

The Sandstone Trail Saturday 11th July

Chris Harris

Nine walkers and 1 support driver, Glenn, met in Frodsham at 4.45 am!! We took 2 cars to Whitchurch and left one for collection the same evening. We started at 5.45am walking the towpath of the canal at a brisk pace in hazy sun and about 15C. I don't think any of us had walked this distance in one day and nobody was sure that they would complete the challenge. I didn't know if we would split into equally paced groups but on the day we all stuck together.

After about 3 hours we stopped for 10 minute break and a look at the views across Cheshire from the Iron age fort, Maiden castle. Five hours from the start we arrived at Burwardsley where Glenn was waiting with tea, coffee, water and food. After a 40 minute break in bright sunshine we continued on our way to reach Janet Coates and Brenda at 3.50pm who were waiting for us in Delamere forest with more sustenance. We left after 35 minutes of eating drinking, sock changing and applying plasters to feet. We could feel spots of rain at this point and this increased to a drizzle and then to rain. A couple of miles from the end we had to waterproof ourselves, arriving at the Bear's Paw on Frodsham at 7.07, 13 hours and 22 minutes from the start.

The statistics are quite revealing (if you are interested). 54 Kilometres (34 miles), 3700ft of ascent without stiles. Our walking pace averaged a respectable 6.2kph (3.9mph) and amazingly did not decrease towards the end. This would give us 9 hours walking which just shows how much time it takes to climb stiles and open gates. Jane recorded 76,300 steps on her pedometer which also gave a surprisingly accurate estimate of the distance.

We had a couple of minor navigation errors. The trail is very well marked but at this time of year the plant life thrives and works really hard to hide the signs. Pete Mann tested one of the many electric fences, there was a sharp crack and then the air turned blue.

After the obligatory photo outside the pub we enjoyed a well-earned off the hill pint. Well done Helen Grant, Fiona Langton, Jane Webster, John Simpson, Janet, Chris and Roger Harris, Dave Chadwick and Pete Mann.

Many thanks to Glen Grant, Janet Coates and Brenda Turnball for providing all of us with support.

The Snowdonia Cycle

Geoff Brierley

Looking back, so many holidays and adventures are enjoyed all the more for their planning. This one was no exception, the DB's and special guest were to join together and cross from Wirral out over the Clywdian hills and on to Snowdonia, our journey culminating at the Chapel. This was the start of three days in the saddle, of camping near an ancient hill fort, of hot tin roofs and a well-timed bus stop and of finding Nebo and a swim in the Llugwy, an adventure into parts of Wales none of us had visited before.



Mike, John, Chris and Geoff at Woodside Ferry Terminal

Day One (Wirral to Moel Arthur)

On an August day in 2008 Chris Russell, Mike Dagley, and I set out from Oxton and made our way through a pleasant and sunny Birkenhead Park to rendezvous with a friend of mine from work, John, at the Woodside ferry terminal. It was a perfect day for such endeavours and we were all keen to set off and get our teeth into the adventure ahead, after a brief stop back at my place we set off towards Landican

Lane via Woodchurch which heralded our joining of the National Cycle Network – Route 56, meeting up with my parents, sister and Heather the dog at the start of the trail who'd come to see us off. We prepared to get moving, and would have been successful in this regard but for Mikes' puncture. This was, although we didn't know it at the time, the first and only one of the trip, it would not however, be the only challenge that we faced, of those there were a few more to come. Storeton, Brimstage and Thornton Hough fell to the progress of our bikes and the tread of our tyres, ignoring the temptations of Parkgate's ice cream parlour but not quite managing to avoid the offerings of Neston's bakery and in we piled to pick up some extra rations.

Another stop this time at Chris's Dad's to top up our water supplies, it was a long and considered departure from the Wirral, but we finally left the 56 and crossed through the villages of Burton and Puddington and then out across fields of Brussels sprouts, a 4 x 4 passing us kicked up a cloud of dust on the track, it was like being in the dustbowl of America's mid-West and the shelter of a large barn in the middle of the hot weather was just too hard to resist.

After a bite to eat we should have made a move, but the hay bales, stacked invitingly one on top of another with edges wide enough to hold or stand on were irresistible and we climbed up and over them, and yes the metal roof was certainly hotter than John was expecting!

With Moel Arthur visible in the distance it was clear there was still a fair bit of North East Wales to wend our way through before we got to set up our camp on its flank. Once through the industrial paths of Deeside we re-joined the Network again onto Route 5 - Chester right into North Wales and a route I used fairly comprehensively some years later when I did a similar cycle over 1 day. The tarmac was oh so smooth and a pleasure to move across, at a fair lick too and soon we were crossing the River Dee into Flintshire and out towards the now more visible Clwydian Hills.

Our hope was to stock up on water at a pub just before our turn off towards Moel Arthur but unfortunately the pub was shut and not due to open until 7pm, we decided not to hang around and reckoned on having enough to last out the night. Onwards to the car park at the base of the hill. It was, it has to be said a fair grind up here, and each of us settled into a pace which was tenable. Getting off was a relief, although Mike having dropped his sunglasses part of the way up, had already had a second start, not something to be welcomed when one has to get back on a bike towing a trailer on an uphill – as Mike described in his article in the Chapel log book 'I don't normally like to stop on hills as it breaks the rhythm. However I was getting tired, and picking up the specs was chance to gulp down a few "M+M's. Problem with stopping of course is that you have to start again. Hill starts with a loaded trailer can only be described as inelegant'

We all met up at the pass and then filed up the single track pushing our fully laden bikes until we reached the gate on the Eastern shoulder of the hill. Here we decided would be our camp for the night and we took our time pitching tents, creating a bivvy shelter pitched against the fence line and making something to eat. Mike set up his 15" high bivvy shelter, under which he was ensconced in his "Dave Kelly Special" bivvy bag, John was in his bivvy just down the fence from Mike, Chris and I had pitched our tents. A dark cloud was building above Moel Famau as we lay down to sleep. The night promised somewhat harsher weather to come, for some of us time asleep would be shorter than expected.



Camp 1 at the end of 30 plus miles

Day 2 (Moel Arthur to Llyn Brenig)

The night had promised harsh weather and the storm had delivered it.

Rain had pummelled down over night and it had thrashed at my tent, bending one side under its will during the night, Mike had been splashed from time to time as the rain hit the ground and bounced up underneath his tarp. John however had seemed to come of the worse of all. Mike had heard his rustlings early on and once he himself decided to stir he saw a woeful John trying to keep warm, he was, he said, very cold. The seeds of his downfall were sown the previous evening, as he lay in his bag he stargazed up at the skies above just before he nodded off. Unfortunately he failed to zip up his bivvy bag, the rain found its way inside his open bivvy and soaked his sleeping bag and clothes before he had a chance to wake and zip it up. Mike's 'phone had been splashed by the bouncing rain drops too so it was on the blink. All in all a fairly eventful night for team bivvy.

We got packed and underway, the rising sun started to warm us and the mist rose from the ground, John's spirits improved. We took a track down from the Bwlch, some of us at faster speeds than others, John took a fall at this point, desperate to avoid a sheep he shouted at it to move as he hurtled round a corner, once he cleared the bracken his quarry came into view and it was taking a slow route across the front of his bike. John swerved and missed said sheep but he skidded, realising he wasn't staying on the bike he moved to unclip his cleats but they stuck and bike plus rider hit the deck. Only now did John's shoes release and this plus the momentum of his crash sent him tumbling into some grass and nettles. We cycled on in to Ruthin, noting the lack of a bike shop which we'd been hoping to find in order to resolve John's recently discovered fraying gear cable, however a slap up breakfast tended all remaining ills.

Post breakfast Chris guided us out of the town and terra incognita was the way of things from here on, our knowledge of the route ahead evaporating like the mist earlier in the day, this was the start of a Wales we knew little to nothing about, true adventure! We cycled on, passing through Bontuchel and upon reaching the village of Cyffylliog we found we had cycled into a rain storm and were forced to take

shelter in the now legendary BUS STOP. It's surprising what an enforced stop and having little if anything to do can do to a person, but an hour and a half passed before we finally noticed any easing in the rain. The opportunity to peruse the map and work out a viable way ahead wasn't lost and we chanced upon an option that would take us off road, following the Clywedog river again. The road steamed in the hot sun, and it was quite magical to watch the others cycling through it, soon enough we reached our turn off at what transpired to be a gate with limited access (perhaps optimistic on our behalf....).

A farm worker was busying himself moving silage nearby so we waited innocuously, or as innocuously as a group of four cyclists can, with four bikes, six panniers and a trailer with a bright yellow flag on it. Our chance presented itself and we took it. Through the gate, along the track, muddy as it was at the beginning, it then took us away from any prying eyes and became grassed over. Stopping at Rhyd Galed, an outpost in the far North of the Clocaenog Forest, we needed to make a decision, our chances of making Betws y Coed and then the Chapel were fading, the off road track we had hoped to take lay in front but there was a problem, its start was a quagmire of muddy ruts. I volunteered to walk up it, leaving the rest with a walkie talkie and I videoed what I found further up.

Things were not good, the track was a mess, it would take us some time to move along it and with our heavily laden bikes it certainly wouldn't be fun. It was early evening, we reconsidered what to do next. Following the tarmac again South, wending our way through wind turbines and a rain shower en route which, when it ended, provided us with a wonderful rainbow over an incredible view of the vastness of the Clocaenog Forest and the hills beyond, with clouds towering above them.



Looking East over the Clocaenog Forest after a rain shower

Descending through the trees we shot out on to the lakeshore, the track down had been a fabulous reward for the toil uphill that preceded it. The plan now was to set up a camp somewhere nearby and have dinner. Unfortunately a van was parked up, and there was the possibility of staff in the visitor centre. We huddled together and agreed to store as much water as we could from the back of the centre, cook some dinner and see how the land lay afterwards.

The van remained resolute. We remained concerned. Camping was, it transpired, not encouraged. The thing was, this wasn't our choice to make. This was a choice made much earlier in the day by forces

beyond our control, had it not been for the hand (or chain saw) of man, our route would have been clear, but with a change of route thus demanded of us what little power we had to shape our destiny had brought us to this place. And so it was, that we camped with as minimal a foot print as we could manage, harassed by midges until we zipped up our tents and bivvy bags and fell asleep.

Day Three (Llyn Brenig to Tan y Garth)

A cooler start to today compared to the humid heat we had experienced, no midges, no interruptions and no one about. A good start. Today was the final thread of the needle over ground we knew little about and it promised green lanes, bridleways and then our journeys end. Kicking off we followed the Western shore of Llyn Brenig and then hung a left following a bridleway out into Mynydd Hiraethog. A stony track led us up past Ty Isaf and shortly afterwards we joined then followed the A543, initially uphill then dropping a swift 300 plus feet in about a mile, John, stuck in his smallest chainring had to coast for parts of the route, but good progress was made before hauling our steeds across the carriageway at Hafodty Hafod Dre. We followed the track over some incredible countryside, in parts extremely wet and flooded and we had to negotiate ourselves and wheels through this, eventually though, we were back on tarmac and found ourselves in Nebo.....found at last!



Mike and Bob...finding Nebo

Through the back country lanes to Capel Garmon, with superb views down the Nant y Benglog and Nant Ffrancon, and down past the ancient Cromlech to a steep descent (with Chris hoping his wheel rim survived) down which we hurtled hoping we maintained control, to meet, via a sweeping final corner, the Llanrwst to Betws road. The trip through Betws came next on familiar tarmac, with a stop at the Spar for refreshment, before tackling the uphill towards Capel Curig.

The Chapel lane arrived and we found all was well with the world, Dave Cole was there to greet us, and Mike and I headed off to the Llugwy for a dip in the river to round of the trip.

What a journey, Wirral and 90 plus miles to arrive in Capel to swim in the Llugwy, through so many different parts of Wales many of which we'd never visited before. It had been a fantastic trip!

Assynt in Winter

Melanie Day

This is an account of when Teresa, Bryn and I went to Assynt at Easter and did Conival and Ben More Assynt in the snow.

The weather had been atrocious in the days leading up to our adventure. Teresa and Bryn had tried to do the Deargs near Ullapool but only managed one as strong winds and torrential rain added to the snow underfoot- and then the pub called them back! I met them in Ullapool and we stayed the night there talking to the guy that ran the hostel and who had just completed all the munros. The next day Teresa and Bryn went off to do Ben Hope, the most northerly munro, while I made a pork pie- as you do! I had done Ben Hope a couple of times and preferred it with a view.

Then finally, after another dump of pre-Easter snow, the weather broke and we had a fantastic day to do the two Assynt munros. We even did some it in tee shirts. The route up from near the Inchnadamph Hotel got very boggy after following the river and heading upwards to Conival. After that we had steep ice slopes to negotiate and a double cornice ridge on the way out to Ben More. We only saw one other person the whole day and that was the very same guy from the hostel in Ullapool, who kindly took our photo. It really was a great day out, made special by the pork pie at the summit, and some wonderful views!







