



Rainbow over Tan y Garth - view from Dolwyddelan bridleway on bonfire night.

The Gwydyr Mountain Club Newsletter.

December 2022

Edited: Chris Harris

Coming soon: (details on meets list on GMC website)

2023

3 January	Tuesday, Climbing at Awesome Walls
7 January	Saturday Walk: LLandegla Moors - Dave Edwards
19 January	Thursday Walk Clwyds in Foel Fenli area - Dave Antrobus
20-22 January	Hut Weekend: Burn's Night - Neil Connolly
10-12 February	Hut Weekend:
16 February	Thursday Walk: To be arranged - Mike McEneaney
19-23 February	Scottish Winter Meet : Fort William - Chris Harris

Please keep the articles coming otherwise this will turn into "Chris's Diary". Newsletters are a source of information for future editions of the GMC History books. So, if you send me an article you may be writing history.

Articles this Month:

- 1) County Durham: Walking the Heritage Coast by Dave Gray**
- 2) A Grand Day Out on the Gribin by Richard Smith**
- 3) Thursday Walk Wirral led by Jan Coates - Chris Harris**

1) County Durham: Walking the Heritage Coast - Dave Gray

Late this September(2022) I did another of my solo static caravan based walking holidays. I wanted – as ever – some new and different walks and found them in County Durham. I stayed at Crimdon Dene caravan park (owned by Parkdean Resorts) just north of Hartlepool.

Hartlepool?! Isn't that the home of h'Angus the Monkey? And weren't we hoping to get rid of the place and cede it to the French sometime back in the 1550s? As the late great Frankie Howerd would have said: 'titter ye not'. I had a splendid walking holiday, and thought it was well worth running it across your radar screens. I based the trip around the Durham Heritage Coast Path. This goes from Seaham to Crimdon Dene for 11 miles (see <https://durhamheritagecoast.org/>). The path is a subset of a section of the new English Coastal Path, going for 33 miles from South Bents (north of Sunderland) to North Gare (south of Hartlepool). I covered about 16 miles of that path, and almost all of the non-urban ground between Sunderland's southern edge, and the northern fringe of Hartlepool. One could do this walk as day trips using the car as I did, or could do a backpack: both ends are accessible on the train. The overall character of the coast reminded me a bit of parts of the Wirral – feeling pretty rural and remote in itself, but having close behind major urban centres. I would guess you'd find accommodation fairly easily there.

On the path you meet more dog walkers than hikers. I found everyone very friendly. A Merseyside accent stands out and people were happy to have a chat and were interested in what I was doing. You'll also encounter

some duplicated and haphazard waymarking in places, a function I suspect of how the coast path has grown gradually. I carried as backup, and needed, the 1:50,000 OS sheets 88 and 93.

The Heritage Coast is the result of a farsighted and successful exercise in renewal. Over 50% of the area's shoreline was devastated by industrial scale dumping of colliery, quarry and other industrial waste right up to the end of the 20th century. Much of it was like this...



Easington Beach before restoration...



And this is the same area as I found it...

T

The long sweep of Horden Bay, looking north towards Easington

If you look closely at the picture above, you can see that just under the cliffs is grassed over colliery waste, that extends in a platform, and which is being naturally removed by the sea. In addition to this natural process a total of over 1.3 million tons of waste were removed by the restoration effort, and cleaning systems were put in to cope with drainage from mines and landscaped waste tips. This coast isn't pristine Sandwood Bay: but the area now has three bathing beaches and the sea water quality and sea wildlife are much nearer the mark.

The main rock in the area is Magnesian limestone from the Permian period (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnesian_Limestone), just pre-dinosaur. This is perhaps most spectacular around Shippersea Bay between Easington Colliery village and Seaham...



At Shippersea Bay



Cliffs and treble arch at Shippersea

This piece of the coast is owned by the National Trust.

The non-marine wildlife is varied as well. Magnesian limestone is relatively rare in the UK and has its own flora, the details of which rather go over my head. In terms of birdlife, little terns breed here, and I saw curlews, lapwings, cormorants, kestrels and buzzards.

As you can see from this next picture, the cliffs feature arches as well as caves and stacks.

The streams and rivers coming down into the sea tend to cut deep steep sided gorges, called denes. Their presence gives most of the ascent on the route, with a few long lines of steps. Two impressive viaducts, at Castle Eden Dene and Hawthorn Hive, carry the coastal railway line across big denes.



Deep in the den at Hawthorn Hive



Castle Eden Dene and railway viaduct



The coastal railway wasn't any help on my trip as there aren't that many stations!

I ended up doing all my walks as out and backs. I had hopes of the bus system, with some direct coastwise routes, and routes via Peterlee. But my first attempt to use a bus failed because it didn't turn up, so I gave up on that idea. Though I had good weather there was rain forecast – and falling - every day and I didn't want to waste weather window time. Out-and-back didn't matter really because I enjoyed the scenery as much both ways, and the lighting changes could be impressive.

If public transport didn't work out too well, one good thing about this area is that there is plenty of parking, mostly free with the rest at reasonable charges. I did four routes in all:

- Crimdon Dene to north Hartlepool (6 miles round trip)
- Crimdon Dene to Horden Point (8.75 miles round trip)
- Easington Colliery village to Seaham Harbour and back (7.75 miles round trip)
- Seaham north to Headon (S of Sunderland) and back (8.25 miles round trip)

Looking south to Chourdon Point, just south of Seaham

Of the two routes that haven't featured so far, Crimdon to Hartlepool, which I did on the afternoon I arrived, was very different to my other days. It's a vast beach and sand dune system, the beach was the only one locally that never subject to industrial pollution.

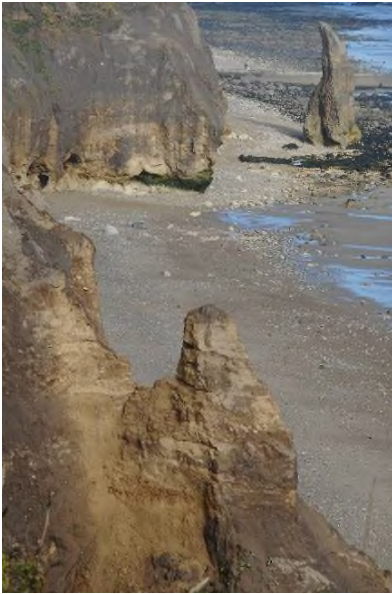


Beach and dune slack at Crimdon Dene



10% rain approaches, Crimdon beach

I had a very bracing walk and this was the one time the rain caught me. I quickly learnt that whilst on the Wirral 10% rain forecasts can usually be ignored, it's not so around here! All the coast path is exposed to the elements and needs full hill gear.



And on my final day, the Seaham-Headon stretch gave more fine cliff scenery. In this section the limestone seemed lower down, and the cap of boulder clay above it thicker, so there were a few miniature 'Badlands' scenes to photograph.

<< North of Ryhope



What if it rains a lot? Well there looks to be possible inland low level walks, particularly in the sheltered denes, in the hinterland. There is also plenty of historical interest to visit. Some stretches way back... And some is uncomfortable.

<< 7th century Saxon Church at Seaham

In Easington Village the churchyard has a monument and a mass grave, where lie buried most of the 81 miners and 2 rescuers killed in the 1951 colliery disaster. This was due to an explosion of fire damp (methane gas) and coal gas caused by an inadequate ventilation system, and poor health and safety practices. All but one of the miners died instantly. Also sobering was the deaths of the two rescuers, both youngish men, both caused not only by what sounds to me like outdated breathing apparatus, but from the stresses of the emphysema (COPD) damage they were already carrying in the their bodies.



Graves of 1951 Easington Colliery disaster victims



Back to a cheerier note there is plenty to do a bit further afield. Ideas include the great Norman cathedral in the old city of Durham, and Souter Lighthouse on the edge of Newcastle; whilst there is part of the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Hartlepool, featuring Europe's oldest warship still afloat.

My last day was wet. So on the drive home I visited another nearby attraction, the 'Locomotion' railway museum at Shildon. This is part of the National Railway Museum and has some very interesting exhibits, focused on much more than 'shiny steam engines'. It is also well quieter than the main museum down in York.

Steam and Speed 1825 style: Stephenson's 'Locomotion No 1'



So taken overall, I felt this area punched well above its weight, and the walking I did exceeded expectations. I hope the possibilities of coastal County Durham have intrigued you too, and you'll want to put this area on your own 'to do' list soon!

100mph plus 1970s/60s/80s style – l-r: the APT; English Electric 'Deltic' (Class 55); HST

2) A Grand Day Out on the Gribin - by Richard Smith



Opportunities for Winter Mountaineering in Snowdonia have become scarce in recent years, so when they do come along, they have to be grasped with due urgency. This December, we have been fortunate to have a good early snowfall followed by a whole week of temperatures staying well below zero; this was coupled with high pressure, blue skies and almost no wind. The GMC climbing group chose to ditch the usual Monday session at the Boardroom and head out into the Winter Wonderland.

<< View down to Llyn Bochlwyd and Tryfan



Starting at Ogwen Cottage, seven of us headed up the icy track and branched off left towards Cwm Bochlwyd. Climbing up to the outfall of a frozen Llyn Bochlwyd, as the slope steepened, we stopped to put crampons on. Here we noticed some animal footprints in the snow, possibly a small mammal (see photo – maybe weasel or stoat - let us know if you can identify the animal!).

<< Unidentified animal footprints



We crossed the snowfield known usually as “the football field”, passed the top of the Cneifion Arete, and reached the start of the Gribin Ridge. The guidebook states that “the route may be tackled easily on the right (Grade I) although it is most interesting to stick close to the crest (Grade II). However, the plunging drop – even just the view of it – into Cwm Bochlwyd on the left may be too much for those of a nervous disposition. Wobblers will take succour from the gentle zigzag path to the right!”

Naturally, we opted to stick to the crest and I can report that there were no wobblers! There were a few awkward moves where the weeks spent at the climbing wall improving our flexibility paid off and we all popped out at the top of the route into bright winter sunshine and magnificent views.

<< View looking down the crest



<< Exit from top of Gribin on to Glyder Fawr

The top of Glyder Fawr was a few hundred metres away to our right so we plodded across the snow to the summit, where we had lunch and sunbathed – it was like being on an alpine summit!

The descent from Glyder Fawr to the top of the Devil’s Kitchen is normally a dreadful scree fest, but banked out with snow it was a great way down. A few tricky steps below the Kitchen were negotiated in crampons, before we arrived back at Ogwen Cottage.

All agreed that Winter Mountaineering is superb and when you get the right conditions, it is unsurpassed. A day to linger long in the memory!

3) Thursday Walk. Wirral 16th Jan, led by Jan Coates - Chris Harris

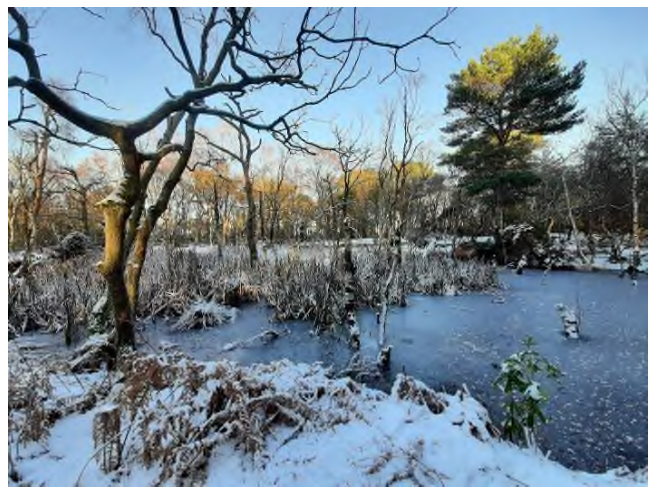


Thurstaston Hill

A rare opportunity to navigate the Wirral in Winter conditions. Jan Coates led a party of 5 across the Arctic landscape of Wirral. with temperatures not rising above freezing but bright sunshine made it feel a little warmer. 10 miles with 950ft ascent made a gentle day of it. The route started at the parking area by Irby Cricket Club, and headed for the icy ridge above Dawpool Primary School to get a view of the Welsh hills. We then descended through Royden Park to re-ascend onto Caldy Hill via Stapledon Woods. Then down to Caldy shore following the Wirral Way to Heswall Sailing club where we followed the beach to Heswall Fields. Then back via the Dungeons and Thurstaston to the starting point where some of us retired to the Irby mill to warm up by the log fire.



Icy tide marks on Heswall Shore



Irby woods