



The Gwydyr Mountain Club Newsletter

February 2021

Edited: Chris Harris

There is very little to celebrate in the first month of this year so this Newsletter is really a recap of events in 2020.

2020 was not a good year for club activities but we did manage a few group meets.

In January: A Clwyds Saturday Walk led by me (standing in for Dave Gray), Burns night at the chapel organised by Neil Connolly then Roger Hughes' stage 7 Castle to Castle walk from Loggerheads to Ruthin.

In February: Fort William and Patterdale.

In March: just before lockdown, Mark Barley took us on a scenic and soggy walk in the Chee Dale area of Derbyshire.

Then in August: Richard managed to rearrange the Dave Brailsford Cycle meet at the hut to comply with the new rules.

September: an equally compliant Dave Edwards had a good turn out (15) for a walk in the Clwyds. The latter two featured in the November 2020 Newsletter.

CLWYDS MEET JANUARY



Meandering through "woods" to top of Moel Famau. Someone's been busy with the chain saw.



Foel Fenlli



Moel Famau. Photo bombed by guy in yellow.

The first meet on the GMC calendar was the Clwyds walk on Saturday January 11th. The first Saturday walk of the year is always a popular walk and usually led by Dave Gray but this time Dave was unavailable so I stood in as leader. Meeting in the large lay-by on the A494 just South of Llanferres we had a large group of 20 people including about 8 prospective members.

The route: Foel Fenlli, Bwlch Penbarras, Moel Famau, Fron Hen. Distance about 8 miles with a couple of thousand feet of ascent which we just about achieved. The forecast was for strong winds and the route can be muddy on the first section. Neither let us down. By the time we got to the top of Foel Fenlli there had been a few "blow overs". Fortunately the many ditches circling the summit gave us shelter for 1st lunch. Up to the top for a quick photo and the plan was to circumnavigate the hill via Offa's Dyke path and then descend gently to the Bwych. I led a short way only to hit what felt like a force field. The wind was impenetrable, so we returned to the top and descended the direct route, very steep, down to the Bwych. The main route, overlooking the vale of Clwyd, to the Top of Moel Famau was very exposed to the wind so we meandered our way through the woods to the top. Descent was pretty uneventful although final fields after Fron Hen were petty muddy. Barb and the Viking continued the Gwydyr tradition of refusing to walk past a cosy pub and called in at the Druid Inn allowing the rest of us to collect the cars and meet them for an off the hill pint.

24 to 27th February 2020 Fort William Winter Meet

The Fort William winter meet is becoming a regular a fixture on the meets list for good reason.

The Ben Nevis Hotel in Fort William charged £135 for 4 nights ie £33.75 pppn Dinner(3 course) B&B with good sized pool, sauna, steam room, Jacuzzi gym etc on site. Oh, and a free bottle of wine that you can drink in the restaurant. It's a 25 minute drive to Glencoe and a 20 minute walk into Fort William. Lunches are usually from Aldi or M&S food about 5 minutes walk from the Hotel.

Participants in 2019 were: Janet Harris, Chris Harris, Helen Grant, Glenn Grant, Mark Barley, Laura Barley, Jane Jones, Richard Smith, Kay Smith, Roger and Judy Hughes, Lee Robinson, Jane Webster, Simon Clark, Doug Florence, Gail Smith Simon Clark and friend Charlie.

The forecast for the week was basically very windy with significant precipitation.



Day 1, Monday 24th: Quite a few were driving up on the Monday so numbers were low that day.

Weather was grim, I think 80mph wind speed was mentioned, so Helen, Glenn, Janet, I and Mark Barley took the simple option of walking the Tourist route up Ben Nevis starting from the Hotel and walking as far as we dared. Starting in sleety stuff it wasn't long after we started the climb that we got proper white stuff. We were reasonably sheltered from the wind until we reached the gully of Red Burn. We were hit by a massive blast of air and those that had not ducked to the ground were floored by the wind. There were suggestions that we returned at this point. Not wanting a mutiny I confidently explained that it was a rogue gust and it would be unlikely to happen again. If it did happen again I said we should turn around immediately - my luck held and we carried on until stopped by poor visibility at Loch Meall an t-Suidhe where we quickly lunched before turning back. We could have carried on but it was snowing and the wind was whipping up the snow. By the time we finished dining at the Lochan our footprints had blown away

Total distance from hotel and return: 7.8mils, 2118ft ascent (half a Ben)



Tuesday: Buchaille Etive Beag. Another very windy day but no major precipitation forecast.

Along with me, Richard, Lee, Helen, Glenn and Doug started out. Doug had to turn back at the col due to kit problem (he had Gail's crampons). Fortunately he was one of the drivers and we could all fit in Lee's car for the return journey. Buchaille Etive Beag lies along side it's big brother Buchaille Etive Mor and is almost a mirror image. It conveniently contains two Munro's Stob Coire Raineach (925 metres) and Stob Dubh (956 metres). The drive from the hotel only takes about 30 minutes and the roads were OK and there was only a few cm of snow in the car park on the Glencoe road. Following the burn, after about half a mile turned South and started climbing in deepening soft snow to the col between the 2 peaks. It was an out and back to Stob Dubh first - it's a lot further on the ground than on the map but it's a superb ridge! There was some cornicing but nothing to really worry about. Quick photos, about turn back to the col then up a rather indistinct path to Stob Coire Raineach. 6.5 miles, 3500ft ascent was plenty in such windy conditions.



Climbing to the col.



Lee on the ridge to Stob Dubh



Richard and Helen approaching Stob Coire Raineach with Stob Dubh in the back ground



Richard on the top of Stob Coire Raineach



Wednesday, 26th Feb: Another bad forecast too much wind to go up high so we decided to walk to the CIC hut from Torlundy.

Chris, Janet, Doug, Helen, Glenn, Richard, Kay, Lee set out on muddy ground but as we started climbing through the woods the snow came down. There was a good covering of snow in the valley leading to the hut but we had reasonable shelter (Ben Nevis) from the wind. We saw quite a few Ptarmigan. The sky cleared for a while but as we approached the hut the snow started falling quite heavily. We managed to find a bit of shelter from the wind behind the hut and hunkered down and ate lunch, apart from Doug who whipped out his snow shoes and left a trail of Yeti prints in the deep snow. Richard tried to talk us into making an attack on one of the Gullies on the North Face of Ben Nevis but could not tempt anyone. There was a surprising number of people disappearing up into the mist and I believe one group did get avalanched that day.

It was 8 miles return with 2250ft ascent which was sufficient for an "easy" day



Hoping to get back before the weather hit us

Thursday:

Doug and Gail posted on facebook: Fairly pleasant walk around Kinlochleven. Would have been more pleasant without the showers of soggy snow between the bright periods. Finished off with a rather nice bowl of spicy parsnip soup in The Wildcat vegetarian cafe in Fort William. Thanks for the recommendation Rosie.

Helen said: Forecast wasn't good for Thursday with more gales and blizzards predicted so Glenn, Richard, Kay, Lee and myself decided we would tackle the Pap of Glencoe as its only 742m. We started the walk from roadside parking on the road between Glencoe village and Clachaig Inn(to be visited later in the day) and began our trek up the muddy and snow covered path. The cloud cleared briefly on the way up to the col with great views of Glencoe valley. The snow got deeper and deeper(thigh deep) as we approached the col and the clag started to descend. At that point we decided to turn back and head down to the pub to dry out in front of the fire.



Janet and I had to return to Wirral on the Thursday so we got up at 5am to find snow was still falling. The hotel staff had agreed that we could help ourselves to the cold breakfast buffet which is plentiful. We could not find the light switch and the dining room was in total darkness so Janet went to Reception for help. The poor receptionist nearly died of a heart attack, not expecting to see anyone for another couple of hours. The drive was challenging but I followed a truck to Glencoe (it flattened the snow). Visibility was poor but the snowploughs and gritters had done a good job and we were soon up on the moors. There was snow all the way to Glasgow but no problems as the roads were quiet.



Janet went to Reception for help. The poor receptionist nearly died of a heart attack, not expecting to see anyone for another couple of hours. The drive was challenging but I followed a truck to Glencoe (it flattened the snow). Visibility was poor but the snowploughs and gritters had done a good job and we were soon up on the moors. There was snow all the way to Glasgow but no problems as the roads were quiet.

Simon Clark sent me a great story of his mission to improve the quality and quantity of winter climbs in his walk log as he is training for his Winter ML qualification.

GWYDYR SCOTLAND TRIP FEB 2020 - SIMON CLARK

Scottish winter trips are always a favourite, and usually begin by a pub conversation that goes something like; You up for Scotland? "yeah sure, let's see what the conditions are like, definitely up for it.

No solid plans can be made too far in advance as we're not spending a week walking in the rain and the last two winters have been devoid of snow, we're after the wild weather, lots of snow with the most challenging conditions we can find, no blue sky days for us!

Now this may seem a bit strange as usually alpine conditions with clear skies and good snow makes for a perfect trip. But I'm in the consolidation period of my winter ML, so I need a minimum of 50 winter QMD's (Quality Mountain days) 25 of which must be in Scotland.

Its accepted on the winter ML assessment that you are going to be tested to the full, it's a qualification which holds huge responsibility and they don't give it lightly. There is no secret that the assessment week is constructed to fully test your ability to lead and make safe decisions taking multiple factors into account.

You may ask why you have to dig a snow hole, which two of the expedition nights are spent in, quite simply they want to knacker you out then put you under pressure to see how you perform. This is summed up in the guidance notes by the simple reference "Expect to experience varying degrees of suffering"

So I'm chasing the wild weather honing all the skills required to function with ease under these conditions.

We had checked out the forecasts in the week preceding, it was looking good; with a lot of fresh the levels had and built up with more forecast but with high winds which would make things harder. Route choice and avalanche risk would need careful consideration.

After a 12 hour or so drive we rocked up at Fort Bill with the rest of the Gwydyr totally unaware that we had snuck on the trip, a quick phone call and some blagging on the drive up had seen us convince the receptionists that we were part the Gwydyr trip and it was fine to join last minute, so we had good company and a place to stay, always a good start to a trip. It was great to catch up with everyone in the bar as we all discussed plans for the next few days.

I had come along with Charlie my long time climbing partner and friend since we were kids. I was aware that he didn't know anyone in the club and that we had planned to do our own thing, I hoped folk would not think we were being antisocial, but the reason for this was twofold; I need the time on the routes to cover all the extra ML bits and this trip had an element of the unknown for us both.

A year earlier Charlie had been diagnosed with Parkinsons, this is the most wicked of conditions, he took it in his usual resilient way but we both knew future mountain plans would likely never be fulfilled. Charlie's love for the mountains is deep like mine, I knew it would be one of the hardest things for him to loose, so this trip was to see how he would cope. I had looked at basing the first part in Fort Bill then moving over to the Cairngorm so we covered another area.

Day 1 saw us having an easy day up in Glen Nevis to ascend Stob Ban, time to tune into the winter conditions after the long drive.

It was great to get into the hills again feel the brisk wind and chill, the crunch of snow under foot, all your senses begin to awaken as the winter environment unfolds.

Day two would be more interesting, it was a route up above Ballacullish, School house Ridge, then onto the summit of Sgorr Bhan 901m then a short ascent over rocky ground to the summit of Sgorr Dhearg 1024m, it was all quite straight forward.

Ridge routes have the advantage's of no Nav to worry about no avalanche risk, just don't fall off!
Our days objective was easily visible outlined against the greyish winter skies. How benign it looks from afar.



We parked in the village and walked up the track, as always this approach seemed to take longer than anticipated as the legs that stood so sturdily in the bar the night before reminded us we should have turned in a little earlier than we did. The ridge stretched up above us into the mist, the wind had lifted slightly increasing the chill, as we started out. The lower sections are easy approaching the first rock bands, there was a big party ahead of us, our ascent would depend on their ability to move quickly so we didn't all get tangled up, passing large parties of unknown ability always poses a risk on ridges such as this.

The route began to flow as it unfolded ahead of us, the initial lower section was straight forward, but it was evident that as it steepened the difficulties would increase.

This route was grade 1 so an easy scramble, but as always with winter routes they can be easier or harder depending on the conditions, a good amount of snow, frozen turf or solid Ice make life easier, whilst unconsolidated powdery snow with a thin verglas coating on the rock leads to a cautious approach. We had the latter so I knew this could be a little more "exciting" than we had expected.

Charlie was coping well although his condition predisposed him to the cold and he would need to eat on a regular basis. The mist enveloped the upper sections and although we were moving steadily the ridge seemed to stretch on interminably.

I knew from the guide books that we were to expect two exposed rocky steps where a slip or misplaced foot could lead to a serious fall.

We had now stopped at a small level section and put our crampons on, poles away and axes out. I always feel an increased degree of security with my cramps on, the rocky sections were straight forward and the day was enjoyable so far.

But soon the angled steepened and the rock scoured of any useful snow increased, we then approached the first step, in the summer this would have been easily ascended but in thick gloves and iced over rock it needed more care.

The step itself was a section of rock very steep on two sides but offering some respite around its flank, I searched around for a hand hold and found a useful side pull, my preference would have been a big jug above to wrap my fingers around but it wasn't to be.

There was a small ledge that would support my crampon, I switched my axe to my left hand and began the steady transfer of my weight onto the ledge, reminding myself this was grade 1 bloody didn't feel like it at I stared down the side of the ridge contemplating the result if this move didn't work.

The problem with these situations is they are short but require complete commitment, once committed, if an axe pops or a crampon slips your off no recourse or forgiveness, perhaps we should have brought a rope?

I stood up and banged my axe in above my head, above to a spot I couldn't see.

Hoping for the thud of frozen turf or thunk of compacted snow, but there was a sharp twang as it bounced from the rock, bollocks, try again, my calves were beginning to remind me they weren't used to this as the aching increased. I swung my axe again this time finding some snow it wasn't very compacted but I had to move.

I pulled on the axe praying it wouldn't pop which allowed me to step off the ridge with my other foot and totally commit to the rock step, I jammed my boot into the crack and locked off my axe arm, I could now see over the rock lip and found a better hand hold, relief. The jammed boot was solid so I could step up but to what, the rock wasn't offering much, I opted for a big step up and rock over onto the top. One final move and I was over the step.

I stood up feeling relief and that it shouldn't have been that hard but it was, two axes would have been an advantage but this was only scrambling territory.

Charlie followed my lead and I felt he made it look easier, it always does when someone else is climbing.

We progressed on and up thinking we had nearly finished, that was the hard section over when the clouds parted to reveal the group above bringing folk up on ropes, the dark rock looked foreboding.

We continued up on some easier ground, and I checked the time as the winds were increasing now, accelerating up the ridge sides and whipping over the top. We reached the next rock band as the party above cleared it.

I searched around as the way they had gone wasn't evident, this section of rock was longer, and looked to have two possible ways up.

I checked one out but it looked pretty blank around the other side it seemed to offer a better option. Both very exposed this was the crux.

The searching around meant that we had stood in the full blast of the wind and were feeling cold, Charlie said he wanted to go first to keep moving, I felt slightly apprehensive I knew it would be a big test for him and his condition. I looked down the steep mountain side and contemplated the chances of surviving a fall, I know this doesn't help the situation but it's how the human mind often works. Perhaps it adds that extra shot of adrenalin that you need or perhaps it just scares the heeby jeeebis out of you, I've known both reactions before.

Charlie stepped up balancing whacked his axe in and managed to pull up and make the next move, he had been stood on a piece of frozen turf, which moved as he unweighted it, marginal I thought. Again he rebalanced and found a hand hold tentatively transferring his weight and banging his axe in again fully committed now he reached up again and moved over managing with one more move to disappear over the top.

"You Ok" I shouted up "all good" came the reply, It was my turn now, it always feels lonely at this juncture, your partners made the moves they didn't look easy and I didn't want to mess it up.

I stepped onto the frozen turf which Charlie had used as I increased my weight it sagged and dislodged more. I knew it wasn't an option. There were little more though, I thought of going around to the other side again and trying that, but decided to stick to where I was.

I had to get on with it, although I wasn't relishing these moves. I had a good hand hold to my left and a hooked axe to my right but the foot options were blank I looked at the dislodged turf, if I banged my boot in hard and kept the angle right it may just hold.

I started to move and place my weight on the turf I wasn't happy stepped down again, swore silently, there was no other way.

Again I committed, kept my calm, got my other foot slightly higher a crampon point into a thin crack, just a little more and I could weight it and leave the grotty turf behind.

I breathed heavily, my cold hands and numb fingers curled around the rock as I put all my strength to re-balance and get my weight onto my crampon point, it worked just as the turf gave way.

Relief was short I was now balancing precariously on a front point scraping my boot around in search of another hold. I failed to find anything decent so with a bit extra height swung my axe which hit some turf this time it stuck pulled up, grabbed another hand hold and stepped up the last few moves were easier.

I came up to where Charlie was, how'd you find that Mr C he asked, yeah it was Ok I said. He gave me that knowing look, we have climbed extensively together over the years on rock and alpine routes our senses are aligned, each knows what the other is thinking, decisions are made jointly there is no bravado, Grade 1 my arse I added he smiled and nodded a wry grin on his face.

We could see the difficulties had ended so we scampered up the remaining ridge breaking out to a small plateau which led after another broad ridge to the summit.

The wind was whipping and swirling spindrift around and a group were descending toward us, we had a quick snack as the time was ticking on.

The summit was easily reached and we sheltered as best we could on the leeward side next to a small rock band and took a quick photo, it was very exposed to the wind which buffeted us wildly. It was an awesome spot.



Sgorr Bhan and Sgorr Dhearg are part of the larger mountain Beinn a' Bheithir , from our summit spot we could see the descent to a col then continuation ridge up to the summit of Sgorr Dhonuill, it looked a stunning route but alas the high wind and time meant it was an unrealistic option for us, so we breathed in its beauty and turned towards our descent. The descent was an enjoyable plod down the North Ridge with good views around Loch Leven, we got back to the truck feeling the day had been enjoyable with a unexpected few difficulties which reinforce that the winter mountain shouldn't ever be underestimated.

Although I've climbed many harder Ice routes today was challenging where a slip could have been fatal, I was glad Charlie had climbed well which gave us reassurance that his medical condition for now would not prevent us spending many more mountain days together.

Patterdale 28th February to 2nd March

Key says: Our Patterdale meet in the George Starkey hut is always a popular meet with the club, mainly because of its location, countless walks from the front door and it's free parking. In 2020 the meet was organised to coincide with the end of Chris Harris's Scottish winter meet in Fort Bill. As usual we meet up on the Friday afternoon, some members from the Wirral and surrounding area and the rest came down from Scotland.

On Saturday we woke to a cold windy morning but the fells were clear with patchy snow on the tops. Myself and Tom Humphries decided to go over St Sunday Crag. Our route took us past Home Farm and over Black Crag and up over St Sunday (2,759 ft 841m) Sheltering from the wind we had a quick bite to eat before heading down the grassy ridge to Deepdale Hause and then down the snowy path to Grisedale Tarn and back to Patterdale via Grisedale Common.



Chris Harris along with Jan, Glenn and Helen, Richard and Kay, Anna, Sonja, Barb and Steve Birch Decided to do 2 Wainwrights, Birks and Arnison Crags with 2706 ft of ascent and 6.6mls. Sonja and Barb accompanied Jan back from the start of the main ascent to do a long lakeside walk to avoid the strong winds on the tops.

As in previous years on the Saturday night we leave the hut and rehydrate ourselves in the White Lion with a few drinks and a hot meal



On the Sunday a few of the group decided to go to Ambleside for some retail therapy, while a group walked from the hut to Aira Force Waterfalls. Not the wildest of terrain but it was a healthy 9.5 miles and some of us managed a pint in what must be one of the few pubs I've not visited in the Lakes.



MY FAVOURITE WALKS by Alan Bartlam



My love of the Lake District eventually saw me take my mobile caravan up the West coast of Cumbria, where it became a fixture! And I would spend as much time there as I possibly could – at the complete exclusion of Wales!

It was only from late in 2008 due to circumstances, that I rediscovered the wonders of Wales and now two of my favourite walks of all time lie in the principality.

The first is the wonderful Penycloddiau on the Offa's Dyke path from the Llangwyfan forestry car park. It rises steeply from here on to the plateau but is then just superb. Wonderful walking on board paths with views all around.

To the east is the Dee, Cheshire and Mersey basin while to the west are the Berwyns and Snowdonian. And then there is still the glories of the Vale of Clwyd below your feet and Denbigh and St. Asaph towards the coast. The return on the Clwydian Way is just as interesting, though with only 180 degree views over the valley, before going up Moel Arthur to complete a fantastic walk.

The route of this fabulous walk on the Offa's Dyke path



The Great Orme from Conwy Mountain

I had heard many walkers talk about the delights of Conwy Mountain in glowing terms. Sadly it took me sometime to discover this amazing place and when I did, I knew I should have come along a good deal before I did. It is simply incredible.

Again superb walking under foot from Sychnant Pass, enables you to enjoy the incredible vista, which is a full 360 degrees. Out front you have the Great Orme in all its glory. Turning clockwise, you have the serene Conway valley and the castle, then Tal y Fan and beyond the wonderful Snowdonian mountains. Turning still further, Puffin Island and Anglesey. Can there really be a better place to enjoy the world than here?



Those two places will now always be in my heart – but my favourite walk of all in the UK is back in my beloved Lakes. It is the amazing walk, again on fine paths, along the top of the Wasdale Screes, taking in Whin Rigg and Illgill Head. I have done this walk a good few times and it never disappoints.

The views down the gullies to Wastwater below are just stunning, while in front you are looking at the majestic mountains of Great Gable and the Scafells. It is just wonderful scenery everywhere you go!

Left; The Screes above Wastwater – the walk along the top of the Screes is just superb



But my favourite walk anywhere in the World, has to be from Mannlichen to Kleine Scheidegg in the Bernese Oberland in Switzerland. Once again really lovely walking terrain but the views are to die for! As you head south you have three epic mountains out in front of you, the Monch, the Jungfrau and the Eiger! This is heaven on Earth. Before returning alongside the famous Lauberhorn ski run back to Wengen!

Left: The incredible view of the way from Mannlichen to Kleine Scheidegg

I'll end this news letter with some prose from Simon Clark who tells what inspired him to write it:

I started to write this with an idea of describing the geology and how the mountains were formed.

The Mountain in my thoughts was Tryfan.

However, having just returned from a N. Wales trip I was influenced and my thoughts changed.

The last two line particularly reflect this.

Having seen a group leave the summit of Tryfan strewn with the remnants of their lunch, and sandwich wrappings, but they seemed totally oblivious to the act.

It is beyond me why people come into the mountains and think it is fine to leave them in this state?

OUR MOUNTAINS.

Mountain Goddess so sublime,
Shrouds of Mystery does entwine;
Standing through the tests of time,
Mystic adventure there to find.

Born in the Earths early days,
Through volcanic mist and ashen haze;
Where Pyroclastic Lava spurts,
From your womb, Mother Earth.

You saw the Meteor of Doom,
Lay the Dinosaurs in Their Tomb,
A year of Darkness the Planets Fate,
For Most Living Forms,
it was too late.

Grinding Glacial Moraine,
Gouged and sculptured your terrain.
Ice Age Winds Scar your Face,
Transforms the Beauty of this place.

Now Climbers come with Crampons sharp,
To scratch your wise old Granite Heart.
You alone decide if they pass or fail,
Will they reach their Holy Grail?

The Rite of passage should be Earnt,
Climbing skills honed and Learnt.
Venture into this Arena Fair,
Step inside the Dragons Lair.

So You Climbers Come You All,
Some will Triumph and some will Fall,
But if you wish to Succeed,
Think of the Mountain and Her needs.

It's fragile Flora and Landscape,
That attracts us to this place.

So
Tread with care take your Rubbish Home,
and
Leave the Mountain as Sacred Stone.

.....

Simon Clark