

THE GWYDYR MOUNTAIN CLUB NEWSLETTER – EXTRA! EXTRA!

February 2026: Editor Dave Gray



Introduction

Welcome to the February Newsletter!

This is a Double Extra! edition, with a very varied and colourful article from Mike Doyle on the Sicily Sports Climbing trip; and one from Richard Smith giving the inside track on last year's Climbing Competition. Thanks to Mike and Richard, and to Chris Harris, Gill Eccles, Helen Grant, Janet Harris, Lindsey, and Nicki, and as ever DLJ for help with this edition. Please let me have material for the next edition, the final deadline for that is **February 20th** (early date due to personal commitments).

Looking Ahead

Here are the upcoming meets venues for February and March, 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....**

3 February	Slide Show at Gallaghers – Skiing from a mobile home in the Dolomites
7 February	Saturday Walk – 3 Peaks of Bryn Alyn
20 February	Monthly Weekday Walk – venue TBA
20 – 22 February	Hut Weekend
22-22 March	Hut Weekend (Annual Dinner)
26 March	Thursday Walk – The Wrekin and The Ercall

Focus on Venues

All being well, the **3 Peaks of Bryn Alyn** circuit will take in not only the higher limestone area, but also the neighbouring Coed Nercwys forest, and the enigmatic marsh of Llyn Ochyn.

As the now defunct website RunwalkWales.com says: 'Llyn Ochyn was once a small lake and is now a small upland blanket bog, with an occasional little pool of open water in the middle'. No one (including or maybe least of all <https://naturalresources.wales>) will officially admit it, but my money is the lake has gone because the conifers of the forest, planted between 1963 and 1965 have stolen its water supply.

I tried online to find out more about the lake, and whether anything has been done to preserve the area. There's not much to go on, but the above website says that it's the habitat of newts and dragonflies. There's evidence that the local authority is making some efforts to keep it from becoming a forest through tree growth, which is a natural 'succession' landscape process. The Denbighshire Council countryside service cut back birch saplings in 2011, and in 2022 press



reports show that they harvested native grown saplings to use them as a resource in tree planting elsewhere.

Here is a 1961 OS map of the area – ‘Nercwys Mountain’ is towards top right – before it was forested. Llyn Ochyn is the small blue pool.

I tried and failed to find any photos online of the old lake, but was able to find one of

the of the general area pre-forest plus a whole lot more intriguing information, on the website <https://www.nercwys.org.uk>

This is a picture of Nercwys mountain as it used to look in 1930 with a shepherd’s cottage above an open moor. There is a large collection of photos of Nercwys village life on the site, many like this one



from the collection of Ray Davies (left), who served on destroyers in WW2.

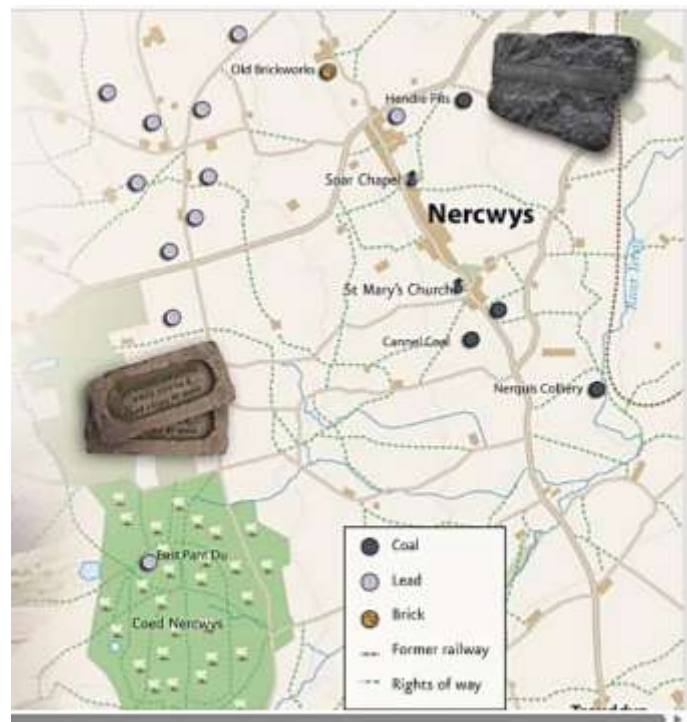


In addition to the photos, the site has a great Council guide to the whole area which has much interesting detail. On our walk we’ll pass the remains of an old lead mine, East Pant Ddu, in the forest. There were about 30 lead mines in the area all told; East Pant Ddu was one of the more successful following the discovery of a rich lead vein in 1876. But the guide’s map shows that Nercwys mining extended to coal, with pits on the far side of the valley nearer the actual village.

Getting coal mining right paid well – but failure was costly. One 1890s venture – the Hendre Pits - was said to have lost £30,000 – about £3.4 million in today’s money on unproductive shafts.

Extraordinarily, Nercwys also fed an oil boom! One type of coal mined there, called ‘cannel coal’ is an oil shale that can be made into lamp oil. The 1864 author of an article ‘Flintshire Petroleum’ in ‘Rylands Iron Trade Review’ gushed ‘...’twas if I had fallen asleep at Chester and woken up in the “oil wells” of Pennsylvania.’ Cheaper American oil eventually ended the Flintshire industry.

There’s also the sense of a community very close to its rural roots. On July 27th 1872, the village schoolmaster wrote ‘Meagre



attendance, whinberry gathering at Mynydd Ddu.' The area where the children had gone is the rough pasture hill just south of Coed Nercwys, where we started a Club meet a few years back and may revisit sometime.

Looking ahead to the warmer days of summer Mike Doyle plans to restart his **midweek sports climbing days** out on 6th May with a trip to **Dyserth Castle Crag**. He plans a full programme of trips, please see the website for more detail.

Grand Days Out (and In) – Recent Meets Highlights

Lindsey writes' Highlights of activity out at the **Hut over the festive period** include a good gathering of folk which will hopefully continue as 2026 progresses. Naturally, getting out on the hill was pivotal and the GMC neighbourly mountain, Siabod, was ticked by members. Enjoying the glorious bright and brisk weather on New Year's Eve was a significant event and the group walked over towards Crafnant and had an early lunch on top of Crimpiau, rounding off the walk by a traditional visit to the Tyn y Coed.'

This is the view west from Crimpiau -



And down to Crafnant –



And finally Chris Harris Chris on a Chris snowy Siabod summit.

Sadly, John Driver was unwell, so Lindsey stepped in to lead production of a fine **New Year's Eve** meal at the hut. The evening continued with party games, two fire baskets and singing and a few hours later a visit to the Siabod Café for breakfast.





Gill Eccles posted 'Great weekend at **Blakedean hut** in the Pennines. Thanks to Sue for organising and to Andy and Sven for a super hike in Brontë countryside.'

These photos are of a walk across the moors past the reservoirs and down into the Haworth valley. I love the shot of the reservoir – you can just imagine the Lady of the Lake turning up!





The monthly weekday walk programme kicked off successfully with a walk from **Connah's Quay to Chester** on the Greenway route. The party enjoyed good weather and a flypast – very close by – by the Beluga plane (aka The Dolphin) that transports A300 wings for Airbus.

One highlight at Connah's Quay is the old Hawarden Swing Bridge which is on, and is the symbol of, the Borderlands Line that the party used to get to the start of their walk. Before the swing feature was immobilised it was the largest railway swinging span in the UK at 287 feet. It was last swung open in 1960.

A large railway swing bridge, the Skelton Bridge, still operates at Goole on the River Ouse.



EXTRA!

SICILY SPORT CLIMBING TRIP – SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025...by Mike Doyle

On the north western corner of Sicily stands a peninsula and at its tip the town of San Vito Lo Capo. Having had many years of sport climbing in Europe but never having been to San Vito despite hearing many good things, I concluded that it could be worth a few routes in a tolerably pleasant environment. We were not disappointed and the venue turned out to be probably the best European sport climbing destination I've been to. The town is separated from the west coast by a west facing, low ridge of some 4.5km which supports the 30+ sectors of crags and over 1000 climbs. San Vito is a very popular tourist destination with the happy consequence that you have a massive climbing area within a couple of miles of two dozen restaurants – clearly my type of venue! Those west facing crags are known as Scogliera di Salinella.



The ridge and the Scogliera di Salinella

San Vito Lo Capo and Monte Monaco

They may be the most accessible crags but there are plenty more in the excellent Rockfax Sicily guidebook such as the nearby Monte Monaco (528m) which stretches out from the Zingaro reserve and has six climbing areas alone. Sperone Est is one of Sicily's tallest walls and has a number of multi pitch fully bolted routes that tackle the full height of this magnificent mountain. Routes can be as long as fourteen pitches. Much more climbing can be found at Castelluzzo and Custonaci. Indeed, the most impressive crag I've seen for some considerable time was The Never Sleeping Wall at Custonaci. A few ultra long routes of 55m are available here to stamina monkeys.



As it turned out we restricted ourselves to Scogliera di Salinella – it was just too convenient! We had two houses for three weeks, and nine of us were there at various times: Me, long time climbing buddy Mike Burrows and his partner Mel, Melinda and Richard, Paul Ross and missus

Gina, Gail and Doug also joined us for a week and then disappeared on what appeared to be a very rewarding Sicily tour.

The order of play was to visit a new sector every day, grab a few routes on the featured and rough limestone, then, when the sun came around at about noon making further climbing an unpleasant experience, escape for swimming (there was an excellent swimming cove beneath the escarpment) or ice creams. Then there was the onerous task of choosing a restaurant for the evening meal.



The swimming cove



Segesta Temple

Days off are essential and Sicily is very well endowed with archaeological sites. Nearby was the Segesta site with the world's best preserved Doric temple of 430 – 420 BC. A walk up the hill is rewarded by a visit to a Roman settlement and theatre. On another, rather long day, we ended up at the hugely impressive Valley of the Temples at Agrigento. The ancient city of Selinunte was also visited on another day. We were Doric templod out but it was hugely impressive that ancient peoples had quarried the stone using hand tools and transported them to the site.

We were there during the cous festival! Now in its 27th year, the Cous Fest in San Vito Lo Capo is recognised as an internationally renowned culinary event that celebrates the dish that is a symbol of the Mediterranean. Of course cous in itself is rather bland and it's what you put with it that counts. I had a seafood dish which involved pouring a bowl of what could best be described as lobster bisque over it. Hmmmm. Yum yum. Restaurants were, in the main, very good in San Vito. Lots of fresh food, local pasta and excellent pizzas. If you wanted fish they came around with a tray of fresh fish and you chose which one you wanted.



Except at Marghe. It started badly. The fools had given up on conventional menus and you were expected to access it via a QR code on your smart phone. Having called a halt on further technological advances, judging that not all of them are in the interests of the human race, I don't possess a smart phone. Ditching printed menus marks the beginning of the end of

civilisation as we know it. We're all doomed. Mark my words. To add insult to injury I had a pizza which only had 4 anchovies on it. On checking their website I discovered that there were clearly 8 anchovies included with this pizza. I was 4 anchovies down on the deal but a message to them claiming the missing 4 anchovies proved fruitless.

Fauna and Flora – this time well and truly alive!



Melinda on first pitch...

...And Richard goes high...

The climbing was almost always very good but I don't recall any really stand out routes. Indeed some were scrappy.

The route developers don't even remove dead vegetation and apparently no-one doing new routes in the area possesses a brush!



My tally of routes was 52 but where shall we go next year? Obviously a venue with plenty of restaurants!

Mike Doyle, December 2025

EXTRA!

GMC ANNUAL CLIMBING COMPETITION 2025...by Richard Smith

The 3rd Annual Climbing Competition took place at the Boardroom on December 18th 2025. The competition is handicapped to give all climbers in the club a fair chance of winning and, needless to say, the handicaps are the subject of much debate in advance. A certain amount of lobbying goes on, with climbers claiming dubious injuries or ailments in order to get an easier handicap, or pointing out the skills of their competitors (he's climbed E4, you know!).

Once the routes have been reset at the Boardroom in early December, climbers get the chance to suss out the routes to try and find those that are an "easy touch" for their grade. Marks are awarded according to the grades climbed, with an extra half point for leading as opposed to top-roping a route. Each climber's best five climbs are added to give a total, and the handicap is then deducted to give the final scores. The scoring was recorded by Gill Potter to make sure there was no underhandedness taking place!

We had eleven climbers taking part this year, with some notable achievements; Rich Kinsman led a 6c and this was seconded by Clare Caxton on a top rope. Eight climbers succeeded on routes of 6B+, so it would all come down to the handicap system to determine who would win the prize of a £50 voucher for the Boardroom. In the event, it was a tie between Melinda Kinsman and Clare Caxton, who agreed to share the prize between them, rather than have a climb-off against the clock. Well done to Melinda and Clare!



After the presentation, we all enjoyed a Christmas lunch at the Boardroom café – the Christmas dinner in a bap is to-die-for, as are the pigs in blanket rolls!

The climbing group meets twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays as well as arranging outdoor trips when the weather is good. It's a friendly group with a good social side promoted by the excellent Boardroom coffee, so if you fancy giving climbing a try in the New Year, please drop in and join us.

Richard Smith

January 2026

