

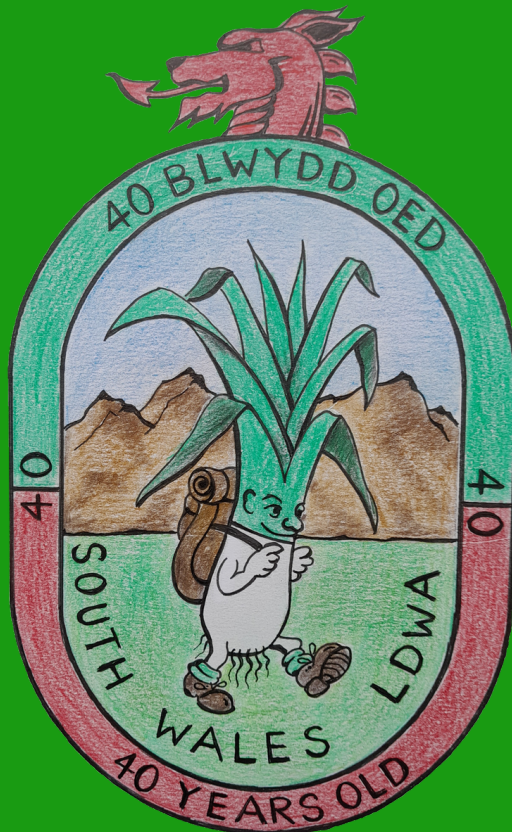


**LONG DISTANCE**

**LDWA**

**WALKERS ASSOCIATION**

# SOUTH WALES GROUP



## SOUTH WALES LDWA GROUP 40TH ANNIVERSARY BLETHER



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## In This Issue

"From The Chair" p3

"Over The Years" p4

"How It All Started" p5

"The Nick Kaye Specials" p10

"South Wales LDWA Group Youth Hostel  
Weekends Away" p12

"The Creation of The Leekie Logo" p15

"Brecon Beacons 100" p17

"Valleys 100" p21

"Y 100 Sir Fynwy" p23

"Virtual Y 100 Sir Fynwy" p25

"Caerphilly Summits Challenge Event" p29

"South Wales Pairs Mountain Challenge Event" p31

"Taith Torfaen Anytime Challenge Event" p32

"Where Ravens Dare Challenge Event" p34

"Rhondda Rollercoaster Challenge Event" p35

"Offa's Twisted Wye Kanter Challenge Event" p37

"Three Circles Challenge Event" p39

"Putting The 'Long' Into Long Distance Walking" p41

## *From The Chair*



In the heart of our club lies a remarkable treasure trove of memories, stories, and knowledge all of which have been brought together in "The Blether." This cherished document stands as a testament to our group's rich history, capturing the essence of our collective journey over the past four decades. As we read this 40th anniversary edition, we extend our gratitude to David, whose dedication and with the collaborative efforts of our club members, have made The Blether a remarkable and invaluable resource. We must extend our thanks to Gerry Jackson, Andrew Clabon, Shirley Hume, Simon Pickering and Sara Down for their contributions but we must save particular thanks to Nick Kaye who has kept meticulous records over the years and which this 40th anniversary edition has accessed to ensure its depth of historical data.

The Blether stands not merely as a compilation of stories, but as a legacy document that safeguards the remarkable history of our club. It serves as a testament to the countless friendships formed, the lessons learned, and the collective growth we have experienced over the past four decades. As we explore the pages of The Blether, we uncover the legacy of our club, one that continues to shape and inspire us today.

Within the pages of The Blether lies a treasure trove of information waiting to be discovered. It is a comprehensive archive that chronicles the remarkable milestones, achievements, and pivotal moments that have defined our club's journey. From humble beginnings to significant achievements, the document encapsulates the spirit of our club, providing a window into the past and serving as a guiding light for future members.

As we reflect on the passage of time, it becomes evident that The Blether encapsulates the remarkable 40-year history of our club. It is a testament to the dedication, perseverance, and shared passion of our members who have carried the torch throughout the years. The document not only preserves our collective memories but also serves as a valuable resource for new members, enabling them to connect with the club's vibrant past and embrace its enduring values.

In the grand tapestry of our club's existence, The Blether holds a special place. It is a labour of love, a tribute to the countless individuals who have contributed to the club, and a testament to the enduring spirit of our community. As we embark on this writing endeavour, let us celebrate The Blether's significance, honouring our club's 40-year history, and cherishing the bonds that unite us. Through the pages of this legacy document, we embark on a journey of discovery, reminiscence, and inspiration, reminding ourselves of the enduring legacy we leave behind for generations to come.

Jason Winney  
Chair - South Wales LDWA Group



# SOUTH WALES OVER THE YEARS

**Sept 1983**

Meeting to discuss creation of South Wales LDWA



**Sept 1983**

First South Wales LDWA social walk



**Jan 1985**

First Nick Kaye special walk

**July 1988**

First Caerphilly Summits challenge walk



**May 1989**

Brecon Beacons 100



**Sept 1989**

First South Wales Pairs Mountain challenge

**Mar 1991**

First Youth Hostel social weekend away



**1991**

South Wales Leekie logo created

**1995**

Taith Torfaen Anytime Challenge walk created



**Oct 2010**

First Where Ravens Dare challenge walk

**May 2011**

First Rhondda Rollercoaster challenge walk



**May 2014**

The Valleys Hundred

**April 2016**

Taith Torfaen challenge walk



**Jan 2017**

First Offa's Twisted Wye Kanter challenge walk

**Oct 2019**

First of the Three Circles challenge walk trilogy created



**May 2020**

Y 100 Sir Fynwy cancelled due to Covid-19

**May 2021**

Virtual Y 100 Sir Fynwy



**Sept 2023**

40th Anniversary





# "HOW IT ALL STARTED"

By Andrew Clabon

I suppose it all started in 1979 when I planned and organised the first three Talybont Trials. Two of the early entrants were Nick Kaye and his wife Julia. I distinctly remember their entry by cheque (remember those days) from a Doctor Kaye. How posh were we attracting an entry from a doctor? Now I know him I have found out he is anything but posh! Our paths crossed a few times over the next couple of years so it came as no surprise that when I received a list of LDWA members living in South Wales Nick and Julia were on the list. The list came from Frank Yates who was the LDWA local group secretary at the time. The list was printed out using a dot matrix printer (remember those noisy things).

I then wrote to the 47 people on the list (stamps on letters as no email) asking if they would be interested in having a South Wales group similar to others that existed in the country. Most people lived in the Newport and Cardiff areas. It did make me laugh when the LDWA counted everyone south of Dolgellau to be classed as South Wales.

From those that replied it looked as though we might have enough interest and four of us were close enough to meet.

Myself (I lived in Newport at the time)

Nick from Cardiff who, as I said above, I had met.

Alan Fox who was my in-laws next door neighbour from Caerleon who I had also met.

And some guy who I had never met called Gerry Jackson who hailed from Llanfrechfa, near Cwmbran. He had recently led a walk for the Bristol & West Group - that being the closest group to him at the time.

I also had a reply from a chap living near Dolgellau who objected to be classed as South Wales!

The above four met at Alan's house and devised a four-month programme starting in the September of 1983. In those days you had to send the programme in the post in June ready for Strider publication in August. The idea was that we would see how we got on and if the group was viable. With such a small number we only had a walk once a month so we only needed to come up with four walks.

September came and Nick led the first walk starting on Caerphilly Common. The photo below (a scanned image taken from a 35mm photo, hence the poor quality) was taken at the start of the walk. I'm not sure who took the photo but I can see there was a lot less grey hair about than there is these days.



L-R - Sue Davis, Gerry Jackson, Alan Fox, Gwyn Howells, Marcus Harling, Keith Bennet, Ron Dix, Julia Kaye, Margaret Mills, Andrew Clabon, Nick Kaye

Four months later and another meeting this time at Sue's who lived in Cardiff. Another four walks planned and I suppose you could say the group has never looked back.

## "THE EARLY YEARS - 1983 TO THE MID-1990S"

By Nick Kaye

After the Group's first 'formal' meeting in the summer of 1983 and the Group's first social walk in September 1983, the Group developed a schedule of monthly social walks with Group Meetings held roughly every 4 months (sometimes more frequently) to plan the next series of Group walks in time for submission to the Editor for publication in Strider. The general principle adopted during these early years was that walks would be usually of at least 20 miles (sometimes shorter in the winter months) with a general lack of formality in all other aspects. Generally, one individual was 'voted in' as the 'chair-person' (for want of a better term) of the Group, who essentially led the Group meetings and wrote up and sent into the Editor the next programme of social walks for publication in Strider.



This, so called, role of 'chair-person' circulated amongst those members of the Group prepared to take on the task with an emphasis on informality (hence 'chair-person' being in quotation marks). The Group was more like a collection of friends who enjoyed a common interest in walking and discovering previously unfamiliar areas within the South Wales region.



2nd Group Walk at Buck Stone - 15th October 1983

L-R - Marcus Harling, Gwyn Howells in red cagoule, Ron Dix with blue woolly hat, David John, Tony Clark, Julia Kaye, Nick Kaye

Channel to the south. However, as will be discussed, in later years within this early period, the Group did spread its wings with raids into England to the east and northwards into mid-Wales. Also weekends away to other more distant walking locations became an annual feature in the Group's programme, as did 'Special' longer night-into-day walks of around 50 miles, and, of course, the setting up of the Group's first very own Challenge Event - but that would be jumping ahead.

### First 6 Months

The first six months of social walks serves to illustrate that the areas walked in were various and that we had a broad selection of volunteers prepared to lead our walks. The Group's first walk in September '83 saw us doing a circuit over the hills around the town of Caerphilly, led by Nick Kaye; in October '83 we were over in the Forest of Dean around Symonds Yat, led by Andrew Clabon; November's walk was led by David John around Twmbarlwm (NW of Newport); a walk in the waterfalls area of the upper Neath Valley was the venue for December, led by Gwyn Howells; in January '84 Ron Dix led us around the head of the Rhondda Valley; February '84 was a joint walk with the Bristol & West and Essex & Herts Groups in the Black Mountains, led by Tony Rowley of the B&W Group and March '84 saw us paying our first visit to Gower, led by Nick Kaye.

The Group did register the fact that other organisations in the area put on challenge walks and some of these were incorporated into the Group's monthly walks programme. For instance, during these early years, the Black Mountains Roundabout (Newport YHA Group) was entered into our social walks programme for April and The Talybont Trial (also Newport YHA Group) became our September entry.

So, what does the phrase 'South Wales' really mean when used to define our Regional Group. Without us ever providing a definition it was informally agreed that our monthly social walks would be within a relatively easy drive from the Cardiff/Newport area. This meant that, essentially, we framed our Regional Area by Gower in the west, the Brecon Beacons National Park and the southern side of Mynydd Epynt to the north, the River Severn in the east and (obviously) the Bristol



Tour de Trigs - 7th December 1985

L-R - Tony Clark, Nick Kaye, Brian Williams, Frank Wood



However, outside of a couple of 'Special' Group activities (see below), as a group, we studiously avoided the central Brecon Beacons area of the National Park due to its honey-pot weekend effect on all and sundry visiting or living in the South Wales area, and we did not venture there until August '86.

## Early Members

Any group is no group at all without its members and, from that very first inaugural social walk in Sep '83, attended by Keith Bennet, Andrew Clabon, Sue Davies, Ron Dix, Alan Fox, Marcus Harling, Gerry Jackson, Nick & Julia Kaye and Margaret Mills, the South Wales Group grew and developed during these early years, largely through the encouragement from members within the Group with new people joining and others expanding their ambitions by taking on longer distances than they had previously attempted.



Downsman 100 - 24-26 May 1986  
L-R - Nick Kaye, Andrew Clabon, Tony Toon

Naming a few names: inaugural members Sue Davies and Alan Fox fulfilled their ambition completing longer walks through their completion of the 40-mile Ridgeway Challenge Walk in May '84. In October '84 a few of us on Gwent Mountaineering Club's Mystery Mountain Megalithic Challenge Walk met and fell into step with a Peter Lewis. We explained about the LDWA and the South Wales Group and he accompanied us on the Group's November walk: he then joined the LDWA, became a staunch member of the Group leading some of our walks, and ended up completing several LDWA 100's.

A couple of those who were on the very first walk around Caerphilly's hills in September '83 encouraged a friend to join the Group, each new member becoming a real regular and a supporter of all Group activities: Keith Bennet from a Cardiff walking group introduced Roger Blake to the Group (Nov '84), and Marcus Harling (from the Bristol Egons outdoor group) brought along Chris Coy (May '85). Chris turned out to be one of the strongest of walkers and runners, up for any distance, any weather condition, and completed many LDWA 100s. Roger was a more 'normal' walker, a lovely character, and both he and Chris led walks for the Group in future years.

Our first social walk into the heart of the central Brecon Beacons was in August '86 on a walk titled Backbrecon Beacons, and it was this walk that Alun Jones chose for his first venture out with the Group; six 2000ers on either side of the Storey Arms, 26 miles and 6,000 feet of ascent. This was a degree of hardship that Alun had not previously experienced. But it says a lot about Alun that he stuck with it and then went onto become a keen member of the



Fan Frynych - 9th August 1986  
L-R - Keith Bennet, Nick Kaye (standing), Chris Coy, Tony Clark, Mike Evans

Group participating in the 'Specials' and Weekends Away, and leading several Group walks. It also says a lot about the social nature of the LDWA since Alun then went on to meet his future wife, Liz Higgins (from the Surrey Group), through their chance meeting on Challenge events.

Other people joining the Group who went on to play a key role in the Group's activities by leading walks and helping in the organisation of future Events include Tony Clark (college teacher, Oct '83), Mike Evans (marathon runner, Mar '84), Don Henley (May '84), Rob Richardson (you may have heard of him, Jan '86), Tim Gronow (S Wales miner, Dec '87), and Dan Hadfield (retired, from Surrey LDWA and relocated, Mar '88). Gwyn Matthews (our Rhondda resident), with father and son combo Alan & Chris Abrams, John Short and Doug Aspinall (who travelled down from Reading for every walk), all joined during 1990. Other regulars on our early Group walks who travelled from far away included Dave & Anne Carrivick from Truro, Frank Wood from Halesowen and Clive Marchant from Derby. Then, of course, there was a certain Wendy Winney who joined the Group in around 1990, and who probably has a lot to answer for regarding a certain future Group member and the excesses he was to bring to the Group's activities in later years beyond the period of this early phase. And not to forget the unforgettable Bob Smith (our guy from Gower of 'it's only 27 miles and less than 10,000 feet' fame) joining during 1993.

And so, with the Group having spread its wings, and with what was now a strong and numerous membership, and with its own challenge walk established in the calendar, this is a suitable point on which to end this account of the Early Years. For myself, I have remained a member of the LDWA but from the mid-1990s I became increasingly involved in road cycling and drifted away from taking part in challenge events and involvement in the organisation of the Group's activities. Therefore, having now reached the mid '90s in the development of the South Wales LDWA Group, it is time to hand over the recounting of the next chapter in the Group's history to somebody more closely involved in the years leading up to the millennium and beyond.

#### **Nick Kaye Archive of Walks**

**By Gerry Jackson**

As described elsewhere in this edition of Leekie's Blether Nick Kaye was one of the founder members of the South Wales LDWA local group. He kept a detailed diary of his walking activities including local group walks. His diary included a route description in sufficient detail to recreate the route on a map together with lists of participants and a short report on the walk. Nick has agreed to make his diary available both for a history of the group's activities and to act as an inspiration for future group walks.

To make this happen Nick has been working hard to copy his diary, plot the routes on an OS map to create images and GPX files of the route. In addition he is a keen photographer and has scanned his photographs of the early walks for inclusion in the groups collection of photographs. To capture the route descriptions they have been typed into a document for each walk that will also be kept in the group's Walks Database and accessible in the usual way on the group's web-site.

In the early years of the group there was one walk a month and the only way of publicising the Walks Programme was via Strider so ad hoc walks did not exist. The archive contains most group walks between September 1983 and 1987 with intermittent coverage in years up to 1997. For some years Nick used to hold 'Nick Kaye Specials' which were at least 50 miles long and held in winter every year. Not all of these appeared in Strider due to one unfortunate occurrence but are nevertheless included as they were designed for group members.

In total there are 75 walks included from his diary comprising:

- 46 routes with both a GPX route file and photographs
- 16 routes with GPX route files only
- 13 routes with photographs only

The Nick Kaye Archive of walks is being made available with this 40th anniversary issue of Leekie's Blether. If anyone wants to repeat one of the routes it will be necessary to carry out a detailed recce first as a lot can change in 40 years such as new roads, path changes and so on.

Getting the above on the website has reminded me of the tremendous contribution Nick made to the group with his enthusiasm and number of walks he led. Many thanks are due to Nick for making this archive available and for the work involved in capturing everything for the group's website.

# "THE NICK KAYE SPECIALS"

By Nick Kaye

The first, so called, spreading of the Group's wings occurred in January '85 with what was the first of what became known as the 'Specials' (organised and led by Nick Kaye). By 1992 a total of ten of these 'Specials' had been held and this first one set the pattern for quite a few of those that followed. The parameters that were adopted for many of these Special walks was that the route should be around 50 miles, held in January/February and starting around 23:00 on a Friday night after a full week at work. Some of these 'Specials' started from a distant place and ended up at Nick's house in Cardiff where a tea urn, a shower, an evening meal, and a space to sleep on the floor were arranged for all (thank heavens for an accommodating wife!).



Hergest Ridge - 8th June 1985

L-R - Mike Evans, Tony Clark, Roger Blake, Julia Kaye, Nick Kaye, Keith Bennet, Peter Lewis, Chris Coy

However, the first 'Special' of Jan '85 was slightly different in that it followed the route of the 'South Wales Seven Peaks Marathon Walk' from Llanddeusant Youth Hostel, on the west side of the Brecon Beacons National Park, to Capel-y-ffin Youth Hostel on the east side; a distance of 45 miles, 10,000 feet of ascent and traversing the seven highest peaks in South Wales (officially run as a challenge event in June by Cardiff YHA Group).

This was only the second ever recorded winter crossing of the South Wales 7 Peaks Marathon Walk and was completed by 14 out of the 15 starters (the previous winter crossing involved 6 people of whom 3 completed the route).

Nine further 'Specials' were held over the next six years. The second was called the South Wales 14 2,000ers involving a night then day ascent of the 8 summits in the Brecon Beacons and the 6 summits of Fforest Fawr. The third of the 'Specials' turned into a near disaster, at least so far as the original aims were concerned.

The plan was to walk the 60 miles around the base of the Black Mountains starting at 23:00 on Friday 31st January '86. However, the small party included a participant from SE England: a certain Mr X, who had responded to the listing of the walk in Strider, but for whom the winter conditions and the intended distance turned out to be way beyond his abilities. The walk started from Capel-y-ffin YH which is also where the road over the Gospel Pass became blocked with snow.



Difficulties struck within the first few miles when Mr X's torch failed. After five or six miles of knee-deep to waist-deep snow Mr X became quite exhausted. Our clothing was ice-covered head to foot by the time we crossed the Gospel Pass. The inevitable decision was made to drastically shorten the route and thereafter we followed tracks and minor roads at lower levels, where the snow was less than knee deep, to return to the Youth Hostel after 28 gruelling miles. Quoting from my walks' diary: 'One of the lasting memories of the walk was sheltering in the darkness in a road-side barn somewhere near Longtown for some food – an open barn with some hay bales and a freezing wind whistling in – one of the few times that I've thought that we were really mad'.

Further 'Specials' included a Round of the Base of Fforest Fawr where one member of the party was delayed arriving at the start point, looked for our torches (which we had switched off as we were doing a little bit of night-time field trespassing) and ended up walking the opposite way round the route to the rest of us. We then met up with him, purely by chance, when he and the main party arrived back at the cars at the same time from opposite directions.

Those 'Specials' that ended back at Cardiff were super walks. The first one (Jan '87) involved starting from Tony Rowley's house in Bristol with Tony leading the first section across what is now the original (or old) Severn Bridge. The middle section to the Pontypool area was led by Andrew Clabon and the final section was led by Nick Kaye over

Mynydd Machen and the few remaining 'undulations' to reach the finish. The ascent of Mynydd Machen on its east side was a bit of a crippler in the darkness (ultra-steep heather-clad slopes) and, when the summit was finally reached, Mac McArthur asked whether there were any more 'ups' before the finish, to which I replied, "only a few undulations" – which was a total lie and which I have been reminded of again and again ever since.

Then there was Brecon to Cardiff in Jan '88 when we crossed the summit of Pen y Fan at 01:00 in a snowstorm and, with most of us wearing 'only' trainers and tracksters, there was me praying that nothing untoward was going to happen which would involve the mountain rescue (me being a member of the Morlais Mountain Rescue at the time). The third one was held in early Feb '91 from Neath to Cardiff following the sandstone ridge that runs west to east across South Wales but just north of the coastal cities and towns. But we broke with tradition for the final 'Special' which was from Hay-on-Wye to Cardiff by holding it in early May '92 and covering the 57 miles (every hill and ridge possible) in daylight hours after a very early start from Hay.



Bullock Smithy Hike - 6th September 1986  
Andrew Clabon

# "SOUTH WALES LDWA GROUP YOUTH HOSTEL WEEKENDS AWAY"

By Nick Kaye

In what could be termed as the beginning of the middle years of the South Wales LDWA Group, following the first 7-8 years after the formation of the Group, a series of seven annual "Youth Hostel-Based Weekends Away" were organised. The organisation and arrangement for all these Weekends Away was carried out by me and I also planned and led all of the walking routes that are mentioned in this article. Each weekend was held during the first half of March, with the first Weekend Away being held in 1991 with the last one being held in 1997.

## **1.Sat-Sun 16-17 Mar 1991:**

Based at Dolgoch Youth Hostel, Mid Wales.

The Red Kite Trail was walked across the two days (81.5 miles).

Day 1 (43.5 miles) - commenced with taking a few cars to the car park below the dam wall of Llyn Brianne Reservoir and following the route in an anticlockwise direction via Llanwrtyd Wells and Rhayader and then cutting away from the route to return to Dolgoch Youth Hostel for the night.

Day 2 (38 miles) - started by re-joining the route from where it had been left at the end of the previous day and continuing in an anticlockwise direction via Tregaron and Pumsaint and returning to the cars parked below Llyn Brianne Reservoir.



L-R - Alun Jones, Chris Hume, Shirley Hume, Andrew Clabon, Andrew Alford, Gerry Jackson, Dan Hadfield, Chris Abrams, Charles Rule, Doug Aspinall, John Short, Mary Partridge, Chris Coy, Mike Dixon, Barbara Williams, Gwyn Matthews

## **2.Sat-Sun 14-15 Mar 1992:**

Based at Bellever Youth Hostel, Dartmoor.

The Dartmoor Perambulation Walk was walked across two days (48.1 miles).

Day 1 (30 miles) - some cars to Princetown where the walk was started and followed clockwise via Great Mis Tor and Yes Tor all the way round to break off to return to Bellever YH for the overnight.



Day 2 (18.1 miles) – started from Bellever YH and re-joined to route where we had left it the previous day and then followed the remainder of route via Ryder's Hill back round to the cars at Princetown.



L-R - Chris Coy, Mike Buckley, Tim Gronow, Charles Rule, John Short, Ian Partridge, Barbara Williams, Anne Carrivick behind BW, Chris Abrams (back to camera), Doug Aspinall, Mike Dixon, John Bickerstaffe, Gwyn Matthews, Dave Carrivick, Jim Howe, Jill Wilkins, Dan Hadfield, Mike James, Gerry Jackson, Mac Wilkins, David Fry

### 3. Sat -Sun 13-14 Mar 1993:

Based at Meerbrook Youth Hostel, Peak District.

Our first of two visits to Meerbrook YH for a couple of open Challenge Walks.

Day 1 (28.4 miles) – "The Pride Of The Peak Walk" (an open Challenge Walk). Officially the walk starts in Bakewell and from there goes clockwise via (or close) to Sheldon, Deep Dale, River Wye, Monsal Dale, Monsal Head, Upper Dale, Cressbrook, Miller's Dale, Tideswell Dale, Litton Dale, Tansley Dale, Longstone Moor, Longstone Edge, Rowland, Hassop, Bank Wood, Bramley Wood, Calver, River Derwent, Froggatt Edge, Curbar Edge, Baslow, Chatsworth Park (and House), Edensor and Carlton Pastures.

However, we started the walk at Monsal Head and followed the route clockwise from there.

Day 2 (24.3 miles) – "The Dane Valley Circular" (an open Challenge Walk).

I do not have, and cannot find on the Internet, a description for this route – other than clearly it was in the region of the Dane Valley (south west Peak District). Neither is it listed in the LDWA UK Trailwalker's Handbook, at least not in my edition of 2009. All I have is the certificate from the Walk Organiser following my submission of my report of our route completion.



R-L - Barbara Williams, Doug Aspinall, Pauline Papworth, Mike Buckley, Dave Carrivick, Chris Coy, Dan Hadfield, Anne Carrivick, Alan Abrams, Gerry Jackson, Mike Dixon



L-R - Bob Smith, Brain Williams, Dan Hadfield, Barbara Williams, Pauline Papworth, Herbert Papworth, Doug Aspinall, Anne Carrivick, Dave Carrivick, Gerry Jackson, Chris Abrams, Mike Dixon



#### 4. Sat-Sun 12-13 Mar 1994:

Based at Clun Youth Hostel, Welsh Marches.

Day 1 (35 miles) – The Six Shropshire Summits (an open Challenge Walk). Leaving cars at either end the Walk involves the ascent of the following six Shropshire hills: Corndon Hill, Stiperstones, Long Mynd, Caer Caradoc, Brown Clee Hill and Titterstone Clee Hill.

Day 2 (19.2 miles) – involved an ‘ordinary’ walk around the hills and valleys in the Ludlow area.

#### 5. Sat-Sun 11-12 Mar 1995:

Based at Minehead Youth Hostel, North Somerset.

No Challenge Walks attempted on this Weekend Away – just two ‘ordinary’ walks.

Day 1 (29 miles) – a walk from the Youth Hostel over Dunkery Beacon, around Porlock and over Selworthy Beacon.

Day 2 (14 miles) – a walk over The Quantock Hills, following the ridge north to south and then back again at a lower level.



L-R - Alan Abrams, Gwyn Matthews, Mike Dixon (giving V sign), Barbara Williams, Chris Abrams, Brian Williams, Tim Gronow, Dan Hadfield, Dave Carrivick, Doug Aspinall, Anne Carrivick, Mac Wilkins, Gerry Jackson, Jill Wilkins, (person on extreme R not in party)

#### 6. Sat-Sun 02-03 Mar 1996:

Based at Meerbrook Youth Hostel, Peak District.

A return to Meerbrook YH for another two open Challenge Walks.

Day 1 (25.5 miles) – The White Peak Roller Coaster Walk (an open Challenge Walk).

Day 2 (23.1 miles) – The Churnet Valley Challenge Walk (an open Challenge Walk).



L-R - Barbara Williams, Gwyn Matthews, Tim Gronow, Bob Smith, Mike Dixon, Alan Abrams, Gerry Jackson, Dan Hadfield (in front), Mike James, Brian Williams, Dave Carrivick, Charles Rule, Anne Carrivick (virtually totally hidden at back), Carol Elcock, Duncan X (friend of Chris Coy), Chris Coy



## 7. Sat-Sun 01-02 Mar 1997:

Based at Beer Youth Hostel, South Devon Coast.

Day 1 (26.3 miles) – followed the route of The Sidmouth Saunter Challenge Walk.

Day 2 (16.5 miles) – an ‘ordinary’ (non-challenge) walk in the Lyme Regis area.



L-R - Tim Gronow, Charles Rule, Mike James, Hannah Brown, Dave Williams, Carol Elcock, Dan Hadfield, Brian Williams, Mike Dixon, Molly Dixon, Bob Smith, Gerry Jackson, Gwyn Matthews, Doug Aspinall, Chris Coy, Mac Wilkins, Jill Wilkins, Mike Buckley



L-R - Dan Hadfield, Chris Coy.

## “THE CREATION OF LEEKIE THE LOGO”

By David Morgan



The South Wales LDWA Group was formed in 1983 and in the late 1980's created the Caerphilly Summits Challenge Walk. In those formative years the only logo used on the Caerphilly Summits event certificates was the LDWA logo.

A conversation commenced within the Group as to what sort of logo the Group would like to have and different ideas were discussed. Separately, Gwyn Matthews had spoken to his niece who was an artist and she had produced two options for the Group members to consider. One was a logo that used the Prince of Wales feathers as a base and the other was a walking leek complete with rucksack, a mug, walking boots and roots that were the subject of much mirth in subsequent years!

A discussion took place on the colours to be used and yellow was chosen as the background colour in order to provide a link to the daffodil, the national flower of Wales.

The matter was settled and Leekman (or more recently, Leekie) became the South Wales LDWA Group logo in 1991!

# South Wales LDWA

## 100 Mile Events

The Long Distance Walkers Association was created in 1972 and the first LDWA 100 mile challenge event was held in 1973. Other than two enforced cessations, once in 2001 with Foot and Mouth and in 2020 with the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a 100 mile challenge event every year since.

The South Wales LDWA Group is proud to have been involved in the organising of three of the annual 100 mile walks. In 1989 South Wales LDWA Group partnered with Bristol & West LDWA Group to present the Brecon Beacons 100, in 2014 the Group organised the Valleys 100 and in 2020 the Group was all set to deliver Y 100 Sir Fynwy until Covid-19 got in the way. In 2021 the Group organised Virtual Y 100 Sir Fynwy, the first ever 100 mile walk that did not have a specific route.

The next few pages in the Blether celebrate the 100 mile events that the South Wales LDWA Group has either organised or been a key partner.





# "THE BRECON BEACONS 100"

By Shirley Hume



"The past is a different country....."

Cast your minds back to 1986 [those of you for whom this is possible]. A 100 mile LDWA event is to be organised in 1989 and the following applies:

- No internet [and therefore no online banking]
- No mobile phones
- No significant Health and Safety regulations to be followed
- No food deliveries to individuals
- No word processing facilities for most individual households
- No special diets or fancy milks etc etc....

This was the norm and while by 1989 a few people had basic word processing facilities, on the first fledgling home computers, this was still very much the exception. Add to that a committee who all had fulltime jobs and, in many cases, young families and you might start to see how the first 100 to be held in South Wales in 1989 was a very different beast to both the Valleys 100 and the 'never to be' Sir Fynwy 100.

In 1986 the first meeting of Bristol and West and South Wales members was held to discuss the event, with 2 South Wales members attending out of a total of 23. A committee of 7 was duly 'elected' [I use the word loosely!] and the fun bit - walking potential routes - started with considerable enthusiasm.



Planning the route  
L-R Ken Falconer, Tony Rowley, Nick Kaye Chris Hume

Jump forward to August 1988 and the committee is down to 4 members with a new Organiser having been press-ganged into office [I will never leave my answering machine switched on when I am on holiday again]! Although we had a route in mind and had verbal agreement about our HQ, not much else had actually been more than talked about - no checkpoints, first aid, Raynet or transport booked and only some optimistic ideas about

menus.

It was obvious that the new organiser's first job had to be some serious delegation and the decision was made to get people who didn't really want a committee role to take on one

discrete job and just do it, with the promise of no interference or suggestions for changes. This worked a treat thanks to both the skills and adaptability of the group members. South Wales took on the role of writing the Route Description and booking the checkpoints, while different B&W members variously took on certificate and badge design, printing, Raynet and First Aid. A talented draughtsman manually did the layout of the RD including OS strip maps for each section while his patient wife manually typed the RD, trying to fit the words round the maps while keeping it as short as possible.



Shirley Hume posting entrants' acknowledgement letters

Transport was taken on by a non-walking friend of a committee member, while the only role that lacked anyone with the appropriate skills was Catering, which had been my job before I became Organiser and remained so throughout, despite any evidence that I could manage without poisoning the entrants. Luckily we had a group member who was a qualified catering manager and she produced the food for the finish meal, much to everyone's relief.

Let battle commence – and at times that is exactly what it felt like! Requests for entry forms had to be posted on or after 1st January 1989 - any postmarked in December 1988 were rejected. Being married to the Entry Secretary meant a lot of late night envelope stuffing and frequent trips to the local post office. As the entry forms were returned, usually with another SAE for acknowledgement, postmen were beginning to drop like flies, while asking for transfers to another district. We had over 500 enter, but with people withdrawing we ended up with 473, uncannily similar to the 472 at this year's EBB 100. I also started a close relationship with my local bank as I deposited all the cheques!

Of course the printed RDs and final instructions had to be posted out, [with any late amendments pinned up at the start to be copied down], meaning another 500 or so envelopes to be lugged down to the Post Office for franking, since they wouldn't fit in the local box.

One part of the process was completely different to nowadays – the Marshals' Walk. This was our first opportunity to see how the route felt as a continuous walk, whether we needed any amendments etc.



Marshals' Walk Headquarters  
L-R Mike Dixon, Richard Jasper, Shirley Hume, Mac MacArthur, Jill Wilkins

Unlike nowadays it was free, the HQ was a family tent on a small campsite in Crickhowell, all the checkpoints were out of the backs of cars or tents, except for breakfast which was famously cooked on camping stoves in a bus shelter on the A470 [at least I think it was the A470, it was definitely a road with a bus shelter!].

(Editor - It was the A40 Shirley!!)



The week before the Marshals' walk there had been snow on Pen-y-Fan and we had the Coastguard on standby (rather than Mountain Rescue) for this event, given the state of the ground. 13 people finished from around 20 starters, 4 from SW, 7 from B&W plus 2 others who were helping on the weekend.



Marshals' Walk Breakfast Stop  
L-R Chris Hume, Nick Kaye, Jean Hadfield, Mike Evans, Shirley Hume

3 weeks to go and catering is gearing up. With 10,000 homemade individual cakes and savouries safely packed up in numerous freezers - begged, borrowed and, in one case, used without knowledge of the Government Dept who owned it. With no supermarket deliveries I was left with the interesting task of trying to buy 70 dozen eggs in one go from the local Tesco. They were very helpful and went out to their storeroom, only to come back and ask if I had said 7 dozen.....

After explaining I did get 70 dozen and cleared a checkout when I approached with the enormous wire cage. We had to go to the local bread factory, the fruit market and clear shelves in various stores before we had everything. I then had to hard boil 500 of the eggs on my domestic cooker at home, make 500 drop scones and 9 gallons of jelly, all of which had to be squeezed into one small white van and various cars. [And you wonder why I won't go in a kitchen at a checkpoint these days.....]

And so to the weekend itself - a really hot 3 days, which meant getting various extra water stops out quickly and a lot of sore feet from the hard ground. We had the usual unexpected issues on the day, the non-appearance of one of our sweepers meant that our first sweeper ended up doing 50 miles instead of the agreed 25. He then demanded a tally card and went on to finish the walk. Given that our checkpoints, with the exception of breakfast, didn't have fridges our decision to use powdered milk turned out to be a good one, even if I was a bit over enthusiastic on the order - I finally disposed of the remaining items in 2014 when we moved house! The jelly went down a treat and nobody seemed to taste the blue mould we had scraped off the top before leaving home.....



Gerry Jackson at the end of the Marshals' Walk



The start of the Brecon Beacons 100

The usual selection of weird, wonderful and downright bizarre incidents were taking place out on the course, while we tried to keep track via Raynet and the services of a leather-clad Nev Tandy from Mid Wales LDWA, who zoomed round the route on his motorbike bringing the checkpoint sheets back to HQ to update the manual progress chart.



Entrants were as delightful, mad and, at times, downright annoying as in every other 100. We had an innovative [never to be repeated] treat for anyone completing their 10th LDWA 100 – a kiss from the Organiser of their choice!. Since the LDWA seemed to regard the Humes as a single entity this was a straight choice between myself and him indoors – luckily for all concerned the relevant entrants were all male, much to the relief of my worried sidekick.

After waiting the best part of 12 months for some of the previous 100 result booklets to arrive, we set ourselves the target of getting them to the printers by the Friday of the bank holiday week and posted a week later. This meant hand typing all the results into a spreadsheet from the manual list, done on our Amstrad computer by teams of 2 people in turns [special thanks to Nick and Julia Kaye, Ken and Isobel Falconer plus my very own computer 'expert']. The day after the event hand written letters were written and posted to every group / individual who helped. All the result booklets had the individual's result highlighted and the booklet signed by myself – all posted less than 2 weeks after the end [another trek to the Post Office!!].

Was it worth it?

Absolutely.....one of the best experiences of my life and one that will live in the memory until the latter gives up the ghost. It formed a bond between the two groups, although I never imagined I would end up a member of South Wales 30 years later.

You might like to compare the following statistics with the 2023 EBB100.

- Entries 473 [427/47 male / female]
- Starters 417 [379/38 male / female]
- Finishers 302 [275 / 27 male / female – 72%]
- Median Time 35 hours 21 minutes



Entrants sleeping between checkpoints on the Brecon Beacons 100



L-R Nick Kaye, Chris Hume, Shirley Hume



Shirley Hume ready to post 500+ results booklets



Richard Denby



The Brecon Beacons 100 Cake

# "THE VALLEYS 100"

By David Morgan



In 2009, having walked several LDWA 100-mile walks, I knew that I wanted to organise a LDWA 100-mile event here in South Wales. I also knew that having walked in the Valleys, our Group could host an event in an area that would be unfamiliar to many members of the LDWA family. I started a conversation with our committee members and other key South Wales LDWA Group stalwarts and my germ of an idea picked up momentum to the extent that in 2010 the National Executive Committee of the LDWA invited us to organise the 2014 event.

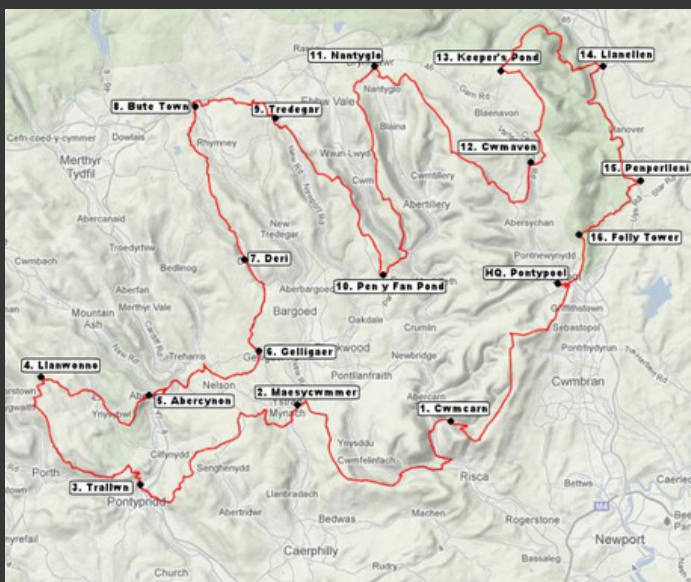


L-R - John Cunnane, David Morgan, Gail Elrick, Gerry Jackson, Andrew Clabon, Gwyn Matthews, Claire Murray, Hugh Woodford, Shirley Hume, Phil Mitchell, Chris Hume

In May 2010 we held our first meeting and because I'd put my head above the parapet, I was to be the Chair. Other committee members were Gerry Jackson, Shirley Hume, Chris Hume, Andrew Clabon, Gwyn Matthews, John Cunnane, Claire Murray, Phil Mitchell, Hugh Woodford and Gail Elrick (NEC representative).

Our route was based on the town of Pontypool and headed as far west as the Rhondda Valleys via an undulating route. The distance was exactly 100.2 miles with a height ascent of 15,361 feet and because recently previous LDWA 100-mile walks had been organised with reduced height ascent, we knew that our event was going to be challenging.

We were innovative too and things that we introduced on Valleys 100 are now taken for granted on current LDWA 100s.



Andrew Clabon (working with Grae Yeandle) designed 'FATCATS' (Finish arrival time and Checkpoint arrival time system) which was the first time that entrants had their arrival times at the checkpoints recorded electronically. PACER has since replaced FATCATS.

We created a forum so that entrants could ask questions ahead of the event in order to manage their expectations. We ensured that we used online mapping and overlaid the route so that people could see exactly where they were to walk rather than read a route description and try and interpret by marking a



paper map. We created an online shop so that people could buy their merchandise electronically.



L-R - Trevor White, Grae Yeandle

But, all of the innovations did nothing to ensure that the weather on the weekend of the main event would behave. The marshals' walk a month previously had seen near perfect walking conditions, but for the weekend of the main event, it rained, rained and rained some more. A deep depression sat directly over the South Wales valleys and only moved on Monday morning. The weather impacted the completion success rate and sadly only 52.9% of the starters finished the challenge that we had set. One completion did stand out though, and that was Rod

Hollands' success. He had already completed the Valleys 100 route once prior to arriving at the start on the Saturday morning having started on Thursday morning. He set off with the other entrants for a second loop and incredibly completed a double 100 when he returned to Pontypool where he was enthusiastically greeted.

But, despite the disappointment of the weather impacting the event, entrants praised our efforts and whilst it took some time, our enthusiasm was only dimmed for a couple of years before I said, 'I have an idea' and Y 100 Sir Fynwy was born!



Water pouring down the Folly Tower path after so much rain!



L-R - Claire Murray, Jo Johnstone



Norma Lloyd



The Start



Rod Hollands returning to Walk HQ having walked 200 miles



# "Y 100 SIR FYNWY"

By David Morgan



I think it was the rain in May 2014 that persuaded me that I should seek to encourage South Wales LDWA Group members to think about organising another LDWA 100-mile event. From a personal perspective and despite knowing that we had done a great job in the face of adversity, when it had rained for nearly all of the 2014 Valleys 100, I knew that many of the entrants had not been able to fully appreciate the beauty that they had walked through. The cloud had hung low and deposited rain drop after rain drop on the entrants' heads making the event nothing more than a gruelling challenge to complete with little visual pleasure.

In 2016 we had successfully hosted the Taith Torfaen and we had seen several new members join the Group who had enthusiastically involved themselves with our weekly activities thus making it viable to organise a large event again. So, in 2016, having persuaded the committee that we could host an event based on the county of Monmouthshire, an application was made to the LDWA NEC and we were granted permission to be the hosts for the 2020 LDWA 100.

Our committee consisted of Valleys 100 veterans and newer members too. I chaired and took on the catering role whilst Shirley Hume took on the role of treasurer and checkpoint liaison. Jason Winney & Rob Richardson looked after the route whilst Rob also looked after Transport and was our secretary. Simon Pickering looked after Walk HQ, Gerry Jackson looked after IT and merchandise, Andrew Clabon was to oversee PACER and media / council liaison. Gwyneth Littlejohn was our entries secretary whilst Alan Warrington was to be in charge of the event control desk. Last and by no means least, Alwyn Nixon was to look after the marshals' event.



Y 100 Sir Fynwy Committee: L-R Alwyn Nixon, Gwyneth Littlejohn, Gerry Jackson, Rob Richardson, Jason Winney, Shirley Hume, Alan Warrington, Andrew Clabon. Missing from the photo - Simon Pickering & David Morgan

I designed the route and was proud of the fact that it was a diverse route taking entrants from the Gwent Levels at sea level to the Black Mountains at over 2000 ft above sea level. Two of Wales' great rivers (the Usk and Wye) were to be followed and a long section of Offa's Dyke path was to be followed between Pandy and Monmouth. Initially we wanted the event to be based on the town of Abergavenny but the business manager at the King Henry VIII school was disinterested in our proposal to hire the school.

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We looked at the route and identified that Chepstow Comprehensive School were willing to host us. There were clearly pros & cons to any location being chosen, but sadly using Chepstow did mean that the visual highlight in the Black Mountains was to be in the dark for many of our entrants but securing a school with all the necessary facilities was key.

Four years of work saw us ready to go in early 2020. We had started to buy the food for the event, had a healthy entry number which was close to the maximum permitted and we were looking forward to welcoming the LDWA family to Monmouthshire. And then Covid-19 struck!

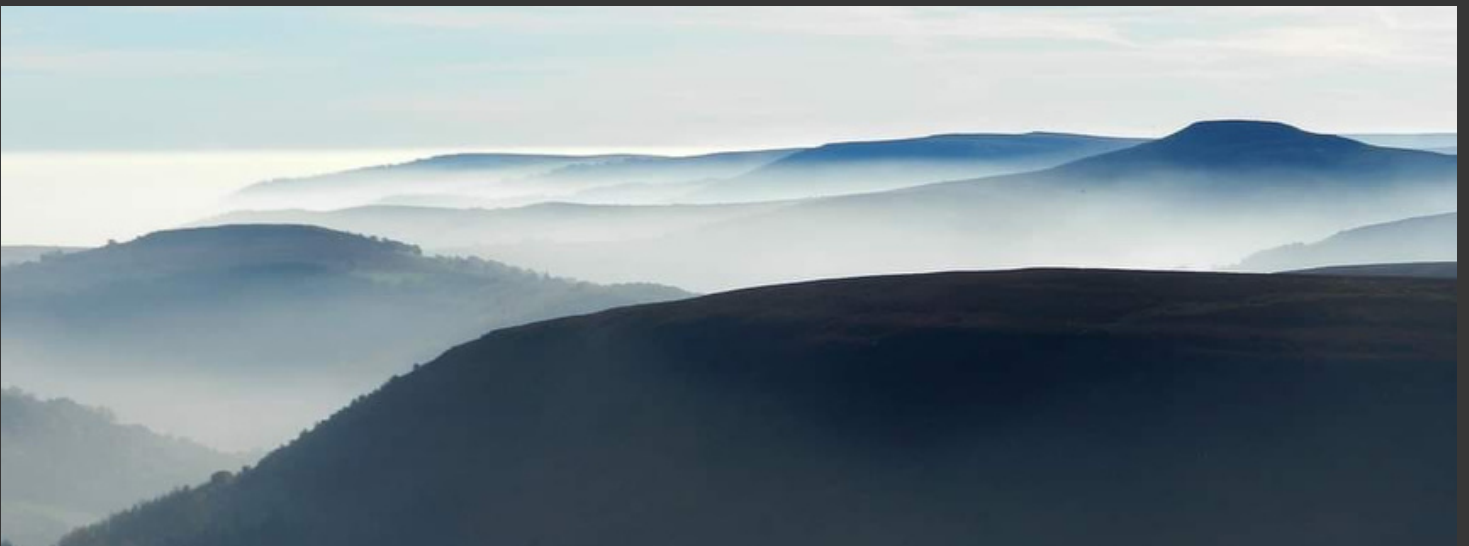


Some of the food that went to a food bank in the Taff Valley

What is there to say? We all know that Covid-19 had a devastating affect on social activities not just in the UK but across the whole world. Initially, the event was to be deferred for 12 months (a precedent had been set in 2001 with foot & mouth) and we mothballed the plans thinking that 2021 would be our year. But, as the year rolled on and government rules and guidance continued to deter large gatherings, we simply could not plan with any confidence that the event would be allowed.

In 2020 entrants had been refunded most of their entry fees but had been forced to give up some of the fee as we had already spent money on several things (food included). We didn't want a repeat in 2021 and reluctantly in late 2020 we made the decision that the event could not be held. It was a unanimous decision not to seek a further deferral as that would have been so unfair on the other 100 organising committees who were stacked up behind us, and so Y 100 Sir Fynwy became 'The Hundred That Never Was' and Virtual Y 100 Sir Fynwy was born.

Will South Wales LDWA Group ever organise a LDWA 100 again? I sincerely hope so and I would hope to be involved and fully support the member who has the vision to lead the Group forward.



The view from Loxidge Tump high above Llanthony in the Black Mountains, a hill that the entrants would have climbed on Y 100 Sir Fynwy



# "VIRTUAL Y 100 SIR FYNWY"

By Gerry Jackson



In mid-December 2020 the announcement was made that the already re-scheduled Y 100 Sir Fynwy event could not be held in May 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The South Wales LDWA local group agreed with the LDWA request to hold a Virtual Y 100 Sir Fynwy event over the weekend of 29th May to 31st May 2021. The Virtual 100 was to be open to all LDWA members who could devise their own route of at least 100 miles but they had to submit evidence of completion of the route.

Detailed planning started in January 2021 with the same organising committee: David Morgan, Andrew Clabon, Alan Warrington, Shirley Hume, Gwyneth Littlejohn, Rob Richardson, Simon Pickering, Jason Winney, Alwyn Nixon and Gerry Jackson and supported by LDWA 100 coordinators Alan Warrington and Sara Dyer. Due to COVID restrictions all meetings had to be held online via the Internet using Zoom.

In some ways organisation of a virtual event was easier as there would be no checkpoints, HQ, route description etc to organise. However there were several new tasks such as creating a new virtual 100 website, deciding what could be provided as evidence of completion, validation of evidence, updating the event badge, merchandise, certificate and map, organising the commemorative gift to entrants (multi-functional headwear), creating event rules, providing guidance about evidence and how to present it and developing support software for the validation process.

## Website

The pages in the original website had to be disabled and replaced with new ones, while this was my responsibility the content was written by other members of the team so all I had to do was create new pages and add the text to them.

## Evidence of completion

Much thought went into this by the committee and it was decided that the evidence could consist of:

- A recorded GPX file of the route covered
- Photographs of key points on the route
- Testimonials of witnesses
- ATM and shop receipts



Jean Bobker completing her 20th LDWA 100 on Virtual Y 100 Sir Fynwy whilst undergoing chemotherapy



Receipts submitted to prove when and where an entrant was!

To help entrants and to make validation easier much guidance and examples were provided on the website along with a set of FAQs. Also an evidence form was created to record basic information such as distance and time taken and to relate evidence such as photographs and receipts to the route. A worry about a deluge of huge photographs being submitted led to instructions on the website about reducing their size – this was mostly ignored by entrants.

Also guidance on how to download GPX files from a variety of GPS systems and watches was provided and presumably followed.

## Validation and Support Software

When validation of evidence was discussed it became apparent that IT support was crucial to cope with the volume of expected evidence from a potentially very high number of entrants bearing in mind that there was no upper limit to entries. This became my main task. The initial plan for submission of evidence and validation was:

- Entrants to login to a South Wales Virtual 100 website
- To complete an online evidence form and upload evidence files to the website server where it would be stored in a database
- The organising committee would all act as validators by downloading an entrants evidence files, inspecting them and either accepting or rejecting the claim, then Informing the entrant of the outcome.

Software to support this was written but when undergoing final testing some three weeks before the event, the website server software detected my test accesses as attempts to hack the site and suspended me. That was quickly sorted out but we decided to amend the process and revert to the previous idea of entrants emailing evidence to a virtual 100 email address with a member of the committee (me) responsible for uploading the evidence for validation. In retrospect this was a wise decision as when the deluge of emails started it became apparent that relying on entrants to upload files would have been far more trouble than it was worth.



Entrants from all over the UK entered Virtual Y 100 Sir Fynwy. This photo features Irregulars members. Photo copyright John Whitworth

## The Deluge of Emails

Emails with evidence started as a trickle in the days following the event but then became a deluge that couldn't be handled by one person. There were also other problems, for example the email mailbox on the server filled up before all emails were downloaded so that entrants couldn't be sure evidence had been submitted – fortunately this was easily resolved by selecting a much bigger upper limit.



After an emergency Zoom meeting we decided that I would bundle a number of emails, using a free internet service called WeTransfer recommended by member Sara Down, and send them in turn to a small team of three, David Morgan, Andrew Clabon and Alan Warrington who would upload the evidence and entrant details. When the bundle of emails was completely uploaded another bundle could be requested. Sadly little or no notice of guidance about size of photographs, completion of the evidence form etc seemed to have been taken by the majority of entrants.

Counting the records of emails there we received 762 emails totalling 4760 Megabytes in size. Many entrants had an excessive number of emails because of the large number of big photographs they submitted.



South Wales LDWA member Tony Alcock at the start of his 2021 journey!

## The Database

Creating and populating the database had a number of unforeseen benefits in addition to its primary purpose as a data repository of evidence for validation. This is because it was fairly easy and quick to write small programs to obtain and/or display performance data in different ways, for example:

- To produce a list of results that could be imported into PACER for the LDWA website to avoid manual entry
- To obtain statistics about how many entrants had submitted evidence, how many were waiting to be validated, how many were accepted or rejected
- To provide a form and display for entrants who could enter their entrant number and see the status of their submission. This was after we started getting requests about whether we had received their evidence and we didn't have time to respond with individual emails
- To generate results in a format for the LDWA 100s recorder to easily cut and paste into the LDWA 100s database.

## Validation

When a member of the validation team (the organising committee) had time to do a validation session they went to a web page where they were presented with an entrant, selected at random from the data base, whose evidence awaited validation. They then downloaded a zipped file of that entrant's evidence plus a display of distance covered, time taken etc. On completion they could then accept or reject the evidence. Once we had amended the process upload and validation of evidence proceeded very smoothly.

## Statistics

Entries: 496

Starters: 433

Non-starters/No evidence submission: 63

Completed 100 miles or more: 199

Completed 50 to 99.9 miles: 195

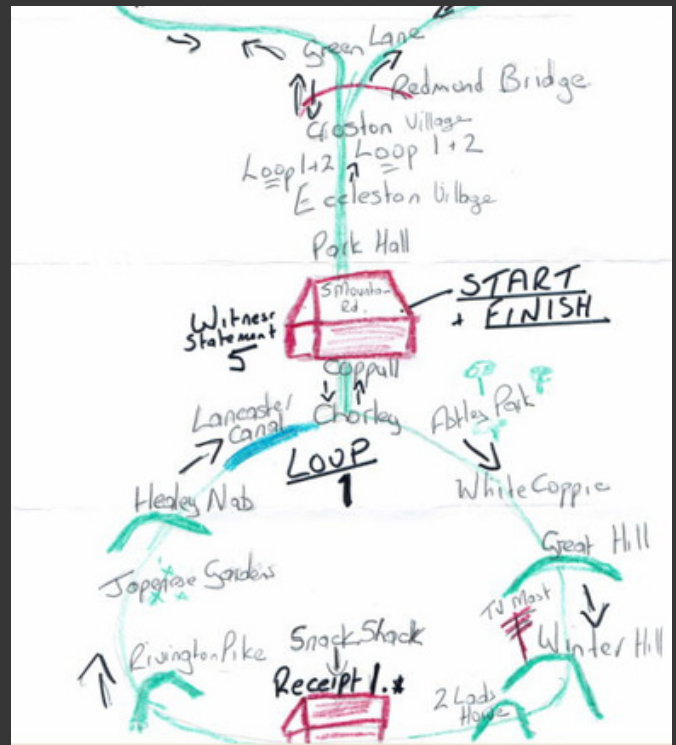
Completed less than 50 miles: 39

## Conclusions

The Virtual Y 100 Sir Fynwy was a great success with a healthy number of entries. The success rate at 45.9% of starters was rather low when compared with conventional LDWA 100s. This may be because it was not a mass entry event where there is always someone to walk with

whatever your pace; that some people were completing 50+ miles to qualify for the 2022 Trans Pennine 100; or lack of support. The large number of non-starters 12.7% of entries may be entrants who didn't bother to submit evidence of completion of a short distance.

In addition, the online camaraderie that Virtual Y 100 Sir Fynwy generated was a real boost at a time when there was so much uncertainty as to when normality would return to LDWA events. Members shared photographs of themselves embracing the challenge and enjoying themselves on Facebook as they walked their personal self-supported 100 mile challenge walk. We were pleased to have facilitated the enjoyment that people enjoyed!



A hand drawn map submitted as evidence to the validation team!

### Names Of Social Walks

By Gerry Jackson

After 1986 the South Wales group started creating quirky/humorous titles for them. Going through Striders for this edition of Leekie's Blether reminded me of them - here are some samples with comments where rather obscure.

"**Backbrecon Beacons**", 9 August 1986 & 29 August 1987.

"**Wye Walk? Why not**", 19 May 1987.

"**Rhondda Ridge but walk the Taff**", 19 March 1988.

"**Wyending Up and Down**", 21 January 1989.

"**Walk Caerphilly**", 11 February 1989.

"**Blake's Severn**", 13 January 1990.

For science fiction nerds - google Blake's 7 for information. Led by Roger Blake and even included a section along the River Severn - what else could it be called?

"**Gower Way**", 17 March 1990.

Rather unfriendly - say it quickly a few times. Someone actually wrote to us for a route description thinking it was a known walk. There is actually a Gower Way long distance path now, inaugurated by the Prince of Wales in 1998.

"**Fawr Taf, Fechan Taf, Fechan Tuf**", 19 May 1991.

Hmm, Nick sneaked this past the Strider censor!

"**Fine Tour of Torfaen**", 21 September 1991 & 8 December 1991.

"**Twmbarlwm Down, Machen Up**", 20 May 1995.

"**Figure of Hate**", 21 October 1995.

The first completion of the 50 mile Taith Torfaen before it acquired its current name.

"**A Walk on the Wye Side**", 21 September 1996.

"**Gerry Meandering**", 6 November 1999.

"**Magnificent Severn**", 15 January 2000.



# South Wales LDWA Challenge Events

The South Wales LDWA Group has organised several challenge events during its 40 years and taken pride in being part of the larger LDWA family. In doing so the Group has introduced visitors to our wonderful walking area, ensured that they have walked through fine countryside and importantly enjoyed great food at the checkpoints and in particular at the Walk Headquarters.

Many of our members love being involved and quickly volunteer to help out whenever an event is announced. Without the selfless help offered, the events cannot go ahead and it has been a true team effort that has ensured that the events have been as successful as they have.

The next few pages in this Blether celebrate each challenge event that the South Wales LDWA Group has organised during its 40 years starting with the Caerphilly Summits Challenge Walk.

## "CAERPHILLY SUMMITS CHALLENGE EVENT"

By Nick Kaye

The reasoning behind the creation of the Caerphilly Summits Challenge (CSC) is worth relating, and I wonder whether it has parallels with the creation of other LDWA challenge walks. During 1987 I was scheduled to lead one of our monthly social walks, but nobody turned up at the start point. So, I drove back home and decided instead to go out for my regular 13-mile hill run around the Rudry area. In the two hours I was out all of the following happened.

I pondered over that fact that the numbers turning up for our monthly walks seemed to be decreasing, that perhaps the Group needed a new 'focus' in order to 'keep going', and what better 'focus' could there be than the creation of the Group's very first annual challenge event. And why not use the very territory I was running over. In fact, why not centre it on Caerphilly, since the town sits within a bowl surrounded by hills on every side. By the time I had returned home from my run I had devised in my head the potential route that we could use and a proposal for the title of the event. All it required was to put the suggestion to the Group and to see if Caerphilly Leisure Centre would be willing to allow its premises to be used as the start/finish point. And the rest, as they say, is history. The Group accepted the proposal, Caerphilly Summits Challenge was agreed on as the event title, and Caerphilly Leisure Centre said yes. The first route survey for the CSC was walked in Jan '88 and the first CSC event was held on Sat 9th July 1988 and involved a route of 32 miles, 5,700 feet of ascent and crossed the summit of 9 hills.



L-R - Dan Hadfield, Don Henley, Jean Hadfield, Gerry Jackson, Marcus Harling, Alun Jones, Mike Evans, Chris Coy, Doug Matthews, Nick Kaye, Roger Blake, Tim Gronow

From 1989, and for the next few years, the CSC used the recreational society building of the Amersham International (AI) site (Forest Farm, on north side of Cardiff) as its start/finish base. AI was the company that I worked for, meaning that we had use of the facilities for free. Thereafter, following the closure of the Recreational Society building, the start/finish point for the event was moved to the nearby Tongwynlais village hall for the period that this account is covering.

Following 1988 the event was expanded to comprise three main routes of 21, 32 and 42 miles together with a choice of family routes of 10, 12 and 15 miles. And then, in 1994 a 37-mile mountain bike route was incorporated. The popularity of the event peaked in 1995 with 281 out on the day, of whom 167 were walkers/runners and 114 mountain bikers. The incorporation of the mountain biking route was always deemed somewhat controversial with some members of the group and the decision was made to drop the bikers' route for the years following.

Following 1988 the event was expanded to comprise three main

Below: Coed-y-Wenallt checkpoint after the heavens had opened



**Caerphilly Summits Challenge - July 3**

Various distances up to 42 miles in up to 15 hours in South Wales LDWA was up to the high standards expected of such an experienced and progressive group and I did not need to say my "Roughly" "Wah" on any poor, unimpressive local - otherwise we might have been back here!

The heat of the day was really quite stifling, especially for those like me with fair skin, but there was just sufficient breeze on the hill tops. Cheered and cheered we went, over rainforest, open fields, with new and exciting views around almost every corner, even if sometimes the excitement was tempered with the knowledge that we were shortly to ascend said view!

**W**HAT I TOOK a short break on Myrddid Mawr, after 27 miles, unperceived by the fact that the control point had chosen their visit to the top point. We then started a long descent on what the route description called "a delightful knobbly". Rarely are we informed on the nature of an upcoming topography, is it hilly, mountainous, rocky, eroded... but the adjective here was an understatement, with the path flitting in and out of the trees and offering wonderful views across the valley as we descended almost 1000 feet.

**"Even Cardiff looked nice"**

At the refreshments at Rady with 31 miles gone and 11 still to go, we were 50% successful in persuading a couple of young ladies we had found six miles of their 21 mile route. One (the sensible one?) ignored the implications of both us and the checkpoint staff, but we were unable to cable her friend into walking the next mile with us (the reason being rainforest at the point). After passing on a few words of what we trained my walking with rain forest and the confidence to believe in the route direction was given, we went our separate ways. Keith and I now climbed to the ridge at Craig Lydvan, with extensive views of the countryside to the north-west and Cardiff to the south-east. Now you may say think much of the Welsh coast, but you may think much of the quiet valleys with pretty villages, and of

just three miles to go. The wisest part of the walk, in terms of route-finding, then followed, although waypoints had been thoughtfully provided. Through the final forest to reach the Cardiff Cock Inn, and the last half mile down to the finish in Tongwynlais, passing our "one mile friends" sitting outside a local bakery, also in hand, having finished.

**W**ITH 174 starters on five routes of differing lengths, ranging from 10 to 42 miles, we will happily see the Caerphilly Summits Challenge continue on the calendar for many years to come. I can certainly recommend the trip to South Wales for the short breadth and beauty of the scenery, not to mention the height (4,000 ft. on the 21 miles route, 5,750 ft. on the 32 miles, and 7,000 ft. on the 42 miles) and the bonhomie and welcome of the marshals. Most of the walkers were, of course, from Wales and the West Country, but it was pleasing to see a fair sprinkling of "foreigners", from the Home Counties, East Anglia, the Midlands, etc. on the longer route.

Some readers (if any are still reading) may wonder why I make little mention of Caerphilly walk, although we walked all the way round the town, and we also walked above it for most of the way, we never went into it. The result is that the town itself was rarely seen and, on the few occasions it was, eagle eyes were required to spot the main feature, the castle "mile friends" sitting outside a local bakery, also in hand, having finished.

In conclusion, you will have gathered that, after the heat, I enjoyed the walk, and I think Keith did too. Also, I shall return in 1994. Our only real grumble was with the marshals that we occasionally straggled in some of the forest stages, but the organisers cannot be blamed for that.

The return journey through Sarneddlydd might take a considerable time, rest and recuperation necessitating at least four emergency service stops. By the time we arrived back on the southern outskirts of London, there were clear blue skies again, leading to another scorcher. I was starting a new job on the Monday, so we decided to "wing out" of the Taners Marathon which we had originally intended to walk later that day. I think Keith was correctly relieved to have such an excuse!

Neil Higham (1989)

**Mortimer Forest Marathon - July 11**

**E**ACH YEAR the Marches Group change the course of this event but each year it never disappoints for it is always staged in a neglected but lovely part of England on the Shropshire Herefordshire border. The Group take great care to avoid roads and the route winds through woods, hills and river valleys with outstanding views.

This year the route left Ludlow westwards into the Mortimer Forest and with very clear instructions. Most of us walked with our lady glades across the Mary Knoll village and across fields to the curiously named hamlet of The Gangle.

The walk is always full of historical interest and offers the welcome detail and beauty at the first checkpoint we climbed up to the van from the hill top on Croft Lush and the valley was wide and hazy in the sun as we navigated our way through quiet woods to the second checkpoint at Aynottery. One of the great attractions of the walk is the fact that it is so quiet. Apart from the occasional sheep, we saw a few

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Neil Higham (1989)



# "SOUTH WALES PAIRS MOUNTAIN CHALLENGE"

By Nick Kaye & Andrew Clabon

During these early years, the Caerphilly Summits Challenge was not the only organised event that the South Wales Group put on. The other was the brainchild of Andrew Clabon and was called the South Wales Pairs Mountain Challenge and was held three times at the end of September/beginning of October between 1989 and 1991. Andrew devised and organised each of these events with each edition being held in a different area within the Brecon Beacons National Park.

The event start/finishes were:

1989 Above the upper Pontsticill Reservoir.

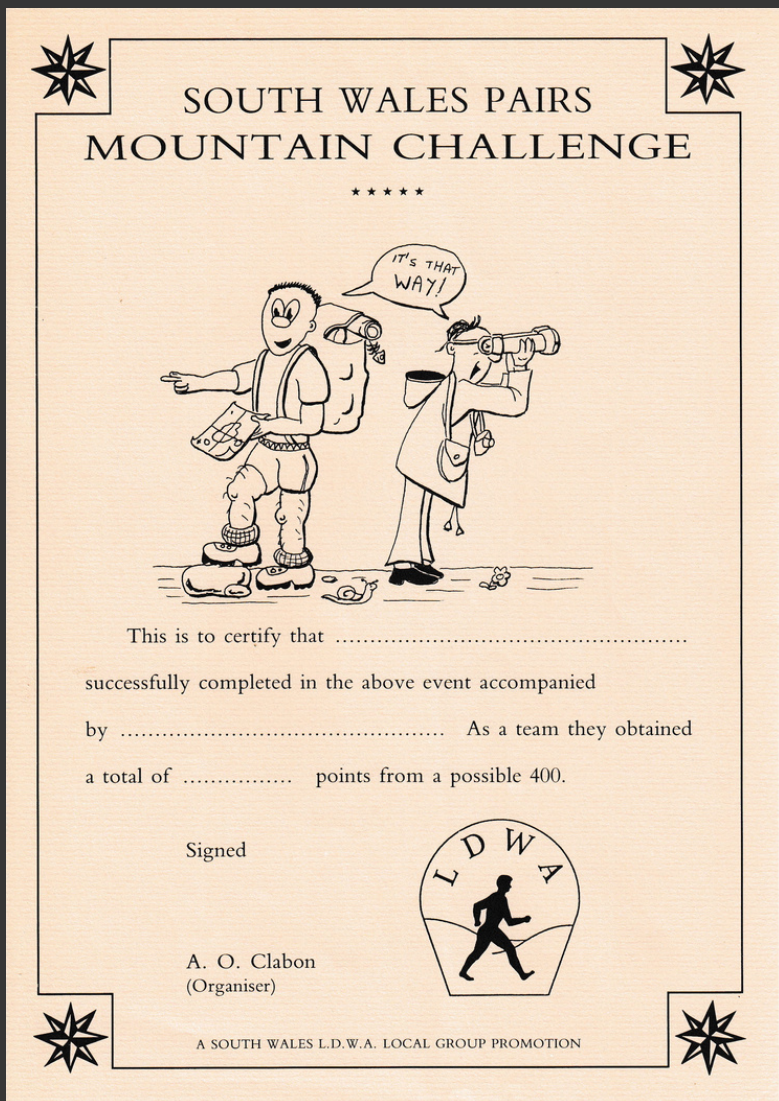
1990 In the forestry just south of Storey Arms which may not be there anymore.

1991 In the forestry below the Grwyne Fawr Reservoir.

The event was a point-scoring mountain orienteering event which required teams of two to locate obscurely positioned clippers with a points-value assigned to each with the value increasing with the degree of difficulty in reaching the clipper location. There were between 40 and 50 pairs entered each year which we felt was as much as we could handle when you consider the start/finish and the one manned checkpoint were outside. We always seemed to attract foul weather the day before when Andrew & Nick put most of the clippers out and on for the day on which this event was held which, of course, only added to the degree of 'challenge', and converted

many competitors' maps into pulp by the time that they reached the finish. It was always a scramble at the end of the day to collect the clippers before it got dark. In 1991 Gerry Jackson could not reach his final clipper as the access road was flooded and Chris Coy couldn't reach his stream junction clipper as it was now under water following the heavy rain. Due to time constraints on Andrew with his family increasing in 1992 and the limited group personnel the event was shelved after the three years.

Now with the introduction of handheld gps devices this kind of event would be much different.



# "THE TAITH TORFAEN ANYTIME CHALLENGE EVENT"

By Gerry Jackson

The idea of an Anytime Challenge walk for the South Wales group was conceived in 1994. The intention was that the walk should:

- Be a demanding route of at least 50 miles
- Cover the hills of Torfaen
- Be visually appealing
- Be completed in one day or as two 25 mile routes in two days

To meet these parameters it was based on Pontypool Leisure Centre which is central in Torfaen, easily accessible with plenty of parking space. To make it easier to be self-supported it was decided to make it two 25 mile loops - to the north and south of Pontypool giving people the opportunity to refuel at the half way point. An unintended consequence was that, having covered a hard 25 miles, it took some determination to continue with the second loop.

Once the outline of the route was devised, Dan Hadfield was roped in to do the detailed route planning taking in the countryside between Pontypool and the Bloreng. The return route was easier as it simply followed the ridge south from the Coety mountain. I did the detailed route for the southern loop. Then route descriptions were written and tested by Dan and me.



The southern loop was ready and used as a 25 mile group walk on 20th May 1995. The northern loop was ready in time for a group walk on 21st October 1995 to do the complete 50 mile route for the first time with the option of dropping out after the 25 mile northern loop. Unfortunately no record was kept of the people who completed the walk but 50 miles was definitely completed by most of the walkers.

The name of the walk, Taith Torfaen, was chosen in mid 1995 after consultation with our Welsh speaking member Alun Jones and added to the LDWA database of Anytime Challenge Walks and subsequently published in "The Long Distance Walkers' Handbook"

by the LDWA. Despite the request for people to report completions of the route, hardly anybody provided feedback so there is no record of completions.

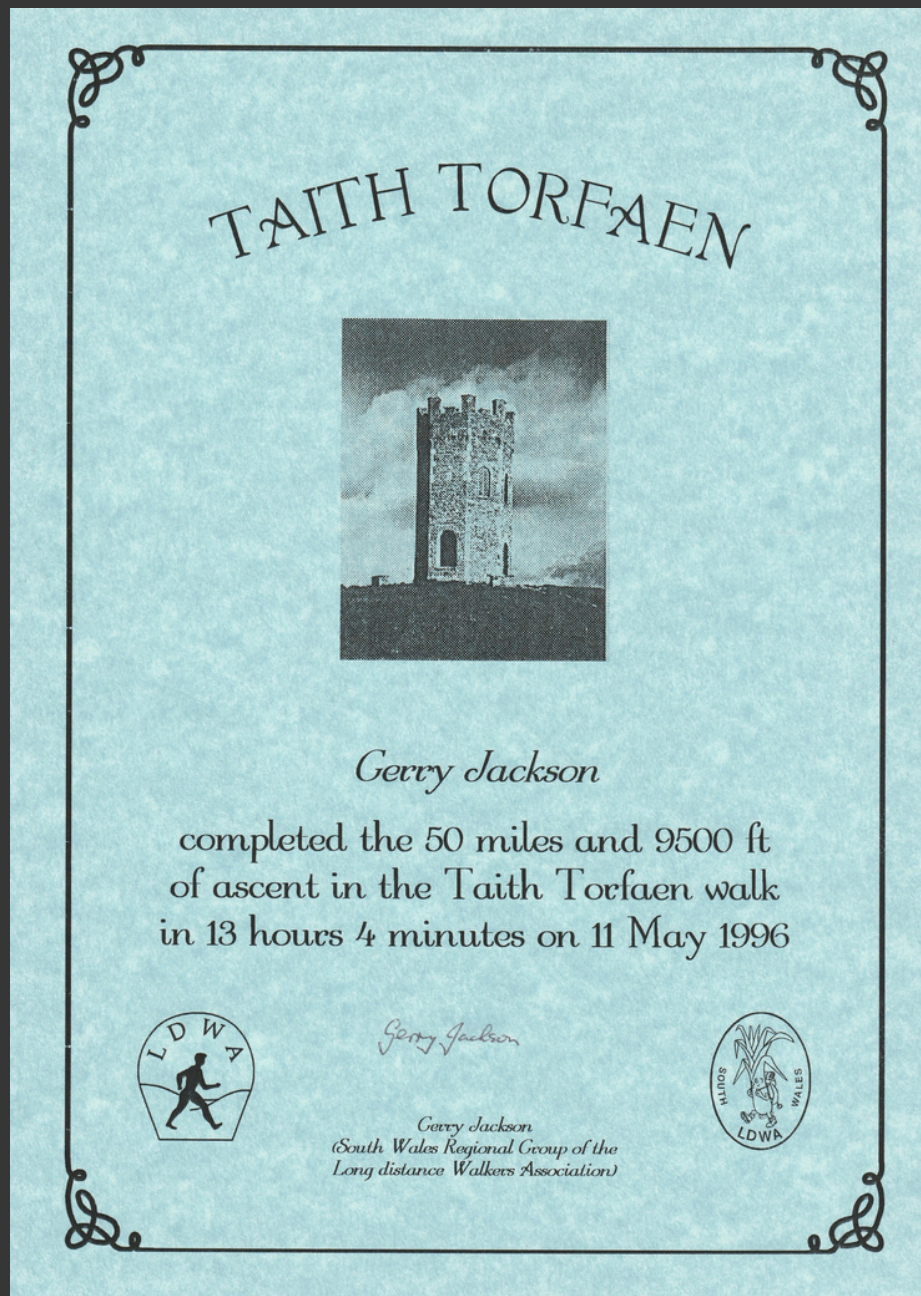
The complete Taith Torfaen has been attempted as a group walk on two other occasions, the 24th September 2011 and 23rd March 2013. On the first occasion according to the report in the walks database, 17 people completed the southern loop with 12 starting the northern loop, of these 9 completed 53 miles but the cycle path was taken back to Pontypool because of the atrocious weather conditions.



On the second attempt the northern loop was started but heavy snow before and during the walk led to it being abandoned for safety reasons with most taking the cycle path back to Pontypool. Surely it is time the group attempted the complete Taith Torfaen again as a group walk!

On 9th April 2016 the Taith Torfaen (Dan Hadfield memorial walk) was held as a challenge event to replace the Dorset Giant that was part of the LDWA South West Triple Challenge. Because of the lack of village halls for checkpoints the northern loop route was amended to use the whole ridge towards the Blorenges which cut out a long steep climb up the Blorenges. The event was a great success, 213 people started the event and 171 completed what was generally agreed to be a very hard challenge. Despite the omission of the Blorenges climb making the event 'easier' we had comments along the lines "that's the hardest 50 mile event I've ever completed" and Tara's Diary in the August 2016 Strider contains a memorable report of the event including a comment on another event "...and up a hill (or what would have been a hill..." before the Taith Torfaen).

A Marshal's event was held in which 18 people started with 15 completing the route.



# "WHERE RAVENS DARE CHALLENGE EVENT"

By David Morgan

In 2009 I joined the South Wales LDWA Group Committee and was tasked with the job of ensuring that we put a challenge event onto the LDWA calendar. The Caerphilly Summits Challenge had been our established event and had been organised 19 times between 1988 and 2009. In recent years the event had moved from its previous



bases in Caerphilly and latterly Tongwynlais to Machen. In doing so, the Committee had identified that the move to Machen had actually provided an opportunity to explore different countryside. So, whilst recognising that we could have organised a 20th Caerphilly Summits, a decision was taken to create a new event and explore countryside to the north of Twmbarlwm.

At a meeting at Gwyn Matthews' house, a decision by Malcolm Winney, Gwyn Matthews, Alun Jones and me was taken to call the new event 'Where Ravens Dare' as much of the new route would use several paths of the Raven's Walk whilst also going north to Mynydd Maen with an outside checkpoint at Edlogan Manor. I created the routes (26 & 15 miles and in 2017 an additional distance of 23 miles), wrote the route descriptions and collated the volunteers whilst Gwyn Matthews booked the checkpoints that we used on the route.

The event was held for the first time in 2010 with the last edition being held in 2017. The event was always held in October in order to show people the wonderful beech trees' autumnal colours and provided a mixture of moorland walking, forestry tracks and riverside paths.

The challenge walk did attract people from all over the country and wonderful feedback was received in relation to the quality of the walking terrain as well as the quality of the food on offer at both the checkpoints and Walk Headquarters. However, with dwindling numbers (2017 only saw 85 people turn up to walk the event) the South Wales Group Committee took the decision to mothball the event and explore new ideas!



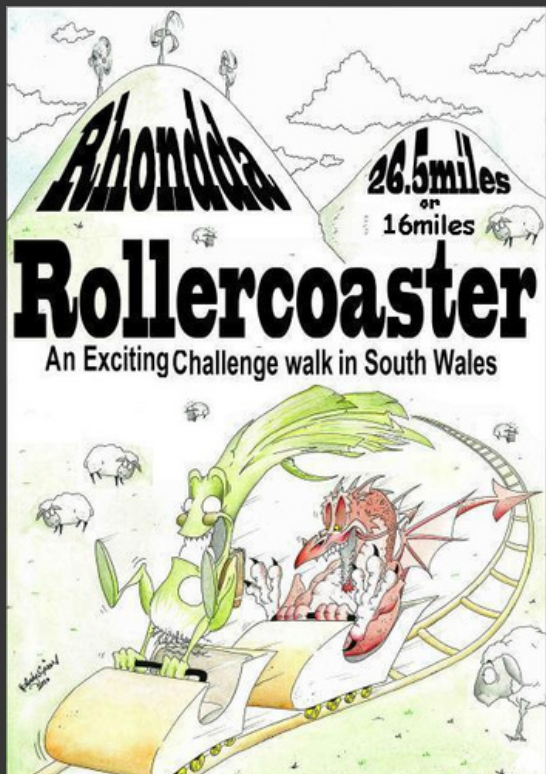
Machen L-R - Steven Hunt, David Morgan  
Andrew Clabon





# "RHONDDA ROLLERCOASTER CHALLENGE EVENT"

By David Morgan



In 2010 with the South Wales LDWA Group having a new committee and a strong core of members to call upon as volunteers, Gwyn Matthews and I considered the prospect of organising a second challenge event. We had already created the Where Ravens Dare event and buoyed by the success of its first outing, Gwyn and I wanted to show other parts of our South Wales Valleys to members of the LDWA. My favourite walking valleys are the Rhondda and Ogmore valleys and with Gwyn living in Pontypridd at the time and hailing from Trehafod, we decided to create a route that would be based in Gwyn's home village.

Our combined knowledge of the two valleys meant that we were soon able to put a route together that we felt showed the area of to its best. There were some problematic areas to explore though, and one area that needed work was due north of Gilfach Goch. On one occasion we explored moorland on Mynydd Pwllyrhebog as

we didn't want entrants to spend a long time in the nearby forestry together with the limited views. On this occasion I stood on an innocuous looking piece of grass and went straight down and past my waist into a hidden mountain bog. If Gwyn had not pulled me out, I might well still be there now. Consequently the entrants were directed into the forestry!!

As with how Gwyn and I had organised the Where Ravens Dare, he looked after the checkpoints whilst I walked the route, wrote the route description, collated the details of the volunteers and managed all the event paperwork including PACER. Our partnership worked well and the event was held for the first time in 2011. That year we had 101 entries but more importantly we received fabulous feedback and the event featured in the LDWA Strider magazine.

I also advertised the event with Runners World, local walking clubs plus I was able to obtain support from the local Rhondda Valley newspapers. Subsequent years saw the event's entrant numbers rise to as high as 280 and importantly, the event sold out each year. We also saw a high number of entrants who were not LDWA members and with an aggressive pricing structure, we were able to persuade many to join the LDWA. In 2017 we added a 16-mile option for people to consider and this distance proved to be popular too. Pleasingly, we also learned from contacts in the Rhondda Valleys that many local people now walked the route of the Rhondda Rollercoaster as a way of keeping fit. Apparently, many did not have the confidence to go off and explore other paths on their own but were comfortable with using the Rollercoaster route having walked it when they entered the event.





Tragically, Gwyn died in 2018 and in order to honour his role in the creation of the event the event was re-named The Gwyn Matthews' Rhondda Rollercoaster.



Gwyn Matthews

Having organised the event for several years, I took a step back and Ferne Davies took on the management of the event and having experienced a hiatus for the last few years due to the Group's commitments with Y 100 Sir Fynwy, the event returned to the walking calendar in 2023 together with a new organiser in Jamie Lewis.

Perhaps I'm biased, but I am firmly of the opinion that the event that we created will continue to live long and provide a very achievable challenge for walkers who visit this wonderful part of South Wales.





# "OFFA'S TWISTED WYE KANTER CHALLENGE EVENT"

By David Morgan

In 2016 the South Wales LDWA Committee discussed the prospect of organising a winter challenge event. We recognised that many LDWA events were held in spring, summer and autumn and that due to the unpredictable UK weather, fewer events were held in the winter. We had also identified that many of our South Wales members did not travel further afield to enter other LDWA Group challenge events and so the Committee decided to organise a winter

challenge event that would fill a gap in the LDWA challenge walk calendar and enable local members to experience a challenge walk in their area.

The Committee decided that we would host the event and try not to involve anyone else thus providing an opportunity for as many people to enter as possible. We were also not too keen on the idea of outside checkpoints in driving winter rain and so a kanter was designed. However, kanters are an acquired taste in the walking community and usually mean that people are not given a route description and must self-navigate to specific locations to answer posed questions. But, in order to make the event inclusive, we decided to also provide route descriptions and GPX files so that people could choose how they wished to navigate and thus enjoy their day out.



The Wye Valley was chosen as the event location since all our other events included moorland and yet we rarely used the valley that had AONB status. The Palmer Community Centre was to become our base in Chepstow and a great working relationship has been formed with the caretaker.

The event was held for the first time in 2017 and I was amazed that our new event sold out with 151 entrants signing up.

In 2018 I designed completely new routes and due to a bout of enthusiasm, even designed more routes that could be used the following year. That decision proved to be fortuitous as approximately one week before the event was due to be held, we learned of decisions by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to close paths in order to fell trees.

I quickly substituted the routes that I had planned for 2018 with those that I had up my sleeve and the crisis was averted. In 2018 we had 148 entries and in 2019 we saw a reduction to 122 and sadly more footpath closures.

A decision was made to mothball the event due to the ever growing uncertainty in relation to planning as NRW did a lot of tree felling in winter but never updated their website to identify where they were going to work. The Committee supported my position that it was almost impossible to plan with any confidence.



Chepstow L-R - Rob Richardson, Gill Morgan

In 2021 an opportunity arose that saw the return of the kanter. Through my contacts in the wider walking community, South Wales LDWA Group aligned the kanter with the very popular Chepstow Walking Festival. The event was to be the culmination of a week's walking events and in 2022 127 entrants enjoyed a fabulous spring day with the bluebells and wild garlic in bloom. And because it was spring NRW weren't tree felling so plans could be made with confidence.

The kanter was once again a part of the Chepstow Walking Festival in 2023 and attracted 138 entrants who all provided wonderful feedback. As long as the South Wales LDWA Group Committee supports the event and its position within the Chepstow Walking Festival then the event can continue with different routes being created every year and for many years to come.



**Dates for your diary!**

**Chepstow Walking Festival 2023**

**Tuesday 11th to Sunday 16th April**





# "THE THREE CIRCLES CHALLENGE WALK SERIES"

By Simon Pickering

After the 2017 edition of "Where Ravens Dares" saw declining numbers, the South Wales committee decided it was time to explore new ideas for an autumn challenge event.



In thinking about possible routes for a new event, some favourite locations quickly emerged - Crickhowell, Machen, perhaps Monmouth. Then, out of the creative mist, a vision emerged of a 'Holy Trinity' - three different locations over three years with three loops each time. And so, the "Three Circles" series, with its "Power of Three" mantra and promise of a special badge for those who came with us for the whole journey, duly emerged.

Ferne Davies was the Challenge Walks Coordinator for the first instalment with the event based at Clarence Hall in the centre of Crickhowell. The routes, designed by Andrew Clabon, were 5, 9 and 17 miles in length showing off some of stunning scenery of the Black Mountains. The Eastern loop, the longest, took entrants on a circumnavigation of the Sugarloaf, a visit to its summit before a riverside walk back to the Hall. The 9-mile Southern loop took people along the Brecon/Monmouthshire canal before climbing to the Llangattock Quarries and caves, while the Northern loop took in Table Mountain with its Iron Age hillfort and views over Crickhowell. It was a tough event with the three loops packing in 7000 feet of climbing. A total of 98 people registered, with 78 making the start line.



Three Circles of Crickhowell - 5th October 2019

For second edition we were between Challenge Walk co-ordinators so the design and administration duties were shared. Jason Winney got the ball rolling designing the three new routes from Machen and sorting out the venue, before I got my first experience of front-line event delivery in coordinating the other activities. The Machen routes were 8, 10 and 12 miles in length. The longer western loop visited Rudry Common, Graig Lysfaen and Ruperra Castle before returning to our base at Machen Village Hall. The 10-mile eastern loop mainly followed the Rhymney River Circular path, while the 8-mile northern loop used part of the Rhymney Valley Ridgeway path en route to Mynydd Machen.

Round Two was to prove a testing event – for everyone involved, including the entrants – all of us battered both by Covid and then by the weather and other problems. The realities of life in a pandemic saw the event postponed in 2020 and when it finally emerged in 2021 it was into a strange new world of face-masks and social distancing, as well as and lots and lots of rain!



Cross stream carefully on stepping stones - Guy Evans (Facebook)

Throw in petrol supply problems that prevented some entrants from travelling and we saw our original entry list of 103 whittled down to 66 starters – perhaps a blessing in disguise as we battled valiantly not only to protect our hall HQ from the elements but also with a WiFi signal that can most kindly be described as ‘dodgy’. Our PACER supremo Andrew Clabon duly added the

following note to the official results:

***"Due to the weather it was understandable that entrants changed circles on the day compared with what they had envisaged when they entered. That made keeping track at the organisers end a little difficult especially when all time recording was done on paper due to a very poor/non-existent internet signal. With that in mind I do hope you can forgive us if there is the odd error in the above time recording."***

The final instalment came in 2022, with the HQ now the Rockfield Community Hall in Monmouth. This time around I designed the routes before passing the exciting adminny and delivery stuff to our newly minted Challenge Walks coordinator, Jamie Lewis. The Monmouth routes were 13, 9 and 5 miles. The longer southern loop took a number of local landmarks including the Kymin and the ‘Cathedral of the Forest’ in Newland. The 9-mile ‘northern’ loop visited Buckholt Wood and Welsh Newton Common, while the 5 mile western’ loop used part of the Offa’s Dyke National Trail before exploring King’s Wood.



The Monmouth instalment attracted 106 entrants with fine August Bank Holiday weather meaning most of them (95) duly turned up – and eleven of them even got to take home the badge (designed by Tony Alcock) for completing all three events!

Organising a challenge event with three loops all starting and finishing at the same point, and enabling participants choose one, two or all three, brings with it both opportunities and challenges. It allows seven different route lengths to be offered potentially broadening the appeal of the event, and offering entrants the flexibility to change

between them depending on weather, mood and other factors. It also simplifies some logistics and reduces costs by eliminating the need for multiple checkpoints. Some of the complexities of having three different loops may not be immediately apparent, however, as it also introduces greater complexity into calculating start and finish times and running Pacer. It also means having to come up with three new routes every year!



# "PUTTING THE 'LONG' INTO LONG DISTANCE WALKING"

By David Morgan

One of the things that I love about being a member of the South Wales LDWA Group is that boundaries in relation to walking distances can truly be pushed. Whilst it is perfectly normal for us to walk 20-25 miles, distances that would make an average walker raise their eyebrows, to then go on and walk even longer routes which were often self-supported is something that I and others find very satisfying.

The first 50+ mile that I led was in September 2011 when I selected the Taith Torfaen Anytime Challenge event as our route. We walked the southern loop first in daylight and then tackled the northern loop overnight. On this occasion the attending walkers were supported by the late Gwyn Matthews, Rosemary Jackson and then later at night, Jo Johnstone. Due to some truly awful weather at night I made the decision not to traverse Coity Mountain on the return to Pontypool, but my first led 50 mile walk was in the bag!



L-R - Jason Winney, U/K, Rod Hollands, David Morgan, Rosemary Jackson, Gwyn Matthews, Nigel Dean, Marina Crockford, Bea Therin, John Tinelli.



Pontypool L-R - Jo Johnstone, Marina Crockford, Norma Lloyd, Andrew Clabon, Bea Therin, Ang Williams, John Tinelli, Nigel Dean, Rob Richardson, David Morgan, Rod Hollands, U/K, John Cunnane, Cheryl Llewellyn, Jason Winney, Rob Wilkinson, Phil Mitchell.

The second time that I tried to lead a 50 miler was to repeat the Taith Torfaen in March 2013, once again supported by Gwyn, but this time do the northern loop first. This turned out to be a truly epic day due to the deep snow lying on the ground and with worsening conditions it soon became clear to me as the walk leader that we were not going to walk the full 50 miles. Indeed it took us best part of 13 hours to walk the first 25 miles but what a great fun day!



The longest walk that I led was in July 2015 and was a wonderful day out in the Black Mountains and beyond. Our route took us over Sugar Loaf and thence north through the Blacks to Rhos Dirion. We descended to Hay on Wye and then headed north to The Begwyns. Heading south we climbed over the Dragon's Back in the night and up to the col between Mynydd Llysiu and Pen Trumau. We dropped into the Grwyne Fechan and my abiding memory was all of us lying on the tarmac lane like a row of sardines as we all had a kip. Goodness knows what a car driver would have said if they'd seen us! We returned to Abergavenny to be greeted by a member of the public wishing us a nice day's walk. Their face was a picture as we said we were just finishing a 55-mile day and night out!



The Begwyns L-R - David Morgan, Gwyneth Littlejohn, Susan Wells, Bruce Kennedy, Nick Vanson, John Tinelli, Gary Upstone, Mike Batt, Andrew Clabon, Hannah Brown, Cheryl Llewellyn, Jason Winney, Norma Lloyd.



Rhos Dirion - Jason Winney.

In 2017 I commenced the first of a trilogy of walks that would see members walk different routes between the Monmouthshire towns of Abergavenny and Chepstow, each time with a pub finish! Each walk started on a Friday evening so that we immediately walked into the night. The first walk saw us walk north into the Black Mountains before heading east to Pandy and thence on the Offa's Dyke Path to Monmouth. We visited the Kymin and then followed the river on the Gloucestershire side of the Wye into Chepstow.



Chepstow Bridge L-R - Fiona Cameron, Norma Lloyd, Mike Batt, Ferne Davies, John Tinelli, Andrew Clabon, David Morgan, Jason Winney, Simon Pickering, Lucy Robins, Alan Warrington.

In 2018 our route left Abergavenny and headed up onto Deri before heading over to Skirrid. We followed a route south through central Monmouthshire using the Usk Valley Walk where at Chain Bridge we decided to have a kip in a hut set aside for local fishermen! We resupplied in Usk and met other Group members who had decided to join us for the second half. Our route headed through

Wentwood and down to the coastline at Rogiet that gave us a gentle finish along the Wales Coast Path.

The final walk of this trilogy in 2019 saw us leave Abergavenny and climb towards the Bloreng. I led the Group onto Coity Mountain and down into Pontypool. We followed the canal towards Goetre and once again frequented the fishermen's hut at Chain Bridge.



The route overlapped with the previous year into Usk and a much larger contingent of fellow walkers met us to join the walk for the second half. This time I led the walk from Wentwood via Itton and into the Wye Valley at Gaer Hill and from there we followed the Wye Valley Walk back to Chepstow. At the finish I presented Jason Winney and Mike Batt with certificates as they had accompanied me on all three adventures.



Chepstow L-R - Rod Hollands, Andy ?, David Morgan, Mike Batt, Jason Winney, Jamie Lewis



Nr St Arvans L-R - David Morgan, Simon Pickering, Kirsty Williams, Jason Winney, Hannah Brown, Jamie Lewis, Andrew Clabon, Mike Batt, Dave Webster, Norma Lloyd, Colin Utting, Gerry Jackson, Jill Richardson, Kathryn Gordon, Sara Down, Gill Morgan, Judith Fox, Sian Knight, Peter Lamont, Claire Murray, Cheryl Llewellyn, Sue Webster, Rebecca Batt, Jo Johnstone, Rob Richardson.

The Group still enjoys the occasional long walk. In September 2021 Andrew Clabon led the walk on a 52 mile route that explored the Cotswolds. His route took the attending walkers in a clockwise direction from Winchcombe via several Cotswolds highlights including Stanway, Broadway, Chipping Camden, Moreton-in-Marsh, Bourton-on-the-Water and Belas Knap. The additional bonus of this walk was that it acted as a qualifying event for the annual LDWA 100 due to the fact that it was an official 'Anytime Challenge Event'.

And, finally this year Mike Batt led members on a 57 mile route on paths in the Vale of Glamorgan as he pushed the mileage towards distances that were walked in the earlier days of the Group's existence when Nick Kaye's Special Walks were enjoyed.

Being the South Wales Long Distance Walkers Association Group, it's wonderful that the word 'long' is suitably respected and 'long' may these longer walks be added to our walking calendar and boundaries pushed!



Abergavenny L-R - Mike Batt, David Morgan, Jason Winney, Andy ?, Rod Hollands, Jamie Lewis

