

THE GWYDYR MOUNTAIN CLUB NEWSLETTER – EXTRA! EXTRA!

November 2024: Editor Dave Gray



Introduction

Welcome to the November Newsletter! This is a Double Extra! edition, with an article from Mike Doyle on the development of a new route on Penmaenmawr Mountain, and one from me on a Hut based walk which just kind of grew (!). A big thank you to Mike, and to Gill E, Helen G, Janet, Lindsey, Richard S, and as ever David LJ for help with this edition. Please let me have material for the next edition, the final deadline for that is 26th November.

Looking Ahead

Here are the upcoming meets venues for November and December, details are on the Club Website. The meets list is constantly being updated, please **check it out regularly** on the Website. Meets added to the programme since the last edition are in bold as a reminder **in case you've missed them...**

30 Oct/17 Nov	Ecuador - 'Triple Crown'
1/3 November	Hut Weekend: Bonfire Party
5 November	Gallaghers: GMC History – talk by Roger Hughes
22/24 November	Hut Weekend
27 November	Royal Court Panto evening
30 November	Saturday Walk – Waterloo to Formby
6 December	Hut Weekend
14 December	Saturday walk – Classic Clwyds
20 December – 1 Jan	GMC Hut Christmas Meet

Venues in Focus

Most of our planned activity in November focuses on the **Hut**.

Once again I looked at walks based on the Hut which may be unfamiliar to readers, but this time I picked a hill walk, based on a trip Reg and I did, rather than a mid-level walk. In the end the material grew so big I shunted it off as an article into the 'Extra' section below. Part of the walk coincides with the **Snowdonia Slate Trail** and may well whet your appetite for Sue's plan to do this trail based at the Hut.

After a hard day on the hill there's nothing better than the **GMC Bonfire Party**. Plenty of wholesome fun, food, and drink. Not so in the 17th century! We'd have been in *compulsory* church each year from 1606 through to 1689, giving thanks for the miraculous deliverance from the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. In the 18th century we'd have been burning the Pope in effigy; in the 19th possibly rioting (think Lewes Bonfire Night with added violence and theft); and in the 20th posing as urchins asking for 'pennies for the guy' in a mock cockney accent.



Hot guys plot like it's 1605!

Nowadays Guy Fawkes is perhaps a bit of a pantomime villain, with a swirly black cloak and silly hat, trundling little barrels around. But the Plot of 1605 - to blow up King and Parliament, along with most of the country's leadership - and likely start a civil war - was all too serious. Despite James VI and I taking pains to emphasise publicly the loyalty of most of his Catholic subjects, it left a lasting legacy colouring politics and views around religion right up to the middle of the 19th century. It helped

drive the mindset of the civil wars and the murderous hysteria of the 'Popish Plot' in 1678 - 1681. A good racy read on the Gunpowder Plot is the book '*Remember, remember the 5th of November*' by Professor James Sharpe.

Political assassination was all the rage around 1605 – between 1570 and 1610 it despatched one Scots Regent, one Dutch Stadtholder, the leaders of two French religious factions, and two successive Kings of France. And an attempted coup d'état in England, by the Earl of Essex, had happened just recently, in 1601. So it was understandable for contemporaries to assume assassination plots would succeed and dark threats were always out there. As we might cry out at the **Royal Court Panto** 'He's behind you!!!'

Right at the end of next month the planned 'station to station walk' **Waterloo to Crosby** will take in the Iron Men (officially called '*Another Place*' on Crosby Beach. This installation is by Anthony Gormley. I realised apart from the '*Angel of the North*' I'd not seen any of his other work.



Looking online this caught my eye, it's a work called '*Sound II*' which is in the crypt of Winchester Cathedral.

The crypt floods in wet weather, and Gormley's figure hold a dish into which the flood water pours passing up through the figure.

The photo was taken by distinguished photographer *David Kernan*.

Grand Days Out (and In) – Recent Meets Highlights

Our trip to **Glen Prosen** went swimmingly – Helen G writes 'Big thank you to Kev for organising a joint meet with Dundee MC. We did Driesh and Mayar from Glen Prosen (14.29 miles), Loch Brandy and The Snub from Glen Clova and Mount Keen (11.5 miles) from Glen Esk.' So I guess most of the team went up 3 places in the Munro ratings! Lindsey adds that

the meet was '...very successful and included great company, a fire pit, BBQ and three great days walking...and Nicky and I swam in Loch Brandy. The weather was kind to us too!'

Here's a couple of Helen's photos...



Above a cloud sea...



...and at Loch Brandy

An email entitled 'Mops, Cloths, and a Steamer' gave me a bit of a jolt in the old inbox: but thankfully it turned out to be material from Lindsey who writes...

'The **Work Weekend** was anticipated with glee by all who attended, in the fond anticipation of the renowned fish and chips from Llanrwst as a reward for cleaning, and it did not disappoint! Well attended and supported by members old and new, the annual work weekend offered the hut and cottage much needed TLC. Rubber gloves and significant elbow grease were needed to bring the hut back to glory for another year. Our hut receives a number of groups, some who return again and again and the Club Members also enjoy it, so it was time to give back and sweep, scrub, brush and wipe down every surface imaginable. Following the garden/outside efforts in July, this weekend focussed mostly on the inside of the hut and Kev and Vanda tackled the cottage, ably assisted by Lewis the dog.

Despite good weather outside, the team took on board the comprehensive list of tasks and gave the Hut the love it needed. Some members generously dedicated two days (THANK YOU AND BIG LOVE THERE!) I discovered the marvels of a steam cleaner for the floor and tackled the lounge area, finding that although I had swept and scrubbed the tiled floor...

...the magical steamer still removed more dirt! Each area had a small team at work dedicating themselves to licking the hut into shape, so I think that increased the 'fun'. The bench outside had a makeover, cushions were washed and plumped, the shed outside was upended (although I am not quite sure of the end result), loos and showers were given a good clean and brush up, mattresses were swept under and wiped, windows cleaned and more. We were rewarded with soup and rolls, cakes and biscuits at lunch time and then back to work.



Steam cleaning the ladies' loo



Hard at work in the lounge

In the afternoon we ploughed on, looking ahead to Sunday's planned walk and Saturday night's fish supper generously donated by GMC. The work was done, the effort rewarded and the hut was full of happy members just relaxing.

Sunday was a great opportunity to get out on the hill as it was a glorious autumn day and we tackled Elidir Fawr and Y Garn, which for some members was the last bit of training for their Ecuador trip, for others it was just a grand day out. The views were splendid and the company united in enjoying the wonderful hills as well as the fact that we had the shelter on top of Elidyr Fawr all to ourselves. Notably, some of us found the descent somewhat demanding on the knees but that may be age related.

I am wondering if we might put two work weekends a year on the calendar as a regular feature as this one was enjoyed by all. What do you think?!



Turning to the **climbing** side, Mike Doyle reports that he had 'A good day out at new crag **Nant Dulas** with Andy and Alan... 10 routes done in warm sunshine.'

Nant Dulas is a newly developed crag near Llandulas which has 17 routes on it per google.

In this photo 'Alan grapples with the overhanging start to this 6a'

I thought here it might help groundlings like myself to have some understanding of climbing grades and terms like '6a'

Thanks to the website <https://www.climber.co.uk/training-how-to/climbing-grades-explained/> for a really clear account: 'Looking first at British trad grades and starting with the technical grade. This is a numerical value, usually starting from 4 and going up to 7, followed by a letter 'a', 'b'

or 'c' and which follows the adjectival grade. The technical grade is designed to express the difficulty of the hardest single move or couple of moves on the pitch. It is not supposed to be a representation of overall strenuousness. The adjectival grade (such as VD, HVS, or E2), is supposed to incorporate both the strenuousness and the seriousness.'



And finally in breaking news, Janet's Saturday's day trip walk, being **Moel y Parc and Pen y Cloddiau from Bodfari**, saw 18 of us leave the Dinorben Arms car park at Bodfari in dazzling sunshine and a cool 4°C.

The Offa's Dyke Path gave access to the hills at the col above Coed y Mynydd. The good weather meant beautiful distant views.

Here's the party silhouetted with rather an impressive summit cairn...which did not apparently respond well to attempts to enlarge it...!



However according to Janet there were positive impacts on the landscape too '...a 5 star environmental award goes to Gill E for collecting discarded banana skins from the top of Penycloddiau!'

EXTRA!

MIKE BAILEY'S ROUTE – A TALE OF PENMAENMAWR MOUNTAIN – by Mike Doyle

Every climber likes a good line and there is one such beast high up on Penmaenmawr Mountain above the A55 express way in North Wales. It's a white rib which forms the left end of the established crag, Black Slab. The rib itself is rather odd, geologically speaking, as it rests on the left side of the slab without being part of it. A thin crack separates the two and the rock is different.

Black Slab was principally developed by driven and prolific new router, Harold Walmsley, assisted by Chris Calow, and the duo were also responsible for the development of the Penmaen West quarries above. The slab is well named and offers balancy, technical climbing on compact and very hard micro granodiorite. The natural crags such as Black Slab are known collectively as Creigiau'r Gigfran (Craggs of the Raven). The quarries on the mountain opened in the 1830's and produced setts (cobble stones) and latterly crushed rock for ballast etc. The super hard rock was also appreciated in neolithic times as the Graig Lwyd axe factory sits on



the extinct volcano that is Penmaenmawr Mountain. Axe heads from this location have been found all over England and Wales.

Unaware of any previous development, the first route Harold developed was the obvious tenuous crack line of *Black Slab* (F6a), climbed with a 'soloist' belay device. He named it Camouflage Slab. Long time local activist Colin

Goodey found out about it and pointed out that he had climbed it as a trad route at HVS in May 1971. Quite an achievement given the thin, flared cracks and the equipment available at the time. Colin was fine about the bolting but wanted it to retain the original name and so it was.

Fast forward to 2022. Local activist and generally nice guy, Mike Bailey, had been working on a climbing guide to the Carneddau from the Ogwen Valley to where the mountains met the sea to the north. As the author of "A55 Sport Climbs", I'd been liaising with Mike for some years and swapping historical notes and photos mainly for the area where the two guides overlapped. I was still very much into new routing and Mike offered to assist if I needed any help. Indeed I did and I had a couple of projects at Black Slab in mind.



Mike Bailey on the quarry inclines

The first was a fill in route using the last climbable rock at the right of the crag and using Harold's lower-offs for Black Slab. That went at a reasonable grade and the second was the fine white rib resting on the left of the slab. Mike knew where Harold's abseil bolts were above Black Slab which he had used to develop it. We trundled up the 4 quarry inclines adorned with ropes, bolts, a heavy duty battery drill and climbing gear. He passed his rucksack through the flap in the fence and I nearly dropped it, his strength and fitness clearly belied his slight frame. Cleaning and preparing the rib and a potential second pitch took the two of us three days. The rib first pitch was duly bolted and climbed and came in at a reasonable F6a. It delivered great rock, some fine positions with a couple of cruxy moves and was climbed the day after Queen Elizabeth died on 19/09/22 so I called it *Elizabeth R* as a tribute.



I mentioned to Mike that it was somewhat perverse that 2 elderly men were spending their days hanging from ropes on a mountain removing heather from ledges and digging mud out of cracks. 'We should be down the British Legion in Llanfairfechan with a couple of pints of lager in front of us.' He disagreed. Whilst chatting it emerged that we had both gone to the same primary school in Newcastle-on-Tyne.

I dug out a school photo from 1956 and there I was second from the left in the second row with one Michael Bailey in front of me.

The 2 six year old boys subsequently went their own way, left the area, both took up climbing and 66 years later found themselves together again new routing on Penmaenmawr Mountain.

The corner between the rib and the slab was clearly a very fine line but it was choked with copious amounts of turf and heather. I wasn't prepared to put the time in but Mike was made of sterner stuff. He spent 3 days by himself cleaning it in September 2022, intending to come back the following Spring to bolt and lead it. It was not to be. Shockingly, a month later, he died of natural causes at home. It was difficult to believe and accept. The next Spring arrived and I was determined that Mike's route be finished.

Harold Walmsley seemed like the appropriate person to assist as he had originally kicked off development of the slab. Harold spent a further two days cleaning it then bolted it and led it with the continuation pitch in one go with an 80m rope.

Harold working to develop the route

The corner looked immaculate and a convenient belay nest had been established below it. There was no doubt about the quality of the route. It ticked all the boxes and although nowhere particularly hard, offered consistent and sustained climbing up a strong line. We gave it F6b *** and called it '*Mike Bailey's Route*'.



Harold on the first ascent

A more fitting testament to Mike's life and climbing career could hardly be imagined. Obviously I'm biased but I'm not aware of a better sport route of the grade in North Wales.

Mike had the last laugh, many anecdotes were told at his funeral at Mochdre crematorium but as the coffin, adorned with quick draws and nuts disappeared through the curtain, Arthur Browns recording Of "Fire" was played. He left us laughing.



Michael Doyle, 3 October 2024

EXTRA!

TRYFAN? – by Dave Gray



Have a look at the rocks in this photo. Pretty close to Adam and Eve on the summit of Tryfan, eh?

Well not quite! These rocks are in fact on the 'other' Tryfan, Moel Tryfan, north of Rhyd Ddu. Moel Tryfan is to Tryfan as Tranmere Rovers is to Liverpool FC, being only 1,401 feet (427m) high.

Reg and I stayed over at the Hut on a midweek night in March this year and took in Moel Tryfan on our way back home. This whole area was new to me and turned out to be very special, well worth visiting.

We parked at a small informal car parking space at the viewpoint (GR 516584 on the minor road that runs to the W of Waunfawr), leaving the village just before the station. Here's a 1:50K a map of the area.



See also the website <https://www.anturwaunfawr.org/en/waunfawr/introduction/> for more walking ideas in this area, as well as insights into its culture and history.



We started up the track S of the viewpoint, then at a junction went SE to a larger walled area which we circled before ascending the scouse-sounding Moel Smytho, a little hill of just 1,125'.

Little Moel Smytho yields big views. To the E is Moel Eilio, the northern outlier of Snowdon.

And from to the S the land drops away to a plateau, rising again to Mynydd Mawr.



Behind Castell Cidwm on Mynydd Mawr is the shapely peak of Yr Aran, south of Snowdon. The Moel Eilio – Snowdon – Yr Aran traverse with a car at each end is a fine day out. Snowdon would be added to this Moel Smytho view on a clearer day than we had.



Next we headed SSW across the plateau and crossed what appeared to be an old quarry railway trackbed. There we met an interesting youngish local hillwalker, who confirmed that was so. He turned out to be a slate quarryman's grandson, and he had a wealth of

knowledge about the industry. He told us that the strange line gashed in the lower flank of Moel Eilio (see earlier photo) was a set of trial levels, made as a seam of slate was explored. He said that exploring and opening new slate quarries was a specialist business, and teams of workers would hire themselves out just to do that job. Then came advice on our route, and confirmation that one could follow the old tramway and work past the quarries to the south and ascend Mynydd Mawr, something I would like to try in the future. He also said that the red tinged slate in the quarries in this area had been particularly prized.

We then went on up a grassy slope to reach the large rock table that forms the summit of Moel Tryfan. The pinnacle rocks in the first photo are part of this table. This is a place of major geological significance.

The rock in the photo is a sandstone conglomerate, that is a rock formed of compressed sandy sediment with chunks of older rocks densely embedded like currants in a bun. The sandstone is dated to 610 million years ago, in the late pre-Cambrian period just as complex lifeforms were evolving. The 'chunks' are from the Padarn volcanic rock. (This is my take on a google search 'Fachwen Conglomerate Rock' which brings up Chapter 7 of Graham Hall's A level book '*Geology Field Studies from Lleyn to Plynlimon*')

Furthermore, Reg and I were walking in the footsteps of a scientific giant – Charles Darwin. In 1852 he visited Moel Tryfan, and concurred with earlier researchers William Buckland and Joshua Trimmer that the rock was of marine sedimentary origin, and had not been deposited by the Biblical Great Flood. Darwin's dating of the rock is, from what Hall's book says, a long way out. But he didn't have modern techniques to date the rocks absolutely. The following website link takes you to the story in the Daily Post: <https://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/charles-darwin-hidden-history-small-21920710>

Well, that was all a bit above my pay grade so back to the view! On Moel Tryfan one's eyes are drawn to the mountain wall of the Nantlle ridge



And the pinnacles of the summit frame Mynydd Graig Goch to the west, the 'new' 2000' summit which makes the Nantlle ridge an even tougher walk, and the white cottage in the foreground makes the scene feel Irish and much as Welsh....



From the top Reg and I descended back to the tramway on a flanking path and followed the old line into the huge old Alexandra quarry.

The quarry is massive, dark, and dramatic. It had an uncertain start in the mid-19th century but became very productive employing at its height over 200 workers.

An article on Wikipedia tells the story and has an old map dated 1913. Alexandra was badly hit by WW1 and afterwards amalgamated with Moel Tryfan and other local quarries, but eventually the business closed in 1930 putting 500 men out of work.

Nearby Rhosgadfan village had an unemployment rate of 99.9% but the then government denied help. After 1931 the National Government put up some money and work restarted on a reduced scale from 1932 up to WW2.



Having explored a little Reg and I retraced our steps and picked up the tramway, which the 1913 map reveals to be an 'exit tramway' whatever that means as a technical term.

I got us a bit lost on the return on the boggy plateau section. But overall a very good 5 mile walk, and an area you may want to explore.

Dave Gray

October 2024