



The Gwydyr Mountain Club Newsletter

November 2020

Editorial by David Lane-Joynt

In these strange times, Glenn has done his best to keep the club going with his Zoom updates, but most of our club life has been on hold.

In the brief period when the lockdown rules were relaxed we did, however, manage to get in two meets, and we have the accounts of these meets. As Richard Smith states he managed to work out a cunning plan on how to go ahead with his cycling meet within the rules. The Offa's Dyke Path along the Clwydian Range is one of my favourite places to go for a walk with the wonderful views that you get on a fine day, and we have Dave Edward's account of his meet at the beginning of September.

Lastly we go back to last year and Bill Morrison's meet in Glencoe. The highlight of the week has to be their traverse of the Anoch Eagach ridge.

Thank you to all those who have responded to my pleas to them for articles. So keep them coming, and even if we don't have any current meets, we will still have some interesting activities to cover.

In these days members often have great digital photos from their activities and it is hard to do justice to

them in the format of a newsletter. So for this newsletter, I have placed interactive links on most of the images. Click on a photograph and this will bring up an enlarged photo in higher definition. There are also some additional links shown as underlined blue text. Try it out and let me know what you think.

(these links will only work when you read the newsletter from within the website)

In This Issue

Cycling the Dave Brailsford Way By Richard Smith	2
Walking in the Clwydian Range By Dave Edwards	5
Traverse of the Anoch Eagach ridge By Bill Morrison	8

Cycling The Dave Brailsford Way by Richard Smith

(there are interactive links in this article - just click on any photograph or underlined blue link)

The Dave Brailsford Way is a scenic cycling route through Snowdonia, named after the head of Team Sky and GB Cycling, who lived near Llanberis as a child, and was therefore an obvious choice for a “celebrity” name to attach to the route.

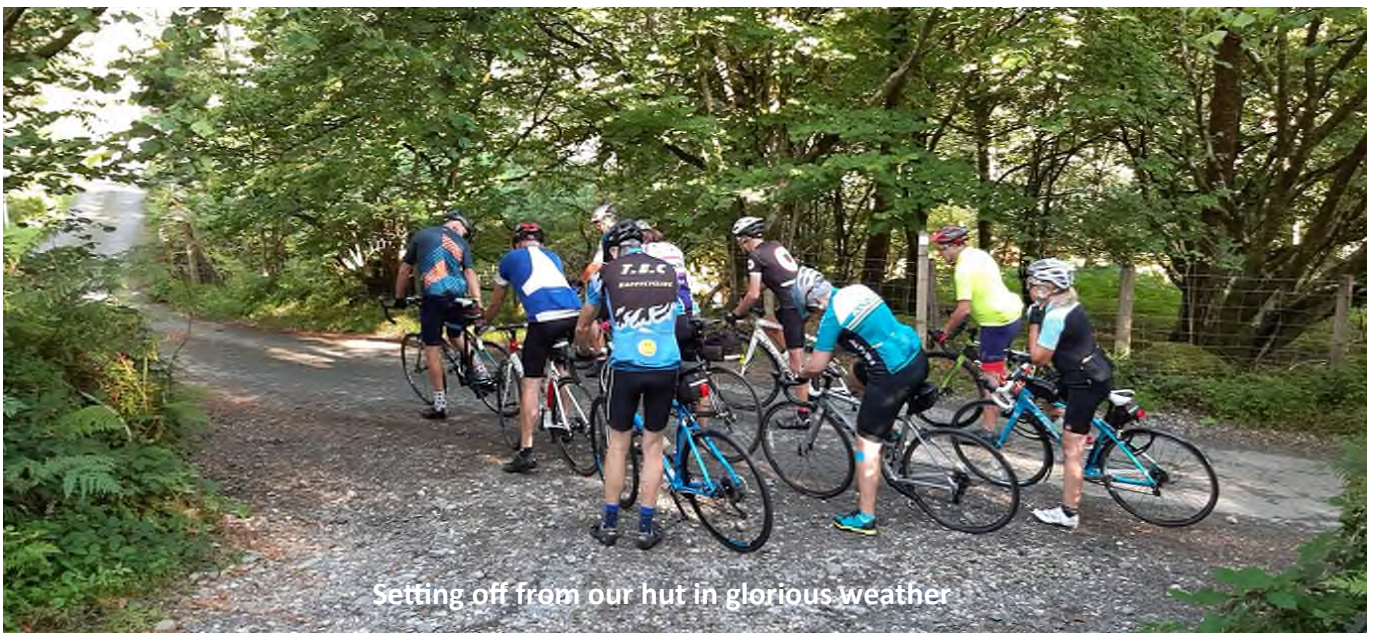
Over a year ago, before Coronavirus or lockdowns were heard of, the Gwydyr Mountain Club set aside a weekend in the calendar for the purposes of cycling this route. Little did we know that Snowdonia would be shut down in early 2020, our hut in Capel Curig would be declared out of bounds, and the idea of cycling in a large group would be strictly verboten! Thankfully, by the middle of the year, the virus had retreated for the time being and we were able to devise a cunning plan to cycle in socially distanced groups and to camp outside the hut in tents and camper vans.



So it was that on 8th August, 11 cyclists [set out](#) in glorious weather and headed up the A5 at

carefully spaced distances, before turning left towards the Pen-y-Gwryd hotel. The stunning views of the Snowdon horseshoe ahead meant that photography stops were essential and the carefully-spaced groups devised by the leader soon melded into a random mass. Immediately past the Pen-y-Gwryd, a right hand turn took us up to the first climb of the day up to Pen-y-Pass; although appearing quite daunting at first, this climb is quite steady and we all composed ourselves at the top ready for the fast descent of the [Llanberis Pass](#). The smooth surface and steep gradient meant that speeds of 30-40 mph were achieved, with the odd heart-stopping moment at the sharp s-bend halfway down, with stone walls on either side. A crash here would not have been pretty!

Past Llanberis, a left turn in Llanrug took us over a few short sharp hills and down into Waunfawr, and then right towards Caernarfon. Here, we followed the official route which does a loop around Caernarfon Castle and back out of town again, before arriving half an hour later at a point on the opposite



Setting off from our hut in glorious weather

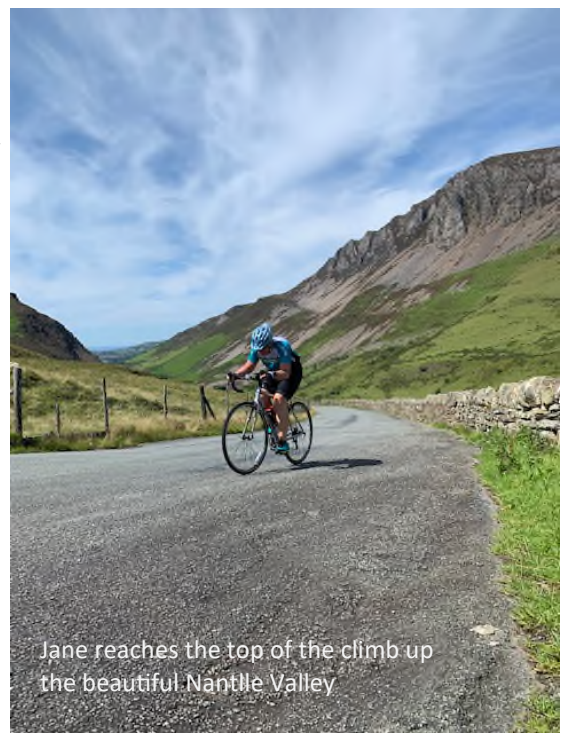
bank of the river from the castle, which could have been reached by a 2 minute walk across a foot-bridge. There were a few audible grumbles from the rear of the peleton at this point!



Team photo at Caernarfon Castle

A lovely section alongside the Menai Strait followed, before turning inland to a lunch stop at the Inigo Jones Slateworks cafe near Penygroes. Refreshed and refuelled, we headed up the next climb up the Nantlle valley, which I think is the most beautiful part of the route, passing the Pant Du vineyard. Here they make good quality red and white wines; combined with the beautiful weather, we could almost have been in Tuscany. We were tempted to stop and sample the wine but with over 40 miles to go, it was probably a wise decision to pass by (although not in keeping with the Gwydyr's reputation for alcohol consumption!). Next was a long steep climb up to the col at Drws-y-coed before descending to Rhyd Ddu. On the fast descent, we were held up by a white Maserati, which could only manage the bends at 30mph. From Rhyd Ddu, there is a superb long straight 5 mile descent all the way into Beddgelert, for lunch stop number 2.

In Beddgelert, the route splits and you have the choice of taking the shorter 50 mile option back up to the Pen-y-Gwryd, or the longer and hillier 75 mile route via Blaennau Ffestiniog. After much debate, we split into two groups, with three riders opting for the shorter route and eight drawn onwards by the prospect of Blaennau on a sunny day. Another delightful stretch of road followed through the oakwoods around the back of Cnicht, before two long challenging



Jane reaches the top of the climb up the beautiful Nantlle Valley

climbs up to Blaennau Ffestiniog. Here we found a little café where we could refuel again and steel ourselves for the biggest climb of the day up to the Crimea Pass. A few opted to get off and walk up part of this but once we gained the top at 385m, we were at the highest point of the day's route. Our reward was another long fast descent all the way to Betws y Coed. With weary legs, we ground up the final climb up the A5 before turning into the lane and back to the hut.

Our final reward was a meal in the Tinny washed down by a few beers, before retiring to the Gwydyr campsite. A total of 75 miles, 1887m of ascent – a great way to escape lockdown!

A few more pictures of:



Walking in the Clwydian Range by Dave Edwards

(there are interactive links in this article - just click on any photograph)

I was due to complete my postponed Derbyshire walk in September. However the English lockdown rule was that only 6 people could walk in a group and you couldn't share a car to get to a walk unless you lived together or were part of a bubble. This made a walk in Derbyshire impractical, and so I moved the walk to the Clwydians, which are much nearer, and also in Wales up to 30 people were still allowed to be together on a walk.

My idea was to cover the northern half of the Offa's Dyke Path through the Clwydian Range, starting at Moel y Parc to as far south as Moel Arthur and then return along the Clwydian Way. In the past I had led a walk approaching Moel y Parc from the North, but this involved some steep climbing, so I decided to do a reconnaissance starting from Aberwheeler and approach Moel y Parc from the South West on hopefully less steep ground. After all we had not been able to get out much during the lockdown and might not be as fit as we were.

Car parking at Aberwheeler was not a problem, and I managed to find a route up towards Moel y Parc. The only problem was that the entrance gate to the fields was all tied up with multiple knots, and I ended up having to climb over it, which might not be so good for a group. After a while I found a good track up over the subsidiary peak and on to Moel y Parc. From there I was on a route that I knew. I walked down the route as far as the Moel Arthur car park before returning for the final important task of finding a suitable pub that could accommodate our numbers. Fortunately I had previously had a drink and meal in "The Piccadilly Inn" in Caerwys, and even better the manager now said that he could accommodate us with an unknown number of walkers at a very approximate time on our date.

After sending out an email inviting interest in the meet, I got an excellent response from a possible 15 people, and they confirmed that their contact details on the website were correct, which covered the Track and Trace requirement.

So on Saturday 5th September, 15 of us gathered at Aberwheeler for the start. We were Sue Taylor, Nicky Hickin, Brenda Turnbull and her 2 friends Jenny and Lisa, Tom and Linda Humphreys, Lindsey Fooks and her friend David (who we last met on Roger's railway trip to N. Wales last summer), Liz Humphries, Chris and Janet Harris, Dave Antrobus, the Colonel (Pete Smedley) and Lee Robinson.



The route up through the fields

All went well till we came to the gate tied with even more knots than before. As we struggled with the gate, a voice from the nearby bungalow shouted out, "It's the other gate!" How had I missed that one? Then just as we were about to move through the gate, eagle eyed Nicky spotted something in the mud around the gateway; it was someone's credit card! After a few minutes' deliberation, someone said, "Why don't we ask at the bungalow in case they recognise the person's name on the card?". To our surprise it belonged to the lady who lived in the

bungalow. She had lost it a few days before when she was out shopping and had stopped her card! So, off we went, our good deed for the day done, through a few green fields and then bracken paths. At this stage all the paths looked the same to me, and I didn't recognise my route through the maze of identical paths that I had taken a week earlier. So we just headed out in roughly the right direction, and soon found the broad path leading up to the Moel y Parc subsidiary summit. We stopped there for a short drinks break and a chance to take some photographs of the fine views that we were beginning to get. It was then on to the main summit at 398m.

The weather was good and from the summit there were unrestricted views all round. We could see



over the Cheshire Plain, beyond Liverpool and up the Fylde Coast, Liverpool Bay, the Welsh Coast, along the Clwydian Ridge and far away Snowdonia peeping over the top of the nearest low hills. We all agreed that it was well worth the effort climbing up there.

You can recognise Moel y Parc from miles away because of the transmitting station at the top. Built in 1962/3 to bring ITV television to N. Wales (the old 405 line VHF signal), its height of 229m high made it the tallest structure in N. Wales at the time. In 1965 BBC transmissions

also started from this site.

From Moel y Parc we dropped down the ridge to join the Offa's Dyke Trail, which goes along the ridge tops to Moel Famau and beyond. We followed the Path up to the top of Penycloddiau (440m), where we stopped for a lunch break in one of the hillfort ditches. Penycloddiau is the largest of the hillforts on the Clwydian range and one of the largest in Wales. It was active from the Iron Age right through to



the Roman Period. There were multiple concentric ditches and extensive ramparts with gateways. The ramparts would have been topped with a large wooden fence giving shelter to the round houses, enclosures and central ponds which might have provided the inhabitants with water.

From the top of Penycloddiau we descended to the Coed Llangwyfan car park on the Nannerch/Llandyrnog road. Faced with the steep ascent up to Moel Arthur on the Offa's Dyke Path,

there is an option here to shorten the route and return along the easy route of the Clwdian Way. But the Gwydyr do not give up easily and we all decided to press on to the summit of Moel Arthur (465m).

Evidence has been found showing activity on Moel Arthur not only during the Iron Age but also earlier in the Bronze Age. A possible Bronze Age burial mound lies on the centre of the fort and in 1962, three

On the shoulder of Moel Arthur with Moel Famau in the distance



copper Bronze Age flat axes were found within the ramparts. Earlier excavations turned up course Roman pottery and flint arrowheads, suggesting the hillfort was in use both before and after the Iron Age. There is also evidence of quarrying and the hill featured during the short lived “Cilcain Gold Rush”, when finds of gold in the local area in 1888 hit the headlines of the mining journals. A small mine at Moel Arthur and several nearby sites were worked for several years but apparently no fortunes were made!

At that stage it looked as though we might get hit by rain showers, so we hurried down from Moel Arthur to yet another car park where the Offa’s Dyke Path meets the Clwydian Way, the “balcony” route which contours around Moel Arthur. Fortunately the rain seemed to be passing through to the north of us as we started back on the Clwydian Way, which was in surprisingly good condition after the amount of rain we had had in August. It was now just a long gentle climb to get back to the car park at the top of what I know to be the “Tank Track” road beside the transmitter station.

We worked our way through the fields and lanes to the cars at Aberwheeler, and most of us then



headed off to the pub. We all sat outside under gas heaters, and the pub provided us with waitress service. The pub had been recently refurbished and the meals menu looks very good so it is worth taking a note of. They were very helpful as we arrived earlier than expected, and there was no problem.

According to Chris Harris’s GPS we had walked 12.2 miles with 2,802 feet of ascent. It is surprising how much up and down there is on the Offa’s Dyke Path along the Clwydians. I think we

all agreed it had been a good day out.

Traverse of The Aonach Eagach Ridge by Bill Morrison

(there are interactive links in this article - just click on any photograph or underlined blue link)

The Aonach Eagach is a 10km long ridge running from east to west along the north side of Glencoe . It starts at the foot of the Devil's Staircase, an old mule trail leading from Glencoe to Kinlocheven (now part of the West Highland Way), and ends near the Pap of Glencoe, above Glencoe village (see the [route map](#)). The ridge has a reputation of being the most difficult horizontal scramble on mainland Britain, mainly due to the 2km central section of rocky pinnacles and the associated high level of exposure. The pinnacles are generally graded at G2 with the occasional G3 where the exposure is greatest. It is these features that give the ridge its gaelic name which roughly translates to the 'Notched Ridge'.

In September 2019 a group of us, Helen, Richard, Kay, Lee, Lindsay, Ray, John and myself plus a couple of Richard's friends, Alan and Gill, took a trip to Glencoe with the intention of tackling some of Lochaber's classic walks. Chief amongst these was to be a traverse of the Aonach Eagach. We stayed at



The Lagangarbh hut

the Scottish Mountaineering Club's Lagangarbh hut.

Lagangarbh is situated at the foot of the iconic Munro [Buachaille Etive Mor](#) and conveniently sits just across the A82 opposite the Devil's Staircase. It's a decent hut in a spectacular location with toilets, showers, two dorms, a sitting room and a well equipped kitchen. It was very comfortable and a great base for exploring the hills around Lochaber; I would recommend this hut to any club members wanting to explore the Glencoe area.

On the morning of the climb the weather was perfect; the sky was clear with bright sunshine providing some late summer warmth. We had elected to start our ascent at the Pass of Glencoe, 4km further down the glen from the Devil's Staircase. Here a path leads up the steep north face towards the first Munro of the day - Meall Dearg (Rounded Red Hill) There is a small car park with space for a couple of cars at the start of the trail. However, if full, there is also a much larger car park about 100m further down the glen on the opposite side of the road.

As this is a linear walk most of us were dropped at the small car park while Richard, Lee and Alan drove down to the Clachaig Inn to park the cars for the return journey to the hut. While we were waiting for the drivers the morning heat was building promising a sweltering ascent. After about 15 minutes the car logistics were completed and everybody was ready to start the climb up the mountain. The path out of the glen up to the first peak was challenging but well defined. The climb took us relentlessly upwards moving up the steep south wall of the Aonach Eagach. The condition of the path underfoot was fairly good, the ground was dry and the route wove its way up grassy slopes and rocky outcrops. As we gained height we were afforded some excellent views west down the glen to Loch Leven and beyond and across the valley to Bidean nam Bian and the iconic buttresses of the Three

Sisters. Soon views of the lost valley came into view, its wooded approach and alluvia fan plainly visible.. This flat hanging valley, formed by glacial meltwater, rises to the saddle between the two munros of Bidean nam Bian and Stob Coire Sgreamhach. Towards the end of our ascent, the sky started to



On Am Bodach looking North

cloud over and the temperature dropped. Cloudbase was high and visibility good - the perfect walking weather.

The path eventually took us to the summit of Am Bodach (The Old Man) - not the nearby peak in the Mamores which shares the same name. At 943m it is classed as a Munro top. Here we rested for 10 minutes taking in some calories and enjoying the vista. From Am Bodach the wide ranging scenery to the north and east revealed a sea of mountains including Ben Nevis, Aonach Mor, the Mamores and the Gray Corries.

The next part of the journey was to start along the ridge to reach Meall Dearg. Richard led the way and soon we were facing our first real scrambling section of the day. The descent from Am Bodach involves negotiating a steep ridge and requires some downclimbing. On a dry day this was no problem but the rock looked as if it would be treacherous in the wet. As we made our way onwards towards the Munro the path was well worn and generally easy to follow. We had to negotiate a series of rocky climbs and exposed ledges, with some blocky scrambling. It is worth being aware that once you have started the ridge proper there are no bypass options, you cannot cir-



Lee on the ascent of Meall Dearg

cumvent the scrambling. This means once committed you have to complete the traverse or retrace your steps. The sides of the ridge are a mixture of sheer cliffs and hazardous steep ground. Too dangerous to walk on and too difficult to descend.

Eventually the route winds its way up to the summit of Meall Dearg (953m) arriving via a grass ridge leading to the cairn. Between us and the next peak the ridge narrows and forms the pinnacles which gives it its name. The way ahead was clearly visible, an unrelenting series of rocky crags marking the out the trail to the western Munro. Leaving Meall Dearg, we were straight onto the pinnacles. Richard and John led from the front checking out the route and some of the more ambiguous sections where the path disappeared. This traverse involved exposed scrambling over rocky towers and negotiating narrow arêtes. At one point an [open chimney](#) had to be climbed whilst at another the rock face required climbing moves to surmount. The terrain was relentless, as soon as one descent was completed it was straight into the next ascent. The difficulty of the terrain meant that we had to



queue up at each fresh challenge waiting our turn. This wasn't a problem as the ridge was empty - very few brave souls were up there with us that day.

The exposure was extreme at several points with steep drops to both left and right. However, despite carrying climbing harnesses and ropes these weren't needed, especially in dry summer conditions we experienced. In the wet or snow it would be a completely different experience. We probably spent about 3 hours crossing the pinnacles and everybody managed this section without much difficulty. A moderate level of fitness, confidence of moving on exposed ground and experience of scrambling brings this ridge within the reach of most experienced hill walkers.

As we pushed on along the pinnacles we encountered a sole climber tackling the traverse west to east.

She was rather uncomfortable with the terrain and anxiously asked if it got any easier further on. On being told 'it doesn't' she decided she had done enough and turned back. Probably a good decision. The most frequent mountain rescue call out for the Aonach Eagach is for people who find themselves stuck on the pinnacles, unable to go forward or back.

On Sgorr nam Fiannaidh having just finished the pinnacles



The path eventually leads onto Sgorr nam Fiannaidh (Rocky Peak of Fian warriors) at 940m. The summit being marked by a shelter cairn and trig point. Here we rested and ate our packed lunches although it was mid afternoon. The 'traditional' way down from the western end of the Aonach Eagach is by a steep path that runs directly down the Clachaig gully. This path is very steep and covered with scree and loose rock. It has a reputation for being dangerous so rather than brave it, we elected to take an easier route off the mountain. We descended aiming towards the youth hostel at the foot of the mountain. There was a path, patchy at first but becoming clearer as we walked off the mountain's rocky crown. At lower levels the path was overrun by a stream and the ground became boggy and muddy but no less steep. Care needs to be taken here even in good weather. The path comes out by a metalled road that takes you a short walk to the Clachaig Inn where a good meal and few beers (for the non drivers) can be had.

This was a great day out - perfect weather, excellent views, good scrambling and two Munros. The Aonach Eagach is to be highly recommended for an adventurous day out in Lochaber.