

The view

Issue No. 33

Winter 2008/09

Photo: Llwyn Onn Reservoir, Brecon Beacons by Mike Krokos

Longtown Mountain Rescue Team Step in to Help Out On Three Peaks Trial

A Walk Designed to Test Endurance & Map Reading Skills

The South Wales Three Peaks Trial Challenge Walk

Saturday, 28th March 2009

Route	Mountains	Ascent	Distance
*Platinum	Bal Mawr; Pen Cerrig Galtch; Sugar Loaf	5000' (1525m)	17 Miles
Gold	Bloreng; Sugar Loaf; Skirrid Fawr	5000' (1525m)	20 Miles
Silver	Bloreng; Sugar Loaf	4000' (1220m)	15 Miles
Bronze	Sugar Loaf	2000' (610m)	10 Miles

ORGANISED BY:
CARDIFF OUTDOORGROUP
www.cardiffoutdoorgroup.org.uk/3pt/3pt.htm
email:3pt@cardiffoutdoorgroup.org.uk

CONTACT:
3PT 2009,
122 Stow Hill,
Newport,
Gwent, NP20 4GA
☎ (01633) 257632

* Although the Platinum Route is shorter than the Gold, the ascents are steeper and navigation more challenging, hence the higher grading.




Due to recurring problem with a shortage of COG volunteers to help out on the COG big fundraiser, the Three Peaks Trial Challenge Walk, Longtown Mountain Rescue Team have kindly offered to help out on the Check-points. *Full Story Back Page.*

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Newsletter of



A message from your Madam

Well here we are again, Heading towards spring. And after such a long, drab winter I am glad to see those tinny signs of the better weather to come. As spring approaches and our March/April program whizzes through your letter box, you can be assured of a wide variety of activities to see you into the months ahead. Throughout spring and early summer we have some very interesting trips away on offer starting with our Annual Easter Break. This year, 'For your pleasure and delight', Tony R, will be organizing a long weekend to Burley, in the New Forest. As well as giving us the opportunity to see The New Forest ponies and to walk in some of England's most beautiful woodlands, Tony is also planning to include a coastal walk in the weekend's activities. (Please Tony, if we are that near to the coast, can we go to Hurst Castle?)



Also, on offer for the early spring bank holiday weekend, I have booked twelve places at The Pantyrathro Inn Backpackers Hostel. This independent establishment offers good facilities and is located on the Towy Estuary. (Why not Google it.)

I am rather fond of this area and have been on the lookout for group accommodation in the vicinity for several years. So, you can imagine how delighted I was when Julian emailed me details of Pantyrathro. (Good old Julian). Along with its sweeping coastal views and the magnificent medieval Castle at Llansteffan, the area adjacent to the Towy Estuary is synonymous with Dylan Thomas and his play for voices, 'Under Milk Wood'. So, during the weekend, I am planning a cultural walk which will take in the haunts of our great Welsh Wordsmith.

For our late spring bank holiday break, Enid is planning a trip across The Menai Strait to Anglesey. ('Ynys-Mon' , Home of the Druids). While on Anglesey, the group will have plenty of opportunity to walk the recently completed coastal path. And hopefully, a visit to Beaumaris Castle. During our stay, we may also come across that famous village boasting the longest place name in Britain,

Llanfairpwllgwyngllgogerychwyrndwllantysiliogogoch.

I will leave the pronunciation to Enid as I am certain that, by the time my dear friend had instructed me on how to get my English tongue around this unpronounceable place name, (That was actually made up as a tourist gimmick in the nineteenth century.) she would be too exasperated to continue leading walks.

Well there we go, yet another wonderful season ahead for all you Coggers. And, here I would like to thank everyone who gives their time so freely to make our Group the success it undoubtedly is, and to mention the constant need for more people to come forward with walks and events.

Cheers to you all,

Sian.

CHALLENGE WALKS



Sat Feb 7th - Lord Crawshaw Memorial Walk - 25, 15, 10 miles - From Llanwrtyd Wells Square, ver waymarked routes thru mountains, streams, lakes & forests. Send SAE to: Gordon Green, Elenedd, Victoria Road, Llanwrtyd Wells, Powys. LD5 4SU, Tel. 01591 610270.

Website-<http://llanwrtyd-wells.powys.org.uk/eventcrawshaw.htm>

Sat 28th Feb—Sun 8th March—Crickhowell Walking Festival—42 Walks Over 9 Days—Core Walks Programme: 6 - 16 year olds Programme; Geocaching; Themed easy walks; Welsh learners walk; Poetry walk; Artists walk; Self led walks; Accessible walks; Town Treasure Hunt; Festival Market; St David's Night Dance Further details from: Crickhowell Resource and Information Centre (CRiC) is located at: Beaufort Street, Crickhowell. NP8 1BN and website <http://www.crickhowellfestival.com/2009/site/>

Sat 4th April—Radnor Ramble—25 or 17ml in 10.5hrs from Knighton Circular scenic route through border hill country. Send SAE. Organised by & chqs payable to LDWA Mid-Wales. Contact Mike Gammon, Jacob's Cottage, Rhos-y-Meirch, Knighton, Powys LD7 1PE. Tel: 01547 528723 (evenings only). Email: matt@panteg94.freerve.co.uk

Sat 4th April—Black Mountains Roundabout—25ml from Crickhowell with 6,790ft of ascent on the scenic Black Mountains, passing through Llanbedr then ascent in to Black Mountains— Waun Fach (highest point in Black Mtns), Mynydd Troed, followed by Mynydd Llangorse, Pen-Allt-Mawr and Pen-Cerrig-Calch. Organised since 1982 by Newport Outdoor Group (YHA) & Brecon Mountain Rescue Team. Proceeds have raised over £27,000 for the MRT. Entry form on website or with SAE to. Contact Black Mountains Roundabout 2009, 122 Stow Hill, NEWPORT NP20 4GA. Tel: 01633 257632. Email: martynrogers@supanet.com Web site: <http://www.walk.to/nogs>

See <http://www.glamorganwalks.com> for other walks.



**26th October:
Cowbridge**



Tony putting the cow in the right direction!

Not all walks end like this!



**16th November:
Llanwonno**



30th November: Sgwd Yr Eira & Penderyn Whisky Distillery Tour



**7th December:
Garth Mountain
& Xmas Meal**



**29th Nov.:
Reservoirs &
Pen y Fan**

Kanchenjunga With A Brolly by *Richard Thompson*



At ten to eight every evening, some two hours after darkness has fallen on the nearby forested hills of Kanchenjunga National Park, the most dramatic moment in Yuksom's daily village life occurs. A short, lean, army man promenades down the stony track that makes for the village's high street. Baton swinging counterpoint to the brittle movement of his legs, a black beret cocked upon his head (and an equally black moustache cocked beneath his nose), he stops at the village's heart, raises a whistle to his lips, and sunders the night with a series of long, piercing blasts...

So Yuksom's curfew begins.

That's not to say that everyone must flee back to their homes or guesthouses, but if you want to carry on eating and drinking then you must do so behind closed doors. Few do continue even so. Yuksom is not the place for a roaring night life. In fact, my artist friend Michael and I couldn't even last till curfew one night, having just returned from a nine day trek up the valley to the foot of Kanchenjunga,

the third highest peak in the world.

Yuksom and Kanchenjunga lie in the tiny, semi-autonomous, Indian province of Sikkim: a slither of mountainous country sandwiched between Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan. It doesn't feel like India at all. The principal language is Nepali and the principal religion Buddhism. Moreover most Sikkimese would probably trace their ancestry back to Nepal or Tibet rather than India. In many ways it feels much more like an extension of Nepal.

But that's not to say my experience in Sikkim were a carbon copy of my recent experiences in Nepal. True, there were the familiar terraced slopes and colourful gompas (temples). The familiar scores of women levelling the Himalayas one shard at a time: crouched by roadsides, shattering rocks into gravel for a few rupees a day. The familiar men and women staggering out of forested hills with firewood or green fodder sprouting from their backs (Birnam wood come to Dunsinane, as Michael remarked). But, in many respects, Sikkim seemed a world apart from Nepal.

The weather, for instance. There was no end of beautiful blue skies in Nepal but, contrary to all my expectations, the weather in Sikkim proved extremely fickle. Whilst it was often sunny first thing in the morning, almost invariably by late afternoon the cloud would have rolled in, obscuring everything beyond twenty yards. Worse still, it had a habit of raining: in what I thought was the dry season too! So, at the earliest opportunity, I bought a huge tartan-esque umbrella under which I could cower. It proved invaluable on my ascent to 4500m. I really don't know how Tensing Norgay managed without one.

It perhaps says a great deal too that the major (possibly the only) political party in Sikkim (the Sikkim Democratic Front) is represented on posters by a multi-coloured umbrella. Moreover it seems that rain is far from the only thing that the SDF promises to keep off you. One local man ruefully suggested his life wouldn't be worth living if he voted for anyone else!

Unlike Nepal (which was never occupied), the legacy of the British empire seems much in evidence too, judging by the number of gratuitous signs written in English. Never mind that the bulk of the populace cannot speak English, let alone read it. Even health information boards -- designed to dispel long-held superstitions regarding leprosy or tuberculosis, for instance -- are sometimes only presented in English. This seems an odd state of affairs; though one not at all unusual in many formerly-occupied, developing countries around the world. I sometimes think that English is used in the same manner as Latin must have been in Europe in Mediaeval times: as a means of keeping "the rabble" in their place.

Still, I shouldn't complain. Most of the English seemed to be reserved for hackneyed aphorisms on environmental or road safety matters. They proved so entertaining I became an avid collector. Their scope was tremendous, ranging from lame puns ("Reach home in peace, not in pieces" and "It is not a rally, enjoy the valley"), to the ambiguous ("Be gentle on my curves" and "Enjoy nature visually, not physically") to the downright abstruse ("I am warmth of the earth on a cold dark night").

Another major (and frustrating) difference was the fact that restrictions (and bureaucracy) are much more onerous in Sikkim. To go trekking in one of the state's national parks one is required to take a guide. Unfortunately, with the exception of singing and whistling, for which he displayed a rare, or at least an enduring talent, our guide proved to be thoroughly inept. Of course he was a friend of a brother of Tensing Norgay, but I'm not sure that can be considered to be qualification enough. Not least because everyone in Sikkim claims to be a friend of a brother of Tensing Norgay. Still, we were fairly successful in avoiding our guide on the trail; helped by the fact that a young Russian couple who liked to walk fast joined our group, so he had to divide his attention. We, on the other hand, walked slow, dead slow and stop. It was an incredibly gentle nine day trek given the altitude we attained; helped in no small part by the fact that all our luggage was riding on dzos (a cross between a cow and a yak). (Continued on Page 5)

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Kanchenjunga With A Brolly *By Richard Thompson*

B(Continued from Page 4) ut the most exciting (and beautiful) difference between Nepal and Sikkim is the enduring abundance of forest cover. In Nepal the forest cover is scant even within the Annapurna Conservation Area, with almost all suitable land given over to terracing. But in Sikkim forest is abundant even outside protected areas, especially the oak-chestnut (*Quercus*, *Lithocarpus* and *Castanopsis*) and oak-rhododendron forests, despite the fact that they lie on very fertile soils.

Although the rhododendrons at higher altitudes were still only teasing with their fat flowering buds, below 3000m the display seemed to be in full swing, with pinks, reds and whites, together with the characteristic, furry brown muzzles of magnolia disgorging their great white blooms. Orchids too were coming out, though most, high in the branches of the moss-clad trees, needed binoculars to pick them out. One exception was a stunning white orchid with a purple throat (*Pleione humilis*): more than fifty blooms of which Michael found stretching all the way up the mossy trunk of an oak.



Above 3000m it was still very much winter, but the silver fir-hemlock forest was stunning all the same. The amount of moss and epiphytic rhododendrons, blueberries, cotoneasters etc. clinging to the trunks and warped, shattered branches was amazing; and the pink trunks of the rhododendrons and red trunks of the paper birch were beautiful against the snow. One flower which was out was a relative of the paper shrub (*Daphne bhoulua var glacialis*), with masses of fragrant pink blooms sprawling over its bare branches.

Beyond the forest was dwarf rhododendron-juniper scrub and, higher still, grassland with tantalising hints of how beautiful the spring would be, judging by the numerous dead and dried flowers and flowering spikes I came across.

Sightings of mammals were far and few between, though the number of cat, fox, marten and deer tracks in the snow showed there were plenty about. We did, however, catch sight of a group of three goral (an elusive goat-antelope) skipping about on boulders in the bottom of a deep ravine of oak and chestnut.

But amongst the animals it was the birds that stole the show. Each altitudinal zone seemed to have its own colourful mascot. In the chestnut-oak forests the brilliant red, yellow and iridescent purple of Mrs Gould's sunbird seemed ubiquitous. In the silver fir forests the blood pheasant held sway, with bright red legs and white and slate-blue plumage splashed in kind. Most spectacular of all though was perhaps the Himalayan monal: a large pheasant living above the tree line; the male of which sports metallic green, red, purple and blue; including a bold green crest, like the feathers on the cap of a Highland piper.



But there was one bird to be seen much higher still. On the morning we began our descent back into the silver fir forests, I looked back up the valley towards Kanchenjunga. High above, edging slowly towards the white peaks, were two large columns of geese. As they reached the head of the valley, they began to circle, gaining height for the final push over into Tibet and the Chinese and Siberian marshes beyond. An extraordinary moment: our journey seemed as nothing next to theirs.



Handy Hint From 'Trail' Magazine

HOW TO TAKE A BEARING

1 Place your compass baseplate on the map so the edge, or one of the straight black lines close to the edge, bridges where you are with where you want to be.

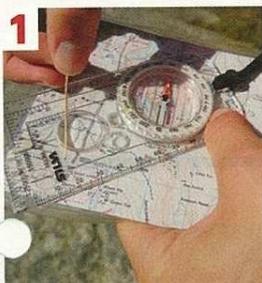
2 Keep the compass flat on the map, and twist the bezel so that the lines inside it match up with the map's vertical gridlines. **3** Add three degrees to your

bearing to compensate for magnetic variation. (See 'Magnetic variation' right to remember how it works.) **4** Turn until the red (north)

compass arrow sits in the middle of the wide red arrow in the bezel. Walk in the direction of the black arrow on the compass baseplate.

Magnetic variation

Confused as to whether to add or subtract three degrees? Grid is map, mag is landscape. So learn: "From grid to mag, add: from mag to grid, get rid."



Cycling the L'Etape du Tour (A Section of the Tour de France) *by David Miller*

In November 2007, while browsing through the sports magazines in my local newsagents, a headline in Cycling Weekly caught my eye – L'Etape du Tour 2008. I immediately thought ahead, and decided that this would be a good idea for a challenge to celebrate reaching the age of 50 in June 2008.

The event has taken place each year since 1991, and offers the opportunity for amateur cyclists to ride the route of one of the mountain stages of that year's Tour de France. This year, the chosen stage covered a distance of 169 km in the Pyrenees, from Pau to Hautacam, and included an ascent of the famous Col du Tourmalet, 2,115 metres high. In addition to the cycling challenge, I was keen to visit south-west France again, having spent 6 months as a student in Bordeaux in 1980.

So in January 2008 I booked the trip and started my training programme. The hills of South Wales provide excellent opportunities to practice climbing, but after struggling to get to the top of Caerphilly mountain one morning in February, I feared that the Col du Tourmalet might be too much for me. However, after gradually increasing the length of my weekend rides, and cycling to work every day, my fitness improved.

In May, the COG weekend in Alfriston offered me the opportunity to cycle in a different area, and I completed a 100km ride around Sussex, including the climb of Ditchling Beacon near the end.

In June, three weeks before the Etape, I took part in a local Sportive cycling event called the Dragon Ride. This covered a distance of 120 km, starting from Pencoed, and included two climbs to the top of the Bwlch, above the Rhondda valley near Treorchy.

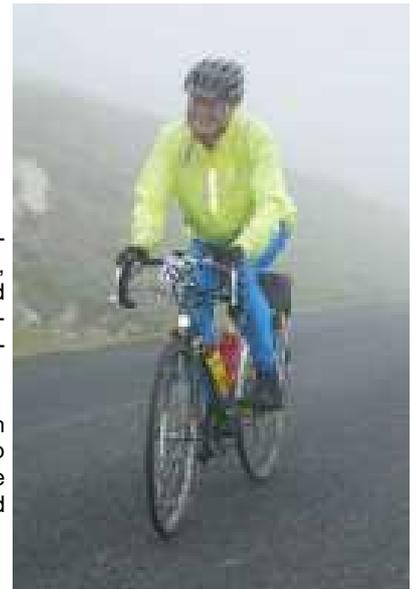
July arrived, and I left for France, confident that I had prepared myself as well as I could for the challenge ahead. I had done all my training on a Dawes Galaxy touring bicycle which I have owned for more than ten years. I did think about buying a racing bicycle for the event, but in the end decided to stick with the one I felt comfortable with. When I arrived in London to join up with the organised trip which I had booked, some of the other cyclists expressed surprise at my choice of bicycle for the event. The other members of the group had smart lightweight racing cycles, and seemed much more experienced than me. One man boasted that he had finished in the top 100 last year, and had beaten the former Tour de France winner, Greg Lemond. I wasn't daunted by this – the event has over 8,000 participants and is not a race. For me, the challenge of completing the course within the time limit of 10 hours was quite enough.

We stayed at Bagnères de Bigorre, an attractive spa town in the foothills of the Pyrenees. This was on the route of the Etape, so we took the opportunity to do a gentle ride along part of the route on the morning before the event. In the afternoon, we travelled to Pau for the registration. Amazingly, I met Lou Lusardi, the cycling officer for Cardiff County Council, and the organiser of the Dragon Ride event mentioned earlier.

On the morning of the Etape, we got up at 4.30, and travelled to the start in Pau by coach. One of my fears before the event was how I would cope with cycling in the high temperatures expected in the south of France in July. I needn't have worried. The day was cool, cloudy and wet, like south Wales in April. This proved to be a blessing in disguise. It didn't really matter that we couldn't see much of the scenery, we just had to get on with the task in hand, and take care not to fall down on the wet slippery roads. The official start time for the ride was 7.00, but it obviously was not possible for all of the 8,000 riders to start at once. We had to line up in groups of 1,000, and since my number was 7235, I was one of the last to start. I finally crossed the start line just after 7.30. This was a great moment, for one day, I could pretend to be taking part in the Tour de France, and to be with so many other people all sharing the same goal was a great feeling. Appropriately, I have a near-namesake (David Millar) who is a professional cyclist, and took part again in the Tour de France this year. Like the real Tour, the roads were closed to cars, and there were a lot of spectators along the way to cheer us on.

The first 80 km, nearly half the total distance, were relatively flat. I tried my best to stay with a group of riders, to conserve as much energy as possible for the climbs ahead. After passing through Bagnères de Bigorre, and resisting the temptation to stop and go back to our hotel, we began the long climb to the top of the col du Tourmalet, a height of 2,115 metres. This is one of the most famous climbs in the Tour, having been part of the route 74 times so far. The gradient did not seem particularly steep, but the length of the climb (23 km), was much further than anything I had attempted in south Wales. The reward for reaching the top was not a view of the mountain scenery, but of a statue of a naked man on a bicycle! After a short stop, we embarked on the long descent towards the town of Luz St. Sauveur, and through the magnificent Gorge de Luz. The weather had cleared up by now, and even though I had to maintain concentration while descending, I couldn't fail to appreciate the stunning beauty of this gorge.

At 3.30 in the afternoon, there were just 14 km to go to the finish, but there was still the climb to the top of the Hautacam (1520 metres). Just before the start of the climb, I followed a group of riders, but could not understand why they were all stopping. I then realised that these were the cyclists who had already reached the top of the Hautacam and had come back down again! Fortunately my knowledge of French enabled me to ask a policeman the way to the top, and he pointed me in the right direction. The Hautacam has only been used 3 times before in the Tour de France, most recently in 2000, when Lance Armstrong sealed the second of his seven wins. The first part of the climb was steep, but after stopping to collect a drink from one of the spectators on the roadside (my water bottles were empty by now), the gradient became more gradual. With 2 km to go, I knew I was going to make it. There weren't many other cyclists there when I got to the top, at 6.40 pm, 10 hours and 10 minutes after I had crossed the start line. All that was left was



Weekends Away



**Easter BH—Burley,
New Forest 10th to 13th April**

Easter in the New Forest at Burley YH (2★ hostel, 36 beds) stands in extensive grounds with immediate access to the New Forest. Possible activities include woodland and seaside walks, plus visits to the Isle of Wight and Beaulieu House and gardens, including the National Motor Museum. The hostel facilities include a self catering kitchen, TV lounge and garden. It's the ideal base for a get-away-from-it-all break close to the seaside. Cost of accommodation for 3 nights £53.85 per/head. For further details and to book, please contact Tony R on 2074 7743. Closing date for bookings 10th February.



**Early May BH—Pantyrathro Independent Hostel,
Llansteffan 1st to 4th May**

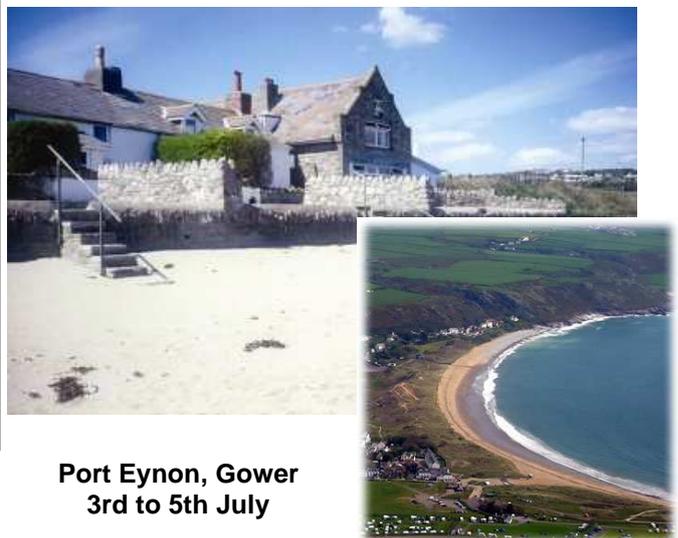
It is still. A moonless night in the small town of Milk Wood. Starless and Bible Black.

Come along and explore this area which is synonyms with our great Welsh Wordsmith, Dylan Thomas. During this three night brake we will explore the area around Laugharne and Llansteffan, taking in the home that Dylan Thomas shaird with his family , as well as the boat house where he wrote the renowned play for voices , Under Milk Wood. We will also take in The Towy Estuary and the magnificent castle at Llansteffan. I am also planning a visit to Pembrey Country Park on our way home. I have booked 6 male and 6 female beds for the 1st to the 4th May at a cost of £40.50 for 3 nights. All money to be in by the beginning of May. I have have already had a tremendous response to this Bank Holiday Weekend and places are going fast. So, if you wish to come along. "Or just make enquiarys". Give me a Ring on 01446 719697 or email me at shannycelt@hotmail.com.



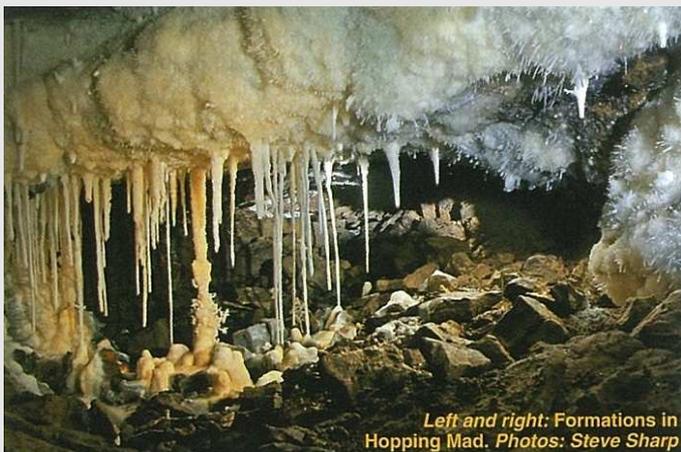
**Whitsun BH—Anglesey,
22nd to 25th May**

This dedicated outdoor activity centre (3★ hostel, 82 beds) on Anglesey's west coast offers a choice of accommodation . Set in 15 acres of grounds close to stunning Trearddur Bay it takes full advantage of this spectacular stretch of coastline. The hostel can organise rock climbing, sea kayaking, cycling, sea fishing, wind or kite surfing, sailing, diving or even horse riding (book directly with the hostel if you want to do these). The COG plan for the weekend is to complete some circular walks along the coastal path and also experience some of the culture on the island. It's a great spot for a short break. The hostel facilities include a self catering kitchen, TV lounge and garden. Cost £16 pppn, - £48 for 3 nights. If would be a big help to get an idea of numbers as soon as possible. If you are interested can you please contact me on 029 2065 5253 or email enid.lewis@ntlworld.com.



**Port Eynon, Gower
3rd to 5th July**

Once a lifeboat station, YHA Port Eynon (3★ hostel, 28 beds) is in a beautiful position on Gower with an award-winning beach on its doorstep. The bay is also extremely popular for all watersports and there is storage for surfboards, canoes and other bulky equipment at the property. With the Gower Coastal Path and cycle trails crossing this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its 34 miles of heritage coast, YHA Port Eynon is an outdoor enthusiast's dream. The hostel facilities include a self catering kitchen, lounge, BBQ area and garden. Also the hostel is to undergo an extensive refurbishment between March and May this year so you'll be amongst the first to enjoy the revamp. Cost £15.95 pppn. Further details from , tel.

Caving News

Left and right: Formations in Hopping Mad. Photos: Steve Sharp

In May the Darren Cilau diggers based at Hard Rock Café revisited a former Reading UCC dig which had not been touched since the early 1990s. Because it draughted well and was heading in an interesting direction – north from Frag Street – a subsequent digging trip was organized in late August. After a solid day's digging, Adrian Fawcwt, Andy Snook and Andy Watson broke through to a T-junction and 30m of passage between 1m and 1.5m high and 1.5m wide; it was named Frog Street (we already had Frag Street and Frig Street, so why not?).

On 11 August the team was augmented by 6 other cavers. Two further breakthroughs increased the length of Frog Street by a further 55m, but this time we were stopped by pristine formations that stretched across the width of the passage – they were named Hopping Mad (which tied nicely into the theme because we were so frustrated to find stunning formations in the way again!) Since any further progress would involve serious damage to the formations or require some very careful excavation, we decided to discuss our options back at camp.

The group took the decision that the diggers should open an excavation route underneath the formations; the prospects of discovering significant passage beyond were good and, with the way on effectively open beyond Hopping Mad and tantalizingly close to the projected continuation of some big, fossil passages including Eastern Flyover and Half Mile Passage, we decided to move quickly.

The next weekend Andy Heath and Mandy and Matt Voysey carried in the makings of a barrier to protect the formations (such need is the perpetual curse of Darren diggers!) while we prepared the dig. The following Friday afternoon Charles Bailey and Mark 'Gonzo' Lumley set up a protective screen that Heath Robinson would have been proud of, using tent material, poles, guy ropes, wire and bulldog clips.

After a few hours digging with the arrival of Andy Watson, a ramp was graded to take us down safely to floor level of the continuation. Everything was now set for the big push and mercifully, the formations were still pristine. The trio headed back to the Hard Rock to find Adrian and Andy Snook manning the cocktail bar with appropriate enthusiasm.

The following morning the full team painstakingly engineered a 30m route along a low 2m to 3m wide passage – Helibeds – among good, extremely vulnerable formations. Then the route went underneath a delicate false floor and on past an array of fine helictites, crystals and straws to a small chamber where we could stand up for the first time since leaving Bonsai Streamway, a tedious, flat-out crawl 200m away!

The team noted a passage in the floor (The Inconvenient Truth) which warrants a further return trip with a drill, while the constricted main way on was passed after two hours digging to a further 10m of flat-out breakdown passage ending with a draughting, awkward, long term dig through roof collapse.

This was a multi-club project including cavers belonging to Brynmawr CC, Cerberus SS, Chelsea SS, Mendip Nature Research Committee and Wessex CC.

Report by Adrian Fawcwt, published by 'Descent' caving magazine.

Cycling News from the CTC**Credit crunch cyclists causing chaos on roads**

'The Independent' newspaper printed this article on the 18th January:

Financial pressure to ditch cars for bikes could be the cause of the big rise in cycling accidents, it was revealed today. There has been a 29% increase in road accidents involving cyclists in the last six months, according to figures from insurance company LV=. It said that the switch from four wheels to two had led to many inexperienced cyclists taking to the road and a lack of formal cycling training may have contributed to the accident tally.

A survey by the company showed 52% of cyclists had never read the Highway Code's advice for cyclists and only 42% had taken a cycling proficiency course. Also, 42% fail to wear a safety helmet, 41% cycle on the pavement, a third have cycled the wrong way up a one-way street and 6% have cycled under the influence of drink or drugs, with the same number using mobile phones while on the road. LV= Car Insurance spokeswoman Emma Holyer said: "Cycling is a cheap and enjoyable way to get from A to B and great exercise at the same time but it's essential that cyclists are fully equipped to deal with the busy British roads to ensure their own safety and that of other road users.

"If cycling training was compulsory, and cyclists were better equipped to follow the rules of the roads we believe motorists, pedestrians and cyclists themselves would all benefit from fewer accidents and a safer environment on the road."

The CTC – the UK's national cyclists' organisation responded to this as follows:

"We completely refute claims by LV= that "inexperienced cyclists taking to the roads in the last 6 months have resulted in a 29% increase in road accidents involving cyclists". The figure appears to be no more than the difference in casualty numbers for cyclists between summer and winter. LV='s estimate of the number of collisions involving cyclists is over 9 times higher than official figures and is based on a serious miscalculation of the number of cyclists in Britain. CTC has dismissed the figure as nothing more than a scaremongering publicity stunt.

Roger Geffen, CTC's Campaigns and Policy Manager, said: "This is Mickey Mouse research and flies in the face of all official published statistics on cycling. There is plenty of evidence showing that cycling gets safer the more cyclists there are. In London there has been a 91% increase in cycle use on the capital's main roads since 2000, and a 33% reduction in cycle casualties in roughly the same period". He added: "CTC has been researching cycle safety for over a century. Manipulating statistics for a PR stunt wastes the time of the people who took part in the survey. By demonising cyclists and scaring people into staying in their cars, it also undermines the efforts of charities like CTC to encourage more cycling and improve road safety for all".

Singling out cyclists as a law-breaking group is discriminatory and serves only to create aggression and conflict between road users. This is highly irresponsible behaviour for an insurance company professing to care about road safety.

Sustrans News:**Celtic Trail:**

Volunteers planted 100 trees along a recently opened traffic-free path near Blackmill in Bridgend. The route opened in July to add another traffic-free section to the Celtic Trail, which stretches across the breadth of Wales from Fishguard to Chepstow.

Afan Forest

It's one year since Sustrans' Connect2 won the TV vote to bring £50million of lottery funding to 79 communities across the UK to create networks for everyday journeys for people travelling by foot or bike. The multi-million pound Connect2 project, to connect Port Talbot to Cwmafan and Afan forest by a dedicated walking and cycling network, is a step closer as sustainable transport charity Sustrans and its Connect2 partners at Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council sign the paperwork that will guide the development for the coming years.

Clydach Gorge:

Villagers and townspeople living along the stunning new Clydach Gorge walking and cycling route will mark its transformation from a disused railway line last November. The new route follows the line of the former Merthyr, Tredegar and Abergavenny railway for eight miles between Llanfoist and Brynmawr, and passes through the Clydach Gorge Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It has taken more than two decades to complete and marks the beginning of the Heads of Valleys route from Abergavenny to Neath. It also forms a key part of the Valleys Cycle Network, which Sustrans will create over the next five years with local authority partners.

The above is from the CTC website, SUSTRANS website www.sustrans.org.uk



The last "Big Sack" was way back in July but not an awful lot of backpacking has happened since then.

The Cadair Idris backpack had to be cancelled – firstly there was going to have to be a change of venue to the Marches (Ewys Harold to

Abergavenny), then the very bad forecast put off the other two people who were coming.

I did manage some backpacking of a personal nature at the end of last year – in the Lake District, as part of my Mountain Leader (summer) assessment. The "expedition" part of that assessment was geographically limited in the sense that there was a load of snow down and we were restricted to the High Street/Haweswater area at the eastern edge of the Lakes. We had two nights out – for the first we camped at Angle Tarn, for the second we stayed at a bothy a few miles south-east of Haweswater. The wild camp at Angle Tarn was an experience. There was powder snow on the ground and, as it was windy in the night, a pile of spindrift collected between the outer and inner tents. I was getting constricted in a snowy coffin, and the condensation was horrendous, but I survived and am all the better for the experience. The three of us who underwent the assessment all passed so all that time backpacking in Scotland has paid off....

The most recent long walk was the one on Sunday 18th January from Porth-yr-Ogof in the Fforest Fawr part of the Beacons. This ended up being 12.5 and 14 miles long. Seven of us started, but Chris L and Lawrence T decided to stick to the 12.5 mile route (made up the night before) whilst one of the ladies on the walk requested an extension to take in Fan Nedd - so the rest of us did 14 miles. I have to say it was a novel and pleasant experience being asked to extend a walk. I hadn't met the two ladies before and they were relieved to discover that, contrary to expectations, I'm not actually a slave driver.

Apparently Chris's long walk at the end of November had 12 people on it, so it's encouraging that his plan for increasing the number of long walks (and the number of people attending



View of Mont Blanc—Steve also attempted Europe's highest peak in 2008.

Steve's Big Sack

them) is working.

Keeping up the momentum, 2009 will hopefully see the return of the "Ultimate Valleys Walk" – in three parts. For those of you who don't know, this is possibly the greatest walk ever (devised by me) that crosses the whole of the Glamorgan valleys from Pontypool to Port Talbot. Part 1 will be in April (probably), from Pontypool to Ystrad Mynach, using trains at either end (thereby satisfying the COG requirement of 1 car-less event for the March/April programme). If you don't glance back at Cwmbran you'll probably be surprised at how attractive the scenery actually is. To add that extra bit of incentive, we'll have dinner somewhere at Ystrad Mynach and the perfect day is topped off by a train journey to Cardiff with the scantily-clad youth of the Valleys – each carrying a one-way ticket to oblivion. Parts 2 and 3 of the Ultimate Valleys Walk should follow in May and June.

The next backpack is the weekend of Friday 20th to Sunday 22nd February (not, as originally notified, the weekend before). This will be in the Church Stretton/Long Mynd area of Shropshire. If you haven't been to the area – get there! For some reason the now-traditional February backpack is usually the best attended backpack of the year. Maybe it's because people aren't doing anything else at that time of year? Or because they're still feeling guilty after Christmas and want to do something they perceive as being a bit masochistic? (This, of course, would be wrong – backpacks are always hugely enjoyable.) Friday night we'll be at Wall Under Heywood, between Church Stretton and Wenlock Edge, and Saturday night we'll be camping at Bridges Youth Hostel. The fact that we have the Saturday night at a hostel means that, if you're unsure about the weight, you can camp on Friday night and stay in the hostel on the Saturday and so have a lot less to carry. Saturday night we'll have the cheering taste of good ales round an open fire and many a hearty laugh ringing to the rafters. However, a warning: numbers are limited, particularly at Bridges, so you should contact me asap if you're interested – on stevebees13@yahoo.co.uk

Just in case you've missed the point, this won't be a barking mad weekend of superhuman activity – the mileages are always tailored to what people want, and there's usually scope for varying the route once under way if it proves necessary. Mileages need be no more than 10 miles each day. So if you're okay at walking, say, 12 miles on two consecutive days with a daysack and you fancy the idea but aren't completely sure if you'll like it then contact me. The group also has equipment that you can borrow if you don't have all the gear.

There's a chance that you'll be reading this after the February backpack has come and gone. Never fear – a quick look at your programme will show you that there's another backpack on the weekend of Friday 20th to Sunday 22nd March – somewhere in Mid Wales....

Will the fun never end?

Elenydd Wilderness Trust News

The Trust has received Three Peaks donations in the past and with a further donation planned for 2009. The Trust continues to make progress with more good news.

£80,000 from the Welsh Assembly Government!

As those of you with access to the Trust's website or email will have heard, the long hoped-for news has been received that the Trust has been successful in obtaining a grant for the purposes of renovating and upgrading Dolgoch.

Sponsored walk

Jeffrey Matthews was again responsible for a very successful sponsored walk taking in Drygan Fawr which has added over £3500 to Trust funds. The event, which was blessed with good weather, was followed by an enjoyable barbecue also arranged by Jeffrey.

Trustees meeting

The Trustees met at the end of August to review progress and consider changes to the general running of the Trust. The following were decided:

1. Although we have over 300 members the number of active volunteers is very small placing a heavy burden on those few. Accordingly the Trust will focus on mandatory activities, ie. those necessary to keep the hostels operational.
2. Open meetings will continue to be held but only those individuals holding formal committee posts will be entitled to vote.
3. A decision of the committee would be regarded as a recommendation to the Trustees, who would make the final decision.
4. Two battery powered lights will be placed on the staircase at Dolgoch.
5. The Trustees will meet twice yearly.

Debatable issues

The Trustees are aware that there has been debate recently on the introduction of electricity to Dolgoch. A survey has indicated there is potential for a hydroelectric scheme based on water from a steep running stream half a mile from the hostel. Solar power is also a possible but much more limited source of supply. The issues are:

Is there a need, from a safety point of view, for lighting in the dormitories?

Should we be relying on gas, an expensive fossil fuel which adds to our carbon footprint?

Should we remove the gas lighting and with it the much loved character of the hostel?

The successful project bid included a wood-fired boiler needing electricity for start up, and UV water filters also requiring electricity.

What are your views? Let us know and help the Trustees make an informed decision. Contact Steve Griffith on +44 (0)208 833 7409 or by [email](#).

Hostel usage

It is pleasing to note that Dolgoch has already notched up 1000 bednights and Ty'n Cornel seems likely to do so before the year is out.

Booking system

Volunteers are urgently needed to provide occasional relief cover. Instruction would be given.

Wardens

The success of our venture depends in large part on staffing our hostels for as long a period as possible. 2009 is not far away and Joan Meek will be pleased to hear from you. If you haven't already booked a slot please contact her by phone on +44 (0)1283 537 440. Training available.

Membership

This remains steady with, currently, 346 members but we are always looking for more supporters. An enquiry has been made about Gift Aid. Simply put, this is a scheme which allows us to reclaim tax on your donation or membership fee, so long as you can sign the gift aid declaration on the [donation form](#) or [membership form](#).

Dates for your diary

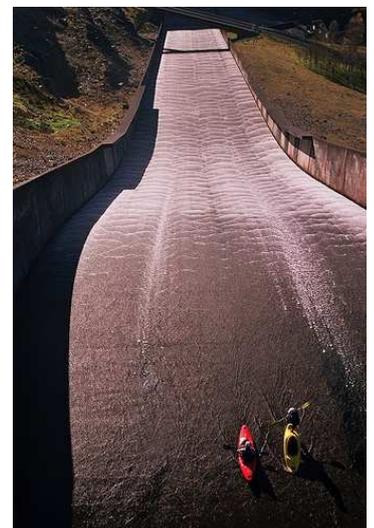
21-22nd Mar 2009, Wardens' Training at the two hostels; Sun 05 Apr 2009 (1030 hrs), committee meeting, Dolgoch; Sat 25 Apr 2009, Sponsored walk (provisional); Sat 6 Jun 2009, AGM, Llanddewi Brefi + Open Day, Ty'n Cornel

Extreme kayakers have been condemned for canoeing down a dam in mid Wales.

A photographer captured the latest incident as one canoeist slid 330ft down the spillway at Llyn Brianne reservoir, on the borders of Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Powys. Check out the website <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/videos-and-pics/videos/2008/11/18/extreme-kayaking-at-llyn-brianne-reservoir-91466-22283852/>. Welsh Water said the practice was dangerous and such activities were banned at the reservoir. An onlooker said: "I always stop and look anyway and I saw four people ready to do the spillway. "There were a lot of people watching at the top car park. "It looked pretty scary." Llyn Brianne was completed in 1972 and supplies drinking water to a large part of south Wales. A statement from Welsh Water, the owner of the site, said it "strictly forbids" water-based activities at the reservoir and would take "appropriate action" against anyone in breach of this restriction.

THE world's leading extreme kayaker has revealed he came "frighteningly close" to death when he rode the 330ft spillway. Shaun Baker has warned other thrill-seekers attracted by the descent at the Llyn Brianne reservoir that they risk possible death or injury. The 44-year-old attempted the sheer drop from the body of water near Llandovery four years ago. Baker said 'Anyone attempting the Llyn Brianne descent would be "mad and almost certainly injured"'. The nearest hospital is almost 40 miles away. Speaking about his descent of the Llyn Brianne spillway, Baker said:

"You really, really fly downwards because the flat-bottomed hull just aquaplanes. You are a bit like a flat stone skimming across a pond but you have to use the paddles to get the right line. If you do not land straight you are going to suffer severe spinal damage. At the bottom it will be like being tossed around in a car accident. To ensure you land straight you have to use the paddles but there is a 45mph to 50mph wind as you skim downwards. The only sound you hear is like a machine gun going off in your ear as the boat shoots at speed across the ripples in the water. I nearly lost my paddles coming downwards because the drag effect took them from my hands but I managed to stretch out and grab them back. If I had lost my paddles I would only have been able to put my hands out to straighten the kayak and that would have meant losing the tops of my fingers because of the friction with the concrete. It would be a decision between being paralysed at the bottom or losing your fingertips. Right at the bottom I found out to my horror that there is what is called an anti-scour ridge which is a razor sharp length of metal. Out of sheer luck I bounced when I landed and jumped right over it. Unbelievably I came out of that ride with no injuries at all but I am completely serious when I say to anyone tempted to do it, don't. This run is deadly."



Review—Ghost Tour of Cosmeston Medieval Village by Chris Lewis

In January COG did an evening ghost tour of Cosmeston Medieval Village. We were expecting some tales of ghouls and ghosts, what we weren't expecting was to be involved in supernatural experiences!

Background (from Wikipedia)

Cosmeston Medieval Village is a "living history" village near [Lavernock](#). Based upon remains discovered during a 1980s [archaeological](#) dig in the grounds of [Cosmeston Lakes Country Park](#), it is a re-creation of 14th century peasant life. The reconstructed village regularly plays host to groups of [reenactors](#), who camp in authentic tents around the outskirts of the village, and perform displays of historical combat for the public. Cosmeston was also used as one of the filming locations for the BBC TV drama series *Merlin*, broadcast in autumn 2008.

The original Cosmeston village grew around a fortified manor constructed sometime around the 12th Century by the De Costentin family, who were among the first [Norman](#) invaders of Wales in the early 1100s following [William the Conqueror's](#) invasion of neighbouring England in 1066. It is unlikely that the manor house at the site was a substantial building and there is documentary evidence that by 1437 the manor house had already fallen into total ruin, its precise site has yet to be located. The village would have consisted of a number of small stone round houses, or crofts, with thatched roofs, as depicted in the current reconstruction, and the village population would have been between 50 to 100 people at most, including children. The de Costentin family had originated on the Cotentin peninsula in northern [France](#). They were the first lords of the manor and they called the village Costentinstune, which over the centuries became known as Cosmeston. They built the original manor house and perhaps a few dwellings or small farms, but for the next two centuries it appears that little further development occurred.

Around 1316 the manor passed into the hands of the de Caversham family, also of Norman French descent. The buildings that have been excavated so far seem to be from the 1300s. It would appear that the de Caversham family brought a more designed approach to the development of the community and a better regulated and more compact settlement began to develop during their stewardship of the village. There is little sign that the village continued to develop much past the later [middle ages](#). Unusually, no Norman church was ever established in the immediate area, so by 1824 all that remained of Cosmeston village were four isolated crofts and the Little Cosmeston Farmhouse as shown on the [Marquis of Bute's](#) detailed maps of the time. It is quite possible that the majority of the villagers were all wiped out during the [Black Death](#) plague of the 1340s or the later outbreaks. In addition to the plague the villagers would have to combat several other difficulties. The land is low lying and at the mercy of the many water sources that now feed the Cosmeston Lake. There is substantial evidence of drainage dykes but even they would have struggled to keep the arable land free from constant flooding. Additionally the period was one of permanent political upheaval with intermittent resistance and armed conflict between several local Welsh leaders. In January 1316, for instance, [Llywelyn Bren](#) attacked [Caerphilly Castle](#), and for the next two months there was conflict and much devastation spilling throughout the Glamorgan region.

By the 1900s all evidence of the village had vanished and local residents had no idea of its previous existence. When the Snocem Concrete works and the Cosmeston limestone quarry closed in 1970 the land was developed under [Countryside Commission](#) funding as a [Country Park](#). During the landscaping of the new country park the first evidence of the medieval village was unearthed and an archeological exploration was undertaken. The resulting heritage reconstruction has been described as the best representation of a medieval village currently available in Britain.

The Ghost Tour

We were met at the Cosmeston Visitor Centre by our guide Alan Gibbon who was suitably attired as a Welsh archer would have been in the 13th Century. There are nine different buildings within the village. These include The Reeve's Barn, The Reeve's Cottage (the Reeve was the most important person in the village so had a wooden floor), the Baker's Cottage & Tavern, the Bake House, Swineherd's Cottage, and



Spooky!

the Tithe Barn. The buildings are packed with artefacts that would have suited the buildings at the time.

We were initially taken to the Tithe Barn (the only building with a 21st century touch—electric lighting!). After that we began the tour. Our guide Alan was excellent taking on the persona of a 14th Century archer and telling the story of each house and how it fitted in to village life of the time. However there were three strange events which occurred during the tour. The first strange thing happened as we made our way to the bakers house. A strange metallic noise came from within one of the buildings as we passed by. Then in the bake house a heavy caldron hanging from a stand was swinging. It was checked out by Julian L. who advised that the weight of the caldron was such that a draught could not have forced the object to swing! The third strange event was felt by one of our party. She had a feeling in one of the houses of a hand brushing her cheek. We returned to the Tithe Barn where we had our fourth spooky encounter. When we left the barn to go on our tour Alan our guide had left the candles burning and the electric lights switched on and when we returned the lights and candles were out! We then sat round the fire and Alan poured us a glass each of some very welcome red wine and regaled us with an extraordinary number of spooky experiences that he'd had when sleeping overnight in the various buildings (he's been a guide there for 12 years). He then went off to lock up one of the huts and as he left there was a loud bang at the end of the room we were in, a final ghostly event!

All in all whatever the cause of the various goings on it was a very enjoyable tour. Glamorgan Paranormal Society held a night time investigation. Their report on <http://www.glamorganparanormal.co.uk/> is worth a look.

One final occurrence. We were advised beforehand to bring a digital camera. Quite often when you take photos with digital cameras you get these odd orbs in the picture. We were shown a photo with an orb taken by some previous guests. They had the image blown up which showed the clear outline of a skull. When digital cameras first came out these orbs created a lot of interest amongst paranormal groups and there's some interesting information about orbs on <http://www.parascience.org.uk/articles/orbs.htm>. They conclude there are two types - one that can be attributed to dust or water droplets, the other there is no explanation! The orbs in our photos are caused by the smoke particles from the fire in the Tithe Barn—I think!



