

THE GWYDYR MOUNTAIN CLUB NEWSLETTER – EXTRA!

April 2025: Editor Dave Gray



Introduction

Welcome to the April Newsletter! This is an Extra! edition with an article from Helen Grant on the diverse wildlife of the Galapagos Islands, which she and Glenn visited as a coda to the Ecuador Meet. Many thanks to Helen, and also to Angela, Bill, Brenda, Chris Harris, Gill Eccles, Glenn, Mark Barley, Ray, Richard Smith, Sven, and as ever DLJ for help with this edition. Please let me have material for the next edition, the final deadline for that is **April 25th**.

Looking Ahead

Here are the upcoming meets venues for March and April, 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...** As a reminder, the full lists of future outdoor climbing meets that kick off in May, plus regular **indoor climbing** at the Boardroom, is now on the website.

1 April	Tuesday Walk – Blue Plaque Wirral (Mallory, Irvine, Rouse)
4/6 April	Hut Weekend (inc. Snowdonia Slate Trail 1)
12 April	Saturday Walk – Cader Idris
18/21 April	Hut Weekend – Easter Meet
25/27 April	Hut Weekend – (Inc. Big Birthdays Celebrations)
26 April	Saturday Walk – Highest Mountain in Anglesey
6 May	Gallaghers – Talk on Air Navigation vs. On The Ground
7 May	Climbing Meet – Dyserth Castle Slab
9-11 May	Hut Weekend (Inc. Snowdonia Slate Trail 2)
21 May	Climbing Meet – Penmaenbach Quarry – Last Butt One Level
24-31 May	Scottish Meet – Glencarron Lodge

Venues in Focus

I was struck by Pete Smedley's innovative **Blue Plaque Wirral** Tuesday walk, which will also take in the Birkenhead Park Eisteddfod Memorial.

Alan Rouse's plaque is in a memorial garden just below The Breck in Wallasey where I do some of my conservation volunteering. I hope there'll be time to visit The Breck itself and see the scarily vertical walls of this old quarry where Al learned to climb. Sometime member of the Club Paul Sinclair is the lead countryside ranger here and he succeeded in getting the



site from neglect to Green Flag Award status in 18 months, with the help of us volunteers, several of whom come from the houses round about, and who include two rock climbers.

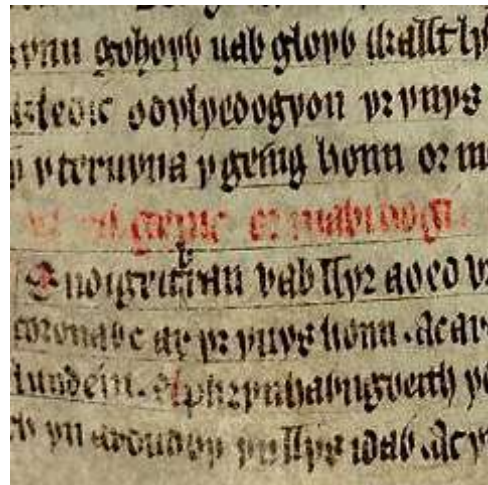
The work we do on the 3-acre site, which was once an open Thurstaston-style heathland, involves managing and selectively felling the currently dominant, non-native, sycamore trees, and moving towards their replacement with native trees such as hawthorn and oak. This, and the selective clearance of brambles, opens the views, makes

the site more airy, and encourages visitors as it feels safer.

We clear litter and lay woodchip (some of which is recycled from felling - see photo) on the paths, and in the areas below the climbing faces. We've also made a gnome garden for small children. Or alternatively I guess a small garden for gnome children...?

One striking memory for me of **Cader Idris** was when – many moons ago – I slept in the summit shelter with then members Christine Smyth and Greg Leasor. We had a sunny walk up and a magic stary night but there was snow on the ground on top, and it was soooo cold. Full 4 season sleeping bags and duvet jackets were in action. Legend says those who sleep there wake madmen or poets, I'll leave you to decide! But on the subject of legends who was Idris and what was his Cader? This takes a bit of unpicking as it all remains uncertain...

Cader or Cadair is a word found in Middle (late medieval) and Modern Welsh and it means 'chair' or 'seat'. It's an adaptation of a Greek word for 'chair' which is also the source of the 'cathedra' Latin word that flows into both the English and Welsh words for a cathedral, i.e. the 'seat' of a bishop. So it can be used both literally and figuratively.



Some Middle Welsh (photo memrise.com)

There are two theories. The literal one is that it was the legendary physical chair of a huge giant Idris Gawr – Cawr/Gawr is Welsh for giant.

The less literal and less legendary one is that it means 'The Seat of Idris', and that Idris was a real Welsh sub-king of Merioneth, Idris Gawr, who lived from c.560 to 632. Idris is a Welsh given name deriving from Old Welsh meaning 'ardent prince'. This man is therefore 'Idris the Giant', but he is also recorded as Idris ap Gwyddno, in English 'Idris son of Longshanks.'

Detailed understanding of our early medieval history post 410 is bedevilled by poor written sources, some made to tell the story 'as it should have been' and most written after the event – sometimes long after. So for example the early records of Wessex say their first king arrived in a boat with heroes 'Beowulf-style'. Mmm... maybe a bit more complex than that...that king, Cerdic, and several of the Wessex kings as late as 689 had obviously *Welsh* names... The overall scene, backed up by archaeology and DNA evidence, is that the Anglo-Saxon settlement of England was gradual and was as much a matter of gradual settlement of *some* new peoples, a cultural assimilation of the original Welsh inhabitants in England, punctuated by intermittent warfare; rather than constant war and replacement of the

population. Cadwallon of Gwynedd (or maybe of the Northern Welsh) was de facto 'High King' of much of Wales and England as late as 633-34.

Idris – and presumably Longshanks his father – were clearly big men physically. Handy when kings led battle from the front as their main job, in small armies. Again looking at Wessex as a model, in their laws an 'army' was as small as a band of 36 men. Abdication by older kings was quite common in the period, perhaps because physical strength was so vital.

The Irish annals say that Idris (then evidently an old man by the standards of the day) met his end in battle with Oswald, future king of Northumbria and 'High King', round about 632 somewhere on the River Severn. The Welsh annals simply say he was strangled. Both of these could be right, he could have been strangled as a POW. Be maybe he wasn't fast enough to abdicate for his impatient wannabe heirs! Again, giving out propaganda of heroic ends is common – for example the Germans on the death of Adolf Hitler – and so the stranglers might well have said 'yeah he died with heroes in battle, Beowulf-style'...

Was his seat the top of the mountain? Maybe. Or it could have been a hall or 'Llys' on the hillfort on nearby Bird Rock (Craig yr Aderyn) which is known to have been occupied into Roman times, or perhaps on the site of what was later Castell y Bere? And there's an intriguing 'house platform' to the north of the mountain about which I can find nothing online.



Moving smartly forward in time now. I did the **Highest Mountain on Anglesey** as a walk with Helen and Glenn a couple of years back. On that occasion we took in some of the rugged coast near Moelfre, and the monument to the loss in a hurricane of the steam clipper *Royal Charter* on 26th October 1859. This was the worst known loss of life in a single civilian ship in peacetime on the Welsh – and perhaps the UK - coast. Around 450 people were killed and only around 40 survived, many through the

bravery of Maltese seaman Joe Rodgers (properly Guže Ruggier) who swam towards the cliffs with a rescue line.

Just one hundred years and a day after the loss of the *Royal Charter*, the coaster Hindlea with a crew of 8 went aground nearby in similar weather conditions. The crew were all saved thanks to the Moelfre lifeboat crew, led by coxswain Richard Evans, who is only one of five people to have won the RNLi Gold Medal twice, one being for this rescue. He lived from 1905 to 2001 and his statue now stands guard over Moelfre.

Grand Days Out (and In) – Recent Meets Highlights

Gill Eccles writes 'Great meet today on **Esclusham Mountain**. The clear, calm weather meant we had clear, beautiful views all around us.' Here's a shot from Ray of some of us on the North Top of **Minera Mountain**.



The views extended from the Arans to the Carneddau to the Wrekin to Winter Hill. Sadly there were no peregrines yet in the limestone quarry – this photo from Mark Barley is of the crag where they nest, and also where there are couple of bolted climbing routes.



A number of us had a welcome drink after the walk in the Tyn y Capel pub in Minera village.

On the Minera trip I got more news of the **Fort William Meet**, and the promise of a full scale article on it for an upcoming edition.



So just in outline for now... it was a great success, mixed weather but some good sun. If I've understood right at least two summit days, with Munros and Grahams getting ticked.

Glenn and Helen Grant also picked up Ben Vane in the 'Arrochar Alps' on the way up. Climbing-wise Richard Smith. Helen Grant and Bill did Curved Ridge on Buchaille Etive Mor with a guide, a Grade II winter ice climb (see left).

Bill and Lee took off to the Cairngorms, again for guided ice climbing, this time on Goat Track Gully in Coire an-t-schnecca on the north wall of plateau. This route also weighs in at winter Grade II.

On one of the less favourable days a number of us did a mid level walk up to Lochan a Choire in Coire Ardair below mighty Creag Meagaidh.

This is a great place on a magic mountain, one which took me three goes to eventually summit!

The photo of Coire Ardair on the next page is from the 24th February entry on the blog maintained by Scottish Avalanche Information Service forecasters -

<https://meagaidhblog.sais.gov.uk/2025/02/>



That day's avalanche forecaster wrote... 'Came across a very friendly and cheery bunch from a mountaineering club on The Wirral in NW England. Well met, folks! There was undoubtedly quite a lot of 'hoods up, heads down' today but this group were undeterred by the poor overhead conditions. Winter hillwalking/mountaineering in Scotland is, shall we say, a bit of an acquired taste and they'll have had a full measure of misery for a time today! Just hope your experience of Creag Meagaidh didn't extinguish your enthusiasm for the planned mountaineering day in Glencoe tomorrow.'

And here they are on the blog!



I've used the SAIS forecasts myself when planning trips in winter conditions without really thinking too hard about how they arrive in my computer – a lot of voluntary time is put in by very highly trained experts to get them to us. I for one didn't appreciate that enough.

Their main website <https://www.sais.gov.uk/> has a lot of information on avalanche safety including links to an online courses and videos, and gives a detailed description of how the forecasts are made and how forecasters are trained.

Another good link is <https://www.mountaineering.scot/safety-and-skills/weather-and-avalanche-forecasts> the site of Mountaineering Scotland. This has a very good video on it where an SAIS guy – looking suitably grizzled and experienced - takes you through how to use the forecasts in a clear and direct way. The appearance of the online forecasts has

changed a bit cosmetically since this was made but as far as I could see the principles in the video hold good.

Date	Wildlife Sighting
30/1/25	PTARMIGAN (WHITE)
19/2/25	Yeti (Tim Miel)
30/1/25	Golden Eagle Carn Liath
19/2/25	GLAUCOUS EAGLE not in notice
11/2/25	2 x PTARMIGAN (WHITE)
18/2/25	GROWN MEN CRY CORIE A'FAIR
5/2/25	GOOSE x 4
5/2/25	Golden Eagle Carn Liath
6/2/25	PTARMIGAN (WHITE)
5/2/25	NA CHAP...

And finally, the Creagh Meagaidh blog includes a wry photo of the 'wildlife sighting' whiteboard at the car park. As you can see this includes the entries 'Grown Men Cry' for 18th February and 'Yeti' for 19th...

The forecaster writes though - 'The **best** entry I've seen on this whiteboard was sometime back in the noughties when one wag wrote, "Lord Lucan on Shergar galloping across the Carn Liath plateau"'!

It's long been an ambition of mine to visit Heptonstall near Hebden Bridge in **West Yorkshire**, and this has now been fulfilled with a super meet organised by Sven. He took us round a 12 mile/2,150' circuit of the beautiful wooded valleys leading to Hebden, with a high moorland section, on a bright and sunny spring day.

These shots are of our party in the craggy upland section, and of the river on the descent of Hebden Water.



As we went Sven also took time to take us through some of the history of the area from medieval to modern times. For me this was really striking on a section of the old narrow gauge construction railway that ran to the Walshaw Dean reservoirs on the moors, which took materials and workers up to the build the dams at the turn of the 20th century. This featured a wooden trestle at Blake (or Black) Dean, and the piers for this are still visible by the river below. I have never seen remains related to these large bridges before. They were once features on UK main lines, particularly in the West Country, the last surviving one is a section of the much lower Mawddach rail viaduct.

The Blake Dean bridge was built on the orders of the totally amazingly ruggedly named Enoch Tempest! It was made by a local carpenter.

Two great pictures here from *Wikipedia* – one of the bridge undergoing static weight tests, and a train of 11-in hand horses towing a steam locomotive up to Heptonstall where the line began. It started at a workers shanty town there, called ‘Dawson City’ in tribute I guess to the days of the Yukon Gold Rush!



We visited Heptonstall, an old weavers village of beautiful stone houses, towards the end of the walk. We took in the atmospheric ruin of the old medieval church, which is where Sven proposed to Barbs!

And also visited its associated graveyard, where the famous and tragic American poet Sylvia Plath is buried. She was the wife of Poet Laureate Ted Hughes.



The day wrapped up with drinks at the pleasant Stubbing Wharf pub on the Rochdale Canal, where a number of us ate. I had a really *big* beef burger – the sort Enoch Tempest would have favoured I’m sure - that tasted just liked the ones Mum used to make!



After all that fresh air, a couple of dashes indoors – the **Quiz at Gallaghers** was well attended and hard fought. ‘Team Richard’ were the winners. Angela was pleased with how it went and is happy to do another one in future.

And inside the **Cottage**, there’s been hard work including drilling! Tom writes on Facebook - ‘Good on you Kev, Vanda and Nicky the club is very lucky to have you, our industrious Cottage team...’ Looks as if Kev’s dog was keen to take over with the Black and Decker!



Brenda writes on Facebook... 'Had a lovely weekend at the GMC Hut for the **annual dinner** and a walk Saturday round Capel Curig. Thank you to Sue for organising the dinner. Thank you to Margaret for a lovely walk on Saturday. Lovely to see you all'

Here are some of the diners having a laugh.

Another group had beautiful day out in the eastern Carneddau taking in Llyn Cowlyd, This reservoir is the deepest lake in Wales. The second shot looks towards Moel Siabod.



Occasional Section – Members' Personal News

Many thanks to those members who've sent me further information for the Big List. I've started work on the update; revised publication date though is next month!

Day 2 – Isabela Island

After sailing overnight we were moored up near the small town of Puerto Villami and spent the morning on a short hike to the rim of Sierra Negra volcano. On the hike we were lucky enough to see a vermillion flycatcher and tree and ground finches.



Sierra Negra rim – view across one of the largest volcanic craters (19 miles) on Earth

Lunch was back onboard, then a trip to the tortoise breeding centre stopping off at the wetlands to see flamingos on the way. Before returning to the boat we had a nice few hours on the beach at Puerto Villami where Glenn tried the local rum coconut cocktail coco loco!

Day 3 – North Isabela Island

Another overnight spent sailing rather choppy seas to Punta Moreno, with a dry-footed landing by panga, to walk across Pahoehoe lava flow, spotting flamingo and mockingbirds.



On the lava flow

We had lunch onboard again before a panga visit to Elizabeth Bay, to the mangrove swamps to see Galapagos penguin, lava heron, brown pelican, sea turtles and sea lions. Or as our guide called them tree lions as they were asleep in the mangrove trees!

Day 4 – Isabela Island and Fernandina Island



Sailing overnight to Tagus cove, we had another dry landing by panga, for a morning hike up to the lookout for stunning views of the bay and Darwin's Lake. Our landing was interesting given a couple of flightless cormorants and their chicks were nesting on the landing steps. We managed to not disturb them!



After lunch on board we sailed on to Fernandina, the youngest of the Galápagos Islands which I am renaming marine iguana island as there were so many of them, together with sea lion pups, on our afternoon walk. We set sail that evening with a lovely sunset, and we were treated to a killer whale and dolphin display. Even the crew were excited to see them as much as we were.



Day 5 - Santiago island and Rabida island

A morning walk took us to see the sea lion and fur sea lion pups on the black sand beach, along with Galapagos hawk and Sally Lightfoot crabs. Lunch onboard, and we then sailed to Rabida island to visit the saltwater lagoon and sea lion colony, this time walking along a red sand beach.

Walking On Rabida Island



Day 6 - North Seymour Island and homeward bound

An early morning dry landing by panga, after an overnight sail, to see blue footed booby, frigate birds nesting, and sea lion pups before a breakfast back on board. We then disembarked at Baltra for a flight back to Quito overnight, and then home via Panama and Amsterdam.

Life on Board!

Life on board was very relaxed with a briefing the night before on the following day's activities. Each day there was the option to go snorkelling and well as morning and afternoon walks.



The crew really looked after us and I would recommend this trip with G Adventures if you enjoy wildlife. Certainly another trip of a lifetime for Glenn and I. It was a real privilege to see wildlife so close up.

Some of our friendly crew...



And finally...Frigate birds following the boat...



(map photo credit – www.orangesmile.com)