

Friends of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley - Newsletter No.4 October 2016



Dear Friends

Welcome to the latest AONB Friends newsletter. We think you'll agree that a lot has been happening since the last edition but Neville's frequent events updates have hopefully kept everyone feeling fully involved. Indeed this edition features reports on successful events of great variety.

Mike Skuse tells us about a wet but informative day on Caer Drewyn, Joyce Howell has a weather report following Robert Moore's lecture, our Chair Julie Masters recounts a good day out at Ruthin market, Neville Howell has some thoughts on the AONB's links with Daniel Owen and also goes back in geological time at Eglwyseg.

We also get the chance to meet Rhun Jones, learn a little about the AONB's Trig Points, and explore our links with Thomas Telford – but first just a little about our first AGM on the 24th August and our arrival as a fully constituted charitable body.

Twenty six members met in the imposing surroundings of Chirk Castle – grateful thanks to the National Trust staff there for making the venue so readily

available. Julie Masters was appointed as our first chair and the remaining five founding trustees - Neville Howell, Tony King, John Roberts, Mike Smart and Mike Skuse - were all reappointed. It was a particularly poignant day for Mike Skuse as it was his original idea – and here we were, an infant organisation with membership already of approaching a hundred and fifty! Needing to strengthen the team, the meeting was pleased to add the names of Robert Moore, Jeff Morgan and Ron Williams to the Committee of Trustees. Neville Howell was confirmed as both treasurer and events secretary and John Roberts general secretary. The Chair was quick to emphasise that there was still scope for further appointments - so if you have skills and time to offer don't be shy! Barbara Milne has agreed to take on the communications brief.

Contact John Roberts 01352 757366, john@johnandviv.plus.com
John Roberts, Trustee

THOMAS TELFORD FOR BEGINNERS

The first thing to remember about Thomas Telford is that he was not that chap with the stove pipe hat and the cigar – that was Isambard Kingdom Brunel. He was younger than Telford, better educated, and a serious competitor to him, as we shall see.

Tom Telford was the son of a very humble shepherd in Dumfriesshire, and was raised in extreme poverty. At the age of 14 he was apprenticed to a stonemason, and by a combination of knowing the right people and very hard work, he was soon designing buildings, ordering materials and supervising the work of his fellow masons. Knowing the right people and getting their patronage was without doubt an important part of his whole life.

At 30, he became Surveyor of Public Works in Shropshire, where he seems to have specialised in building bridges (but not the famous one at Ironbridge). And then, six years later, he got the job of building the Ellesmere Canal, and of course Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, which I suppose is his chef d'oeuvre and the most spectacular thing he ever did. At the same time he built the canal up to its start at the Horseshoe Falls, which he also designed.

But he was unstoppable. Scotland followed – the Caledonian Canal, the Crinan Canal, 120 bridges, nearly 1000 miles of roads all over the Highlands, and 32 new churches. He must have been a wonderfully organised man, and he surely knew how to delegate! - and, indeed, how to call up the services of countless “navvies” with picks and wheelbarrows.

As well as our very own World Heritage Site, local works include much of the Holyhead Road, including the pretty Waterloo Bridge at Betws y Coed, the

picturesque and slightly alarming Nant Ffrancon Pass, and suspension bridges at the Menai Straits and Conwy.

And what sort of a man was this ambitious and competent Civil Engineer? “Likeable and convivial” his biographers say. He never married, he was fond of poetry – he was a friend of Southey, who called him “the Colossus of Roads” – and he “possessed great tact and suavity of manner.”

When he visited London on business, he stayed at a hotel frequented by engineers, where he had rooms exclusively for his use and his customers. Such was his fame that he was regarded as part of the goodwill of the hotel, and valued at £750 !

His life, it seems to me, illustrates perfectly the merits of learning your subject in great detail – he had several different skills, bridging, canals, roads. And he tells us by his example to keep our heads down and work every hour God sends, checking everything at every stage of the work in hand. At times though I think he must have been a difficult man, and not past a bit of commercial sharp practice.

At one time he chaired a committee to decide who should build a bridge across the Avon Gorge at Bristol. The young upstart with the stove pipe hat and the cigar submitted his plans.

Telford refused them, having ideas of his own. Brunel resubmitted various designs – all rejected by Telford, who apparently controlled his committee with a rod of iron. But there was a public outcry and eventually Telford had to back down. The result was the iconic Clifton Suspension Bridge, Brunel’s answer to Pontcysyllte. Brunel, in the next generation, outshone even Tom Telford, and is today regarded as the greatest Victorian civil engineer.

Telford once said to the Budapest authorities, where he was commissioned to build a bridge, “We do not consider anything to be impossible. Impossibilities exist chiefly in the prejudices of mankind.”

What a pity we don’t all have that attitude today!



THE TIME TRAVELERS

It was a fine dry day when 12 of us met on the Panorama walk above the Dee Valley for our trip into the past of around 320,000,000 years. Raymond Roberts, who is Senior Geologist for Natural Resources Wales would be our guide for the day.

We set off for the past by climbing a gradual slope up the path of the tramway that served the Trevor Quarry. Once we had reached a relatively flat area, Raymond explained that we really would not want to be standing on this spot 320 million years ago since it would be at the bottom of a sea somewhere near the South Pole. That's where this whole mass of North East Wales Carboniferous Limestone was formed. In the rock face left behind by the old quarry we began to look for fossils and soon found small fossilised brachiopods (shellfish). Some of us also couldn't help but remark on the views, especially of the nearby Castell Dinas Brân, seen now from equal height, rather than the more usual view from below.

We followed the quarry face on the level for some way and then began the climb to the top of the escarpment. Some of us once again found ample opportunity to pause to admire the views (and maybe catch our breath). On the way the different layers of deposition of the rock were pointed out to us. Then there was a flat walk across the top before descending to the Wailing Wall below. Well no, not the Wailing Wall as the picture seems to show but us looking for fossils again.

It was a thoroughly enjoyable trip without a TARDIS.



MEET THE TEAM

The second in our series gives us the chance to get to know a vital member of the AONB team, Rhun Jones who heads up the Llangollen office. Senior Countryside Warden - Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB (South Office). (Rhun is the one in the far left in the photograph)

Friends had agreed to meet Rhun late on a Thursday afternoon and he was running a bit behind schedule. This proved to be a good thing for two reasons. Firstly the meeting which had overrun concerned a joint initiative with regional partners bidding for government funding to introduce a trainee warden scheme. If successful the AONB would benefit from the services of three trainees who, in turn, would gain second to none experience. Rhun's enthusiasm for the project was obvious and we hope that the initiative meets with success. Secondly, your correspondent was able to sit in a corner of the Warden's Office at Loggerheads quietly listening to the end of day discussions of the four officers there. The interest they took in each other's activities and their keen anticipation of what was lying ahead in the immediate work programme was heart warming - real teamwork in action. But back to Rhun!

Born in north Wales and with connections in Rhuddlan and Llandudno, Rhun spent much of his early years living in Winsford. His father's work meant a welcome return to this area by the time secondary school beckoned and he eventually completed his

education at Bangor University. Rhun's lifelong interest in the countryside led to his appointment to a seasonal post as Information Officer at Loggerheads in 1999 and he made a good impression. In 2002 he was employed as Partnership Warden working with the three forest blocks in the AONB. When a permanent role came up in Llangollen in 2008, after gaining experience in other countryside roles Rhun had the right credentials and was able to fulfil his ambition to join the team as a fully fledged member. This is how he responded to some of my questions :-

You were working in Llangollen long before the Dee Valley became part of the AONB. What has changed?

I think there's real enthusiasm now for what we are trying to do. I notice this particularly in the Corwen area which is really developing a sense of place. The arrival of the train, the walking festival and now the Picturesque project is adding to this and there's a really good feeling about the town. Llangollen, of course, has always had a strong appeal but again the work we are doing is warmly welcomed and valued.

What about doubts in the farming community?

There were certainly some misgivings and even suspicion in the first place but this has been replaced by a willingness to work with us for what are mainly the same objectives. For example we have built up an excellent partnership with graziers on Llantisilio Mountain where they take the lead in managing the landscape in a way which benefits their own interests whilst improving the habitat for threatened species like black grouse.

How have you linked up with local commercial interests?

This is something we take very seriously. One example is the take up by local tourism operators of our guide badge scheme and is something we take great pride in. It's real partnership in action. I'm particularly pleased that most of the first successful group of participants were from the Dee Valley.

So what do you like best about your role?

Everything really! The chance to come in every day and contribute to something I have a real interest in and passion for is so rewarding. I'm interested in every aspect of what we do and it's a privilege to have such a close involvement.

Everything? There must be aspects you're not so keen on?

Not really – though I do get annoyed with people who disrespect and damage our special landscape with complete disregard for others.

Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?

Here hopefully! This is my ideal job and there's always so much to look forward to. The Picturesque project in particular will give us scope to extend what we do in a number of positive ways. We left it at that.

Rhun lives in a lovely part of the AONB, Maeshafn, with wife Dawn and growing

twins Gwen and Lotti who are coming up five. I was anxious not to intrude too much on his time with them. Ever smiling, he said that for the first time the children were staying with Nain and Taid that weekend and he and Dawn were off to the Wales v Australia game at the Principality Stadium. I'm sure you had a great time Rhun – but we share your pain about the result !

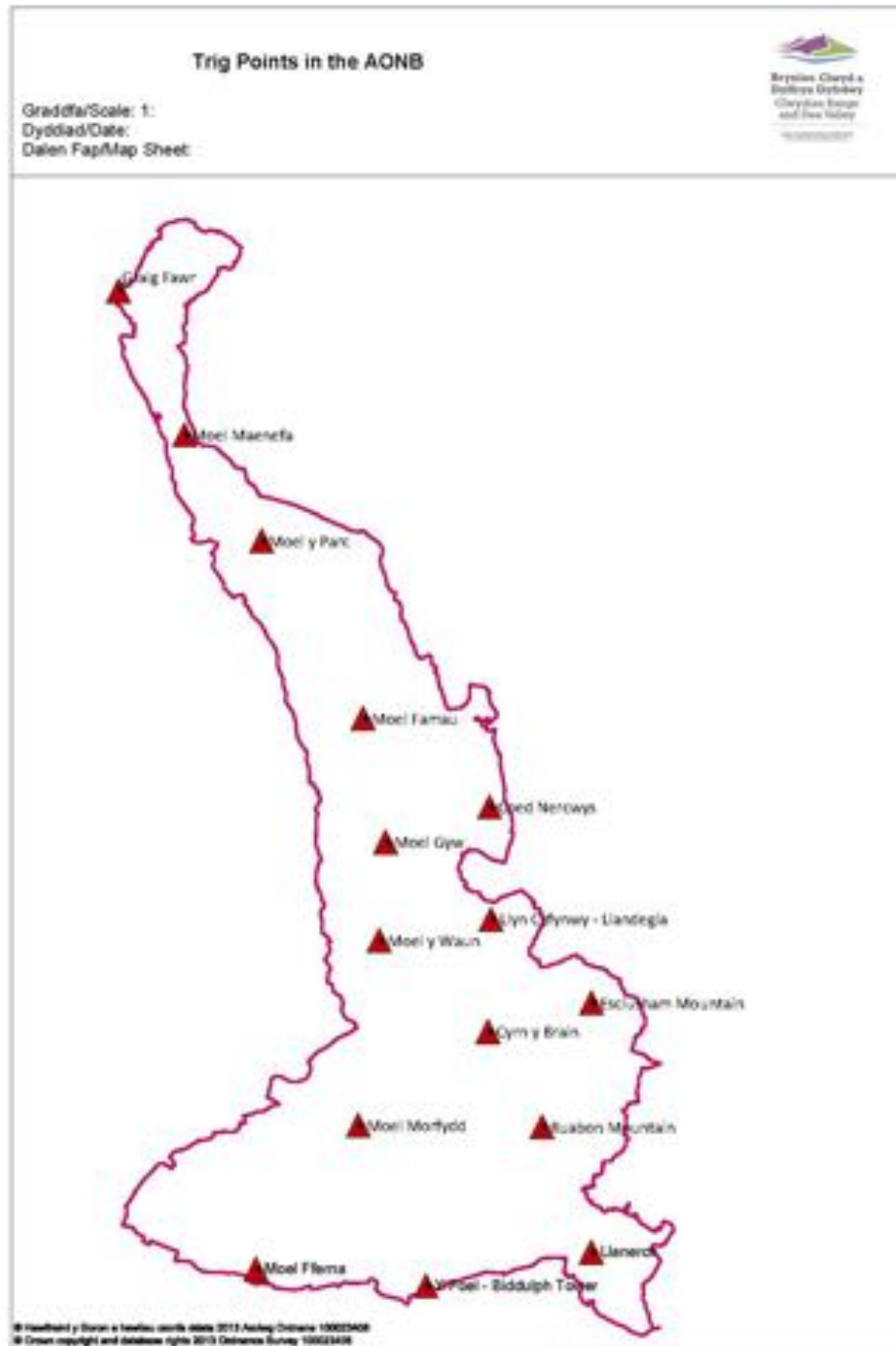


TRIG POINTS IN THE AONB

We're all familiar with the typically stone or concrete pillars erected by OS that mark trig points. Apparently the first appeared in 1936 in Northamptonshire. When they were finally all in place it was possible, in clear weather, to see at least two other trig points from any one other.

Unfortunately many of them are disappearing from the countryside as their useful function for geodetic surveying has been overtaken by more sophisticated technology. Nevertheless, they form an important part of the landscape and are fondly regarded by all who love the countryside.

There are as many as fifteen in our own AONB – as shown on the map - from Graig Fawr in the north to Y Foel (Bidduph Tower) in the south. We're sure some enterprising Friends members will have visited them all – do let us know if you have. We're sorry to say that there is no longer any sign of the pillar on the summit of the highest point in the AONB, Moel Fferna (2065 ft.) If anyone can shed any light on this sad disappearance we'd be pleased to hear about it. What it does emphasise is the importance of protecting these historic man made additions to the landscape, which have played such a vital role in mapping and shaping it. We're keeping an eye on them!



INTERESTING.....BUT WAS IT FUN ? An account of an outing to Caer Drewyn.

Five minutes before the start, we had not finally made up our mind to face the bucketing rain and high gusting winds, but then, at exactly 10.30, we remembered we were British, and if Jade Jones and the Hockey Girls could win gold, the least we could do was walk up Caer Drewyn!

We were all pleased we had. I think we all learned a lot about these extraordinary piles of stones from our amiable expert, Ian Brown, who lives in Wrexham, works for the University of Oxford, and is currently studying a hillfort in Hertfordshire! He is without question an authority on the Iron Age and has written several books on it.*

We wanted to know why this hillfort consists of exposed stones, while all the other hillforts in our AONB are grassy trenches and grassy mounds, good for walking on. The reason is that this (?unique) hillfort was originally a massive purpose-built wall, smooth and vertical on the outside, and buttressed for strength on the inside, about 12 feet high, and over the past 2500 years it has gradually fallen down. Grazing around it has prevented growth. Ian showed us, through the teeth of the gale, all this, and we wondered why anybody would go to all the trouble of building anything as massive as this.

Was it a defensive position, a fort, against enemies? It is situated in a suitable place. Or was it a stockade for cattle? There is an “annex” near the entrance where hut platforms have been found – so perhaps the cattle were inside, and the stockmen in the annex? Or was it a chieftain showing off to his neighbours that he could build something better than them?

The extraordinary thing is how little is known about these places, even after so much study by so many eminent people. But for sure today’s little bunch of wet enthusiasts are now better informed, thanks to Ian’s informal and knowledgeable presentation. Perhaps we should ask him to become Honorary Hillfort Consultant to Friends of CRDV !

Do go and have a look. Park at the Corwen Leisure Centre, and then it’s an easy uphill walk of about a mile.....but do choose a better day!

*Most recently, “Beacons in the Landscape – the Hillforts of England and Wales” pub. Windgather Press, 2009



St. TEGLA'S WELL, RHOSDDIGRE AND TOMEN y RHODWYDD

14 of us met at the village carpark in Llandegla on Thursday the 20th of October. On this occasion we had partnered the Mold Daniel Owen Festival, finding a link between our AONB and the famous, and probably the first, Welsh Novelist, Daniel

Owen.

But first, a visit to St Tegla's well, renowned for curing epilepsy providing that a complicated ritual involving a cockerel and lying under the communion table in the parish church. Space is too short to give details of all 10 steps!

We then crossed tranquil limestone meadows to a lane which passed the farmhouse at Rhosddigre. This provided the link to Daniel Owen as his mother was born there. Sarah Edwards, known as Sally, was widowed soon after Daniel's birth by the tragic death of her husband in the Argoed colliery disaster of 1837. She obviously was very influential in Daniel's up-bringing. Kevin Matthias of the Mold Daniel Owen Festival told us that she was recorded in a census as a "Mangler", i.e. someone who used a mangle to help dry washing.

Onwards then to the Motte and Bailey of Tomen-y-Rhodwydd, where, with the land-owner's permission we were able to walk on the earthworks. Thanks to volunteers in recent years the layout of this castle, built by Owain Gwynedd in 1149, is now clearly visible.

Return to the village for the optional snack in the village store and café was via fields and lanes. In one of the fields several of our group paused to take close up photographs of the inquisitive cows only to be somewhat surprised when a large fully-grown bull emerged from the middle of the herd, even more inquisitive than the cows but fortunately, friendly.



AN INSIGHT TO NORTH WALES WEATHER

BY PROF. ROBERT MOORE

It was standing room only for this talk by one of our Trustees, Professor Robert Moore at the Loggerheads Meeting Room on the 21st of October. His subject was North Wales Weather, in particular Holywell weather, the crowd confirmed the persistent British fascination with the weather. There were 36 people in attendance; 20 members and the others were guests drawn particularly from the Mold Daniel Own Festival and the Buckley History Society.

Robert began by describing his private weather station contrasting it with some of the professional stations. He also had data from various satellite links and held vast amounts of data on computer spreadsheets.

He talked of the special weather conditions in North East Wales as the prevalent weather systems came in off the Atlantic from the South West. These weather systems had to cross or go round Snowdonia before getting to us thus we were sheltered from the worst they could bring.

Robert left us with the forecast for the most likely weather for tomorrow . That is (whenever you ask) tomorrow will be exactly the same as today. Proven by statistics to be true more often than not.



RUTHIN CATTLE MARKET

I knew it was going to be a good day when a gentleman approached me while I was waiting for the group of “Friends” and asked me what a nice lady like me was doing in a cattlemarket!...made my day!

Such a great vibrancy of humans and animals. During “store” sale day, we wandered at will, watching while the farmers from all over North and Mid Wales astutely calculated the price they were prepared to pay for animals for breeding or those that would need to be fed all winter to then yield a profit next year.

The bidding was fast and furious, with the knowledgeable understanding the difference in prices between good and poor stock, pure breed and cross breed, those that would thrive in the valley or in the hills!

The day we visited they sold 4,000 sheep and 100 cattle – similar to the Tuesday and Friday that week.

Walking round the market brought back memories of when I first moved to Ruthin and used to push my babies through the livestock market as a treat - then it was in the middle of Ruthin Town, and watching the sheep being herded down Wynnstay road. The market has been in Ruthin since 1920, and moved to the outskirts in 1992. Although a shame in some ways it has meant that the Market has been able to grow and into a major business, selling £20m of livestock annually and developing the venue for all sorts of other community events.

This trip was what “Friends” events should be about...expanding those boundaries of our understanding of Rural Landscaping, and merging them...in this case with economic landscape!



FUTURE EVENTS

Friends of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley future events will provide fascinating insight to the area. Hear about the North Wales Pilgrims Way, discover the

background to one of our best known Landmark, the Jubilee Tower, a walk looking at the industry of the Alyn Valley, together with walks from the recently published 24 walks in the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and visit to a global business, H&D Fitzgerald that operates from Tremeirchion. Just outside the area a visit has been arranged to the Rhydymwyn World War II Mustard Gas Plant, which is on flat, surfaced paths suitable for wheelchair users. For further details about these events, please look at our website www.friends.cymru



Registered Charity Number 1163812

Recommend a Friend to Discover, Enjoy and Protect the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley

www.friends.cymru





Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy
Clwydian Range and Dee Valley

Ardal o Harddwch Naturiol Eithriadol
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Friends would like to thank the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural beauty Sustainable Development Fund for their support.

Our mailing address is:

hello@friends.cymru

C/o Loggerheads Country Park, Loggerheads CH7 5LH

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#)

MailChimp