



View over Loch Treig from Stob a Choire Meadhoinne - Richard Merry

The Gwydyr Mountain Club Newsletter.

February
2023

Edited: Chris Harris

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

2023

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|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 12 March | Sunday Walk: Wenlock Edge - Bill Morrison |
| 16 March | Thursday Walk: Castle to castle - Dave Edwards |
| 21 March | Annual General Meeting |
| 25 March | Annual Dinner - at Moel Siabod Cafe - Sue Taylor |
| 4 April | Tuesday Evening: Awesome Walls |
| 7 April (Good Friday) | Traverse of Carneddau - Richard Smith |

Articles this Month:

- 1) Cabo de Gata and GR92 – Andalucia, by Doug Florence
- 2) Thursday Walk, Llantisilio Mountain Led by Mike McEneaney - written, Chris Harris
- 3) Scotland Winter Meet, Fort William

1) Cabo de Gata and GR92 – Andalucia by Doug Florence

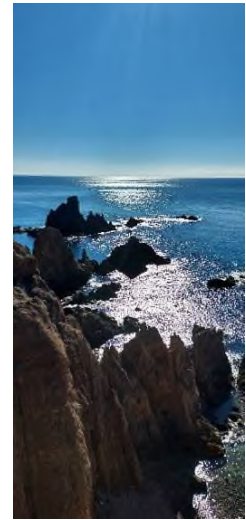
Feeling in need of some winter sunshine I booked myself nine days in Andalucia in Southern Spain to do some walking at the end of January. Gail decided she had better things to do, so this was a solo trip. I scouted around for a good area to visit and settled on the Cabo de Gata National Park. It is right next to the sea so likely to be reasonably warm, fairly accessible and what looks like some nice coastal walking with some interesting volcanic features. Cabo de Gata roughly translates as “Cape of the Wild Cat”. The highest hills are just a tad under 500m so not very high, but coastal walking does tend to involve a lot of up and down and in and out. It is basically a desert, very dry and has been used as a film set for various western and Indiana Jones films. The Spanish Mediterranean coast long distance path the GR92 goes round the coast as well.

I think I was very lucky with the weather. It was surprisingly cold and windy and on occasions I was pining for some woolly underwear, but I had sunshine and blue skies most of the time. The day before I reached Cabo de Gata I could see it being drenched in a thunderstorm and the day I left there was a heavy soaking drizzle driven by a cold brisk wind.

I flew from Liverpool to Malaga with Ryanair, which could be comfier, but was cheap (£93 return). Just a light cabin baggage backpack because I was staying in hotels and apartments and the less I am carrying when walking, the happier I am! Most places were very out of season with not much open. Got the bus from Malaga to Almeria in time to have a quick trip round the Alcazba old castle above the town before it shut at 15:00 then found my apartment which was very close to the bus station and beach. Next day I had a morning wandering around Almeria, then another shorter bus ride to Cabo de Gata village. I stayed in another apartment there to get an early start the next day. I picked up the apartment at a Spar in neighbouring village but was only the name of the street, no house or apartment number so I had to furtively go around trying the keys in different doors until I found the one that fitted. It was actually pretty cold with an icy north wind coming down from the frozen heart of Spain. The white peaks of the Sierra Nevada on the north horizon were living up to their name. The

apartment hadn't been used since Christmas and was a bit of an ice box. Cabo de Gata village is on a shingle bar with salt pans behind it. Apparently the salt pans fill up with flamingos some times of the year, but in January they are all off in warmer climes.

Tuesday the walk proper started. The day's walk was quite long, about 20km, but relatively flat and easy going on asphalt or gravel roads. After about 4km along the gravel beach there was a climb up to the Cabo de Gata lighthouse with views down to the rather spectacular Arrecife de las Sirenas (Mermaids reef) which is an eroded volcanic dyke going out into the sea in a series of rocky spikes and little islands. Then lots of gravel road over a 200m pass and eventually a bit further inland to get to the charming little seaside resort of San Jose. I had a very compact but very clean and white apartment there. The coastal resorts are pretty much still all closed for the winter but there was one shop and one restaurant open. I realised I had left my phone charger in the apartment in Cabo de Gata Village; classic mistake, but could have been rather a problem since I was relying on the phone for entertainment, communication, navigation, weather forecast etc. I did have paper backups for the reservations and a 1:50,000 paper map, however, rather miraculously, the local Spar had a suitable charger and lead so I was saved the inconvenience.



Wednesday was also quite a long leg to Rodalquillar. First two thirds were a nice coastal walk with a lot of in and outs around headlands and bays and 100m ups and downs in and out of valleys. The walk passes round the base of the El Fraile volcano which does look very much like a twin peaked volcano and it the highest point in the park at 492m. The path goes past Los Escullos beach with the impressive coastal artillery fort Castillo de San Felipe. That got me to the little seaside village of Isleta del Moro where I was in time for a beer and a rather nice late seafood lunch of baby squid, a favourite of mine. Delightful seaside restaurant with a view from the terrace back across the bay to El Fraile. Then it was a rather tedious haul up an asphalted road to a 150m pass and then back down again into the huge Rodalquillar volcanic caldera. I was booked into a very off season and therefore cheap four star hotel for two nights in Rodalquillar but when I got there it was so off season it appeared to be locked up, eventually I found a phone number on the reservation and when I called it, the receptionist drove from the town to open up. I was the only guest, which is a bit unnerving. Very nice hotel though. Rodalquillar was a mining town with a gold rush for the first half of the 20th century which came to an end in 1966 when the mines closed and the place turned into a ghost town. It is now trying to reinvent itself as an eco tourism destination but in early February it is still pretty much a ghost town. Just one tiny delicatessen/supermarket and a rather nouvelle cuisine restaurant open. I felt in need of something more substantial than nouvelle cuisine so bought a ready meal in the delicatessen.



Thursday I planned an inland loop so went back to the top of the pass I came over the previous day and then headed up a dry valley on a rather nice old path to the La Rellana plateau which is around 400m. There were three ruined houses that have a fantastic view back down into the Rodalquillar but for whatever reason all abandoned now. Dirt and metalled roads over the plateau go to the top of Cerro Penones at 488m with a weather radar on top. It was nice clear day so there was a huge view across to the sea and back to the Sierra Nevada on the inland horizon. The number of polytunnels in the valleys is amazing. It looks like they are under a blanket of snow! All busily growing fruit and veg.

Onwards and down another old path in a dry valley to the other side of the plateau. This takes you close to the ruined Cortijo del Fraile farmhouse which has featured in various films like "The good the bad and the ugly", "A few dollars more" and was also the setting for Federico Garcia Lorca's book "Blood Wedding". Then back to Rodalquillar on dirt roads which lead back through the gold mines area. A lot of very impressive volcanic geology on display in the road cuttings. Just before Rodalquillar is the old Denver gold ore processing plant. All rather derelict but impressive in scale.



Friday I had an inland or coastal route option to get to my next stop, the seaside village of Las Negras. I went for the coastal option which at first involved a plod up a few km of dirt road to the light house situated on top of an 18th century military watch tower at 269m. My plan was then to walk down a ridge back to a nice little cove. The Outdoor Active app mapping I was using is normally very reliable, but in this case there was definitely no path and I had to make my way down over very rough ground covered in spiky bushes. Cala de Bergantin was a nice place to stop for a snack and then on round the coast to the coastal village of Las Negras. I arrived there in time to catch the lunch menu at a restaurant with a terrace overlooking the bay and then hung around until check in time at the apartment I had booked for the night. Las Negras has a slightly scruffy, middle of nowhere feel to it and seems to be a place people with tatty self build campers and dreads wash up. Probably busy with tourists in the summer though.



Saturday I started on the final leg of the walk to Agua Amarga coastal village. The route starts on a surprisingly large dirt road which leads to absolutely nowhere and then a nice little coastal track which leads round a headland down to the isolated bay of San Pedro which is only accessible by foot or by sea. A hippy colony has sprung up there with lots of little shacks. It's a nudist beach but would be rather nippy on your bits this time of year. The climb up the other side of the San Pedro valley is a steep 250m haul to a plateau and then a gentle descent down to some nice little bays and eventually to Agua Amarga. Agua Amarga is a nice and lively little place. I stayed in a nice little family run hotel. It was a major ore shipping port in its time and there are the remains of an old incline down to the beach from the headland above.



No buses run to Agua Amarga on Sundays, so I took a taxi back to Almeria which gave me time to check out some local museums before getting the bus back to Malaga. I had Monday wandering around the sights of Malaga and the old town, which is really nice. Then back home Tuesday. A nice little break and some pleasant walking.

2) Thursday Walk, Llantisilio Mountain Led by Mike McEneaney - written, Chris Harris



It was great to have Mike McEneaney lead us on a Thursday walk again on the roller coaster Llantisilio mountain. 8.5 miles and 2300ft ascent. A bit misty on the ridge but the cloud cleared as we descended into the valley. 12 walkers and a leader or a baker's dozen (not 13). Finished off with a cosy drink in The Bridge Inn at Pontblyddyn.

3) Scotland Winter Meet, Fort William



Never have so many of the GMC been seen with so few drinks in a bar

A good turnout this year now covid phobia has left us - 23 members and 2 prospectives, Richard and Jacqui Merry. The weather forecasts were horrendous, basically a lot of wind and a lot of rain. As it turned out it was probably one of the best years for walks but the snow level was about 900m.

Attendees: Chris Harris, DLJ, Lindsey, Richard and Kay, Katie and James, Teresa and Bryn, Lee Robinson, John Simpson, Jane Jones, Bill Morrison, Helen and Glenn, Gill and Paul Eccles, Margaret and Sonja, Sven and Barb, Doug and Gail, Richard and Jaqui Merry. The core dates were Sunday night to Thursday morning but some arrived early, some left later. I asked for newsletter contributions and got plenty. Hopefully I've managed to include most of the content

Monday



Cow Hill.

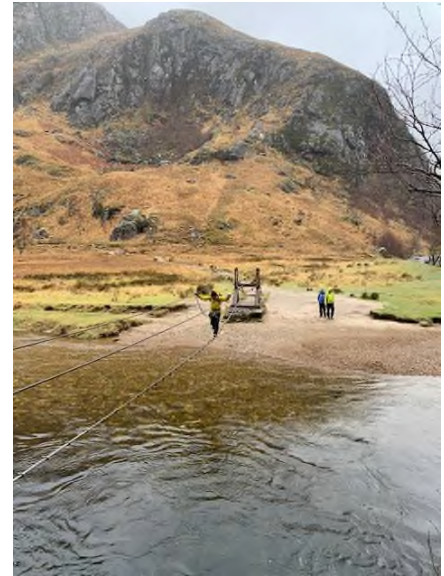
Helen led a party of 8 on a walk from the door of the hotel, a circuit of Cow Hill. Cow Hill is the lump "towering" 287 metres above Fort William. In fact it was a good choice as it was the only hill with a visible summit that day. Lunch on the summit included a little entertainment when Kay discovered that she had the "all day breakfast" scotch egg from Tebay which meant that Richard was enjoying a delicious vegan Scotch Egg.

Doug and Gail "walked up Glen Nevis from our hotel in Fort William to the lower falls car park beside the river and then back through the forestry. "Quite wet underfoot beside the river with a need to avoid the occasional frog on the path. We just managed to avoid wading. Nothing more than a drizzle which didn't quite get you wet, and sheltered from the wind, so a better day than we had expected from the forecast."

Glen Nevis walk - Richard Smith

Day 1 of the Scottish Winter Meet and a fairly dodgy weather forecast, so Lee and I set off with limited expectations. Much of the snowfall from a month before had now melted, so we did not expect to do much snow and ice climbing. Our plan was to walk up Glen Nevis and go up the first Munro on the Ring of Steall, An Gearanach. Parking at the end of the Glen Nevis road, we followed the Nevis river through a spectacular gorge before arriving at Steall meadows, a grassy area next to the river. Here, it was necessary to cross the river on the infamous wire bridge. There was some debate about whether it was better to wear a harness and clip into one of the top wires with a Karabiner in case you fell off. Bryn and Teresa arrived at this point to watch the entertainment. Eventually, we made it safely across and headed over to Steall Falls, which were in full spate. This was a dramatic sight and our route required us to cross the base of the falls. After floundering around for nearly an hour trying, we managed to get on to an island halfway across, but concluded that further progress was impossible without getting very wet or drowning in the process. So we reluctantly turned back and recrossed the wire bridge, returning back down the gorge.

Although our day had been truncated, we retired to the coffee shop in Fort William, content that we had seen some beautiful scenery.



Tuesday



Richard Smith led the assault on Stob a Choire Meadhoine (1105m) with the intention of going onward to Stob Choire Easain (1115m) - both are munros alongside Loch Trieg. He had researched weather for the day and the weather was to be better in the East of the area which turned out correct. Only 30 minutes drive from Fort William with a large parking area it was a good choice as I think all of us had not previously explored this area.

The ascent starts relatively gentle then up a bit of a scrambly bit and onto a gentle slope to the top. Hardly any wind all the way up but just as we summited we got the full force of the MWIS forecasted wind. Forward progress was difficult and there was a narrow ridge with the wind blowing from the side so it took little discussion to make the decision to return rather than advance. With limited daylight this was a good decision.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the lock John was attacking another two Munros, Stob Coire Sgriodain and Chno Dearg and managed both and I'm pretty sure they will be on the to do list for the rest of us next time we are in Fort William.

Wednesday -



Sgor na h-Ulaidh -

Chris Harris, John Simpson, Helen Grant and Richard Smith

I had offered to lead this one which was on John's "to do" list of Munros. A 10 mile walk with 4250ft of ascent, so quite ambitious for a winter walk but we decided to miss out the optional Corbett of Meall Lighiche.

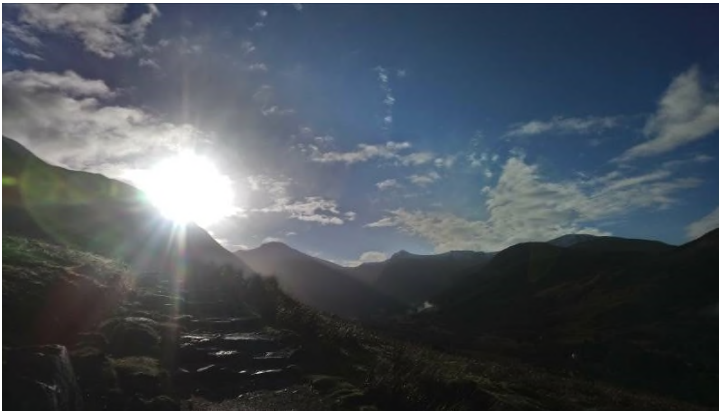


It's a bit of a hidden Munro, tucked in behind Bidean Nam Bian which probably explains the lack of paths and apparent lack of climbers. There was a section of track leading to a stream crossing but with all the snow melt and rain we could not cross the "stream". Fortunately John was equipped with an alternative route following the stream upward to join the original planned route. The final 1500ft of ascent was on very steep mossy, wet grass and rock which then further up added a dusting of frozen snow.

The summit was rather pleasant and a pretty decent ridge walk followed with a tricky to find step, snowy descent off Stob Fhuarain, a bit more ridge then an endless steep grassy descent. This shorter route was still 3900ft ascent and 9.4 miles

Ben Nevis via the Mule Track. Sven, Barb, Sonja and Lindsey

Sven Barb, Sonja and Lindsey to the top of Ben Nevis via the mule track. The day started fine and finished on the summit with a blizzard. First ascent for all three ladies and fist time use of crampons for some.



CIC Hut. - Doug Florence

Doug, Gail, Lee, DLJ, Jane, Richard, Kay, Bill went up the Ben Nevis tourist track from the visitor centre to the halfway Lochan, then round the track under the North Face to the CIC hut, then back down to the hotel. Lunch stop at the Lochan where the tourist path continues its windy way ever upwards.

Very nice weather, although the top of Ben Nevis clouded in just after we got to the hut. There was a little drama crossing the stream by the CIC hut. We could see the snow flurries menacing Fort William as we descended, but nothing fell on us. Lee was impeded by a lack of insoles in his boots, mitigated to some extent by a pair of borrowed socks.

All in all a very nice walk, especially the balcony track under the North Face. The forestry trails do start to get a bit tedious once you get above the smelter, but they get done eventually.