



# Gwydyr Mountain Club Newsletter.

September 2023

Edited:  
Chris Harris

## Coming soon: (details on meets list on GMC website)

6-8 October	Hut: Joint Meet with Dundee MC - Kev McEvoy
13-15 October	Camping Barn: St.John's in the Vale - Barb Reynolds
21 October	The Sett Valley Trail and the Torrs at New Mills - Mark Barley
23-28 October	Snowdonia Slate Trail - Sue Taylor
3-5 November	Hut Weekend: Bonfire Party - Kev McEvoy
18 November	Bryn Alyn - Dave Gray
24-26 November	Hut Weekend: Rescue Emergency Care (REC) Course

## Articles this Month:

- 1) 26th August Berwyns Meet - Dave Gray
- 2) Extreme Via Ferratta at Honister - by Chris Harris
- 3) The Galloway Hills - Christy Miles.

### 1) Berwyns Meet 26<sup>th</sup> August 2023



The sunrise above Liverpool looked distinctly dodgy...  
*Scouserise!*

And the forecast was mixed; but seven of us turned out for day – Andrew Mitchell, John Simpson, Kay, Lindsey, Ray, Sonja, and me. We met at the Llandrillo car park, reviewed our options, and set off about 10.00. We decided to postpone a decision as to which hills to go for till the last minute.

On the way up towards Moel Pearce the cloudy weather eased, and we got good views east to Arenig Fawr. With things looking more optimistic we took time out to visit the cairn circle on Moel Ty Uchaf. At first sight this looks like a stone circle but

it's believed to be a cairn circle, a rim of stones which would have ringed an earth burial barrow in the centre. It's likely to be late Neolithic or Bronze Age in date.

This snowy photo I found online brings out the character of the circle very well.



*Moel Ty Uchaf Circle in snow (online photo by Barry Prole)*

We then had light rain shower, and the clouds gathered on the hills all around on our way across the high moorland to the path/track junction near Carnedd John Frongoch. Soon the main Berwyns, Cader and Craig Berwyn and Moel Sych, were deep in mist. We decided to go for Cader Fronwen (2,569 feet) as that had been clear, and set off across the rough boggy path to the top.

More mist hung around, but we settled down in the lee of the summit cairn for lunch. It soon started raining again. But suddenly it cleared, the main Berwyns came out of the clag and we could see again. This seems to be a good spot for Brocken Spectres, and Ray was lucky enough to see one. The photo below is 'one I prepared earlier', in January when on the same walk in the same spot I had the same type of mist clearance.



<< Brocken Spectre on Cader Fronwen

Now in sunshine, we elected to do a circuit east down to Bwlch Llandrillo, aka 'Memorial Stone', and then follow the landrover track from there back to Llandrillo.

On the way down the rough ground of the ridge eastwards we had great wide views. Back to Cader Fronwen, and out to the Berwyns, Hirnant Hills, Arans, Arenigs, Moelwyns, Tal y Fan, and round to the Denbigh Moors and the Clwyds. Mainstream Snowdonia was still clouded over, only Tryfan and Tal y Fan being visible.



<< Looking back to Cader Fronwen from the ridge to Memorial Stone

Memorial Stone pass is so called because it has a memorial to a cycling writer of bygone days who was called 'Wayfarer'. He was a stalwart of the Rough Stuff Fellowship who used to do mountain biking before there were mountain bikes.



<< 'Memorial Stone'

Wayfarer was the pen name of early 20<sup>th</sup> century cycling journalist Walter McGregor Robinson who lived in Anfield and worked in a Liverpool insurance office. Here he is in tandem with his eldest daughter...



There is a fair bit about him to explore online, including this article from 1937:

<https://www.cyclingnorthwales.uk/cycling-history/walter-macgregor-robinson-aka-wayfarer-by-cyril-rowson/>

The weather and the views stayed good for the trek back west to rejoin our outward route and get back down to the cars. Per a couple of GPS readings the mileage was 9.75 miles, I reckon with about 2,150 feet of ascent in the day. On the way down those of us at the tail end took a quick break by an attractive roadside waterfall.



We rounded off a fab day with a drink in the Blue Lion at Cynwyd, a pleasant pub with good beer.

Thanks to all for joining me on the day!

**Dave Gray**

<< Falls on Afon Llynor

## 2) Extreme Via Ferrata at Honister, 4th September - by Chris Harris



I've not done any via ferrata before so Janet bought me this as a birthday present but decided not to participate so Katie and James joined me. We drove up on the Sunday for a 3pm slot and stopped over on the Sunday night. Accommodation in the Lakes is not cheap but Katie managed to book a 6 bunk room in Rosthwaite YHA for the Sunday night for only £45. Immaculately clean with excellent showers and toilets and the Riverside bar only 10 minute walk. There's even a bar with decent ales in the YHA. Katie and James stayed an extra few days in a 2 bed room for £29 !

The website says: " from mountain edges, vertical ladder climbs and overhang descents to Burma bridges and sky ladders – this Lake District experience is not for the faint of heart."



It's a 3 hour session but the time goes quickly. I reckon the worst part was the initial stepping backwards over the edge onto rungs that were tricky to locate but after that it seemed to flow quite well as long as you look at your feet not what is not below them. A final ascent took us to the top of the rock face and only about half a mile from Fleetwith Pike. Some did leg it across and the guide did not notice. We were last slot of the day so I guess the late return of equipment did not matter too much.

## 3) The Galloway Hills - Christy Miles.

### Bonnie Galloway – Scotland's best kept secret

Most people visiting Scotland head straight up to the Highlands. As they pass the Scottish border sign on the M6, celebrating their arrival in "Bonnie Scotland", they no doubt miss the next sign at Junction 22 of the A74 (M) which will lead them towards South West Scotland. Little do they know they are driving past the road leading them to one of Scotland's best kept secrets?



My love of the mountains began when I was in school, we went on a trip, walking up to the summit of Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon). I can remember eating my sandwiches, sitting near the edge looking down over the patchwork fields far below in the distance. I could also see the Llanberis Pass winding its way upwards and the tiny cars making their way through, it was mesmerising and I was in awe. Much later on, around 20 odd years ago, a few of my friends locally started travelling to the Lake District at weekends to go walking in the Fells there, I thought back to that day on Snowdon and a recent trip I had made with a friend to climb Tryfan in Snowdonia and realised that I loved the freedom of being in the mountains and the challenges it brought. So I joined them on one of their trips.

I started to frequent the Lake District and fell in love with the mountains there. So much that I started to complete the Wainwrights. I was a regular visitor to the Old Dungeon Ghyll in the Langdale valley. But over

the years I watched as the Lake District become more and more popular, the campsites became busier and whilst in the mountains it was like following a chain of ants upwards to each summit. The Lake District seems so busy these days it is like the equivalent of London in the outdoor world.

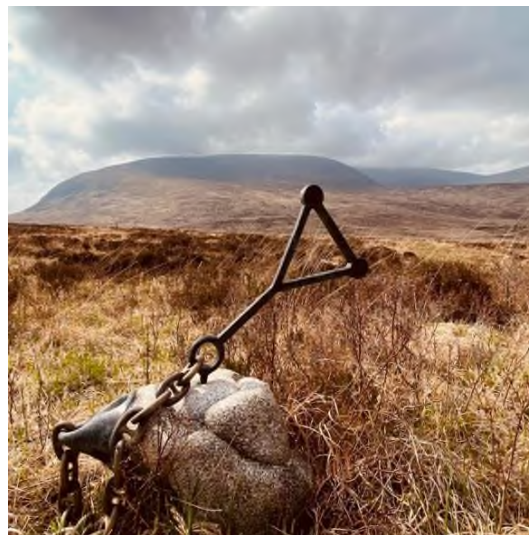
Why am I telling you this you ask? I am meant to be talking about Galloway? Well this brings me nicely to Scotland's best kept secret, The Galloway Hills.

Described as a walkers paradise, The Galloway Hills are part of the Southern Uplands of Scotland, and form the northern boundary of western Galloway. They lie within the bounds of the Galloway Forest Park, an area of some 300 square miles (800 km<sup>2</sup>) of largely uninhabited wild land, managed by Forestry and Land Scotland. The Merrick is the highest hill in the south of Scotland, though at less than 3000 feet it is not a Munro. For this reason a lot of mountain walkers overlook and often sometimes snub the Galloway Hills as "just hills" I have even heard the area called "Pretend Scotland"! In the absence of Munros, the mountains of 3000ft or more that attract ambitious 'peak baggers' and without the hordes that invade Wainwright's beloved Lake District, the Galloway Hills remain, almost totally unspoilt, thankfully.



**Bruce's Stone – Loch Trool**

The northern part of Galloway is exceedingly rugged and forms the second largest area of wilderness in Britain aside from the Highlands. Whilst the Galloways lack the sheer ruggedness of the Scottish Highlands they are fairly remote. It is not unusual to spend the day wandering and not see anyone else out walking, although you may bump into the occasional Stag, Red Deer, Red Squirrel, Fox and Pine Martin or see a Golden Eagle soaring high above you. A pleasant change from the busier mountain ranges of the UK.



**Cairnmore of Fleet - NNR**

"BE WARNED, IT'S GOING TO BE TOUGH UNDERFOOT THIS YEAR" was taken from publicity for the 1986 Karrimor International Mountain Marathon, participants thought they were in for an easy ride in the "Galloway Hills" soon found out otherwise. It should be noted, with the possible exception of the popular tourist path to Merrick and the picturesque Gairland Burn path, clear paths are very few and far between. Deer, goat and sheep trails can often be used to advantage but all too frequently the way lies across grassy, heather-strewn, bracken covered, or rocky surfaces and the multiplicity of burns, albeit extremely attractive, can present a problem after heavy rain with the need for a river crossing not uncommon. You will need to be able to navigate well, as you will, at times be relying on micro-navigation techniques using the contours to navigate due to the lack of defined paths and features.



**Craig Ronald**

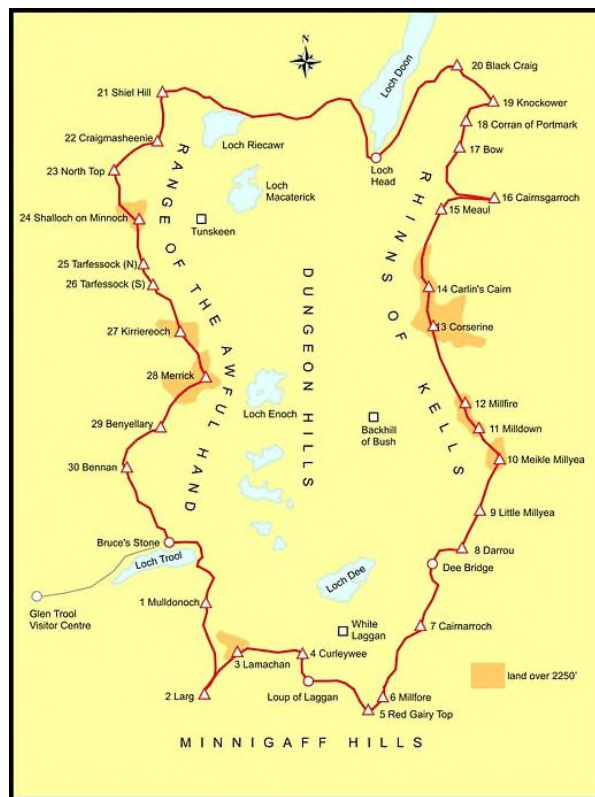
Galloway was long regarded as a wild and lawless place - somewhat other from the mainstream of Scottish culture, which was as much as anything to do with its remoteness and inaccessibility. The Galloway hills played an important part in this image especially as at various points in history it was a place of refuge for fugitives who did not fit into, or defied, the power structure of their times. Think Robert the Bruce and the Covenanting fugitives.

The Galloway Hills are part of the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere. Galloway & Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere covers almost 9,800 km<sup>2</sup> of southwest Scotland's land and sea, Galloway & Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere follows the rivers that flow out of the Galloway Hills: through forests and farmland, historic villages and towns, all the way to a ruggedly scenic coast. As a region, our Biosphere includes iconic wildlife and natural habitats which are recognised as being of international importance. Galloway and Southern Ayrshire is recognised by UNESCO as a world class environment for people and nature.

The unusual place names reflect a mixture of the Old Norse and Scottish Gaelic languages and hint at the range of influences which have acted on society within the area over the centuries. The Galloway Hills form part of the Southern Uplands, but are generally contained in a fairly compact arrangement of six distinct groups:

- The 'Awful Hand', a fanciful name given to a range of hills in which the Merrick (at 2766ft the highest of the Galloway's) is the forefinger. The other fingers are Shalloch on Minnoch, Tarfessock and Kirriereoch, with Benyellary the thumb. Buchan Hill, at the southern end of the range, overlooks Loch Trool.
- The Dungeon Range, which runs parallel to the Awful Hand, extends from Craiglee, near Loch Dee, to Macaterick. The highest in the range is Mullwarchar at 2270ft.
- The Kells, an undulating ridge of hills parallel to, and east of, the Dungeon Range, stretches from Darrou at the southern end to Black Craig which rises above Loch Doon, Corserine, at 2669ft, is the dominating hill in the ridge which includes 13 summits of 2000ft or more.
- The Minnigaff Group with Lamachan, its highest at 2350ft and Curleywee the most rugged, lies south of Loch Dee between the Water of Trool and Clatteringshaws Loch.
- The Carsphairn Range, situated to the north-east of the main group of Galloway Hills, includes Cairnsmore of Carsphairn (2614ft) and 13 other hill- tops of over 2000ft.
- The Solway Hills are fairly scattered along the Solway Coast-line from Cairnsmore of Fleet (2331ft) near Newton Stewart, to Criffel just south of Dumfries.

If you like a challenge then Galloway is home to The Ring of Fire, also known as the Gallo Way, a peak bagging round. 45 miles (72 km) with 13,000 feet (4000 m) of ascent, starting and finishing in Glen Trool in the heart of the Galloway Forest. I will be attempting to complete the Ring of Fire in 48 hours next May, as part of a fundraising event with Galloway Mountain Rescue Team.



The Southern Upland Way also winds through the Galloway Hills, Scotland's only coast-to-coast long distance route, running across the country from Portpatrick on the Atlantic Ocean to the North Sea at Cove to finish after 212 miles (341km) at nearby Cockburnspath.

Although the Galloway terrain can be rough underfoot at times, it is worth the small discomfort to experience the vast wilderness and awe inspiring vistas a day out in the hills can offer here. Duly advised, the visitor is able to enjoy complete freedom. To roam at will and sample the delights of one of the most beautiful parts of Scotland, if not the whole of the British Isles. The climate, being influenced by the warm Gulf Stream, is generally mild and compares favourably with many places south of the border. So, whether for the pleasure of viewing the wonderful scenery, observing the flora and fauna, or just for the exercise, the walkers of Galloway's hills will not be disappointed.

The area was the first in the UK to be awarded Dark Sky status. The Scottish Dark Sky Observatory occupies a fantastic hilltop site on the edge of the Galloway Forest Dark Sky Park near the town of Dalmellington in the east of the Biosphere. This publicly accessible educational observatory has some of the darkest skies in the UK and has two large telescopes through which to observe the night sky

Some club members recently visited Galloway on a GMC meet in the area. Due to demand there is another club meet planned next year for the 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> October with the option again for club members to camp in the grounds of Sorbie Tower, and old Scottish Tower house. There is also accommodation available nearby in the villages of Garlieston and Whithorn. There will be more information sent via email soon.



GMC Meet – Loch Enoch



GMC Meet – Sorbie Tower

I look forward to welcoming some of you next year to “Bonnie Galloway” – Scotland’s best kept secret...  
SSSSSH! Don’t tell anyone!  
Christy