

THE GWYDYR MOUNTAIN CLUB NEWSLETTER – EXTRA!

March 2025: Editor Dave Gray



Introduction

Welcome to the March Newsletter! This is an Extra! edition with an article from Mike Doyle on the intensive work he, together with Club Members and other friends, has been doing to develop new climbing crags along the A55 corridor. This has contributed to a new edition of the guidebook he co-authors (see therefore Members Personal News!) Many thanks to Mike, and also to Brenda, Gill Eccles, Hew, Mark Barley, Nicki Hickin, Reg, Roger, and as ever DLJ for help with this edition. Please let me have material for the next edition, the final deadline for that is **March 26th**.

Please note this edition is coming out a bit early because of my other commitments and so some of February's events will await the next newsletter.

Looking Ahead

Here are the upcoming meets venues for March and April, details are on the Club Website. The meets list is constantly being updated, please **check it out regularly** on the Website. Meets added to the programme since the last edition are in bold as a reminder **in case you've missed them...** Also, if you are interested in climbing meets a programme of **outdoor climbing** beginning in May, in addition to ongoing **indoor climbs** at the Boardroom, is now on the website.

1 March	Saturday Walk – Minera and Esclusham Mountains
4 March	Quiz Night at Gallaghers
8 March	Saturday Walk – West Yorkshire
14-16 March	Hut Weekend
21-23 March	Hut Weekend – Annual Dinner
22 March	Saturday Walk – Wirral (venue TBC)
25 March	Annual General Meeting
4/6 April	Hut Weekend (inc. Snowdonia Slate Trail 1)
12 April	Saturday Walk – Cader Idris
18/21 April	Hut Weekend – Easter Meet
26 April	Saturday Walk – Highest Mountain in Anglesey

Venues in Focus

If everything goes to plan we'll end our walk on **Minera and Esclusham Mountains** by going down the old railway line from Minera Limestone Quarries to the Lead Mines museum. This was a branch originally to service the lead mines, that linked in at a junction to the Wrexham and Minera railway, a little way below the large quarry. The system – designed

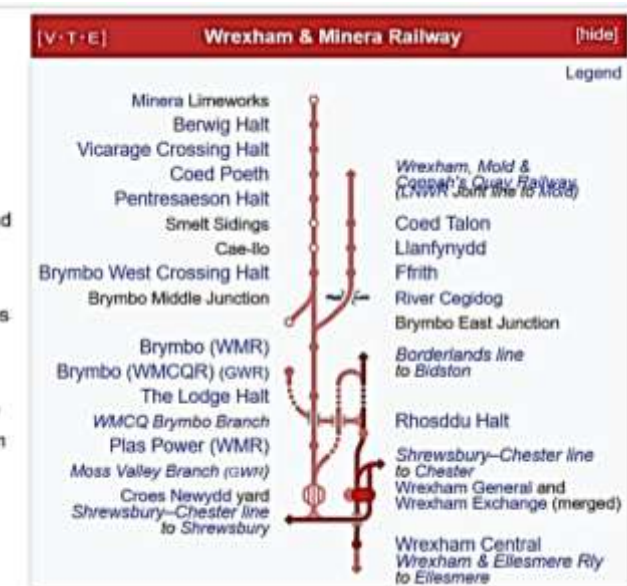
around the heavy industry in the area - became part of the Great Western and later BR systems. There were more rail lines within the limestone quarries themselves.

The branch we'll walk down was lifted just before WW1 when the lead mines closed, but then re-laid in the 1920s to service limestone workings, and ran until the track was finally lifted in the early 1960s.

In Minera Lead Mines days the branch used a locomotive called 'Henrietta' a powerful 0-6-0 engine made by Manning Wardle of Leeds. 'Henrietta' may have looked like their loco 'Gow' pictured right.



This link <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-minera-mineral-1965-online> takes you to a short film made in 1965 of the railway in operation preserved by the British Film Institute. I found it amazing how far back in the past this looks, that I was alive, kicking and at infants school when this was shot, and that it was allegedly the swinging 60s. This is a long way from Carnaby Street.



The film is shot on the main part of the system between Minera quarries and Brymbo. This is a schematic map of the whole network of railways in this area. On the Minera branch passenger traffic only ran as far as Berwig in Minera village; the line to the quarries and limeworks etc. being goods only.

As far as I can tell, most of the shots are taken from the lineside or at a distance, not from the footplate of the locomotive. The film interleaves three different stories it seems, the journey of two trains of

empty wagons back from Brymbo steelworks to Minera Limestone Works below the quarries, and the odyssey of a lone locomotive and brake van. A chat with Reg who worked on railway goods trains confirms the latter is likely to be about the loco returning from the quarries to base where it was prepared and serviced but without any 'paying cargo' of full wagons, or going up to the mine when there were no empties to deliver.

Here is one of the smaller 16-ton wagons seen in the film smartened up in preservation today. The white strip denotes which end of the wagon had a tipping door. And next to it a



similarly smartened up 0-6-0 pannier tank engine, the star of the film, in Great Western colours. These locomotives were passenger and freight workhorses on rural lines.

A couple of scenes in the film are health and safety *not* in action. The mineral line is so rural it seems the fireman opens and closes the road crossing gates – and then in one shot gets back onto a moving engine. And a shunter at one point rides downhill on the steps of a brake van. Both dangerous as one slip might end them up under the train or otherwise badly hurt or killed just through a fall. But Reg tells me this type of thing was typical of the time, and he never saw anyone hurt!

This whole area of Wales was involved in iron production at least as far back as the 18th century, when Bersham Ironworks (worth a visit!) allegedly made arms for both sides in the Seven Years War. Limestone products remain to this day key to the manufacture both of iron and steel, and ancillary processes such as waste management. Hence the traffic to Brymbo.

But this railway system came to a piecemeal and gradual end. Nippy Crosville buses running on much more direct routes in this hilly area put paid to passenger railway working on the Minera route by 1930. Minera Limeworks and the railway to it closed in 1972, and the last freight section at Brymbo closed in 1982.

(Photo credits: in order - railwayarchive.org.uk; Wikipedia; southleedslife.com; flickr.com)

Before 'Crossies' were nippy, fast road transport could be enjoyed by the gentry, not least on private carriage drives on their own estates. In another look at mid-level days for a **Hut Weekend**, we take 'Lady Bagot's Drive' along the River Clywedog near Ruthin.

This 5 mile circuit is mostly under trees and is on the way out to or home from the Hut if you are based in England, and has been on several occasions my default choice for 'something worthwhile to do' if the day is irretrievably wet. It is actually better after wet weather although the paths can be muddy. The walk starts and finishes at Rhewl (see map extract below)



There is a very small car park in Rhewl village, free the last time I was there. But I often start at a large layby on the A525 Denbigh road just beyond the village, approximate grid reference is 105605, on the right hand side of the road heading north.

Then walk back towards the village on the wide verge of the A road, and after about 100 metres on the other side of the road you will see a lane heading SW (this goes under the 'E' of Rhewl in the 1:50K extract above). The lane climbs up and forks after about 400m into two tracks, you take the left hand southern fork.

This track goes SW mostly well above the bottom of the Clywedog valley, but is diverted into a descent just to go round rather than through a house and garden. At the end of the diversion it goes on SW at mid level above the valley through deciduous woods, skirts a field, and then through conifers, emerging on a minor road east of the hamlet of Bontuchel at GR approx. 086582.

Referring to the map below, carry on down the lane steeply SW and take the next left steeply downhill to the river at Bontuchel. It's worth look at the old mill on the river, crossing the bridge and going right and west for 150m or so to look at the weir and fish pass below. The pass allows salmon and sea trout to access a long stretch of the river that was denied to them by the weir for many years.

Bontuchel and its weir



It's possible to extend this walk but at this point I usually turn round and go back to the point where you joined the minor roads.

Here at a lower riverside level begins the best bit of the walk, the Drive track itself. It closely follows the River Clywedog that goes over a long sequence of rapids and minor waterfalls,





over rock slabs for two miles. The super arty photo is sourced again from *Flickr.com*, it's a magical walk and I've never been able to capture it as well as this!

Towards the end of the walk there are small cliffs of sandstone and limestone beside the river too. If you are lucky, you may see dippers hunting along the river. Back at Bontuchel, the rock exposures are slate – here's Mark Barley checking out the geology there.

The track ends in Rhewl passing a few houses and then one crosses the old bridge over the Clywedog back to the main road. As you go north back to the car, please take care crossing the new bridge, there's no pavement and when I was last there the road was still 40mph!

Who was Lady Bagot? The one concerned was the wife of the second Lord Bagot and flourished around 1830, when her husband was involved in developing the first forestry plantations around Clocaenog, partly as an attempt to give work to people and relieve poverty.

Their house was at Pool Park (Farm) near Efenechtyd, a neo Elizabethan pile currently being renovated. The carriage drive enabled her to get a scenic run from the house to Ruthin, particularly for Sunday church. I think the photo is the lady herself (*photo National Portrait Gallery*), here seen as a widow, she was Lord Bagot's 2nd wife.



Occasional Section – Members' Personal News

I wanted to say thanks once more for the contributions I have received from you for the upgraded '**Big List**'. I plan to do this project in March, so please can I have any more contributions by email by the end of February?

Also, a **request for help** please. I'd like to start a new string of occasional shortish pieces in the 'Venues' section focussed on walks, climbs, and other activities based on the Hut. I'm thinking of something around '**My most memorable Hut hill day...**' So these are things – days ranging from great through epic to 'disastrous' - which people have done when based there (not necessarily starting from the door!), on actual meets or otherwise.

I'm thinking of something around as little as 150-200 words – anything up to 500 is fine, but beyond that point I'd treat it as a full article, which would of course be equally welcome. But either way a bit more than what one might write on Facebook, with enough info so that others could repeat (or avoid!) the trip if they wanted!

Plus two or three photos. If you have none to hand I can usually get generic ones of the hills concerned online. If other people are clearly identifiable in your photo(s), please clear its use with them.

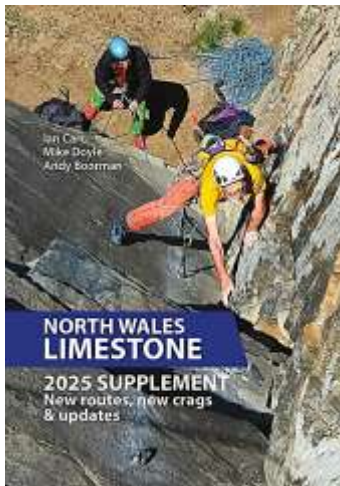
If you would like to send me something, please let me know, and know what it's going to be about, in advance by email – that way I can manage things if two people want to cover the same thing and avoid anyone duplicating work. If you don't want the hassle of writing or typing, you can always by arrangement dictate it to me over the phone!

The purpose of this is to get some material out on the Hut in 'voices' other than mine.

Here now is **Mike Doyle's** Facebook post on the **new guidebook**, all the proceeds of which go to a good climbing cause as you can see. Not everyone may have seen this online –

'Greetings All

Exciting news from the North Wales Limestone Team and from Mike Doyle, author of A55 Sport Climbs:



Since the publication of the 3rd edition of the popular A55 book and of the 2023 North Wales Limestone guidebook, there has been a huge amount of development - so much so that we have now produced a full colour, 80 page, 2025 Supplement!

The Supplement includes vital updates, many new routes and seven fully bolted, new or redeveloped Sport Crags!

This is now with the printer and will be available from early March.

All proceeds from sales of (and extra donations towards) the new Supplement will go directly to the North Wales Bolt Fund: www.northwalesboltfund.co.uk

The new book has been supported by Joe Brown shops, [V12 Outdoor](#), the [Boathouse Climbing Centre](#) and [The Boardroom Climbing](#) and will be available to purchase at those locations.

There will also be copies available out and about on the crags - keep your eyes skinned!

Happy Climbing!'

Finally, our very active founder member **Roger Hughes** was **80 years young** this month and had a great party – he writes to the Club -

'A big thank you to all who remembered my birthday, a goodly number made it to the Squash Club to celebrate with me, many bearing gifts, and there was a further gift of an Airbnb voucher - too many people involved to thank individually but it was great to see those who made it and a big thank you to all who contributed to cards and gifts.

I had a fantastic time (what I remember of it) and I thank you one and all, not just for those festivities, but for your friendship and camaraderie over the last 55 years...'

Grand Days Out (and In) – Recent Meets Highlights



Staying with parties we can't guarantee that no Haggises were harmed in the making of **our Burns Night Supper...**

Nice though to see Reg's orange hamster got through the night safely sheltering under his hat!

We also took advantage of some sunshine to get on the snow dusted hills on this meet – Nicki Hickin writes: 'Glorious weather for a 6 mile circular walk from Rachub, taking in Moel Faban, Gyrn and Moel

Wnion and then back to the hut for a delicious Burns dinner - thanks to Lin and Tom for the food and whisky'.



Moving indoors, Chris Harris's **Ecuador Talk at Gallaghers** got a good reception. A lot of people came up with questions at the end, and he was able to remain discreet about Guayaquil's scary murder rate!

Intense cold and snow flurries did not deter a big turnout for Janet Coates' **Sandstone Trail** meet. I very much enjoyed it, and it was good for me to do some new ground in a well loved area. Conditions were misty and atmospheric on this wintry day. But the snowdrops were out in force so spring is nearly here!

The photo below is Raw Head, the highest point on the Trail...



A little further on Chris Harris took a few of us on a diversion to take in the cave of Queen's Parlour, which is impressively large. The Sandstone Trail website says that the cave was extended by mining for specially fine sands, which could be used in processes such as cleaning milk churns. I know my Nan who was a kitchen maid in grand houses in Edwardian times used sand to clean pots and pans.

After leaving the cave we circled over Bulkley and Bickerton Hills before returning finally to the cars. A few of us then enjoyed a post hill pint in the Bickerton Poacher pub.

We didn't see any Triassic era wildlife on our travels, but did see a couple of mean looking characters in a field – presumably exiled from some Cheshire mansion. And what could be a Triassic era motor car in a farmer's vast collection of tat!

The car is I'm fairly sure a 1950's/60s era 'Baby Austin', a make of *enormous* historical significance.

Que? Wass is dass? Pourquoi?



Well, on page 4 of his Club History (see our website!) John Huxley tells that it was in just such a car that the Gwydyr Mountain Club's name was devised! Don't tell the farmer though, he'll just put its price up...

Gill Eccles writes on Facebook 'Thanks to Bill for leading a **Hike around Wirral** today. Lots of paths and points of interest that I didn't know were there along the 16 mile route. The rain held off until the last few miles, so that was a bonus.'



These shots are of some of the group on top of Caldly Hill, and then by the memorial to the old RAF base at West Kirby, where many recruits had their training...

I once met an old airman who had trained there, who told me the end of training treat was a trip to New Brighton funfair led by his Corporal!



EXTRA!

RECENT CRAG DEVELOPMENTS – ON THE A55...by Mike Doyle

Introduction

Logically, there must be a finite number of crags available for climbing development in any area so it's quite astonishing that, in the A55 Catchment area, a further 5 crags have sprung to life since publication of the 3rd edition of 'A55 Sport Climbs' in 2019. This article reviews the development of those crags. They are listed in no particular order.

Nant Dulas

A friendly but small crag of good, natural limestone with a flat base and with fine views across the Dulas valley to the major trad crag of Craig y Forwyn and Bryn Dulas above. The crag is home to 17 routes between F3 and F6c+ and is worked out other than one project outstanding. It's south west facing, at the west end of the village of Rhyd y Foel and low down on the hillfort of Pen Y Corddyn Mawr.



Prolific new router Harold Walmsley and his partner Chris Calow kicked off development in August 2022 with 6 routes, 5 of them being on the right hand, cleaner, wing. Harold then announced that they were finished so myself and fellow new router Keith Mills took up the baton.

Nant Dulas – Keith drilling and Alan Johnson climbing



We first established 3 routes on the right wing on lines which Harold had curiously ignored. With these in the bag we took on the removal of copious amounts of cotoneaster from beneath the crag. Cotoneaster is a non-indigenous, hugely invasive plant which sadly loves limestone and north Wales is drowning under it. Cotoneaster species were originally introduced to the UK from Asia in the 19th century as an ornamental garden species. Since then, these species have spread widely across the UK, including to important limestone crags, cliffs, slopes and dry grasslands in north Wales. As part of the Limestone Restoration Project to control non-native cotoneaster species on part of a limestone grassland Site of Special Scientific Interest, North Wales Wildlife Trust, further up from the crag, have sprayed large amounts of hillside to kill it off. We also removed the turf from the starting ledges. We do like a tidy crag.

We then established a further six routes on the left hand side. Some tended to be unbalanced whereby a harder start or finish was interspersed with straightforward climbing. One such route was '*Fuelled by Gregg's*' F6a+ (a reference to a mandatory Gregg's visit for bacon baps prior to visiting the crag). A puzzling and technical start is followed by much easier climbing. Richard and Melinda Kinsman helped out on the first ascent. The final route we did was '*Dad's Die in Hot Bras*' F6b* which climbs steep rock to a reachy crux going over the overhangs. My son Chris did the first ascent and named it so I'm blameless!

Craig Bryn Dulas

The sport climbing venue of Craig Bryn Dulas has been neglected for over 30 years but has recently been updated and further developed. The crag was originally developed in July 1993 by Paul Jenkinson, Iwan Arfon Jones and Bob Wightman. However, due to unsubstantiated claims of brown long-eared bat roosts, all the hangers were removed and climbers were requested to stay away. On-going investigations by BMC Area Reps and Officers have revealed that this is not a bat roost: access has thus been re-established.

Step forward driven local activist Matt Burson. Matt got involved and development is on-going: at present 8 of the original lines have been re-equipped and 8 new routes have been bolted, all with high-quality 316 stainless equipment courtesy of the North Wales Bolt Fund. The cliff has three distinct sections providing worthwhile sports routes of a variety of grades, styles and angles. It also has one of the best crag outlooks along the North Wales coast. Currently only the main area has been re-equipped – work is on-going. Unstable rock, rusty studs and old staple bolts can be seen in the Diggley Biggley and Far Right areas and should be avoided at present.



The crag has a south-easterly aspect and gets sun from early morning until around 3pm. It's sheltered from westerlies and generally stays dry with little seepage. This is an ideal winter sun trap, often too warm on sunny, summer days but ideal for windy, westerly periods. The location is stunning, with far reaching views across the Dulas valley and the North Wales Path running directly below.

Bryn Dulas

The rock tends to be fractured and seamed. Despite the hard work of the re-equippers, a large amount of loose and suspect rock remains across some areas of the crag; some is still to be removed and some will, inevitably, have to be left in place. The routes still feel quite 'fresh' - it seems inevitable that, over the coming months, some holds will depart downwards and grades may change. Helmets are strongly recommended for both leader and second. A clip-stick will provide welcome reassurance. The crag sits on a steep slope above the North Wales Path and the ground is rough and unstable in places.

Road Runner Crag

New sea cliffs don't emerge very often but this is one such beast! This crag of hard grano-microdiorite is accessed from the beach below the crag known as 'The Gallery' and the Penmaenbach tunnel. The name refers to former dangers in crossing the A55 nearby.



Road Runner – central section with The Gallery crag above

The crag was developed by the prolific Matt Burson and friends in 2023 and is tidal making the starts of some of the routes quite smooth and problematical. Parking is at a large car park at the Shell filling station and Puffin cafe (no longer open) on the A55 west bound carriageway by a foot bridge. Cross the footbridge and turn right along the cycle way to go left through a tunnel onto the beach. Turn right towards the prominent pinnacle. The climbs are on this and either side of it.

It is one of those crags which we unfortunately dismissed, not recognising the potential and it isn't the first time that this has happened! The crag faces north west and currently has 22 routes between F3 and F7a+ of around 12 metres. It's a pleasant, non serious place to climb and well worth a visit. There is some bouldering beyond the left side of the crag.

Keith Mills climbing on the right wing



Pen Y Corddyn Mawr

This crag is on the east side of Pen y Corddyn Mawr hillfort above the village of Rhyd y Foel. It's a great place for a hillfort, having a large flattish summit and being protected by crags on much of its sides. The hillfort is iron age and employed earthen ramparts faced by rock in some places. Internally, hut circles have been found and the northern entrance is in-turned. The name 'Corddyn' is one of those Welsh names whose meaning seems to have been lost in time. According to a Welsh friend it could mean dwarf or elbow, neither of which seem to make any sense.

The hillfort had laid dormant for 2,000 years until Matt Burson, having obtained the necessary permissions, got stuck into the crag development of the east side. Matt is a local and spent many hours by himself at the crag, devegetating and removing loose rock. He went on to establish 13 routes with his partner Jinnie, between F6a and F7b, mainly in July 2024.



It's a very steep crag but can be nicely featured. Matt invited me to get involved and it took 3 visits to find and access the top of the crag due to the copious amounts of blackthorn and bramble. Once this was dispatched, I could abseil down the right hand face with the help of Richard Kinsman, who appears to have caught the bug for crag development. It is all very labour intensive, not helped by the fact that it requires a bit of a walk to reach the bottom of the crag from the top. Another 3 visits allowed us to establish a new route. Andy Chapman was on hand to take the pics:

Richard Kinsman in action, Pen y Corddyn Mawr

'Dame Edna Everage' F6a+ 12m 'A well bolted route which starts up the vague runnel on the right of the sector. Make a steep move to finish by a small cracked pillar. M.Doyle, R. Kinsman, M. Burrows. 29.11.24'



It's not a big deal but nevertheless the route climbs quite well. Richard has another project to the right which he has been cleaning.

Drone shot of us on the right hand side of the crag

Oak Tree Crag



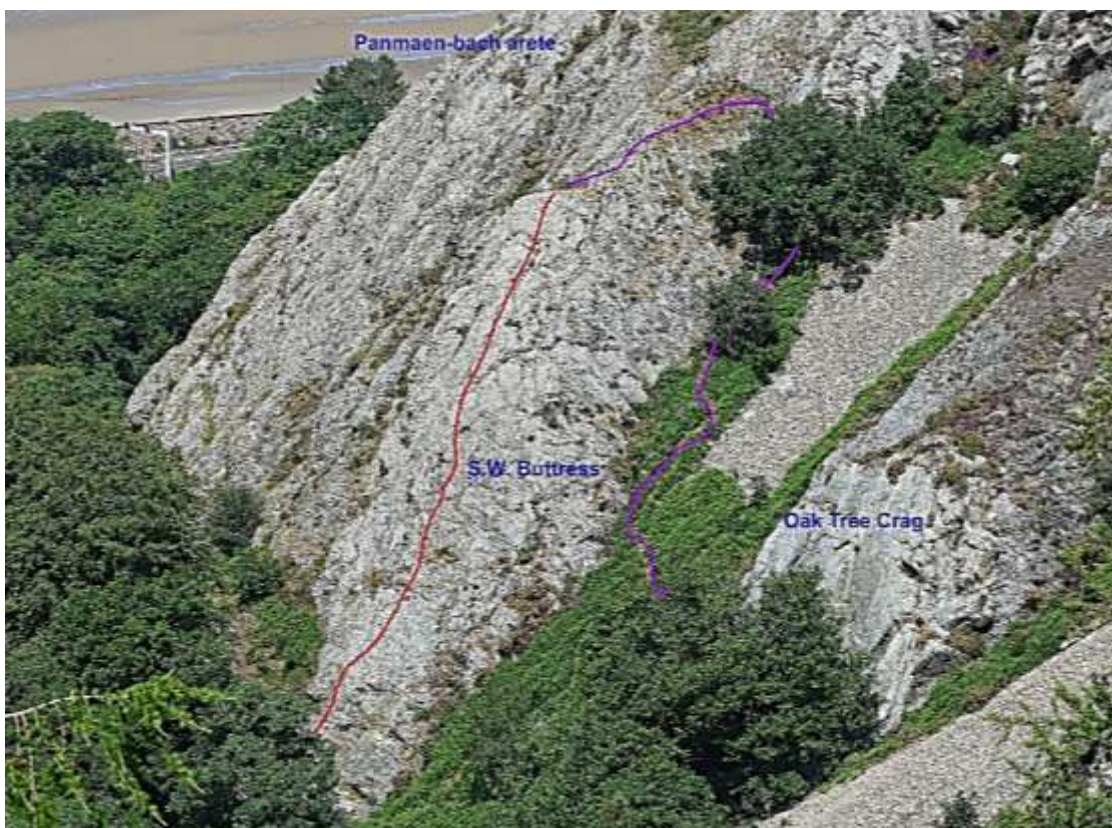
A small but perfectly formed crag hidden behind an enormous oak tree near Dwygyfylchi, just off the A55. The rock is a remarkably solid, hard micro-granodiorite and, serendipitously, the strata has been arranged by nature to provide a profusion of reassuring, incut holds.

The crag had been known about for many years but Keith Mills and I were prompted into development action by Dave Evans of Plas y Brenin who reckoned it would an excellent beginners' crag or one for ageing bumbles.

Dave was correct and for us ageing bumbles it eventually yielded 8 routes with a top grade of F5. The routes were established over many visits, mainly in 2022. The crag is situated at the foot of and on the south west side of Penmaenbach Mountain, with parking as for The Gallery and is accessed through Lyons caravan park. Shielded from the sun in the summer, it gets any sun going in the winter with the leaves off the trees. All of the climbs can be bagged in one satisfying session.

At Oak Tree Crag

To the left of Oak Tree crag is a large 50 metre buttress of the same rock with 3 climbs. A route on the right of it is reputedly a v. diff although the exact line is not known and gear is so sparse for it to be effectively a solo.





Keith and I established a 2 pitch sport route in May 2023, which we imaginatively named '*South west Buttress*', from the lowest point on the buttress making the best of the contiguous rock. It's an easy F3 with positive holds throughout and can be done in boots or soloed by the competent. It has a mountaineering feel about it. DLJ and I sampled it along with Oak Tree Crag last year.

DLJ on South West Buttress

To the left again is Penmaenbach Arête, an excellent grade 2 scramble starting almost from sea level. The route can be seen to be curving up the hillside just before the Penmaenbach tunnel going east on the A55. Well worth doing.

Expect all of these crags to feature in a new guidebook supplement published in the spring. Look out for it!

Mike Doyle

February 2025