

THE GWYDYR MOUNTAIN CLUB NEWSLETTER – EXTRA!

June 2026: Editor Dave Gray



Introduction

Welcome to the June Newsletter!

On the principle of 'Speech by Toad, Song by Toad' this Extra! edition has an article by me on 'The Welsh 3000s and Beyond' which grew out of the editorial work. So extra choccie digestives for me, and thanks to Brenda, Carol, Chris Harris, John Driver, Kev, Steve Swygart, Sue, and as ever DLJ for help with this edition. Please let me have material for the next edition, the final deadline for that is **June 25th**.

Looking Ahead

Here are the upcoming meets venues for June and July, 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 June	Midweek Climbing – Castle Inn
9 June	Thursday Walk – Liverpool South Parkway to Hale Village
13 June	Saturday Meet – High Berwyns
17 June	Midweek Climbing – Nant Dulas
19-21 June	Hut Weekend – Welsh 3000s
26-29 June	Pembrokeshire Lodge Meet
26 June – 2 July	Pembrokeshire Climbing Meet
1 July	Midweek Climbing – Road Runner Crag
7 July	Talk at Gallaghers – 'Trekking in China' by Mike Gilbert
11 July	Saturday Walk – 'Wharfedale 3 Peaks'
15 July	Midweek Climbing – Penmaenbach Quarry (Last Butt One Level)
24/26 July	Hut Weekend
29 July	Midweek Climbing – Marian Bach

Focus on Venues

Straight to the end of June now, when all being well we're majoring on Pembrokeshire!

Kev's trip to St David's opens up a wealth of opportunities on the coast path around St David's. The peninsula location means one can walk west and circuit round on the cliff path through

Ramsey Sound and back inland. Another good walk goes east along cliffs to the pretty inlet of Solva (see photo, *credit* www.visitpembrokeshire.com) . One time I extended this to do the remainder of the cliffs on the south side through to Newgale, which is my 'furthest south' on that part of the Pembrokeshire coast.



St David's saw one of our funniest incidents, well back in the day. It's in John Huxley's book, and I was there! We'd camped at Caerfai and Hilary Cooper was walking along the lane to join us for an evening drink in the pub. A car went past her and from it leaned out Bryn Roberts (the Elder, not our current Bryn), who greeted her with a cheerful 'How's it going, Sister!' In the fading light and out of context Hilary didn't grasp it was Bryn, and understandably advised the Presumed Pembrokeshire Pervert to 'F ___ Off !!!' In the pub Bryn repeated his greeting as Hilary walked in and oh did we all laugh...

Steve Swygart's climbing meet is based at St Petrox south of Pembroke, another great area for walking and of course for the rock. It includes an opportunity to be briefed to use the West Range as a climbing venue, a wild and demanding rock scene within a live ammo Army Firing Range. One website I read described the briefing from the Chaps/Chapettes as 'robust'!



Mmm... – 20 press ups? – or could *this* be a 'before and after' shot of a robustly-briefed climber...?

Seriously, to be fair to the military they have to train somewhere, and it's good that they put in the effort to allow climbers safe access to what is potentially a very hazardous environment, and don't just do a thoughtless blanket ban.

(photo credits uk.pinterest.com and info@foticoscollection.com)



Here's a shot (*credit: the BMC*) of one of the routes on Range West

The whole southern area of the Pembrokeshire coastline is just stunning and well worth the extra drive whether for climbing or walking. I've walked there between the two ranges based on Freshwater East, and also around Tenby. Between the ranges lies the arch of the Green Bridge of Wales, plus the Elegug Stacks.



Also towards the end of the month is the **Welsh 3000's Hut Weekend**. It's now getting on for 40 years since – after four failed efforts – I managed this magnificent but challenging walk. Good luck to 2026 participants and supporters! I wondered when did people first started doing the 3000s walk and what can come after it in way of long distance walks. That got me onto research which blossomed out of control, hence the article at the end of this newsletter...

Grand Days Out (and In) – Recent Meets Highlights

The **Hut Weekend** on 15/17 May saw us host and in some cases take part in a **charity event** that John Driver had organised to raise money for the Samaritans, in memory of his late sister Susan Driver.

John tells me that there were 47 people participating in the walk, in three teams put together by John himself, Anna, and Carol, and that:

‘...the total raised for all the teams, is now approaching £8,000 (plus gift-aid). Perhaps more importantly, Susan's story has been shared in excess of 10,000 times. I'm overwhelmed by people's generosity and sense of connection with her story. Even after 50 years, this means so much to me.’



Carol writes about her team, the ‘Jibber Jabbers’:

‘I am so proud to share that the Jibber Jabbers made it to the top of Snowdon on the 16th May. The weather was atrocious, everyone was soaking wet and cold, but they dug deep and persevered. Many of the group have not walked in the mountains before, and they could not have had worse conditions for their first experience...’

‘...I am in awe of the Herculean effort they made in support of The Samaritans. If it wasn't for that commitment I'm sure we would have all turned back and gone to the pub! ...big thanks to Steve Birch and John Driver’.

The photos say everything about the conditions!

If anyone would like to donate to this worthy cause, or make a further donation, please use any one of the teams' links below:

<https://samaritanscommunity.enthuse.com/pf/jibber-jabbers>

<https://samaritanscommunity.enthuse.com/pf/here-comes-the-sun---in-memory-of-susan-driver>

<https://samaritanscommunity.enthuse.com/pf/cheshire-and-merseyside-nhs>

Also, Sue Taylor tells me that other members on the meet also braved the nasty weather and did a walk over Crimpiau and then down to Llyn Cowlyd and back to the Hut along the slate trail.



Brenda writes 'Huge thanks to Dave for a wonderful walk around **Marbury Country Park** today, with views of the Anderton Boat Lift and plenty of bird spotting along the route. Couldn't have asked for a more beautiful sunny day!'

Top of the line birdwise was a view of a great crested grebe sitting on its nest at the edge of the reedbed at Budworth Mere. Something I've never seen before. The photos below are (clockwise) Irises, Anderton Boatlift (built 1875), Budworth Mere, and ex Manchester Ship Canal steam tug 'Daniel Adamson' (built 1903).



Members' Personal News

Chris Harris is back safe home from the southernmost section of his **Land's End to John o' Groats** marathon walk. Here's some news and initial thoughts from Chris (and at the bottom a reminder of the link to his LeJog Facebook blog)... 'Last May I was wondering what to do to celebrate reaching 75 and I thought "Why not walk LEJOG?". Unfortunately I thought it was a good idea and purchased the Cicerone guide. Having cycled, 5 years earlier, 1000 miles from end to end in 14 days, I was rather shocked to find the walking route was 1215 miles in 61 days and the guide broke it into 20 mile sections.



The mileage in fact greater. The guide does say its sections are from map plots not actual measured distances and as I've found, with sourcing food and accommodation, the actual distances can come out to 10 to 20% more, even using short cuts and avoiding unnecessary hills. I have plotted the route waypoint to waypoint the whole way so that navigation is easy. The route avoids road walking by using national trails e.g. The South West Coastal Path, Offa's Dyke Path, The Staffordshire Way, The Limestone Way, The Pennine Way, St Cuthbert's Way, The Southern Upland Way, The West Highland Way, The John O' Groats Trail.

I started the Tuesday after Easter Monday but unfortunately twisted my knee and after day nine had to return home to recuperate, continuing the Tuesday after the Early May Bank Holiday for another 13 days. by which time I had covered a rather satisfactory 507 miles. Due to domestic commitments it will probably be late July before I can continue.

Progress so far	Day	Miles	Ft. Asc.
Trevescan to Zennor	1	21.20	4007
Gwithian	2	20.20	1960
Perranporth	3	26.60	4330
Mawgan Porth(Treyarnon))	4	16.60	1860
Wadebridge	5	15.00	929
Boscastle	6	21.40	3897
Bude	7	18.90	3400
Clovelly	8	23.50	4440
Westward Ho	9	17.00	3750
Barnstaple	10	17.30	930
Simonsbath (Exmoor)	11	23.70	2840
Roadwater (Exmoor)	12	21.90	2200
Bridgewater (Quantocks)	13	28.20	3170
Cheddar	14	20.20	470
Easton in Gordano M5 services	15	30.20	2260
Tintern	16	31.70	2990
Monmouth (Treadam)	17	25.10	2940
Hay on Wye	18	29.90	3460
Presteigne	19	26.80	4240
Craven Arms	20	23.00	2970
Ironbridge Much Wenlock)	21	20.10	2160
Penkridge	22	29.97	1555
	Average	23.07	2761.73
	Total	507.47	60758

Using the lightest of kit I got my rucksack down to 11kg, without food and water (about an extra 2kg), when not wet ! I was not carrying cooking equipment but relied on meal deals and pub/cafe hot meals. I have found that the best way to keep sane and refreshed is to overnight in a hotel about every five days. I can then eat well and wash and dry clothes. Drying is impossible in a tent when it is cold.

Negatives so far: The weather has not been kind, although I have not had much rain during the days, a lot of the nights have been near freezing. The cold winds have been head-on from the north. Food availability has been a problem and some days I survived on fig rolls and/or choc chip cookies. My new boots feel like they have no waterproofing which means if there is a heavy dew I have wet feet from the start. My rucksack was difficult to balance so I changed it for an old one for section two which is more comfortable. Crops, nettles, brambles, freshly ploughed fields blocking paths, path diversions.

Positives so far: Excellent route. Early mornings, seeing deer, foxes, hares etc.. Meeting amazing people - ultra runners seem to be chatty. And turning left onto the Severn bridge after 14 days heading eastish on the SW peninsula meant I was at last heading north!

[https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61579531413155&_cft__\[0\]=AZbYkTd7H-bL2M3RrjDN-A6liho-nqXKq5nq3DkLRGaOjKM95i8LTSIcAQjx7FuhNRHfberCOQM36OAnA4oMzG8G_t1T-w5x8NIQSZGN8LnhJOXFJsTYzTzBCy7PmpuabUZHA3ItLINJVEB-IMHD7ciN&_tn_=-UK-R](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61579531413155&_cft__[0]=AZbYkTd7H-bL2M3RrjDN-A6liho-nqXKq5nq3DkLRGaOjKM95i8LTSIcAQjx7FuhNRHfberCOQM36OAnA4oMzG8G_t1T-w5x8NIQSZGN8LnhJOXFJsTYzTzBCy7PmpuabUZHA3ItLINJVEB-IMHD7ciN&_tn_=-UK-R)

EXTRA!

THE WELSH 3000s - AND BEYOND?

I wondered when did people first started doing the 14 or 15 or 16 peaks. This simple question took me – via the rabbit (some rabbit!) hole of the internet to some history and people of which I was almost totally unaware. And to their relationship with other long distance walks that are there for the Welsh 3000 finisher – or anyone who'll give them a try in whatever way suits you..

At first there was little yield on searches about the first 3000s-ers. Ambiguous' was one answer. In fact that I think stands good, at least in that sense that the best one can do is look for the first *record* of the walk being done. There's nothing to say that someone didn't do it earlier but any evidence has been lost.

Another source offered the view that the walk was first done under the influence of Sir Hugh Munro's list of Scots 3000 foot peaks that came out in the 1891. That idea has something to commend it too. Munro's list caught on and those Victorians/Edwardians were fast out of the traps in the peak bagging race, the first Munro completion was by the Rev. Aeneas Robertson in 1901. It's worth remembering that he achieved this in times when – away from the railways and the loch steamers – transport in Scotland was still powered by horse or you walked. There is also a possible link in that J. Rooke Corbett (1876-1949), who devised the eponymous mountain list and was the fourth Munros completer and the first from England, was active in the Rucksack Club which was and is based in Manchester.

For eventually the authoritative website <https://www.14peaks.com/index2.php?id=8> came up with the goods – the first recorded Welsh 3000s walk was done in 1919 by a Rucksack Club party led by Eustace Thomas (1869-1960).



Who he? Well wait for this...

This is Eustace the professional man, the engineer and businessman, whose family firm specialised in heavy electrical switchgear used across the world.

And this is another Eustace, the mountaineer, a shot that I think gives a different impression of his personality. He's pictured in the Alps, probably after a successful climb, as the full photo shows



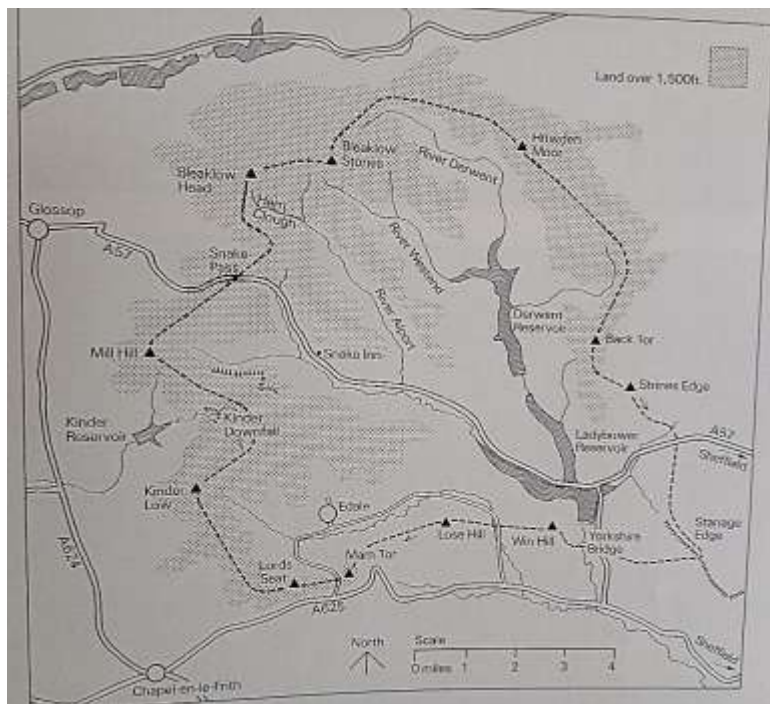
a tall thin man with his arms round his two diminutive guides.

The *photos* and the Eustace story I got mostly from the wealth of historic material on <https://rucksackclub.org> , in particular an article by Steve Dean.

I'd known that in the early 20th century there was a walker/runner in Manchester known as 'The Greyhound of the Grouchs' but hadn't remembered the person's name. It was Eustace Thomas.

His achievements beyond the Welsh 3000s were such that they actually demand bullet points to keep track. And they may give you ideas of 'other things to do' though maybe not in the same style or speed!

- In 1918 (aged 49) he was in a team which 'walked' 50 miles, over the hills from Colne to Buxton, in under 18 hours. That walk (which swallows whole the Marsden to Edale walk over Black Hill, Bleaklow and Kinder that took me two days mini – backpacking!) was first done by Cecil Dawson. I could find little about him, beyond the fact he was a Manchester cotton merchant.
- Shortly afterwards in 1918 Eustace was in the team which planned and executed the first walk over the Derwent Watershed, doing 40 miles in under 12 hours. Have a look at the map below for the route and see if you fancy it! I chopped off the section south of the Edale Valley and Derwent Reservoirs, used the north rim of Kinder, and dropped off the tops to the River Derwent for 5 miles as well. My timing – two days as a mini backpack and I was seeing Buddha at the end! And I didn't have to dodge angry and potentially violent gamekeepers on the way like the pioneers...



- His serious Alpine career started aged 54 in 1923 and over the years to 1932 became the first British person to ascend all the Alpine summits over 4,000m. Yes, he employed guides whose support and leadership he fully acknowledged, but still a big physical and mental challenge.
- Almost by way of a 'snack' in 1924, Thomas was the first person to complete all the Scots 4,000 foot summits in under 24 hours, a car was used to get between Fort William and the Cairngorms. (As far as I can tell, no one has yet done this walk in 24 hours without transport).

- In his 60s Eustace took up gliding, then flying. As you do. At age 70 he piloted his own four seater plane to Egypt. When the government requisitioned his plane in WW2, Eustace's response was to donate £5,000 to the fund that Manchester raised to build spitfires. Depending on whose figures you use that was between 40% and over 50% of the cost of a spitfire, and equates to nearly £300K in today's money. A plane was named 'Eustace' after him and was flown by Czech airmen; sadly it was shot down in 1942.
- Finally and perhaps most significantly, many people owe their lives and/or health in part to Eustace Thomas. Bringing the two parts of his life together, he was in 1932 lead designer and manufacturer of an innovative stretcher specifically for mountain rescue, called in his honour the 'Thomas Stretcher' (see right). The introduction of the stretcher was a collaborative effort following a couple of nasty incidents with makeshift casualty evacuation. It was in regular use in the UK till the 1970s, is still apparently used by at least one rescue team, and was the springboard for later improved designs. (*Photo credit - Douglas Scott*)



The secret of Eustace's successes? Well great fitness, stamina, and diverse skills are clearly in the mix, plus the ability to work effectively in a team as leader, member, or follower as circumstances demanded.

Plus a *great deal* of dosh. The first half of the 20th century, especially before WW2, could be seen as the last of the golden age of the 'gentleman climber' and his female equivalent. Cecil Dawson the cotton merchant was clearly well heeled, Eustace could write cheques for a quarter million in 2026 money. As could the last character in our story, Thomas Firbank, who paid the 1931 equivalent of that amount and then some for the farm of Dyffryn on the south of the Glyders, and was high-status enough to be a lieutenant colonel in WW2. These people worked hard, but they did have the flexibility to get leisure time to undertake and train for very long walks, they weren't clocking on at a factory with just Sunday off. They had the readies to pay for transport, including by car, and for accommodation etc. for themselves and sometimes a support team. And can't imagine the gamekeepers actually beating up Eustace.

The intensity of the training for a Welsh 3000s record attempt in 1938 is described in Firbank's book '*I bought a mountain*' which is available on Amazon in a new edition and is well worth reading. Thomas and two other upper crust gents, Rex Hamer and Eddie Capel Cure who were housemasters at Stowe public school, smashed the existing record by over two hours. On the same day, Esme, Firbank's then wife (and as Esme Kirby the founder of the Snowdonia Society in 1967), set a new female record, accompanied by local shepherd Thomas Davies, one hour faster than the old overall record time. On the subject of teamwork it's interesting that the success was due largely to the men eventually listening to Esme's suggestions for the best route.

Firbank was a great one for publicity and his book has some vignettes redolent of the time – the special train up Snowdon and then ‘she and Thomas threw off their coats and vanished into the mist...the hotel staff and the engine driver cheered excitedly, and the photographer fell over a rock...’. Later on people turning out to see the excitement - ‘We went through Nant Peris like a whirlwind. Women stood at the doors of the little quarrymen’s cottages, their children peeping round their skirts like chicks through a hen’s feathers. They all knew of what they called the Great Race and waved wildly.’

Times were a-changing though, after the walk Esme was invited to go on the infant medium of television! And in March 1926 a Rucksack Club group of Messrs. Burton, and Heardman had done a continuous walk of 75-80 miles from Colne to Rowsley. I seem to remember from another book I read years ago that one of them had to make the last train back to Manchester to *go to work* the next morning! Proletarian or what!

What did the well-equipped walker and climber of those days use as equipment? What were the Rucksack Club rucksacks like? Well let’s finish with this marvellous advert from 1907 or 1908 for top quality hill kit that was on the Club’s site.

The price of the most expensive boots, 36/-, translates as £1.80 or roundabout £190 in today’s money. But the 1908 average UK earnings were £70 a year compared to £35,880 today (www.ons.gov.uk) (www.parliament.uk).

And instead of using the internet you could order by telegram to ‘Value, Leeds’!

**Dave Gray
May 2026**

Telephone: 1231

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