



# The Gwydyr Mountain Club Newsletter

September 2021

Edited: Chris  
Harris

Thank you everyone who has sent me articles, please keep them coming.

### Coming soon:

24-26 September	Hut Weekend
24-27 September	Chairman's Luxury Meet
2-10 October	Javea, Alicante Spain Meet
8-10 October	Lake District Camping Barn
22-24 October Hut	Weekend: Work Weekend
30 October	Saturday Walk: North Bolton Reservoirs
5-7 November	Hut Weekend: Bonfire Party

### Articles this month

- 1) Tryfan Downhill Dash 2021- John Simpson 24th August.
- 2) Offa's Dyke Trail - Chris Ramsden
- 3) Via Ferratas for the Uninitiated - Gail Smith
- 4) LEJOG - Chris Harris

### **1) Tryfan Downhill Dash 2021- John Simpson 24th August.**



Tryfan Downhill Dash is something I've wanted to do for several years so when Mike the organiser and record holder (8 mins. dead) announced on the Monday the event would be going ahead I decided if I don't do it this time, I'll never do it.

Tryfan Downhill Dash, if you've not seen or heard club members talk about this event. It's basically to see how fast you can get yourself from Adam and Eve stones on the top of Tryfan to the wall by the roadside at the bottom.

With Tuesday afternoon booked off work and feeling very apprehensive remembering how we normally pick our way down West Gully during 3000 events plus I have problems walking across the top of Tryfan so running across the top should be fun! I drive out to Ogwen. Getting there early gives me plenty of time to take to Mike and try and get some tips on how to not to break any bones. Soon after, other runners started to turn up, 3 guys had travelled from Leeds, most others were local runners. 19:00 is start time so I decided to give myself around 60 minutes to get to the top, 18:00 started early plod up the mountain. The bracken on the lower paths has grown tall so made hard going up the hill. Should be fun coming down. Got to the summit around 15 minutes before the start so had time to relax chat to the other competitors and enjoy the early evening view across Ogwen valley, Carnedd's and Glyders.

As I've said I'm not great on the rock on the top of Tryfan so I think I must have been the last person to drop into West Gully. I think I had my eyes open for most of the way down. Finally, the wall at the road came into view as I dropped into the gully on the north west side of Tryfan. Running on the lower slopes was difficult due to the bracken being up to my waist. It was hard to see the path, I tripped on hidden rocks several times which lost me precious seconds.

Mikes still holds the record of 8 minutes dead. Though this years 1st place came close with 8 minutes 48 seconds, I finally hit the wall not quite 10 minutes later just inside 18 minutes at 17 minutes 47 seconds.

It was a great run and fun evening. Also, my 1st race after 18 months of lock down.

Though I'm wondering if it might have been wise to start back with something a little less mad

## 2) Offa's Dyke Trail - Chris Ramsden



Sorry Chris, nothing I could do would get it the right way round



On 24 August 21 I finally completed the Offas' Dyke trail. The 177 mile trail runs adjacent to the English/Welsh border criss-crossing into both countries along the whole route. It is a fantastic trail through glorious countryside, hills and mountains. It also has an abundance of great, real ale, pubs along the way perfect for rehydrating or an overnight stop. I walked from Prestatyn to Chepstow as it looked down hill on the map! I always planned to do it in several stages, however, the pandemic, and life's challenges, did delay me completing it by a year or two. It was also fitting that I finished it this year as we both celebrated our 50ths. Much of the trail was completed with my little Jack Russell Mojito although she opted for home and her comfy bed on the last leg. It is a challenging trail but one I thoroughly enjoyed including the logistical challenge of the sparse public transport en-route which is apparently on an 'every blue moon' schedule. I highly recommend the route and whether you do it over 2 weeks or two years you'll be rewarded with a memorable journey.

### 3) Via Ferratas for the Uninitiated - Gail Smith



The main thing that via ferratas enable you to do is to get to some superb exposed mountain locations in relative safety, without all the gear and expertise you need to go rock climbing. At the technically-easy end of the scale, this means that there might be short sections of wires that make long alpine traverses practical for walkers, although the vast majority of the route is a “conventional” walk. At the other end of the scale there are “sport” setups that involve sections of overhang or far-apart rungs; these usually have escape routes, so you can give up if it seems that you have bitten off more than you can chew. The more modern “sport” routes arrange to have wobbly wire bridges and steps over long drops, all so you can get your adrenaline without a lot of danger. The best (to me) sort of via ferrata is a day-long mountain route with multiple pitches. Since via ferratas vary so much there has inevitably been a proliferation of incompatible grading systems that have evolved for via ferratas in different countries, but it’s generally easy enough to assess how hard something is and how long it takes to do based on the guidebooks (e.g. the Cicerone guides to the Dolomites) or an internet search. Many of these via ferratas are also signposted from main paths or valley floors.



Doug and I first came across a via ferrata in Yugoslavia (as it then was), probably somewhere up Triglav or Prisojnik in the Julian Alps. We teetered along a narrow ledge using the “convenient” wire as handholds, and then used another set of metal footholds and wires on an awkward and exposed scramble. Locals in a mountain hut tried to explain to us what we had been using but we were left with only half the story, as we had to talk in German, which was a language that none of us knew very well. They told us that the routes dated from the first world war, when they had been set up as part of the military campaigns to control the high peaks (in appalling conditions) but were now improved and maintained by the climbing clubs (who also maintained the mountain huts). However, as we were cavers, we (thought we) already understood about using fixed lines and cows-tails, so we did a bit of reading and set ourselves (and, eventually, the children) up with helmets, harnesses and crabs on climbing-rope slings for many small adventures. Modern understanding of fall-factors and safety implications makes it clear that this was dangerous until we added in screamers into the home-made systems.

Today, the equipment you need is, a helmet, harness and modern via ferrata lanyard; gloves can also be useful as the wires get hot, dirty and

frayed. The lanyard consists of an energy-absorbing system (usually similar to the screamers we had used in our home-made setups), two arms which connect to the cable with the carabiners, and a means of connecting the lanyard to the harness (screw-gate crabs or a maillon rapide). The idea is that you are always attached to the cable with one of the two cables with a crab on one of the two



arms, and you leapfrog the arms, so that the new one is attached in front before removing the one at the back. If someone does fall and shocks the system, a sewn sling rips apart, or a thing like a belay device slows the fall – these are the “energy absorbing systems” so that the lanyard can hold a Factor 2 fall – but you then have a potentially difficult job rescuing someone who has fallen, even though they will still be attached to a wire rope, if they just drop into space. I try to take a couple of extra long slings with crabs along “just in case”, and I think it is because of the difficulty in rescuing someone that people you hire to take you on official via ferrata trips are supposed to be Mountain Guides in many places.

So – unless you are a purist – what’s not to like about via ferratas ? Lots of fun, mountain experiences, and good times with friends.

Gail Smith August 2021 v1

[photos are mostly Via Ferrata des Evettes near Flegere, taken by Doug Florence on a quick “family reunion” trip in July 2021. Spot the unacceptable knee technique, and the sort of rungs you tend to get on the more vertical bits.

Final photo is the Lehner waterfall via ferrata which features a ridiculously exposed 2 wire rope bridge across the top of the huge waterfall as a climax.]

#### **4) LEJOG(Lands End to John O Groats) Cycle 2021 - Chris Harris**

**Team GMC - (Helen and Glenn Grant, Steve Birch and Chris Harris)**

I've always said that if someone asked me, I would ride LEJOG. That someone was Helen Grant but she cannot entirely be blamed as it was Steve Birch who asked her.

I recorded 1017 miles of pedalling and 60,700ft of ascent (from 3000 to 6300ft per day) !

So it was that on Saturday 21st August we made our various ways to St Just in Cornwall. Steve and I approached from different directions, merging at Exeter and "letting the train take the strain". That was until the Exeter Penzance train was cancelled ! Anyway, we arrived and as expected Helen and Glenn were enjoying a drink in the warm sunshine, having driven down the day before. We met the other 20 members of the group and our 3 guides at dinner that evening.

Day 1, Sunday - Land’s End to Fowey 64 miles

The day dawned sunny and dry but with a North-Easterly breeze, we had hoped for the prevailing SW winds but probably for the first time in meteorological history the wind blew from the NE for 2 weeks with variably force.



We had to cycle 7 miles to Lands end before we could start! (from the peninsula, Cape Cornwall, in the background of the photo). The format of having a mid morning break, a pub lunch and a mid pm break broke the days up nicely. Arriving in a car park, sun shining, overlooking St Michaels Mount at Marazion with supplies fresh fruit, tea, coffee, squash, chocolate bars, cereal bars etc. etc we thought this could be achievable. The day continued, up and down and with a chain ferry ride across the River Fal, eventually arriving in beautiful Fowey for the overnight stop.



#### Day 2, Monday - Fowey to Moretonhampstead 61 miles

This was a tough one! Polperro, Looe, Seaton - all big dippers followed by a short ferry crossing to Plymouth then a long, long climb up to Dartmoor against that ever present headwind. You may have seen some of this route on the Tour of Britain, they followed us the next week at a slightly faster pace. The fast descents to Moretonhamstead were amazing assisted by smooth clean roads.



#### Day 3, Tuesday - Moretonhampstead to Street 72 miles

This was supposedly a bit easier as it included the Somerset flats and more decent than ascent. It was however longer and did include some steep ascents and gravelly roads and a tricky navigation through Exeter. Every night our bags waiting in our rooms carried there by the Peak Tours guys - a real service.



#### Day 4, Wednesday - Street to Monmouth 64 miles

I lot of sight-seeing on this one. Less ascent but there was an 800ft steep climb from Wells. Highlights: Glastonbury Tor, Wells cathedral (we got a bit lost there), crossing Bristol Clifton Suspension bridge, Crossing the old Severn bridge, Tintern Abbey. The afternoon break was at Tintern but when I climbed back on the bike I realised the gear cable to the rear cassette had snapped, leaving me only with the highest gear. Fortunately, someone (Laura) found a bike shop in Monmouth that closed at 6pm. I had 12 miles to go in top gear and 1 hr to get there - it was 4.15. I made it in 45 mins. plus 15 mins to find the shop. The route was relatively flat but I was standing on the pedals all the way. Ace Bicycles were brilliant. The internally routed cable was not easy to replace. Pedals off, bottom bracket removed 3 cables disconnected, the bike was in bits. They worked after closing time and charged £25 parts, £26 labour. An absolute bargain.



#### Day 5 Thursday - Monmouth to Clun 58 miles

A great day - less miles, less ascent, fine weather, finishing in Clun at the Sun Inn in scorching sunshine. We passed through Much Dewchurch, Hereford, Weobley and lots of villages with quaint names. The off the road

pint(s) were wonderful and we walked a few yards up the road to the White Horse for the evening meal, a pub with it's own micro brewery. We even had time to explore Clun castle before sunset. This must be the most bucaholic village in England.



#### Day 6, Friday - Clun to Runcorn 80 miles

This was one of the longest days in distance but relatively flat across Shropshire and the familiar ground of Cheshire. This was fortunate, following an evening in 2 of the best pubs in Shropshire. Note: I said evening ! Most mornings we set the alarm for 6.30 to be on the road before 9am.

We rode below the ridge west of the Stiperstones, wove our way through Shrewsbury with occasional Garmin confusions, skirted Whitchurch, then through Tarporley, Kelsall and down to Frodsham. Some riders were commenting on the deteriorating quality of roads as we headed North. If they thought Cheshire was bad they had a shock to come. In the evening I chose to swap dirty washing for clean clothes and enjoy a meal with family in Frodsham. Steve had a romantic assignation near Northwich.



#### Day 7, Saturday - Runcorn to Lancaster 73 miles

This was a day we were almost dreading. How to get from Runcorn to Lancaster through all those towns and cities. Peak Tours managed once again to do the impossible, with a mixture of parks and cycle ways we wended our scenic way through Warrington, Bolton and emerging from Blackburn to climb a steep hill (see picture) which gave us tremendous views of the Pennines and a taste of hills to come.



#### Day 8, Sunday - Lancaster to Penrith 62 miles

After a luxurious night in the Lancaster House Hotel on the University Campus we headed North which means only one thing - Shap ! Once again the route was amazing along quiet lanes and passing through Kirby Lonsdale . We followed a very minor road on the other side of the valley from the motorway alongside the Howgills, taking us into Tebay town for a pub lunch. The weather was decidedly cooler this day and most dined inside. Afterwards we veered away from Shap summit towards Orton. This was not an easy option as there was a long steep ascent from Orton. However, it did result in a long descent into Penrith.

## Day 9, Monday - Penrith to Moffat 70 miles



We were warned at morning briefing that Scottish roads are much rougher than those south of the border. Not as hilly this day but we took a battering from the road. The wrists and shoulders took the brunt of it. The bonus was that we were heading for the Scottish mountains. About midday we arrived at Gretna and for a few miles turned west avoiding that pesky NW head wind which gave us a bit of a shove for a change. Moffat was an excellent place to overnight. However, we now had to play by Nicola's rules. ie masks on indoors. OK if you were sitting in a bar but if you stand up you might catch covid so mask on.

## Day 10, Tuesday - Moffat to Kinross 82 miles



A long but gentle climb out of Moffat in sunshine but in the cool morning air was a great start to the day. Strange to hear the Armco barriers pinging as they expanded in the sunshine. A long climb means a long descent and this was no exception, except we cleared the hill that had sheltered us from the wind and had to pedal hard for the next 10 miles just to go down hill. The wind was icy and at morning break most added as many layers as possible. A few more bounces over the hills and we were approaching Edinburgh. This is where the roads went even worse. It would appear that in Scotland when the

side of the road breaks up and becomes unsuitable for cars, they paint a line 3ft from the kerb and call it a cycle lane. I reckon Nicola has blown the complete Scottish road budget on cameras for the A9 !

Anyway, a lovely up and over the city of Edinburgh eventually led us to the Forth Bridge which was in fact closed to traffic making for a pleasant crossing on the cycle lane. Arriving at our hotel we were pleased to see a brewery with it's own bar, across the road.

## Day 11 Wednesday - Kinross to Ballater 80 miles



Cairngorms and Glenshee - this was going to be a challenge. Starting with a fine descent to Perth took us to sea level just to ensure we did the full climb via Spital of Glenshee up to Glenshee at 2132 ft. This launched us into an amazing fast descent down to Braemar passing Liz's place at Balmoral and on to Ballater where many of us enjoyed a pint on the green in warm sunshine. Glenn had a technical at Spital of Glenshee when he had to put a tube in his tubeless tyre which involved a rather messy procedure cleaning out a lot of liquid glue from the tyre. I think this was our first encounter with the dreaded midges.



## Day 12 Thursday - Ballater to Inverness 73 miles

Having conquered Glenshee we were now treated to The Lecht. Fortunately the roads were much improved here but the 20% hills were painful but it was great to be riding through the Cairngorms on minor roads and cycle ways. Grantown on Spey, Nethy Bridge (lunch at the hotel), Boat of Garten, Carrbridge all ticked off on two wheels. A final ascent over the Slocht which you don't really notice in the car but you do on a bike. Followed by a long descent into Inverness

## Day 13 Friday - Inverness to The Crask Inn 66 miles



Two more days to go ! Normally at this point in a holiday you would want the holiday to go on forever - not me on this one. All I could see was the end. The day started gently following the coast line which can only mean one thing, we started climbing from Dingwall. The effort was worth while. We followed a ridge above the busy A9 taking in amazing views of lots of firths and dropping down to Bonar Bridge for lunch (back to sea level). Then a gentle steady climb to Crask for a pint in the remote Crask Inn, brooded over

by 3156ft. Ben Klibreck. Some stayed at the Inn, others were split between 2 neighbouring villages - there's not much accommodation in this area.



Don't believe the midges all live in the West of Scotland, I have never seen so many midges. The area is a mass of mossy wetland - midge heaven. As soon as you walk in the door there's a shout "shut the door" followed by "put your mask on". I'm not surprised Scottish Covid rates are high if you can't open a door or window.

## Day 14 Saturday - The Crask Inn to John O'Groats 82 miles



The morning saw a frantic rush for the bikes, nobody made it unscathed. I didn't chance it and covered up as much as possible. I suspect the early morning mist was actually clouds of midges waiting to pounce. We started with a 30 mile gentle descent, pedalled at a frantic rate to escape the midges, we then turned right at the coast to undulate our way with 3800ft ascent to John o Groats. For me, this was a tough day, possibly due to the rather excellent beer the night before. As expected, once heading East we were into the wind and it was pretty cold. The coastal scenery made up for the busy A836. Unfortunately there is no choice of roads on this section. Photo's by the famous J o G sign, some fizz and one lady went for a swim, drowning her phone in the process. A

celebration meal in the Seaview Hotel sealed the day.

Sunday, we left at 0645 to get to Inverness train station and Airport in time to connect for the homeward journey. A cool sunny day made for a pleasant journey down the coast to Inverness, for the first time in 2 weeks we were moving in comfort.