



The Gwydyr Mountain Club Newsletter.

November
2023

Edited: Chris
Harris

Frances Valley, Torres Del Paine

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

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| 12 December | Christmas Pizza Evening at Gallagher's |
| 14 December | Thursday Walk - Foel Goch |
| 16-17 December | Bronze Navigation Course |
| 22 Dec-1 Jan 2024 | GMC Xmas & New Year Meet |
| 5-7 January | Hut Weekend |
| 12-14 January | Yorkshire Dales Weekend |

Articles this Month:

- 1) Patagonia 2023 - by Helen Grant
- 2) Bryn Alyn Meet 18th November 2023 - by Dave Gray

1) Patagonia - by Helen Grant



We've just returned from an amazing trip. Patagonia is a special place. We were fortunate to have Natalie(Nati) as our guide for the whole of the trip and Yasser who joined us for the Chilean part. Both climbers and mountaineers as well as walking guides. They were both excellent and really added to the enjoyment of the holiday with their knowledge and enthusiasm. Nothing was too much trouble and we felt really looked after from start to finish. Our group was a small group of 6 with 2 couples and 2 solo female travellers all with a keen interest in wildlife especially birds and regular hill walkers up for the challenge of the hikes. Logistics wise everything went to clock work. We flew with British Airways direct from London. Our hotel in Buenos Aires very friendly and comfortable with great fish restaurant across the road. We only had the day to do a half day city including tour of BA we could have done with a few more days as so much to see there before flying down to El Calafate the next day.

Colourful Caminito area Buenos Aires



<< Rosada palace with the famous balcony Evita addressed the crowd from.



On the trek weather wise we struck lucky with only one dodgy day with near gale force winds and rain on the second day we trekked to Grey glacier which did look very grey that day. The previous day we had better luck from the other side.

<< Grey glacier first day first sighting of a blue floating iceberg, windy and dry



<< Grey day the next day on the way to grey glacier on the w trek



Crossing the Cerro Castillo border into Chile to visit Torres del Paine national park.



Good training for coping with the wind gusts though and we were able to dry our kit out at the wood burner area in the large Paine mountain refuge which was busy with other trekkers. Our bunk room for six was nice and cosy and we were well fed at the buffet.

<< Paine grande lodge



<< Self heating exploding lunch pack !



Others days we had barmy 21 degrees.

<< The first day we arrived in the national park and our first view of the Torre del Paine mountains.



View of the famous Los Cuernos horns in the background before we took the boat across Lake Pehoe to Paine grande refuge.



We had a great mountaineering day out hiking up the Frances valley to the British lookout 13.63 miles 2686 ft ascent. Blue skies and fresh snow on the ground. Amazing mountain scenery and glaciers. Not a bad way to spend my birthday!

<< Francis valley hike



Lake Nordenskjold.



Francis glacier on the hike up the French valley



The only day we had to carry a full rucksack all day on trek was from Frances camping domes alongside Lake Nordenskjold to Chileno refuge (11.57 miles 2712ft ascent) where we camped in their brand new tents with ladders very comfy. Lake Nordenskjold



<< View from our Dome at Frances refuge

Only downside, facilities limited but the location was a big bonus giving us a 2 hour head start on day trippers to the Paine towers. It was snowing at the refuge and cloudy the day we started the hike to the Towers and there was some doubt we would get to the viewpoint as there had been news of ice on the plateau. None of us had brought microspikes. However luck was on our side when sun came out at the decision point to continue snow had softened and cloud cleared as we got there. Again our guides judgement and knowledge of the terrain proved invaluable. 6.81 miles 1879ft ascent



We celebrated finishing the trek in style with lots of Chilean carmenere wine and lamb cooked on a spit by a real gaucho at a ranch that evening.

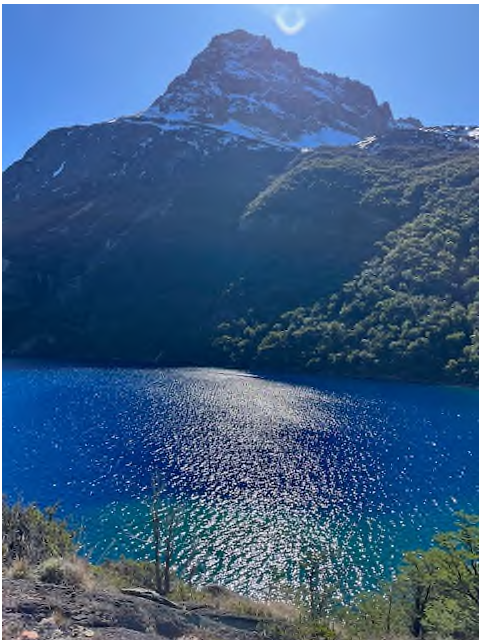


We returned to our friendly hacienda style hotel in El Calafate with some taking advantage of their laundry service before we moved on to El Chalten . Next day we had a touristy full day viewing the spectacular Perito moreno glacier including a busy boat trip.

Perito Moreno glacier



<< *Perito Moreno glacier*



We liked El Chalten a smaller relaxed town with 3 great day hikes from our base there. Nati arranged all our meal bookings including an the excellent 5 course Argentinian tasting menu with the best steak and Malbec of the trip .

Hike to Lago Azul in Humueles nature reserve



<< Hike to Mount Fitzroy viewpoint at Laguna de Los Tres
14.03 miles 3068ft ascent



<< Laguna de Los tres with Mount Fitzroy in the background



Hike to Cerro Torre viewpoin

<< Amazing scenery on the way up to Cerro Torre viewpoint. 12.83 miles 1756ft ascent



We chose to add on a few days at Iguazu falls well worth it especially the Argentinian side with optional boat trip under the falls. We got soaked!

<<< Iguazú falls from Brazil water levels very high



<< Boat trip from the Argentinian side scary but exhilarating!



Wildlife on the trip included many birds condors, flamingo, caracaras buzzard eagle, Magellanic woodpeckers rhea and guanacas to name a few. Amazing plants and trees too.



Lenga trees in the foreground



Guanaco bush in flower

In summary an amazing trip great company, stunning mountains, wildlife and lucky with the weather. Definitely a trip of a lifetime.

2) Bryn Alyn Meet 18th November 2023 - by Dave Gray



This is a picture of the cliffs of Pt 403 east from the limestone pavement on Pt 403 west, on a bright winter's day.

I guess you might say that the Bryn Alyn hills are 'Clwyds Lite'. They are the limestone hills south east of the A494 which broadly parallel the central Clwyds on the east side of the valley of the River Alyn. The scarp above the river rises to a grassy limestone plateau, from which rise the main summit at 408m (1,338'), and two subsidiaries both at 403m (1,322') roughly to the west and east of the main top. So smaller and more compact than the Clwyds, but these hills and the surrounding area give a good day out with plentiful parking on the A494 opposite the lane to Plymog Farm. There are limestone cliffs, sinkholes, and an area of limestone pavement, so no need to visit the Peak or the Yorkshire Dales to see these things.



Please note the splendid new fence and gate.

Sadly we didn't get such good weather, but still we saw the sights, and had a fun day out. There were ten of us plus prospective members Steve and Lesley. Here we are at the end of the day – collective thanks to Chris Harris and Hew McDermott for this and the subsequent photos in this article.



There has been recent work done on this route which has replaced a decrepit ladder stile, and has improved the stepping stones below Pothole Quarry. Here, this route crosses a limestone spring at the start of the hills, where underground water hits an impermeable layer of rock and surges out. Just beyond the spring and stepping stones is Pothole Quarry itself, where members have often climbed. As far as I can work out from the internet the grades go from V Diff into Yorkshire Territory (Eee numbers!) and the crag is in the Clwyd Limestone Rockfax Guide.

<< Unfortunately flash floods from Storms Ciaran and Debi have eroded the landrover track past the quarry:

A little way on we climbed up a fairly steep but pleasant grassy woodland path to emerge on to the limestone country of the plateau. The day was cloudy and dry but with a number of light showers backed up by a fresh breeze. So it was a bit bracing – Skegness factor 5 – at times. Point 403 West was our first summit. It gave us good views of the Clwyds across the valley, and in the distance Minera Mountain, Cym y Brain and the Llantysilio Hills. On a better day we'd have seen the Berwyns too.



Doug spent a fair bit of the day looking at fungi, of which there were plenty on the route. And to our horror taste testing a couple of them by nibbling at them. Inevitably the 'magic mushrooms' jokes started, and rose to a crescendo when the Federales, in the shape of two hikers in police-like hi-vis jackets, paused below us looking upwards. Some of the fungi were beautiful – including one pretty orange toadstool which Doug has provisionally identified as a Vermillion Waxcap. It is not that common in the UK but has worldwide distribution.

Here's a picture of the little orange jobby, from Reddit.com, in the marvellously named Big Thicket National Preserve in Texas.



The plateau had the biggest 'fairy rings' I think I've ever seen. Here's Doug with one of the rings between Pt 403 (West) and the main top.

I was also interested to learn from Doug that on his early trips to the area quite a big part of the plateau was still sterile waste from the extensive lead mining in this area. I've only ever known it as green hillsides. Bryn Alyn is now an SSSI because of its rare flora.



On Point 403 (East) a couple of us explored an entrance to a collapsed mine tunnel, and on the ground above we could see the line of the old tunnel following the vein of lead ore.



Chased by another shower we went east over the plateau and then through fields to enter Nercwys Forest by the pretty Llyn Nercwys. We had lunch under the trees, and then progressed to the south end of the forest on tracks past old mine buildings, and the wetland of dried up Llyn Ochin.

The walk finished along quiet lanes to Eryrys village, and then the landrover track of Craig Harri road took us past more old mine workings, under the cliffs of Bryn Alyn, to rejoin our outward route just east of Pothole Quarry and the walk back to the cars.

Adrian, Hew, Reg, and myself rounded off the day with a welcome pint in the Druid at Llanferres, a pleasant and cheerful pub.

Mmmm, I'm not sure about 'Clwyds Lite' – Chris's GPS showed the day as being 7 3/4 miles with 1,616 feet of ascent. The latter figure surprised me I must admit. Thanks to everyone who came along, I very much enjoyed our day!

Dave Gray