



Taff Ely

Sunday 5th March: Cwm Sychan and Cwm Ffrwd led by Tony Yule

The first time that I led this walk in December 2007 three of us sat in the car and drank coffee while the rain fell. It then stopped and we decided to walk the Cwm Sychan section. Then, as it still was not raining, we completed the full walk. Had a few more a year later but nowhere like the 24 who came out on this time.



On my last reconnoitre in February I also took the opportunity to write up the walk for Ramblers' Routes. On the day of the walk we found, again, that my suggested car park was full and thanks to Gareth for quickly finding and routing people to an alternative.

March

From a lovely February to the wettest March since 1981 and 5th wettest on record for Wales! Martyne's walk on March 11th nearly got cancelled due to snow!

It also followed us to Dorchester and gave us a very windy and muddy, weekend away. But the extreme's are always the memorable times, and Dorchester was fun filled, food filled and we even got a glimpse of the sea on our final walk of the weekend.

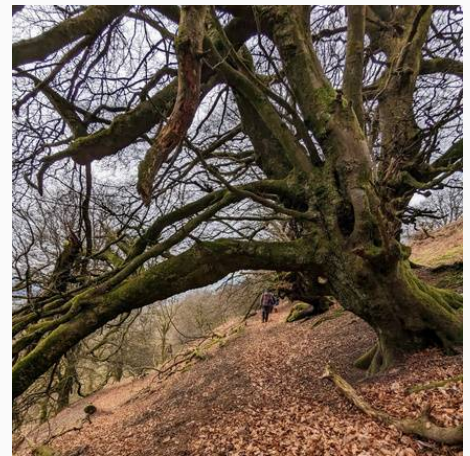
I apologise for the lateness of April's newsletter, a very busy end of March and then a family week away in sunny Portugal, meant I had too little time to complete it!

I will take this newsletter up to the 16th April and then do the next one at the end of May.





Huw responded to my request for people to check my Ramblers' Route directions and he led the walk for me. (That's the way to do it!) I was intending that different people would each check one of the eight legs but, as Huw was happy to continue, I left it to him. In addition he suggested a number of changes that I have made before submitting the route to Ramblers. It was also Hugh's birthday and he shared cakes on our lunch stop at the ruins of Graigddu, a former farmhouse/chapel/pub, what a perfect way to spend your birthday.



Saturday 11th March: Talygarn led by Martyne Hopkins

After much dithering by walk leader Martyne on whether, because of a snowy start it would actually take place, eleven of us set out from Pontyclun Community Hall car park. The walk took us through Pontyclun then Miskin, and over fields where a swathe of daffodils and the first pussy willows and early blackthorn reminded us it was supposed to be spring.

Then onwards to Talygarn Lake where we had a brief stop. Despite its picturesque setting it was too cold to linger, even the swans and other wildfowl looked chilly, so we soon headed back over the fields to Brynsadler and Pontyclun.



Sunday 12th March: L Lanhilleth led by Tony Lawrence

The main purpose of the walk was to visit The Guardian of the Valleys although it was kept as a surprise feature by the leader. The walk commenced with a steady ascent out of the town along rows of terraced houses to reach a footpath where the ascent continued through the steep sided Cwm Cyffin. One walker, a lady, missed her footing and rolled a short distance down a bank, fortunately without injury. (You can't predict everything on Risk Assessments.) Leaving the cwm, we crossed a field then followed a slightly less steep track to reach a mountain road via an avenue of beech trees.



Along the mountain road and high above the valley we stopped briefly for a coffee break. A chill wind sent us on our way along the road to join a moorland track over Mynydd Llanhilleth. After crossing the moorland, we reached a stile giving access to a field where we began the long descent to Six Bells via a beech woodland and later a narrow path. Slippery stones and snow on the path resulted in a number of falls, fortunately without injury although I suspect a few bruises appeared later.



At the valley bottom we made our way to the site of the former Six Bells colliery, now landscaped. A new school occupies part of the site and beyond, a large area designated as a nature reserve.

Here stands the impressive Guardian. The 20 metre high statue commemorates the loss of 45 miners in an underground explosion in June 1960. A nearby commemorative plaque has a poignant message by the Welsh poet, Gillian Clarke.



Our lunch stop near the Guardian was followed by a quite steep climb out of the valley to the hamlet of St Illtyud, Llanhilledd. We then followed footpaths and fields for two kilometers to join a descent alongside Cwm Cnyw back to Llanhilleth. The day ended with refreshments at the bright, new and friendly Llanhilleth Rugby Club.

Sunday 19th March: Craig y Nos and Cribarth led by Andy & Hayley

Unfortunately the blue skies in the Rhondda didn't stretch to the Swansea Valley but that and Mother's Day didn't put off 21 ramblers joining us for the 2 part walk at Craig y Nos Country Park.

Andrew took the lead and I was back marker, meaning I didn't hear the moans and groans about the steep incline that took us up to the summit of Cribarth. Everyone agreed it was well worth the views from the trig point, where we stopped for coffee.



The views down the valley continued on our descent, then we tracked back beneath Cribarth, with beautiful gnarly trees stretching over our path.

I don't know who spotted who first and if all were equally surprised lol but in all our recce's we hadn't spotted the alpacas before

We had seen the beautiful shepherds huts though at Cae Glas Camping, but with no one in occupancy we all enjoyed a good look around.

We then crossed over the River Tawe and back to Craig y Nos car park for our lunch stop.



We had advertised this as a two part walk, so it was no surprise that we dropped to 11 walkers for the second part of our walk. This time following the river for a short while, then a little road walking past the entrance of the National Showcaves Centre for Wales, then turning off right and following a farm road to our second incline of the day.

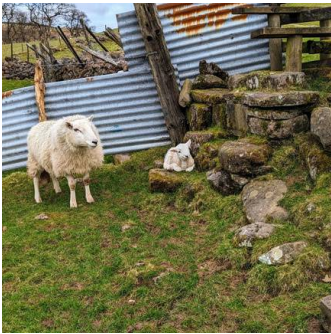


RAMBLERS

Taff Ely

The path took us through the farmyard with some very interesting chicken variety's, a few goats and a gorgeous new born lamb and her mum relaxing calmly as we passed through the gate.

As promised the second climb was nearly as arduous as the first but definitely shorter.



On level ground we passed by the disused railway station that had been used by visitors to Adelina Patti's performances at Craig y Nos Castle in the early 1900's.

It was downhill all the way from there, reaching the bridge before the car park, the weary looking wooden sculpture of a man was pointed out to me, I think portraying how we all were feeling after our 9.5 mile ramble around the beautiful hills of the park.

The Ancient Briton Hotels real ale selection, brought a smile to many who joined us for a refreshment before travelling home.

Saturday 25th March: Pencoed led by Rob Young

Another great Saturday walk, 11 turned out for Rob's 4 mile leisurely walk around Pencoed then up to Llanilid Church, afterwards to a local cafe for a fabulous coffee and a bite to eat and a good old chat.



Sunday 26th March: Ewenny and Spring Flower walk led by Tony Lawrence



The walk started at St Brides Major on grassland just outside the village. After leaving the village the route skirted the southern edge of Old Castle Down before joining a narrow path leading down to the northern end of Cwm Alun. After passing under a railway arch, we looked for a series of stepping stones that we were to use crossing the Afon Alun. However, the previous night's heavy rain had swollen the stream and the stepping stones were under the fast-flowing water making a crossing impossible.

So, plan B. We walked south through Cwm Alun for 800 meters, admiring the wild daffodils. We followed the winding river for 800 meters then crossed over at a clapper bridge.

The route then followed roads and footpaths across fields to the village of Corntown. Turning left we walked west through the village then joined minor roads which circled round to Ewenny Priory. Here we stopped for lunch in the church grounds. Some members visited the church interior. A left-over feature from the Middle Ages is the hole in the wall that allowed lepers to see inside the church and the priest conducting a service. The unfortunate lepers were not allowed inside.

Lunch over we returned to Corntown, following a footpath across fields. We then headed east through the village to the village pool on the roadside. The pool, it is thought, was once a site for baptism.



The route then headed generally south across fields and roads to cross again the clapper bridge over the Afon Alun. We returned to St Brides Major using an alternative route to that followed on the outward journey.

As a pleasant coda to the day, we enjoyed refreshments while sitting in the sun at The Three Golden Cups, Southerndown.



Dorset Weekend Away 31st March - 2nd April, report by Derek Willis.

Normally Dorset is one of the driest counties in England but this weekend it didn't live up to this reputation at all! Indeed the forbearance and goodwill of the members was sorely tested by the tempestuous start to the trip on Friday. Most of the 36 members of the group were in 2 minibuses, ably driven by Gareth Bissett and Andy Fellowes, and those of us in the second one were forced to endure a long delay on the M4 so that we were about 30 minutes behind everyone else. We finally caught up with the others at Shaftesbury for a later than intended lunch. We all went to Win Green, the highest point on Cranborne Chase, for a 6 mile walk, just as the storm arrived. Struggling to put on waterproofs was a good indication of the challenging weather conditions. Despite this we descended from Win Green off the high ground into the quiet of the valley and onto the pretty hamlet Tollard Royal, with its interesting church and King John House. Then a return uphill through along a track between trees until we again were in the open and the strength of the wind trying to push backwards. With this introduction the rest of the weekend was plain sailing!



We stayed in the county town of Dorset, Dorchester, most of us in the comfortable Wessex Royal Hotel, and the majority enjoying two sociable meals together on Friday and Saturday evenings. On Saturday the 6 and 8.5 mile walks were variants of a circular route from the very attractive village Cerne Abbas, up Giant Hill, along the ridgeway and down into Minterne Magna. Although there were light showers the reasonable visibility offered good views of the valleys and countryside around. Returning past the tiny hamlet Upcerne allowed us glimpses of beautiful old houses before returning to Cerne Abbas via the viewing point for the impressive if provocative Cerne Abbas Giant, and the chance to relax for a drink and then back to Dorchester. The jolly atmosphere in Georgie Porgie Pie and Burger was probably a combination of relief at an improvement in weather and some alcohol!





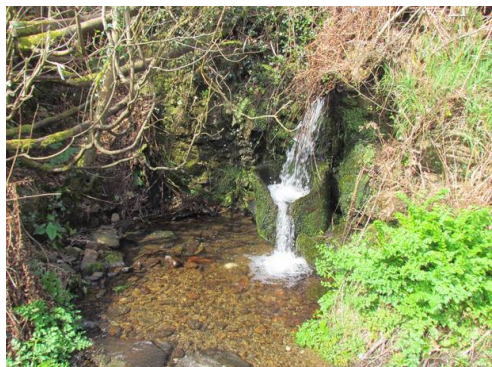
On Sunday morning it wasn't raining! We went to the nearby Maiden Castle hillfort and followed a 5 mile circular route past the hillfort entrance southward to the South Dorset Ridgeway. The coffee break allowed views down to Weymouth and Portland. Passing several farms we returned to Maiden Castle and a quick lunch before a brief stop in Dorchester and a very welcome presentation to our excellent drivers Andy and Gareth, and a nice surprise for me too. Clearly, it takes more than inclement weather to dampen our spirits and we look forward to our next adventure!



I think you can tell, we all had a very enjoyable weekend, I just want to reiterate our thanks to Derek, who recce'd all 3 fantastic walks in his own time, giving consideration to all levels of walkers and despite the weather, was leading from the front for the whole of the weekend.

Saturday 8th April: Rhiwsaeson led by Geraldine Rogers

Geraldine led 8 walkers on a 4 mile leisurely walk around Rhiwsaeson, with 1 new walker John who we hope to see again soon.



Sunday 9th April: Parc Cwm Darran led by Tony Lawrence

From the Visitor Centre the route headed south east along the lake edge before turning away from the lake and heading uphill in a northerly direction to a junction of paths. That is the official version.

More correctly, there were a few diversional errors before the correct route was followed. Just shows value of reconnoiters.

Finally on track, the route climbed steadily, circling around a conifer plantation on a broad track to a kissing gate. Passing through the gate we were in open countryside following a path that contoured around the hill, affording splendid views of the Darren Valley below.



A kilometer along the path and after a brief stop for refreshments the walk continued along the hillside but then climbed steadily through Beech woodland. The trees were devoid of leaf in early April but a thick carpet of last years bounty gave an idea of what is to come.

Emerging from the woods we were again in open country and made our way to a track heading south, part of the Rhymney Valley Ridgeway Footpath.

Along the path stands the memorial stone of Tergernacus and the Celtic cross at the ruins of Capel y Brithdir. (I suggest a Google search).

We followed the footpath for two kilometers across fields and a long descent to the southern end of Parc Cwm Darren and our lunch stop. (Along the way Colin tried to help an injured lamb find its mother. Hope Colin's efforts were not in vain).



Lunch over, the walk continued along the valley bottom but soon after the party separated when the appointed leader chickened out. Fortunately, Tony Yule and Huw Evans stepped in and led the majority of the party from Deri across the hills, eventually crossing Gelligaer Common and returning to the park. So, a big thank you to those gentlemen.

The smaller party led by T L, who was on his thousandth paper hanky, walked back to the Visitor Centre.

Post Script.

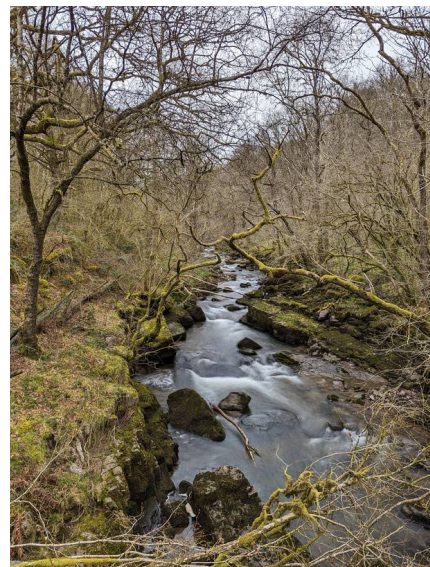
Along the route attached to posts, a compass logo could be seen with the accompanying words, Escape to..... This refers to an excellent series of published walks issued by Caerphilly County Council and still available on line if not in hard copy. In this particular case, Escape to...Parc Cwm Darren.

Sunday 16th April: Ystradfellte led by Michelle Mansell.

22 walkers and two dogs set off from Cwm Porth car park (near Ystradfellte). We began with an easy stroll to Sgwd Clun Gwyn but only Tony Yule ventured down the steps (and back up again) to get closer to the waterfall which was in full flow after all the recent rain. The walk was based on one in a book entitled "Walking on the Brecon Beacons" by Andrew Davies and David Whittaker. Their description of the walk stated that the total ascent was "negligible". After Sgwd Clun Gwyn, we did some of the negligible ascent up to the road between Pontneddfechan and Ystradfellte before heading towards Pont Melin Fach, walking through fields with many spring lambs.



We then followed the muddy, undulating path along the Nedd Fechan, for which I was very glad I had my pole, and stopped for coffee at a pleasant grassy spot overlooking some small waterfalls. We then continued along the undulating path before doing some more of the negligible ascent up through Coed y Rhaidr. When we reached the wide forestry track at the end of the ascent, due to the felling of many trees, we enjoyed some good views, although they would have been much better if the weather hadn't been overcast and misty in the distance. After a little while, we reached Sarn Helen (an old Roman road) and found a suitable spot to enjoy our lunch.



We then had a short descent to re-cross the Nedd Fechan before some more negligible ascent up to the limestone pavement of Carnau Gwynion. The views of Fan Nedd and Fan Llia should have been spectacular but, due to the mist, they were not visible but we walked past several large shake holes before heading back to Cwm Porth. Luckily, despite the threat of the overhead clouds, we had no rain during the walk.



SOCIAL

We had a great turn out and lots of fun at our Rhondda Bowl 10 Pin Bowling social event, in early March.

We had strikes, misses, zero scores, competitive banter, food, drink and plenty of laughs.

To top it off, Keith put all the youngsters in there place and won it in style.



Our next social event is due to be a nature walk and talk on Llantrisant Common in June, I have yet to confirm dates, so they will be emailed out asap.

Thursday Evening Walks

Last years evening walks proved very popular but as yet Tony L has not had many responses to his request for walks.

Can you think of a 4/5 mile walk you could lead on a lovely summers evening? If so get in touch with Tony at anthonyplawrence@yahoo.co.uk

April/May Walks

Saturday 22nd April

Coed Ely led by Carolyn Smith 4m L

Sunday 23rd April

Gilwern and Cwm Clydach led by Tony Yule 8m M

Sunday 30th April

Baglan led by Gareth Bissett 8.5m, optional 5.5m M

Saturday 6th May

Heol-y-Sarn led by Tony Lawrence 4.5m L

Sunday 7th May

Caerwent led by Derek Willis 8.5m M

Saturday 13th May

AREA WALKS FROM PENARTH DETAILS TBA

Sunday 14th May

The Blorange led by Michelle Mansell 8m M

Saturday 20th May

Coach trip to Avebury details TBA

Sunday 21st May

NO WALK TODAY

Sunday 28th May

Talgarth and Castell Dinas led by Tony Lawrence 10m M