



LONG DISTANCE

LDWA

WALKERS ASSOCIATION

SOUTH WALES GROUP



“LEEKIE’S BLETHER”

MARCH 2023

**A NEWSLETTER FOR SOUTH WALES LDWA GROUP MEMBERS WRITTEN
BY SOUTH WALES LDWA GROUP MEMBERS.**



THE COMMITTEE

Chair
Secretary
Treasurer

Jason Winney
Simon Pickering
VACANT

southwales.chair@ldwa.org.uk
southwales@ldwa.org.uk
southwales.treasurer@ldwa.org.uk

Walks Secretary
Challenge Walk Coordinator

Sara Down
Jamie Lewis

southwales.walksec@ldwa.org.uk
southwales.cwc@ldwa.org.uk

THE OTHER VOLUNTEERS

Facebook
Website
Twitter
Merchandise
Newsletter

Valmai Lewis
Gerry Jackson & Sara Down
David Morgan
Judith Fox
David Morgan

southwales.cwc@ldwa.org.uk
southwales.walksec@ldwa.org.uk
southwalesldwa@live.co.uk
southwales.treasurer@ldwa.org.uk
southwalesldwa@live.co.uk

In This Issue

"From The Committee" p3

"Merchandise" p4

"The Samaria Gorge - A Walker's Guide" p5

"Offa's Twisted Wye Kanter" p8

"You Cannot Be Serious" p9

"Real Ale Ramble" p12

"Down Memory Lane" p14

"Winter Backpack 2022" p15

"The Rhondda Rollercoaster" p18

"Leekie Meets" p19

"A Walking Welshman Part 1" p20



The South Wales LDWA Group **ALWAYS** needs walk leaders.

No walk leaders = no walks = ????

Please contact Sara Down if you want to lead a walk for

this wonderfully supportive group at: southwales.walksec@ldwa.org.uk

From The Committee



The local groups weekend, what's this all about?

The local groups weekend is an annual event in the LDWA calendar.

It provides an opportunity for representatives to get together and talk about some of the common issues that affect local groups. Before the weekend takes place, we're invited to send in topics that we'd like to have on the agenda; the local groups officer then creates a programme of activities and discussions to reflect what's relevant for the groups right now.

Last year's weekend was held in November, near Buxton at the Ravenstor youth hostel.

It's a former mill owner's home and sits within 60 acres of mature woodland; it has amazing views from many of its windows.

A huge amount of work goes into organising the weekend and the activities. There are workshops and updates, Q&As and brainstorming. Even the social walk on the Saturday has a designated walk and talk focus, where you're given a topic and then need to chat about it with as many people as possible during the walk to get their thoughts. Upon returning to the hostel, you're asked to note down all the feedback you've gathered, which is shared with everyone else at one of the meetings.

Topics last year included:

- The impact of cost-of-living on LDWA activities
- How can the NEC consult more effectively with the local groups
- How can we get members more involved with group activities
- How can the LDWA appeal to younger people to ensure its long-term viability.
-

There were also two workshops held across the weekend looking at:

1. Membership and local group data - this was an interesting piece of work and a draft report was shared with attendees to get their feedback. It covered data pulled from the database with both national and local information, including membership numbers, demographics, social walk and challenge event activity. Hopefully a new version of the report will be created in due course and shared with us.
2. Challenge event management - looking at catering, volunteer expenses, co-operation between local groups and using an electronic tagging system.

The discussions were great and sometimes quite passionate. We often ran out of time as we tried to keep to the tight and very full schedule.

It was an interesting weekend that of course included some great walking options on the Saturday balanced with a lot of brain power and sharing of ideas.

Hopefully some of those ideas will move forward and help to support and shape what the groups do in the future.

If anyone is interested in more detail, come and find Sara on a walk for a debrief!



South Wales LDWA has an active WhatsApp page. Why not get involved and keep up to date with local matters? Email southwales@ldwa.org.uk and join!



MERCHANDISE

Gear up for the summer "Challenge Walk" scene with Leekie merchandise.

Replace that faded, ripped, snagged and much loved T-Shirt!

Wear "Leekie" with pride and be smart for Leekie's Travels!

Our items include:

- T-Shirts (large badge)
- T-Shirts (small badge on left chest) out of stock
- Multi Functional Head Tube
- South Wales LDWA Oval Badge
- Rhondda Rollercoaster Badge
- Leekie Mugs (too expensive to post so only available in person from Judith)

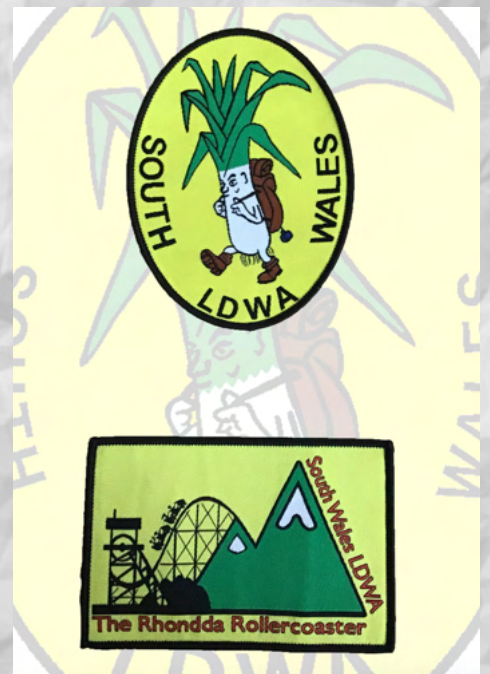
Prices

T-Shirts £12.00 (+£1.64 P&P)

Head Tubes £6.00 (+£1.64 P&P)

Badges £2.00 (+76p P&P)

To place your order, email Judith Fox (judithfox224@yahoo.com) and she'll provide details on how to pay.



"THE SAMARIA GORGE - A WALKER'S GUIDE"

By Rob Richardson



Facts:

Situated in South Western Crete and 15km long, it is one of the longest gorges in Europe. It is a very popular walk with up to 3000 people a day walking it in the summer months. It is open from early May, depending on the weather, until October. It can be closed at short notice in the event of a rockfall or adverse weather. It can get very hot in the middle of summer (40C) but there is plenty of shade under trees and in the gorge itself. There is no shade walking the last 2.5 km down to the beach.

The gorge can be walked in either direction, however most people enter the gorge at the top and walk down to the sea. The height difference from top to bottom is 1200m.

Entrance fee is 5 euros, but free if under 18 or over 65. Your entrance ticket is retained to be shown at the exit in order to ensure everyone leaves the gorge at the closing time of 6pm.

It takes between 5 and 7 hours to walk the gorge, we took 6 hours with plenty of stops.



Getting there:

The village at the bottom of the gorge, (Agia Roumeli) is not accessible by road. Unless you walk down the gorge, turn around and walk back to the top (just about possible, but would give little time to admire the scenery), the only way out is by boat.

The options are:

1)Go on an organized coach trip. Can be expensive (90-100 euros). Could be a very early start (5am) and a late finish, especially if travelling from Eastern Crete.

2)Public transport is possible. Buses run from Chania and take about an hour to get to the top of the gorge. Then at Agia Roumeli you can get a boat to Hora Sfakion (1.5 hrs) and then a bus back to Chania (2 hrs). When we were there in May; there didn't appear to buses running on a Sunday.

3)Hire a car and drive to the top of the gorge near Omalos. It's about 1 hour from Chania, the roads are fairly good but watch out for fallen rocks on the hairpin bends. It costs 5 euros to park for the day. Tickets for the boat and bus back to the car park can be purchased in the café (~16 euros for boat and bus). It's important to note that there's only one boat to Sougia to get the bus and it's at 5pm. The boat trip takes ~45 mins and the coach another hour. We were back at the car park around 7pm.

Walking the gorge:

The gorge opens at 7am and most guide books recommend an early start. We started at 8am and had plenty of time to descend at a leisurely pace with plenty of stops for breaks and photos. The first section is a steep decent down the Xiloskala (wooden staircase). This zig zags 600m down to the gorge and river on a stepped, stony path. The stones are polished due to the high footfall and somewhat slippery. There is a strong wooden handrail to one side. Experienced walkers will have no difficulty in descending. There are excellent views of the surrounding mountains as you descend, in particular Gingilos, which towers above the path. In mid May there was still plenty of snow on the nearby mountains.

As you near the bottom of the path you can hear the sound of rushing water and the river soon comes into view. The river is followed all the way to sea from this point on. The river is crossed countless times, sometimes on stepping stones other times on bridges. These range from rickety ones made out of what look like fence posts to more substantial bridges.



In May the river was flowing strongly, but I believe it dries up completely in the summer.

We were treated to an abundance of wild flowers, again something summer visitors would miss.

There are several shaded rest areas along the gorge which have picnic benches, toilets and spring water, but there is nowhere to buy food. The nicest rest area is at the deserted village of Samaria, from which the gorge gets its name.

As you continue to descend the gorge, the surrounding near vertical rock walls get closer and there are signs warning of the danger of falling rocks. Eventually you reach the so called 'iron gates', the narrowest part of the gorge. The gorge is 3m wide at this point and a raised board walk allows you to walk above the river.

Beyond this point the scenery opens out to reach the end of the gorge and a ticket collection booth. There are souvenir shops and refreshments available here. To avoid the 2.5km walk to the village it is possible to take a minibus for 2 euros. There is no shade on this part of the walk along a concrete track.



The village of Agia Roumeli has many tavernas and places to eat. There are also a couple of small supermarkets. The regular ferry boats dock at the small port, but our boat to Sougia left from a jetty at the far end of the beach. When we purchased our tickets, we were handed a map with the name of the boat. As mentioned earlier, there is only one boat at 5pm and it leaves on time.

On arrival at Sougia there are many coaches waiting. These are for people on organised tours as well as the coach back to the car park, so

it's important to find the right coach. All the people on our boat were going back to the car park and we found the correct coach without difficulty.

The journey back took an hour along mountain roads with multiple hair pin bends.

In summary, the Samaria gorge is a fantastic walk through stunning scenery. By the end of the walk I felt a sensation of visual overload. Our walk was on a Sunday in mid May and there was not an impression that it was particularly busy. In fact, at times we were walking on our own with no one in sight. The weather was perfect, with a clear blue sky and a temperature around 23C. There was also a cooling breeze blowing through the gorge. However you do the walk, it will inevitably be a long day due to the location of the gorge and the logistics of getting there and back. But it's well worth the effort!



Do you enjoy social walking with the South Wales LDWA Group?

Would you like to give something back to the Group and become a walk leader? You don't have to do it alone and can learn from experienced walk leaders. Please click [here](#) to read an article that was written to help people take that step and become a walk leader.

New walk leaders will mean that we will have a variety of distances to choose from ensuring something from everyone.

Let's not walk at the back but instead step up to the front! We all took that step once!

Offa's Twisted Wye Kanteo



A Date For Your Diaries!

Sunday 16th April 2023

Thanks so much to the South Wales LDWA Group volunteers who will be hosting the event! Now that we have enough people to 'run' the day, all other South Wales LDWA Group members are encouraged to enter!

**Ang
Norma
Enrique
Andrew
Simon
Tony
Jamie
Valmai
Rod
Dave
Ferne
David**

To enter the event, click [here!](#) 

"YOU CANNOT BE SERIOUS"

By Hugh Woodford



We all take our walking seriously but, occasionally, something happens, or we see something that makes us laugh. Over the years I can recall a few, walking alone, with Heather, or in groups such as Gwent Mountaineering, LDWA, Cheltenham Ramblers. Unfortunately, some happened so quickly that, even if a camera had been to hand, it would not have been possible to capture the moment. As a result, only 1 of the photos accompanying this article is in real time – others are close or have had to be arranged.

Back in the early 90's, whilst walking in the Blacks between The Rock and Twyn y Gaer, the local hunt was out in force. It seemed like they had spotted a fox, as the hounds were running around all over the ridge and the Master was near Twyn y Gaer sounding his horn. As I stopped and watched, behind me trotted the fox, as cool as a cucumber, as if to say 'fooled you lot'!

In 1996 I spent my fortnights holiday in mid and north Wales ticking off 2000 footers. On the day I did Plynlimon and a few others I parked at Nant y Moch dam. After a good walk, and a few ticks, when I arrived back at the dam car park there was a gentleman there in kilt and full highland dress playing his bagpipes! Luckily, I did manage a photo.

During my Gwent Mountaineering Club days I took part in a couple of navigation courses the group put on. One day in the Beacons we were on fairly featureless high ground. One of our group thought she had lost her map so she went back the few hundred yards to the trig point we had left to search for it. She returned, rather sheepishly. In those days, she used to carry her map in a waterproof case around her neck. The wind had blown the case – with map inside – around to her back, so it was there all the time! On another occasion, she was on an accredited navigation course (not with GMC) and was asked by the course leader 'what would you do if you were in the middle of nowhere and had lost your compass?' Of course, the answer the leader was hoping for was to use a watch and the position of the sun. Not Caron. 'I would use my spare compass - I always carry one' was her reply. Only Caron could come up with an answer like that!



Alun, now a retired GP, who we nicknamed 'Doc' loved to dine well on good quality food. On a group walk one cold day in the Beacons we stopped for lunch, taking shelter among the peat hags. We all got out our usual packed lunches. Not Alun – he produced a large packet of sliced salmon! How the other half lives.



On another occasion, I was accompanied by Alun on the Big Blacks Challenge. As we walked along the northern escarpment one of the straps on his rucksack gave way so he had to carry it on one shoulder. At the next checkpoint the Mountain Rescue team, who were manning it, were able to fix it for him. In those days, he always wore shirt and tie when out walking, so they tied one end of his tie around his water bottle, put it at the bottom of his rucksack and fed the tie through the hole in the bottom of the rucksack and tied the other end around the broken strap. Problem solved, he was able to complete the event in relative comfort.

Over the August Bank Holiday weekend in 1997, six of us went for a weekend of scrambling in north Wales. The highlight of the weekend was a traverse of the Glyders. We completed the gully on Tryfan which I mentioned in my previous 'Ticking off Marilyn - not Munro' article and were ascending Bristly Ridge. That rare split-second moment occurred, unfortunately too quickly to get the photo. We all know the saying 'the sun shines out of a person's backside'. The sun had begun to shine and one of the group above me was positioned perfectly. If only! I couldn't very well have asked her to re-position herself so that I could get the shot. A mouthful of abuse I could have taken, but a slap across the kisser, no.

Heather and I have had a few incidents which we still laugh about years later. One beautiful cold, clear, snowy winters day we parked in Llanfoist and walked up to the Punchbowl on the side of the Bloreng. I was a few yards in front when, all of a sudden, I heard a yelp behind me. As we neared the Punchbowl Heather had fallen flat on her face onto the, thankfully, soft snow. Resplendent in her Heidi hat, she got to her feet before I could take a photo of her indignity. It certainly gave me a good laugh but I will always admonish her for not letting me get that photo. She will probably say I was too slow!! neared a dip in the track, out of nowhere it



On a Cheltenham Ramblers walk we were walking through an innocuous field when, not looking where I was treading, I tripped on a molehill. Fortunately I did not fall flat on my face but, to this day, Heather will never let me forget it whenever we encounter molehills.



On another Cheltenham ramblers walk we had the afternoon stop in Sevenhampton. Barry (RIP) picked up a pile of horse dung lying in the middle of the road and put it into a carrier bag which he had in his rucksack. When we asked him why, he said it was to put on his garden. It reminds me of the old joke:

Knock knock, who's there? Duncan! Duncan who?
Duncan (dung can) make the garden grow!!

My first traverse of Crib Goch on the Snowdon horseshoe provided an unusual occurrence. I have probably traversed it half a dozen times, mostly anti-clockwise, which means that on the narrow ridge the drop off to the left is steep and rocky while to the right it is almost vertical and any fall that way results in Mountain Rescue searching at least 1000 feet below and carrying the faller away in a body bag. These days my head for heights has gone; saying that, I have never been confident enough to traverse stood up straight – always stooping or on all fours. On my first traverse I was on all fours (bum to the ground, I think) when a Jack Russell came from behind and passed under me, rather than go around. That was certainly disconcerting and put me in my place!



Some of the events I have written about are amusing. This final one, however, is straight out of the Keystone Cops. When Heather and I were recceing my 'Torfaen's slightly grand canyon' walk a few years back, we sat on rocks in the slightly grand canyon (quarry) to eat our lunch. All of a sudden, a knocked about, flat bed 4x4 police vehicle came past, driving through, hitting a rock, bouncing off it, becoming airborne, before landing in a fair sized pool of water across the track, which they had to drive through anyway. The 2 Police officers asked us if we had seen someone on a motorcycle going through. Yes we had, earlier, but further along. A teenager was on a scrambling bike and his father on foot but were no longer nearby. Again, no chance of a photo as it happened so quickly.

I'm sure we all have amusing tales to tell from our walks over the years. Are there enough out there to compile a book? Why not, as many sports do.

Did you enjoy this article? Would you like to write and submit an article for your mates to read? If so, please send your work to: southwalesldwa@live.co.uk

"REAL ALE RAMBLE"

By Ang Williams



The first and last time I did the Real Ale Ramble (RAR) was in November 2019, just before Covid. I fancied a winter event and this event is a lot of fun. Claire Murray is a stalwart of the RAR and I drafted in my good friends Hayley and Damon; Damon was in for the real ale. We booked a nice B & B just outside Llanwrtyd Wells and the others stayed in the town jail!

The event is centred in the Neuadd Arms Hotel in Llanwrtyd which is the smallest town in Britain. The walls are covered in interesting photos of past events- notably the man versus horse competition and the world bog snorkelling championships . It was also once the headquarters of the Monster Raving Loony Party!



Beers, supper and a very talented singer entertained us on Friday evening. We were also surprised to discover a GPX track for the route - a first for the Real Ale Ramble!!

The weather forecast was pretty dire and we were doing the 20 mile event on the Saturday and the 13 mile event on the Sunday. We enjoyed an early breakfast and we were off on what was a very pleasant route; lovely views and nice paths. We were pleasantly surprised as in previous years the tracks were often in forestry.



Not concentrating we missed Checkpoint 1. As there is beer at the checkpoints we retraced our steps and identifying that the checkpoint was a sheep trailer, I deployed the skills I possess due to my agricultural heritage to open up and we helped ourselves at 10am exactly!

Onwards we went to Checkpoint 2 and there we lunched with Richard Rosser, and more beer.

The route was wetter in the afternoon with an interesting stream crossing and we then bashed on to Checkpoint 3 where, you guessed it, beer and also a BBQ offering!

At the end at the Neuadd Arms we enjoyed wonderful homemade cake and yes, more beer! The weather had been very kind to us!



There was a different band for Saturday evening and the best homemade chips and cosy real fire.

Sunday morning saw us head off in reverse over a slightly shorter route, partly retracing our steps but with a few new sections. The real ale was still flowing and plentiful homemade cake at the end of our 13 mile walk. One could be tempted to stay on an extra few nights as rumour has it that they sell the beer off at £1 a pint on the Monday!



Down Memory Lane!

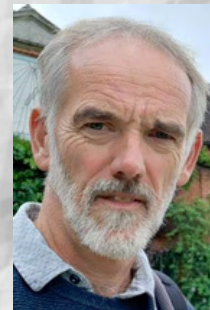
This edition celebrates the "Valleys 100 Marshals' Walk" that took place during the weekend of 3-5th May 2014. The joy of this particular 100 mile challenge was that the vast majority of the South Wales LDWA Group members walked together thus making this a fantastic social experience! Several members completed their first ever 100 and whilst the main event later in the month was affected by wet weather, the weekend of the marshals' walk was dry and sunny!



"One wheel on my wagon, feet are killing me.
4.5 miles to go, let's do it!" - John Tinelli

"WINTER BACKPACK 2022"

By Andrew Clabon



Otherwise known as the Full English tour.

All characters in this article are fictitious and any resemblance to actual people is purely a coincidence.

Day 1

The day started well with Peeler, Newbie and me in Laila's café with tea and cake waiting for the other three to arrive. Once they arrived, we set off at around 12:45 heading for Callow Hill and Flounders Folly. The folly is 24m high and was built in 1838 by Benjamin Flounders hence the name.



Flounders Folly

A very steep descent followed, then a climb onto the southern end of Wenlock Edge then past the historic working farm at Acton Scott. As we approached Ragleth Hill (the last hill on the Long Mynd Hike) dusk was falling. With no time to lose we picked up water in a stream and headed for Hope Bowdler Hill which was our target for the day. Hope Bowdler Hill resembles a multi-humped camel rather than a hill and it was decided to camp between the first and second humps. 11 miles done and now to pitch camp in the dark. Emergency 1. Where are my tent pegs? None to be found. Fortunately, Newbie, Peeler and Jonas had a few spare to lend me.

Emergency 2. Taff broke one of the poles for his tent. A hasty repair was made which surprised me by lasting the rest of the trip.

Day 2

The alarm went off at 06:00 and the aim was to be away by 07:30, which we just about did. We visited the remaining humps then up the very steep sided Caer Caradoc. The summit has an Ancient British Iron Age or late Bronze Age hill fort. The early morning sunshine was



Climbing Caer Caradoc

spectacular. This was followed by a windy descent into Church Stretton and Berry's café. Full English breakfast for six was enjoyed and as service for four of the group was slow, they enjoyed two rounds of complimentary drinks!

With full stomachs we headed up the popular Carding Mill Valley, past the Light Spout Waterfall and up to Pole Bank at 516m - the highest point on Long Mynd.



Berry's Cafe

The westerly wind was now brisk and containing heavy rain. You can imagine which way we went. Straight into the wind and rain to eventually find shelter in a ruin. A ruin is a kind name for it. It contained the remains of a few metal-framed bunk beds, window frames from WW2 and had been used extensively by the local sheep.

As the rain eased, we continued our day via Bridges (that's a place if you didn't know) and up onto the Stiperstones. It was here that Peeler and Taff insisted on rock climbing to the trig point on top of Manstone Rock (which at 536m was the highest point on our trip) and bathed in late afternoon sun. The remaining four of us ignored them and carried on. A short rock-strewn ankle twisting heather clad path led south down to our next camp amongst the gorse just above the fields with 15 miles done in the day. The gorse was chosen as shelter from the wind.



Light Spout Waterfall



Taff on Manstone Rock

Day 3

Another 06:00 alarm and we were away at first light into the day from hell. It basically rained all day hence no photos. We headed south and were glad to reach Bishops Castle and Kirsty's Café. It was quiet so we dumped our sodden sacs and clothes all around and got stuck into another full English. We must have spent well over an hour there enjoying the dryness. From the café it was west navigated expertly by Leader, eventually reaching the Offa's Dyke path above Churchtown. 16 miles for the day which was now rapidly closing in.

Day 4

The sun was out and spirits were generally higher. The exception being Peeler who was complaining about the amount of condensation in his tent, but we just ignored him. South down the dyke to the church and then a welcome climb to help warm me up and dry out some of my sodden clothes. Leader had chosen the Shropshire Way down into Clun where you can probably guess, we called into the Maltings café for a cuppa and in some cases a full English.



Churchtown

After an hour or so of gorging we headed back into the sun and up to the Bury Ditches on Sunnyhill. Bury Ditches is a hill fort dating from circa 500BC. This proved to be the perfect spot for drying out wet tents and clothes, admiring the extensive views and having lunch. From here it was a



Bury Ditches



Jonas entering Clun

road section that took us to Plowden, the bottom end of the Long Mynd and a very long climb to our eventual camp location next to the forestry. Our reward for an 18 mile day was another 2 degree night.

Day 5

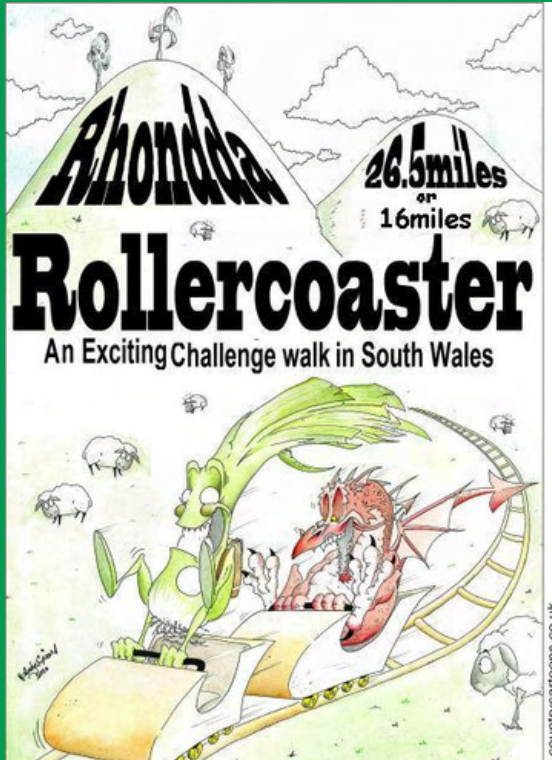


Long Mynd Camp

Leader granted us a lie in today mainly because the forecast (which was correct on this occasion) was for heavy rain around 06:00. We didn't start until 08:45. South now down through the forestry then lanes and field paths via Wistanstow back to Craven Arms. The fields were often waterlogged so a flooded lane gave us the opportunity to clean the footwear. 9 miles later we were back where it all started in Carven Arms and Laila's café for, you guessed it, a full English! A total of 69 miles planned and navigated by Mike Batt aka Leader. Thanks Mike I had a great time.



The Return of our Rhondda Rollercoaster!



After an absence of four years, we are pleased to announce the return of the Rhondda Rollercoaster on Saturday 13th May 2023.

Jamie Lewis is the key organiser for the 2023 event and has been hard at work developing amendments to the route due to the significant landslip that took place on the approach to Tylerstown Tip.

The event ALWAYS attracts big numbers and already the entries are piling in, so if you haven't done so already, **PLEASE** would you contact Jamie and offer to help marshal on the event. It really is great fun working hard with your walking mates either on a checkpoint, at Walk HQ or if you are really fortunate, as a sweeper.

In order to offer to help and have a great day out, please email Jamie at: southwales.cwc@ldwa.org.uk





Leekie Meets Claire Murray



1 How long have you been an active member of the South Wales LDWA Group?

About 22 years. How has that happened? The years have not dented my delight in walking.

2 Where did you hear about the Group?

I met the fantastic Carl Edwards, whilst walking in the Elan valley, of course. Before then I had not even heard of the LDWA but he gave me the confidence to join a local walk and I was hooked.

3 What do like best about the Group?

Obviously the superbly planned walks in our amazing countryside but really it's the friendships I have developed that keeps me coming back. The "girls" are the most supportive group of people I have ever met.

4 Where is your favourite walking area in the South Wales LDWA Group area?

Anywhere within an hour of home but I suppose the South Wales valleys, with the mixture of mountains, villages and industrial ruins are my preferred landscape.

5 How many LDWA 100 mile walks have you completed?

What? 100 miles? I'm sorry, I don't understand the question.

6 What is your favourite challenge event?

Any that has breakfast at the start, cake on the way round and rice pudding and tinned fruit at the end.

7 You arrive at a LDWA checkpoint. What cake would you like to eat?

Lemon drizzle.... and fruit cake.... and bread pudding. Well I have burnt a lot of calories.

8 What is your favourite piece of walking equipment?

Comfortable, WATERPROOF boots. If anyone ever discovers a pair, could they let me know.

9 What is your favourite sandwich filling on a walk?

Egg mayonnaise. I don't care if it's white or brown bread as long as they haven't been stingy with the filling.

10 What's your ideal walking distance?

20 miles is perfect, you have done a reasonable distance but still home in time for tea.

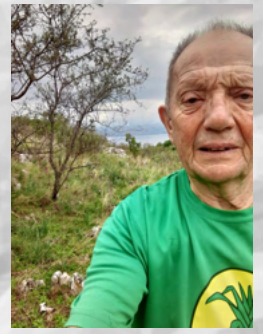
"A WALKING WELSHMAN PART 1"

By John Roberts



His entry in the Welsh Academy Encyclopaedia of Wales is barely 100 words. He is deliberately neglected and ignored because of past controversies and the challenge his C19th life poses for C21st people. He is an embarrassment, largely avoided. Between 1871 – 89, however, he made three immense, important, expeditions through Africa.

He is known as Henry Morton Stanley.



But he was born John Rowlands, in Denbigh in 1841, abandoned by parents, brought up by relatives and in the St Asaph workhouse. Sailing from Liverpool, as a cabin boy, he arrived in New Orleans, aged 18. He worked in stores, mostly, moving up the Mississippi to Arkansas. Took the name Stanley from a prominent businessman he may never have met but who he later claimed as his adoptive father. In the Civil War HMS fought on both sides, including the bloody battle of Shiloh, finally deserting from the Union Army. Extraordinary adventures followed, including leading a trip to Turkey, where he was beaten and robbed, but claimed \$1200 compensation from the government.

Back in St Louis he became a travelling correspondent for the Missouri Democrat, wrote articles about The West – interviewed Wild Bill Hickock – and saved money. He moved to New York and made a deal with James Gordon Bennett (Yes! That one!) to cover Britain's war in Ethiopia. HMS would pay his own expenses and Bennett would pay by the letter for exclusive stories. Stanley was 26.

This went well, so Bennett agreed to fund Stanley's obsession - an expedition to find Dr Livingstone in Africa. After covering a civil war in Spain and the opening of the Suez Canal, Stanley went to Africa.



Dr. David Livingstone

The search for Livingstone began in March 1871; over 100 men, led by Stanley, travelled through dense forest, suffering fevers, dysentery, malaria, attacks, loss of animals, desertions, thefts. They were frequently attacked, got drawn into local wars and encountered violent slaving expeditions; **"I have taken a solemn, enduring oath, an oath to be kept while the least hope of life remains in me, not to be tempted to break the resolution I have formed, never to give up the search, until I find Livingstone alive, or find his dead body... No living man, or living men, shall stop me, only death will prevent me. But death - not even this, I shall not die, I will not die, I cannot die!"**

HMS reached Livingstone (Oct/Nov), having marched 525 miles in 84 days, with about 35 people -incredibly vulnerable in this environment. Livingstone had no wish to be rescued. The two spent 4 months together, including a 300m voyage exploring Lake Tanganyika. Stanley appears to have seen Livingstone as a father figure, and while recognising his faults, later presented him as a saintly character – this was, after all, Stanley's passport to fame.

Stanley's return to the coast, completing a 700m journey, took only 35 days. Gordon Bennett cabled him: **"You are now as famous as Livingstone, having discovered the discoverer."**

What followed were adulation, controversies and embarrassments. After being celebrated in France HMS landed at Dover to be met by drunken Welsh relatives (**"I never felt so ashamed ..."**) there were revelations and exposures of his impoverished Welsh background (The Rhyl Journal!) confrontations with relatives, accusations of fraud, and HMS (a nobody, with no family or academic credentials) was shunned by the Royal Geographical Society which had hoped to find DL itself. However, in 1872 **How I Found Livingstone** appeared - all 700 pages, followed by lecture tours of GB and USA, and the RGS belatedly honoured Stanley.

Livingstone died a year later and Stanley saw his own later expeditions as partly continuing DL's work.

The Trans Africa Expedition 1874-77 was financed by Belgium because no British support could be found. It was to establish boundaries for a new colony and establish river stations on the Congo (control of rubber supply was a Belgian motive). Stanley wanted to explore Lakes Victoria & Tanganyika and their relationship to the Nile, Lualaba & Congo rivers, and to make relief maps. He led roughly 230 people (men, women, children) at the start on the East Coast. Baggage included: barometers, chronometers, sextants, compasses, photographic equipment, mercury bottles. And a 24ft metal boat, carried in sections.



These details are typical of Stanley's expeditions. Deep, thick, sticky mud after rains ... dark equatorial forest, foot-wide paths through the savannah, burning sun ... low bush – dwarf acacia, mimosa, smelling gum trees, euphorbia **"so interwoven one with another than it sickens me almost to write of."** After days in some of this, navigating by compass, no food to be found and reduced rations, several men died of starvation. **"I must now wait until all my people are strengthened, refreshed and perfectly rested; I propose to deal very liberally with all, to repay them for their sufferings."** (12 Jan 1875)

After 720 miles in 103 days they reached Lake Victoria, having lost 62 men from desertion, disease, missing or being killed in fights. To map the lake (was there one huge lake or a complex of several?) Stanley made a 57 day circumnavigation in a 24ft boat with 10 companions. They lost sails and oars in conflict with a tribe, so spent 7 stormy days with only improvised paddles.

The country en route to Lake Tanganyika was coarse grasses that wound like knives ... **"tough reeds tall as bamboos, creepers of cable thickness" ... "and thorns like hooks of steel."** Mapping Lake Tanganyika itself took 51 more days; HMS was the first man to circumnavigate

it - c 2,000 miles. There were many skirmishes with inhabitants (often kill, or be killed). An agreement was negotiated with the most important Arab slave trader in Central Africa, known as Tippu Tip, for an armed escort force. Tip was hoping that Stanley would open up more potential slave trading routes for his business.



Lake Tanganyika

The way to the West coast was downriver on canoes, but rivers miles wide had very violent storms, when men and supplies were lost. Then there were the cataracts. For 200 miles, in which the river dropped 1000 metres. One run of 32 on the Congo took almost 5 months to pass through, sometimes by walking around them carrying everything, including the boats. These were so demanding and dangerous that travel **"through cannibal lands seems child's play. For instance ... a strip of water blown over by a hurricane, with every interval of 50 or 100 yards marked by wave towers ... mad clash of watery hills ... the thunder of an express train through a rock tunnel ... the river almost heaved bodily upward, as if a volcano had burst underneath it.."** When a canoe drifted into the main current **"it and its unfortunate people glided over the treacherous calm surface like an arrow to doom."** All drowned.

Eventually he gave up the river and they walked: they were starving (now living on nuts) and suffering scurvy, dysentery, ulcers and more; Stanley sent a letter ahead with four men. To any gentleman who speaks English at Emboma... **"We are now in a state of imminent starvation. ... of the greatest distress ... The supplies must arrive within two days or I may have a fearful time of it among the dying ... I beg you to believe me. ... You may not know me by name - I therefore add that I am the person who discovered David Livingstone in 1871."**

Supplies were eventually received – they were saved: **"I had to rush to my tent to hide my tears that would flow despite all my attempts at composure."**

Soon HMS was at the coast and met white men: **"The pale colour ... had something of an unaccountable ghastliness. I could not divest myself of the feeling that they must be sick ... Yet there was something very self-possessed about the carriage of these white men."**

Stanley took care of his remaining followers (over 130 had died, deserted or been killed) by persuading Bennett to finance a British gunboat to take them, around the Cape, back to Zanzibar. At 36 he had solved the greatest geographical questions about Africa, with scientific readings and measurements as bases for his maps. However, by using runners he had been able to send some newspaper despatches and stories of fights with Africans had provoked criticism and condemnation. Stanley was unfavourably compared with the 'saintly' Livingstone.