. How much would the church accept? "£2,000 but we are not selling to any Mountaineering Club".

The answer? The solicitor's secretary submitted a bid of £2,000, this was accepted, and the secretary duly sold the Chapel on to the GMC.

Mission accomplished, the rest is history, as they say. It was meant to be.

Colonsay—An Idea For A Future Scottish Meet by Dave Gray

Where's Colonsay?

Colonsay is a relatively small Inner Hebrides Island – on the outer edge of that island group, south of Mull and North of Jura. I had a five day break there – effectively four days walking - in August 2015 and was really impressed by it as a venue for a Hebridean trip. Hence this article.

Why is it a good 'starter island'?

It struck me that this could be a good island to visit for those new to the Hebrides (or indeed those wanting a bit of a change.) This was because...

(a) It's far out enough to get the feel of 'remoteness' from the wider world that you don't get so much on say Skye, but

you do on the Outer Isles. It's quiet and there's a nice peaceful retro feel to the place. I went in late August after the Scots schools had gone back, saw very few people and you could even road walk without seeing a lot of cars.

(b) On the other hand it's not *too* far out. You don't have to bust guts to get into the peace and remoteness – the ferry goes from Oban which is a reasonably easy drive from home (or you can take the train); and the ferry trip is an interesting 1.5 hours with good mountain and coastal views.

(c) The weather is better than on more mountainous islands – yes it does rain but there is a tendency for the bad stuff to fly over Colonsay's head. There were times for instance when I was in sun and Mull in particular was getting a battering. It's pretty breezy too being so maritime, and this does help keep midges at bay.

What's the walking like?

The island has very fine coastal walks – of which more in a minute – and that was basically what I did. The interior is farmland, rough pasture or small rugged knobby heather hills. The main summit of Carn an Eoin (right) has great views and can be picked off in passing from Killoran Bay but otherwise we're really talking coast not hills.

There is also rock climbing – there's some information in the old SMC Islands guide-



book and some scary looking stuff at Uragai at the north west end of the island to look at on www.ukclimbing.com

Travel and Accommodation?

I went over as a solo foot passenger and got around just by walking and hitching. I got lifts when I needed them to cut down the road walking. As the island is relatively small I could have done all I did just on foot with a bit more effort. Taking a car over is obviously more expensive and may not feel that worthwhile, I guess it depends how many are in your party and what you want to do. To me as a non-cyclist the island seems ideal for cycling – quiet roads and not too many steep hills. Some of the others in the bunkhouse complex were on bikes going up through the islands on long trips.



I stayed in the estate bunkhouse which was basic and quirky but was comfortable and had everything I needed. It's had a nasty encounter with a Cape Buffalo at some stage...

I don't think there's other budget accommodation, though there are cottages and B&Bs plus a hotel; there's no official campsite and there's a bit of a lack of fresh running water which suggests wild camping may be challenging.

Downtown Scalasaig, where the ferry docks, has a small shop that is well stocked, plus a hotel and bar; also a small café/restaurant that I would recommend, I ate there on my last evening waiting for the ferry.

Where's the Best Beaches?



On my first day I walked from the bunkhouse down to Killoran Bay on the NW coast, a beautiful deep gold strand set between headlands, confusingly called Traigh Ban, or 'white sands' – its sands have in fact become darker over recent years because of peaty run off from streams.

I then went over Carn an Eoin and along the coastal cliffs and then

over a wide grassy area of machair, strewn with flowers like a medieval tapestry, to another Traigh Ban. This is a great wild white sand beach on the NE coast near the tip of the island.



Traigh Ban was populated by little ringed plovers, I also saw arctic skuas and wild or feral goats on this walk. You can go north from Traigh Ban through increasingly complex cliff scenery right to the top of the island. I stopped just beyond there and didn't carry on back down the west coast, as it looked as if the going was getting tough!



I returned pretty much by the way I'd come out, but had the bonus of a fantastic evening swim at Killoran Bay.

Another fine beach on the east side is called Queen's Bay, that looks partly towards the Paps of Jura. I spent my last day on the east coast, walking to the ferry via a trip to see an old deserted fishing village at Riasg Buidhe, then going over the headlands south for a mile or so from the ferry to relax and swim here



Does God exist? Does He play golf? If so, where?

At the risk of being controversial, if the answer to the first two questions is 'yes' the answer to the third is possibly 'Colonsay'! If you don't believe me, have a look below at what you see on the 'golf course at the end of the universe'...



On my second day I hitched on the road south through Kilchattan; a kind local lady gave me a lift to Port Mor and confirmed there were indeed no buses and no taxis, not even secret ones for locals only!

A little way south the lane brought me out onto the start of the island's golf course, across which you walk past the airstrip to get to the further area of cliffs and beaches on the south west coast. This area is again machair grassland and overlooks great slabs of wave cut platforms that create massive areas of surf out at sea, plus small rugged headlands. The stones piled up you can see in the photo below are

'raised beaches', which are common here and on Jura and elsewhere in the Hebrides. They're caused by the land rising after the weight of the last glaciers have been taken away – seriously! – and leaving beaches stranded. You also see stranded sea caves and stacks caused by the same process.

Beyond here the coast is a mix of headlands and sandy bays with some great views across to Jura and Islay as well as back north to Coll and Mull.



I was headed for the bottom end of the island hoping to cross over the tidal strait of 'The Strand' to Oransay, the small isle that dangles off Colonsay. The path was clear on the map, but I got slightly lost on the ground going too far south and had to scramble over a couple of fences. Instead of the golden stretch of sand I imagined The Strand was bleak and offputting with greyish silt and seaweed under darkening skies. No one had been able to give me any advice about

safe crossing times or any tide times (if you are a maths/oceanography PhD the advice at www.colonsay.org.uk/Things-to-Do/Oransay may help but is this not much use in the field!) There was nothing posted on the causeway and no one around so I gave up the idea and walked/hitched home via the lanes. Wildlife highlights of the day were orchids, sightings of gannets diving, plus fulmars and more little ringed plovers.

What's the 'Pigs' Paradise?

Pigs might have been on the menu for day three, which was a walk from the bunkhouse to Killoran and then south along the island's NW coast. This was easier going than expected along some pretty impressive cliff scenery – after an initial path close to the edge and then down to some cattle pastures on a raised beach, a stile over the last wall and then a muddy path up a clear break in the cliff line takes you above the most hairy sections.

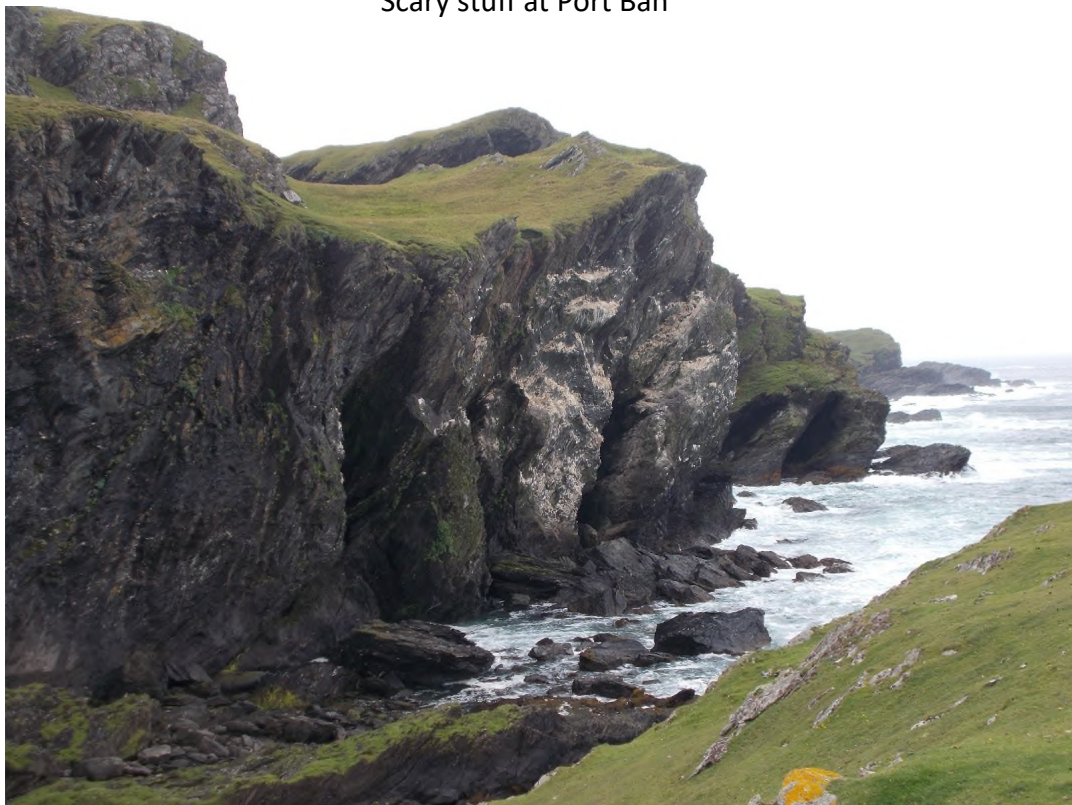
You emerge and go along the top of the coastal hill of Beinn Bhreac before going around the 'pigs paradise' at Port Ban which is a large grassy bowl leading down to the sea. Here the islanders once grazed their pigs. This give access to the cliff edge again, the most disconcerting feature of this area being the way the grass edge just 'pours' over the rocks. A good path then goes past a narrower deep 'bowl' to cross the hill of Binnean Riabhach and down to Port Mor and the road home.



Cliffs, caves and stacks early in the walk – Caillich Uragaig, and The Pug's Paradise (right)



Scary stuff at Port Ban



and in conclusion?

I hope you agree Colonsay looks worth a visit. As you can see I had decent weather. I didn't do everything on the island, and to my mind this venue could be worth up a week, especially if you get some wet days.

I got the ideas for the walks from the OS map and <http://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/> whose descriptions I found to be accurate and sensible.