

CAPEL CURIG CLUB

The Club's first meet was on March 12th, 1967, a day-trip to Moel Siabod, passing very near to the derelict chapel which was to play such an important role in the Club's future. The proximity of North Wales to Merseyside in general and the Wirral in particular made it the obvious home base. The nearest similar area, the Lakes, is just that bit further away. So Wales it was, very much in the spirit of the name Gwydyr. Although Llanrwst was an excellent base for the Club for three and a half years, the move to Capel Curig had an inevitable logic about it. The previous chapter dealt with the acquisition and development of Tan-y-Garth but this chapter is devoted to events both on and off the hill.

Prior to the acquisition of Tan-y-Garth there had been heated arguments about whether we were a mountaineering club or a "chapel renovation society". The argument in favour was won and, as time passed, it became clear that it was possible to be both.

In spite of the requirements of Chapel renovation the new hut's prime position meant that a large amount of climbing and walking took place. One of the early climbs, 1973 I think, took place at the dead of night when a gang of drunks including, I fear, your humble author, drove down to Nant Gwynant with an ample supply of bottled beer and ascended Lockwood's Chimney. Perilous though the ascent was, it was nothing compared to the descent, or even the drive to the foot of the cliff. In saying this I am not for one moment condoning driving after consuming that amount of alcohol, something that would quite rightly not even be considered today.

One tradition that continued from the Llanrwst days was the practice of taking Sunday breakfast at the "Cheese & Egg" in Betws-y-Coed. This splendid establishment, known officially as the Ancaster Milk Bar, was a favoured GMC haunt. One morning "Bunty" Hughes and Les Fowles decided to put their tea-drinking capacity to the test: with free tea provided by our smiling hostess the pair drank their way through seventeen cups each before calling it a draw. Both felt very ill later, Bunty throwing up on some desperate rock route.

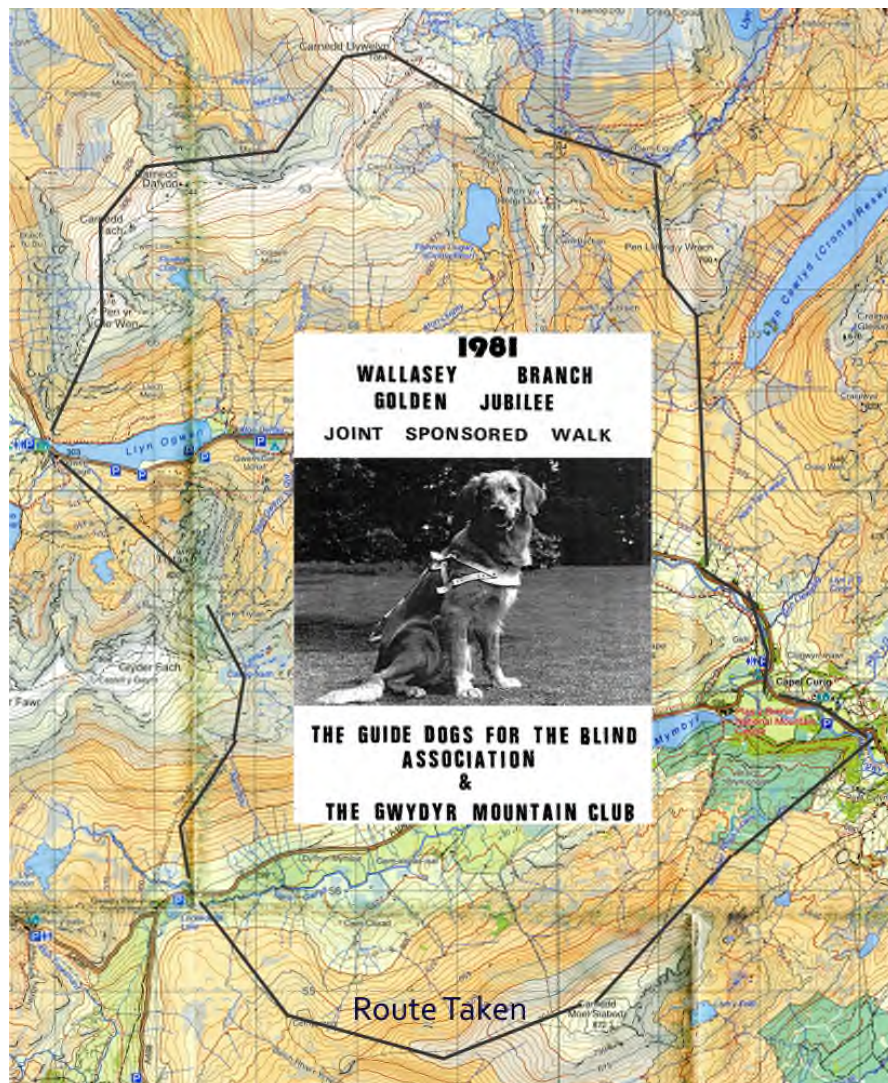
THE SPONSORED WALKS

The idea of the sponsored walks was to raise money for Club funds and the first such, on 13th November 1971, was a litter collection along the full length of the Glyders from Carnedd Y Filiast to Gallt Yr Ogof and down to Capel, omitting Tryfan, during the Llanrwst period. Later the Club hit on the idea of linking with a major charity, following a discussion Roger Hughes had with the South Wales M.C. who had linked up with Spina Bifida successfully. A number of joint sponsored walks with the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association followed, using two twenty mile circular routes based on the Chapel. It was felt that a mountaineering club could hardly ask for sponsorship on anything less than this scale of walk.

The first route went over Moel Siabod to the Pen-y-Gwryd, over to Ogwen on the Glyder Miners Track, then Pen yr Ole Wen, Carnedd Daffyd, Carnedd Llywelyn, Pen yr Helgi-du, Pen Llithrig y Wrach and down to Capel, about 7,500 ft of ascent. This was the route used for the 1974, 1976 and 1981 walks.



On the 1981 Sponsored Walk



The first route used for the Guide Dogs for the Blind sponsored walk

The second route, established in February 1978 on a slushy, damp winter's day, ran from the Chapel to the summit of the Crimea Pass via Moel Siabod, Bwlch y Rhediad, Ysgafell Wen and Moel Druman, then east over Moel Farlwyd and Moel Penamnen before descending below Carreg Alltrem to Dolwyddelan and finally back over to the Chapel, about 5,000ft of ascent. The problem on this route was getting delayed in "Y Gwydyr" at Dolwyddelan. This second route was used for the 1978 and 1983 walks and also for the 1992 walk which was solely for the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association.

The walks were organised in liaison with the current Northwest Guide Dogs Organiser. Club members met a number of these excellent people, all blind themselves. There was Captain Finney, based in Southport; Peter Frost, based in Connah's Quay; and David Herbert, based in Chester. The arrangement was that the Club would organise everything and get sponsors; the local guide dog branches would also get sponsors using personalised versions of the forms (bearing photographs of members, some highly amusing in retrospect) and that at the end of the day the proceeds would be split on a 60%/40% basis in favour of the GDFBA. No deduction was made for administrative expenses and, of course the split of the proceeds was made clear on the sponsor form.

The walks were extremely successful and in total yielded about eight thousand pounds of which the GDFBA received about five thousand pounds and the GMC the rest. The Club's efforts thus funded the training of a number of dogs and pictures were presented in each case: the first one was, appropriately, called "Gwydyr", then there were others like "Bracken", "Siabod" and even one called "Huxley".

SOCIAL EVENTS

Bonfire parties have been held at the Chapel on the nearest available Saturday to 5th November since 1975. Only once has the bonfire failed to take, during a three-day rainstorm which proved too much for all our efforts, even using dodgy substances like petrol. Normally the bonfire roars away, there are fireworks, booze and food, and quite often there has been a balmy autumn evening to round things off by the fire. That's only if the drink lasts, of course: normally there is a mass movement to the Tyn-y-Coed Hotel after nine o'clock. There have also been a number of excellent fondue parties organised by Christine Rowlands.

The Club Dinner has been held at the Tyn-y-Coed Hotel since 1975. The Cottage and Chapel are full and there are bookings at the Tyn-y-Coed itself and various other places. It is traditionally the only Club event where dressing-up is the norm. Recognition of previously familiar people can be quite difficult. (see Meeting and Eating for more on the Club Dinner and Bonfire Parties).

CHARACTERS

Capel Curig is one of those places that attracts characters. We had quite a few ourselves, but in the seventies you seemed to bump into them all the time. There was one-eyed George and his girlfriend, who always had tales to tell if you had a spare couple of hours; Tony Jones of the OMR (still a character), late of Capetown and Aberystwyth; and Cambridge Pete, who had escaped to the hills after losing a fairly high-powered job and his wife into the bargain: it was always fascinating to meet Pete and learn of his latest misfortune at the hands of "the bastards" and his plans to escape yet further into the hills, Scotland perhaps.

THE KARRIMOR SYMPOSIUMS

For two years, I think 1989 and 1990, Karrimor held symposiums at Plas-y-Brenin. These took the form of two streams of seven lectures, the dining room providing the second lecture theatre. There was barely time to grab a quick drink and a sandwich between lectures. There were some big names: John Barry, Jim Perrin, Catherine Destiville, Simon Yates, Joe Simpson and Andy Fanshaw, among others, and they were most enjoyable occasions.

WINTER MOUNTAINEERING

To generalise, winter climbing in the last ten years has been poor, whereas the seventies and the first half of the eighties were rather more reliable for good snow and ice conditions, giving good climbing on the Black Ladders (Ysgolion Duon) on the Carneddau, Y Garn, Crib y Ddysgl and the Trinity Gullies of Yr Wyddfa.



John Hall, Mike McEneaney and Mike Davis
About to set off up Banana Gulley

On New Year's Eve, 1981, Mike Davies, Mike McEneaney, John Hall and John Huxley stood in Cwm Clyd at the bottom of Banana Gully. Mike Mac and Huxley explained to Mike Davies how to brake with an ice-axe in the event of a fall while Hall faffed around with the advanced passenger sledge (APS), a deep, blue coloured plastic tray affair which he proposed to lash to his back during the ascent for use later:

"We just hoped he didn't fall backwards during the ascent. We set off up the gully: the snow was deep and reasonably consolidated and we were happy enough to be without rope or crampons, an axe each being deemed to be sufficient. I think Mike D. was fairly impressed: it was one of his earlier routes on the hill. We had lunch

on a snow platform we dug about halfway up. It steepened up at the top, where we beheld several parties roped up over the cornice, which was, I guess, about eight feet high and vertical. I was in front. There was a bit of a bulge so that was chopped off first. One then just kicked into it and hauled up with a final pull on the ice-axe, a most exhilarating finish".

On the way down to Foel Goch (Having first bagged Y Garn summit):

"Mike D. slipped and travelled downhill (on the south side, fortunately) on his backside at some speed, waving the ice-axe ineffectually in the air. 'Turn over on to your front!' we shouted. Just as he was trying to do this fate intervened in the shape of an uphill bit and he slid to a halt. The day was becoming a bit too exciting; one could do with a drink to calm the nerves. More was to come when we got a bit lower down and put the APS to use: after a number of breathless episodes Hall got carried away, shot over a roche moutonne, and vanished. Was this the end of Hall as we knew him, we asked ourselves. No such luck; he appeared grinning some minutes later. Now I did need a drink!"



John Huxley, John Hall and Mike Davies at the start of Banana Gulley



John Huxley on Banana Gulley



John Hall, Mike Davies
And Mike McEneaney



John Hall and the APS

One hard, blue winter's day in the early eighties John Hall and John Huxley were chopping steps up the zig-zags when they heard a faint cry from below. They stopped and turned to look down: about 500ft below and well to their right (i.e. well left of the normal route) were two figures, apparently marooned in a sea of compacted snow. They waved and shouted "can you help us?" The GMC pair set off down the slope, alternately glissading and shuffling across to the right, until they were able to reach the pair and brake with a final flourish of ice axes.

The two figures turned out to be a London stockbroker and his au pair girlfriend who was from Sweden. The au pair had some warm-looking fluffy boots on while the stockbroker had glorified shoes. Needless to say, they had no gear whatsoever, although they appeared to be reasonably warmly clad. Because descending the Pyg track seemed a bit risky the decision was taken to guide them up Snowdon and then send them down the Llanberis track with instructions to be extremely careful. John Hall began cutting large steps to accommodate their ice axe-less friends. At the summit, profuse thanks and a nip from the au pair's brandy flask concluded the brief acquaintance.

Just to prove that winters these days do have their moments, in January 1996, Bryn Roberts, Christine Rowlands and Richard Kinsman headed off to do Bryant's Gully, a grade two ice climb in the Llanberis Pass. It was Christine's first ice climb (from "Bryant's Gully", Magazine no 12):

"The stream coming down the gully had frozen over and there were curtains of ice draped over the rocks. We donned our crampons and, with ice axes in hands, started the ascent. It did feel a bit strange to be relying on a few metal points embedded in ice. We could see the remains of the stream flowing beneath the ice, which was a little disconcerting."

After lunch, during which Bryn had speculated about the descent route:

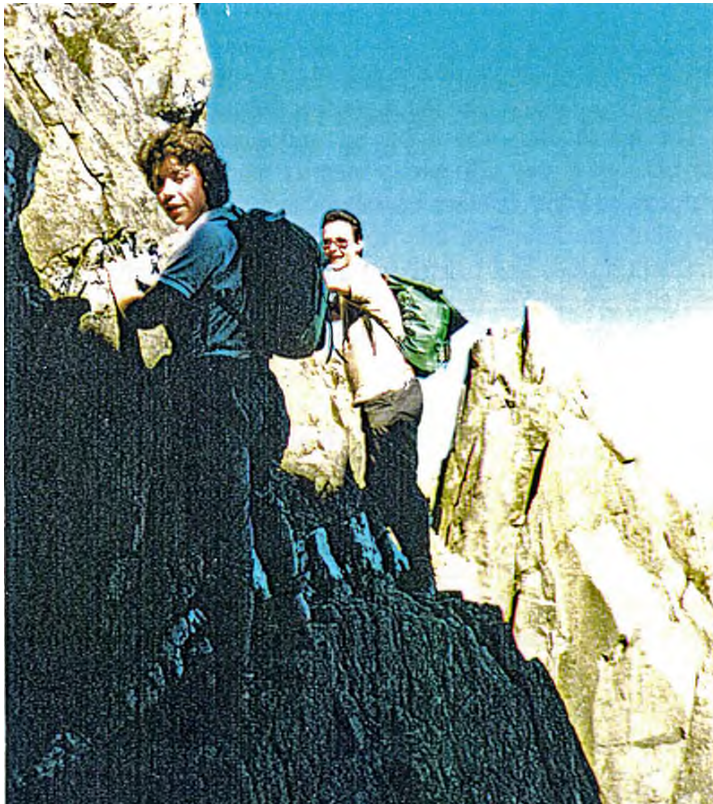
"Up to the third pitch now and my wonder at this grotto had disappeared as I tried to edge my way over an ice-covered slab, ice-axes refusing to go in, legs getting that familiar shake as you begin to wonder who got you into this mess. In the end I did it and with firm reassurance from Bryn finally overcame the crux".

In March of the same year, Richard, Helen Beddows and Andy Chapman headed up to Clogwyn Ddu to do Right Hand Gully Direct (Grade three), descending via the Gribin Ridge. The next day (from "Pilgrims on Ice", Magazine no.12):

"Andy and I got up at 6a.m. to attempt Snowdrop, a grade four route below Snowdon summit. We walked in via the Pyg track in misty conditions. Andy started to traverse a snowfield towards the route but turned back quickly as he was certain the field was ready to avalanche (there was evidence of an avalanche to the right of our position). Due to this and the poor visibility we decided to do Cave Gully, a grade three which Andy had done previously. The gully was well formed and progress was quick. I did most of the final section with my eyes closed as the wind was blowing snow right down the gully".

They descended via the Crib y Ddysgl-Crib Goch ridge. Just beyond the pinnacles:

"Two Irish lads were coming the other way. They were on all fours on the ridge and there appeared to be not a single crampon, ice axe or rope between them. Thankfully they must have got off the mountain in one piece as we heard nothing about any rescue. This was the first time I had ever traversed the ridge in this direction at any time of year and the first time I have climbed over the pinnacles".



Diane Chresesen and Mike Borland on the quartz traverse on
Bristly Ridge, Glyder Fach



Lynette Thornton and Simon Glover
On Adam & Eve



Mike McEneaney on Y Garn
New Year's Day 1981

THE SNOWDON WALKS

From 1994 to 1996 the Club was involved in marshalling the annual Snowdon walk in aid of the Roy Castle Cause for Hope appeal. This was organised by a great character called Terry Cavanagh who was a good walker in spite of having lost one of his lungs. The marshalling was a bit hit and miss: GMC members wore bright-coloured I.D. but it was difficult to identify who was taking part so one might ask a complete stranger whether they had done this kind of thing before or how much they were sponsored for, only to receive blank looks. One year a girl wearing only trainers slipped and twisted her ankle. Club marshals duly strapped her up and escorted her down on the train. Had there been another walk we would have insisted on both proper footwear and clear I.D. for everyone taking part but the organisers felt people were tiring of sponsoring the Snowdon walk and switched to other fund-raising activities. Still, they were worthwhile events and raised a considerable sum for the charity, which now has a magnificent centre in Liverpool.

ACCIDENTS

The Spring 1996 magazine was slightly unusual in that two of the fourteen articles covered mountain accidents. The first occurred on the day of the Bonfire Party in 1995 when Julie Rose broke her ankle on the miner's track while descending from the Glyders with the Barleys and, more seriously, the head chef for the bonfire do, a Mr Dave Gray. Laura Barley writes in "The GMC Bonfire Party-Alternative Version (magazine no.12)

"Julie, Mark and I had come down to Wales for the bonfire weekend. Together with Dave Gray we scrambled up Senior's Ridge on to Glyder Fawr, walked along to Glyder Fach and were descending via the Miners' Track to arrive at Ogwen before 5p.m. so that Hartley (see "Cumbrian Memories") would have time to roll up his sleeves, put on his pinny and fry some burgers for the sumptuous feast".

Leaving Julie in Laura's tender care the chaps headed off to alert the authorities. In due course the helicopter arrived:

"After brief introductions Julie and the RAF paramedic started discussing drugs (she is a vet, after all)...sex and rock & roll were out of the question".

Later:

"We were amazed that it took less than two hours between the fall and being rescued, thanks to the professionalism of the Mountain Rescue Service. The incident brought home to us the risks we take on the hills".

Back at Capel, the replacement cooking team of Marilyn McEneaney, Reg Cromer and Martin Stanley stepped in heroically.

The other incident involved Mal Bonner on the day of the 1996 Club Dinner when he, Andy Chapman, Mike Dagley, Helen Beddows and Richard Kinsman were scrambling up South Gully, above the Heather Terrace on Tryfan, in soft snow interspersed with greasy rock and grassy tufts:

"After about thirty metres Andy, who was leading, decided to cross the snow-filled gully which entailed stepping off a rock about half a metre high onto the snow. I was probably feeling a little over-confident after having spent most of the week on the Ben (where the snow and ice had been in good condition) and declined Andy's offer of a rope. My left foot was on a good

ledge and at least one left finger was in a hold, but there was little or nothing for my right hand..."

Seconds later:

"I had had gained momentum and was travelling quite fast, over a lip, diving through the air. Losing count of how many times I hit rock or snow, I relaxed-there was nothing I could do. I must have rolled over and over, my helmet hit something solid, then my face and nose hurt a little and I was aware of blood streaming down my face and my glasses had gone. Suddenly, with a final thump I landed in a snowy flat and stopped".

The rest soon arrived on the Terrace, horrified at what they had seen. However, some judicious application of first-aid rendered the patient capable of descending under his own steam and they were soon down at the road, where Andy and Helen carted Mal off to Bangor Hospital. There he was kept in overnight and X-rayed profusely but was able to walk out, somewhat bruised and battered, the following day. As the man himself said:

'It's one way to miss a GMC Dinner but not one I would recommend".

HILL GROUPS

Every part of Snowdonia seems to have its memories: the Carneddau, for example, by Ffynnon Lloer, where Ken Clowes and others once built a snow woman who was toasted with blackberry wine and where Mike McEneaney once led a group, unroped and including a dog, up a steep gully right to the summit of Pen yr Ole Wen. Or glissading off Llewelyn in deep snow, when John Beamer established himself as the "fastest backside around". Then there was the time that John Huxley led a party off Carnedd Llewelyn in a white-out, claiming that he knew the place "like the back of his hand". Fortunately the party soon realised that they were heading north instead of east down the ridge to Pen-yr Helgi Du, their intended destination.

The idea of taking tents up high and spending the night in some wild place, often by a small lake, is as old as the Club itself and, let's be honest, much, much older than that. What it lacks in logic it makes up for in atmosphere. One such outing was when a group pitched outside the Foel Grach Refuge on a cold winter afternoon and proceeded to wander up to the summit of Carnedd Llywelyn, about a mile to the south. That done, they cooked dinner and retired into the refuge for a suitable session. Later on, after a reasonable intake of drink, someone noticed that John Hall appeared to be missing: an immediate sweep search of the frozen, moonlit hillside was ordered: eventually Hall was found a short distance from the refuge where he had gone to sleep some time earlier. Thankfully, he was O.K.

On another occasion the Beamers, accompanied by the Huxleys and sundry canines, drove up towards Melynllyn in the landrover. There was deep snow and they drove as far as possible before grinding to a halt in a snowdrift and pitching the tents. The night was spent drinking in the back of the vehicle and in the morning an igloo was built.

Ffynnon Caseg, below Yr Elen, was another high camp favourite, if you could get the tents pitched. On one notorious occasion the idea was abandoned, the group fleeing from a severe gale to the safety of Bethesda. Equally remote was Ffynnon Llyffant, just east of the summit of Carnedd Llywelyn at 2,800ft, where some aircraft remains add to the atmosphere.

The snowfield of Y Foes Dyffyn, north-northeast of Llewelyn, has long fascinated a certain founder member. To it he has dragged many a group to see "what may have been the site of the last ice to go at the end of the ice-age". This deep gully holds snow well into May and

occasionally into June. On 13th May 1995, a sizeable group, some wearing shorts, trekked over to the snowfield, glissaded down it, and drank red wine to mark some occasion or other. Heavy snow showers on the return forced the shorts wearers to don trousers, except for one foolhardy soul who had failed to bring any.

Llyn Clyd, in the Armchair Cwm on Y Garn, was another favourite high-camping spot. One fondly recalls drinking Derek Burrows' Cypriot Brandy there under the frozen moonlight before ascending Banana Gully the next morning. On another, snowless, occasion the ascent of Banana was accomplished by Sue Taylor with the aid of some sherry. The Glyders are notorious in mist and have successfully ruined many fourteen peaks aspirations. With the number of prominent rock formations like Castell y Gwynt, the summit of Glyder Fach and the Cantilever one would think navigation easy, but problems still seem to occur. The quality of scrambling on the Glyder group ridges is exceeded only by that of Snowdon. The classic "Big Four" day seems to be Tryfan via the North Ridge, Glyder Fach by the Bristly Ridge, then over Glyder Fawr and Y Garn before descending the Armchair Ridge. Shorter days can be had by using the Gribin and Senior's ridges.

One of a number of high camps over the years, the Cloggy high camp, just by Llyn D'ur Arddu, had the most exciting conclusion, being brought to a sudden end the following morning by high winds and clouds of spindrift. Certain members even had to go back for a flysheet which was left in the rush to descend. Elsewhere on Snowdon, Glaslyn and the area above it have long provided Friday evening sites for those starting the Fourteen Peaks the following morning.

Apart from the obvious attractions of the Snowdon Horseshoe the route from the west, making a circle of the Rhyd-Ddu and Snowdon Ranger paths, makes for a great day, using the old railway track to link the two. It was on this one day that Nuala Mulholland was attacked by an over-amorous Shetland pony. If one starts with the Snowdon Ranger, a diversion under Clogwyn D'ur Arddu provides a dramatic alternative before picking up the Llanberis track. One of the harder Snowdon days is to do the whole of the Moel Eilio / Moel Cynghorion group before picking up the Snowdon Ranger path at the gap above Llyn Ffynnon-y-Gwas and then descending via the Llanberis track, about 12 miles and 5000ft of ascent.

The Siabod Group includes Moel Siabod itself, the line of "watershed" summits leading round to the Crimea Pass and Cnicht and the Moelwyns to the south, the latter providing some excellent rock-climbing. Moel Siabod is the regular fill-in, half-day, afternoon mountain. Three



New Year's Day on Siabod
Anne Harnden & Christina
Callaghan

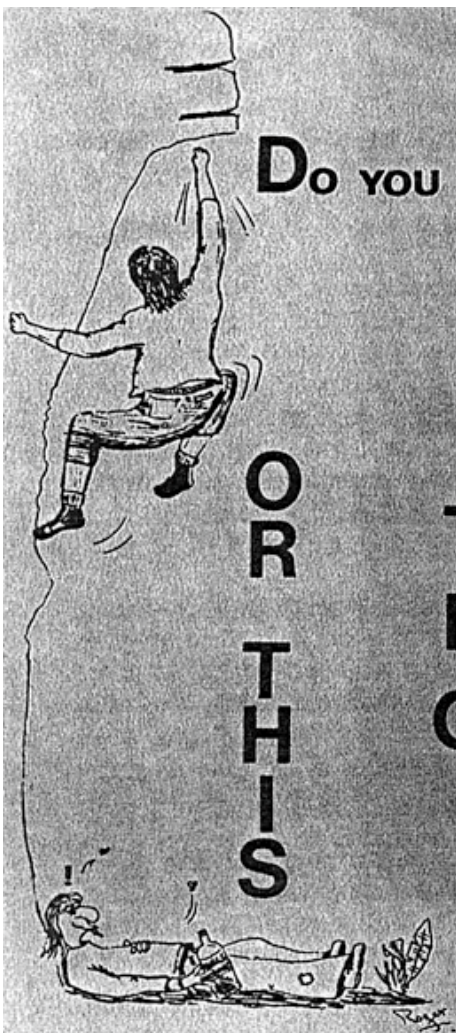
to four hours up and down will suffice but this takes nothing away from its many qualities which include its position, giving unrivalled views of Central Snowdonia on a clear day. Champagne was drunk on the summit to mark the Club's 21st birthday and again on the 50th birthday of a certain founder member. The Three Lakes route includes the excellent scramble ridge to the summit and just to its right is a steep open gully which gives a straightforward winter route at around Banana Gully grade. The sponsored walk route mark 2 takes Siabod itself and all the watershed summits before crossing the Crimea to take in Moel Farlwyd and Moel Penamnen. The circuit of Cnicht and the Moelwyns from Croesor is a minor classic and quite a decent day's walking.



Y Foes Dyffyn, April



Andy Chapman, Mike McEneaney, Ronnie Waters and Mal Lamb on the Carneddau
With Elidir Fawr in the background



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*MID-SEVENTIES
RECRUITMENT POSTER
(Cartoon by "Bunky" Hughes)*

The fifth and final group of what is considered Snowdonia proper is that of Moel Hebog and the Nantlle Ridge. Hebog and its satellites, Moel yr Ogof and Moel Lefn, make a good shortish day while the six summits of the Nantlle Ridge, dropping down to upper Cwm Pennant for the return through the forest, provide a full day on one of the best ridges in Snowdonia. For a really big day one can of course combine the two, an epic circuit round Cwm Pennant.

It is nice on occasion to do without the cars and there are a number of circular routes that can be done direct from the Chapel. The longer ones include both sponsored walk routes; over Siabod to the Pen-y-Gwryd for a pint then up the Glyder miners' track and down over Y Foel Goch and Gallt yr Ogof; along the Glyders as far as you want to go and back down the old road, and various other combinations. Among the shorter, non-circular routes are Crafnant and return and going for a pint at Dolwyddelan.

Until the access was blocked off it was customary, on a warm summer's day, to walk towards the A5 for a few yards and slide off to the right down to the Afon Llugwy for a swim. The favoured place was dubbed "The Chapel Pool" and comprised a lower, shallower pool and a deep, narrow one which was basically an underwater gorge. At the head of it was a sort of natural jacuzzi and there were a couple of good diving spots, the depth being at least twenty feet. Many pleasant hours were spent there, cans of beer cooling in the shallows.

In the seventies and eighties it was customary to stop off for a meal and a drink on the way home on Sunday night. One of the earliest haunts was the Railway at Coed Talon. Then there was the Smithy's at Rhualt, the Tavern at Alltami and of course the Tudor Rose at Two Mills. The Club also patronised the Swan at Gwernymynydd and others like the Raven at Llanarmon-yn-Ial, various pubs in Eryrys and Ruthin, and the Sportsman's on the Denbigh moors. Curiously, the tradition seems to have lapsed. It obviously needs reviving.

(Additional photos added curtesy of Mike McEneany)

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