

# THE GWYDYR MOUNTAIN CLUB NEWSLETTER – EXTRA!

April 2026: Editor Dave Gray



## Introduction

Welcome to the April Newsletter!

This is an Extra! edition, we have an article from Chris Harris on the successful and snowy Fort William meet at the end of February. Thanks to Chris and to Brenda, Doug, Gill Eccles, Lindsey, Ray, and as ever DLJ for help with this edition. Please let me have material for the next edition, the final deadline for that is **April 27th**.

## Looking Ahead

Here are the upcoming meets venues for April and May, 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...**

3-6 April	Hut Weekend (Easter)
18 April	Saturday Walk – Tal y Fan
24-26 April	Hut Weekend (St George's Night)
6 May	Midweek Climbing – Dyserth Castle Slab
15-17 May	Hut weekend
20 May	Midweek Climbing – Penmaenbach Quarry
24-31 May	Scottish Meet - Aviemore

## Focus on Venues

**Tal y Fan** is the northernmost of the 2000' peaks in the Carneddau and is one of my favourite walks.

A memorable occasion was when I took a visitor from Australia, the sister of one of my work friends, to see the mountain ponies. Seeing wild ponies was on her UK 'bucket list' and as they were in North Wales in any case I took them out to do the mountain.



Here's a pony I met last January on the northern slopes of the hill:



My guest was delighted to see a good number of the ponies. Less so was my late father, many years ago now, when one of them tried to eat his rucksack while he was still wearing it!

Research by Aberystwyth University has shown that the Carneddau ponies are genetically distinct from the general population of Welsh ponies of a similar size (called 'Section A') ponies. The scientists consider that this means that they have been a separate isolated population for several hundred years.

The ponies, which number in the hundreds, are owned by a number of local farming families, who care for them, although they are not generally given supplemental feeding. They can live on the mountain grasses including *Molinia* grass and can also eat soft rushes. In winter they have the ability to sweep the snow off their pasture, although the severe blizzards of 2013 killed over 100 animals.

There is an annual round up to check their health, and some ponies are sold as riding ponies if that is needed to regulate the balance of the herd. The link below takes you to a short video of a local farmer telling the story of his family's long connection with the animals:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmHLGeByvm8xx>

In the past some of the ponies were sold for work in the mines. More generally, Welsh ponies are classified in 'Sections' A to D depending on the size and the roles they can fulfil. Section D ponies, the largest animals, are called Welsh Cobs and can be ridden by adults.

Cobs may well have been used as 'rounceys' or second line war horses in medieval times, either to mount archers or less well-off soldiers supporting the knights, but also for specialist tasks including, as shown in a 1327 document, a swift pursuit of broken enemies (I suspect the bigger horses bred to charge enemies lacked stamina to chase them down). As a big bloke Henry VIII wasn't impressed by small horses and legislated for a cull of undersized stallions; but his wiser daughter Elizabeth I partially repealed this, understanding and citing the greater usefulness of smaller horses on rough ground.

Stories of military guys on horseback brings us to the **St George's night meet** at the **Hut**. Let's hope England's patron saint brings better weather for some days on the hill than Robbie Burns managed in January! More weather like the recent **Dinner Weekend** please!

I owe St George. Again going well back in the day, when I was a cub scout we had to do a church parade on St George's day. Cubs and church parades were not my thing at all, but they provided my first goes at reading (in this case from the Bible) to a large public audience, early practice that laid foundations of a career and then a freelance business for me.

A venture into Wikipedia just now reveals how little I knew about St George. Perhaps the most perceptive comment on him is from the pope who canonised him in AD494, Gelasius I, who in a letter classed him as among saints 'which are known better to God than to human beings.'

Certainly in the 400's there was a tradition of the veneration of George, who was held to be a Roman officer of the Emperor's Praetorian guard. He lost his head for his Christian faith on 23 April 303, as part of the widespread and intense persecution under the emperor Diocletian who lived c245-c311 and reigned 284-305.

The context is that Diocletian was a transformational ruler, who stabilised the Roman Empire after 50 years of upheaval, and was the founder of the later imperial era, usually called by historians the 'Dominate'. Dominus is Latin for 'Lord' and the Dominate was what it says on the packet – Emperors and sometimes teams of Emperors who were usually no-nonsense military hard men, in an empire often centred near the frontiers rather than on Rome. Diocletian is held to have thought himself as a restorer of Rome's past glories, and unfortunately this included giving his authority to persecution of people whose religious beliefs were considered 'un-Roman'.



The picture above is part of a 17<sup>th</sup> century Greek Orthodox icon depicting St George as a soldier. He is patron saint of places as diverse as Aragon, Moscow, and Ethiopia. Given that yer average historical ruler would have been a military man, I'm not surprised about his widespread appeal – a lot better saint to have as a patron saint than some unwashed hermit. The St George and the Dragon story first appeared in Georgia in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and again dragon/monster slaying is something really *leading* heroes do – think of Beowulf for example.

The St George's flag was 12<sup>th</sup> century Genoese in origin and was used in the English royal standard by Edward III in the 14<sup>th</sup>, St George being picked as the patron saint for his new Order of the Garter. Hence St George's Chapel in Windsor.

This is a very different image of St George. An Islamic one.



In the picture above, he is the person on the left being tortured by the 'King of Mosul', depicted in a 14<sup>th</sup> century book produced in Iran for its then Mongol overlords. George is patron saint of Mosul, the story being that he was tortured and martyred for opposing the king's worship of idols. The king's tortures didn't work because angels were protecting George from them. Nor did his execution of George who was miraculously – and repeatedly – resurrected.

George's place in Muslim traditions is complex, in the Mosul tradition he is a merchant, one of a number of believers in touch with the last apostles of Jesus

Other schools of thought identify him with the figure known as Al Khidr ('The Green One') who is himself identified by some scholars with an unnamed angelic figure of great wisdom who features in the Koran.

Left is a Mughal painting from 17<sup>th</sup> century India, which pictures Al Khidr riding on a fish.

All a bit more complicated than when I was a cub scout!

Finally a quick reminder that summer is nearly here and the first of the planned summer midweek climbing meets is on 6<sup>th</sup> May at **Dyserth Castle Slab**.

## Grand Days Out (and In) – Recent Meets Highlights

Kicking off with the **Rhuallt and Mynydd y Cwm** trip, we were rewarded with a good sunny day, and very fine views, especially across to the snow capped Welsh 3000s. Ray's pictures below capture the huge sense of space looking west from these hills.



On Mynydd y Cwm summit we saw the memorial to the tragic loss of a Halifax transport plane on the mountain in December 1947. It was carrying a cargo of high fashion dresses from France to Speke airport.



As promised to those on the walk a bit more on this event. An article on the website <https://aviation-safety.net/wikibase/18825> based on official reports suggests the causes of the crash were bad weather, plus errors of commission by the pilot and of omission by air traffic control. The pilot was a decorated war veteran, who had over 2,000 hours flying of which over 1,000 were on this type of aircraft. It is of course very easy to be wise after the event from the safety of a desk.

We decided not to try for Moel Hirradug as an added extra – as ever it looked a bit steep seen towards the end of a walk!





Gill Eccles posted 'Thanks for a super weekend. Sue and Nicky, big thanks for arranging the **Club Dinner** for us all.

Kev, Saturday's hike up Moel Siabod was great, a new to me route to get to the scramble section, which was really enjoyable. Weather helped to give us spectacular 360 degree views. Big thanks!

Hew was compere for the evening and ran the ever popular bingo!

Here's a couple of Gill's photos of the Siabod walk,,,



On the same trip another group headed over the other side of the valley towards Crafnant for a five mile mid-level walk, thanks to Brenda for the next three shots -



Some had already prepared for that walk with a stroll at Conwy whilst Richard and Adele joined the Parkrun...



Some like it coooooo....old!



This is Llynau Mymbyr at Plas y Brenin, braved on the Sunday morning by five of our lady members. Lindsey said 'Madness but great fun to do together. My first outdoor swim this year. Thanks girls!'

Finally I couldn't resist sharing this fantastic photo from Doug, taken on a weekday jaunt to Blencathra via Sharp Edge!



## EXTRA!

### 2026 WINTER MEET: FORT WILLIAM...by Chris Harris

It was after New Year before Strathmore Hotels presented their Winter break offer - four nights D B & B for £159 at the Alexandra Hotel in Fort William - but 12 members were able to join in despite the short notice.

For eight years we had used the nearby Ben Nevis hotel until, it was squashed by a tree in the Winter storms, forcing us to use its Alexandra sister hotel. This would appear to be a better hotel, located on near the Fort William Station, Nevis Sports, Ells Brigham, Morrisons and Tesco. It is an old building and it does show, but it would take millions to update. However it is warm, clean, very well organized, and very reasonably priced.

The usual last week of February was booked up so the core dates of our trip were 15th to 19th of February.

As it happened this was the better week with fresh snow down to 1,000 feet. Here's a roundup of what we did.

#### Day 1 Monday

The Monday threatened cloud and showers so Helen, Glenn, Lee, John Driver, Richard Smith, and I opted for the Glencoe Ski lift up to the ski area, then on to Meall a Bhuiridh and if conditions allowed a second Munro, Creise so we could refresh ourselves on the use of full winter gear.

There was a steady wind as we ascended and by lunch time the snow flurries were getting flurrer. By the time we got to the top of Meall a Bhuiridh it was nearly a total whiteout. We had the technology (OS maps App) to get us to Creise, but common sense said it was not a good idea, so after a hasty lunch we retreated to the Clachaig Inn.

We were photographed by the SAIS assessors which was interesting as some of the group had been snapped by them near Creag Meagaidh last year.



*Our party climbs the hill (photo credit SAIS)*



*Lunch as it whitens out*

The SAIS are the Scottish Avalanche Information Service who assess avalanche risks and then issue online warnings.

It was an excellent kit and fitness test day. The snow was soft, so crampons were not deployed. Only 4.5 miles and 1600ft of ascent shows how soft snow and poor visibility can slow you down.

Jaqui and Richard Merry decided on a 'gentler' (?) day and walked Cow Hill and Neptune's Staircase which came in at 15 miles!

Ros opted for a massive hundred lengths (2,500m) of the sports centre pool.

Ian, Paul and Simmo did Glas Charn (2,076'), a Graham near Glenfinnan, plus its smaller neighbour Sgurr a Mhuide.

### **Day 2 Tuesday**

The day dawned sunny and stayed sunny all day with sub zero temperatures at sea level and little wind.

Helen, Glenn, John Driver, John Simmo, Richard Smith Ian and Paul and I opted for Helen's route choice, 3 Munros: Càrn Liath (3,300'), Stob Poite Coire Ardair (3,454') and Creag Meagaidh (3,707').

This was going to be a challenging walk but the forecast was good. The route involved 13 miles and 3600ft ascent - a 10 hour summer walk according to the Walkhighlands website.



*We approach Carn Liath Summit (photo credit SAIS)*

The biggest concern was the descent to "The Window" between Stob Poite Coire Ardair and Creag Meagaidh'. However there were options to shorten the day – either retreat the way we came, or come down to The Window and miss out Creag Meagaidh.

Paul, Ian and Simmo made a break on the ascent and it was obvious they were going for the triple. The rest of us decided on a more 'leisurely' pace and were happy to summit just two of the Munros.

We met another SAIS lady in the carpark, and again on the top of Carn Liath where she was able to explain the areas of avalanche risk, fortunately the opposite direction of our route. She also gave us an update on conditions on the notorious window and advised John of a good descent from the ridge. She then clipped into her skis and made a rapid descent.



#### *Lunch on Carn Liath summit*

The ridge walk with 360 degree views covering a massive area was about 3.5 miles of soft snow underfoot. However ascending the start of the prominence of Stob Poite Coire Ardair ice axe and crampons were essential as it was steep and icy.

The descent to the lochan via the window was actually rather pleasant, the threat of boulders and tricky downclimbs was cushioned by deep soft snow.

We clocked 11.5 miles and 3500ft ascent so Ian, Paul and Simmo must have added a good few hundred feet and a couple of miles to the total, so it was a quite some walk for winter!



*The ridge between Carn Liath and Stob Poite Coire Ardair*



*Descent route via The Window*

Lee chose to walk up to the CIC hut from Torlundy and Ros managed another 70 lengths (2500m) of the pool along with Jaqui.

### **Day 3 Wednesday**



The weather forecast was threatening high winds and clag on the tops, so we stayed low.

Helen, Glenn, Lee and Richard walked up Glen Nevis to Pol Dubh Falls.

Richard and Jaqui walked up the Creag Meagaidh Nature Reserve to the lochan.

Simmo wanted to reccie Meall Onfhaidh, (2,234') so I accompanied him up to the snow line and he went for the summit. I backtracked to the Glensulaig bothy where I sheltered for lunch.

#### *Glensulaig bothy*

Ros managed another 60 lengths (1,500m)

Paul and Ian summited Sgorr Dhearg (3,359') above Ballachulish, They reported 'Snow and ice all the way from the edge of the forest to the summit, very windy and cold - loved the spindrift (not)!'

### **Day 4 - Thursday**

John Simmo stayed the extra day to walk the West Highland way from Kinlochleven to the end at Fort William and rescued a sheep from a drainage ditch on the way... 'it was stuck on the ditch at the bottom left corner, had to drag it up the ditch until it could get its front legs out, then managed to haul it out. It must have been in the ditch awhile as it took a while to get to its feet.'

**Chris Harris**

**March 2026**