

Friends of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley - Newsletter No.3 July 2016



Dear Friends

Since establishing the Friends of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley a year ago it has been a tremendous success with over 140 members already. We have by far exceeded our original expectations and this just shows how valued this precious landscape is.

We look forward to meeting as many of you as possible at the AGM in what should be the prelude to a fascinating day at Chirk Castle. The **Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday the 24th of August starting at 1pm** in the Function room. Please allow time to either walk or get transport to the Castle from the car park (free admission for members of the Friends all day).

Following the meeting there will be a talk about the Castle and the opportunity

for 15 lucky members to have a behind the scenes tour of the state rooms. This is our first formal meeting as required under our constitution that has been approved by the Charity Commission. Up to now we have been operating under the management of 6 Trustees, and all of these now need to be formally reappointed. All have indicated that they are willing to continue. They are:

Neville Howell, Ewloe, Retired Steel Works Manager

Tony King, Maeshafn, Retired Physicist

Julie Masters, Llanbedr, Retired Civil Servant, proprietor of the Shepherd Hut

Mike Smart, Llangollen, proprietor of Treksmart

Mike Skuse, Llangynhafal, Retired Commodity Broker

John Roberts, Sychdyn Retired Public Servant

Please let us know if you would be interested in becoming a Trustee / Committee Member as we are able to appoint 15 in total. We need to widen the range of skills open to us so that we can continue to develop the Friends in the way that benefits our members and most importantly the protected landscape. Contact John Roberts 01352 757366, john@johnandviv.plus.com
John Roberts, Trustee



A BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO RICHARD WILSON

The AONB project based on the “Picturesque” art movement of the late 18th century will be starting soon, so I thought members might like to hear about a very important chap whose name is bound to crop up a lot.

He is Richard Wilson (not Victor Meldrew!) and he was a Welsh artist, who was born in 1714 at Penegoes in what was then Montgomeryshire, and who died in 1782 in our AONB at Colomendy Hall, a large country house behind the We Three Loggerheads pub. He is reckoned to be the most distinguished painter that Wales has ever produced, and he was very influential in kick-starting this new artistic movement, which tried to paint landscapes in what became known as the “picturesque” style.

To cope with any conversations you might find yourself engaged in, on a Friends’ event or elsewhere, you need to know that the idea behind the Picturesque method of painting was to portray landscapes according to certain rules – there should be something man made in the foreground, like a castle or perhaps the odd shepherd and sheep; and a middle ground natural and pleasing to the eye; and a distant view of terrifying crags and mountains, exaggerated for dramatic effect. He looked at nature for the first time free from the classical allusions and mannerisms of artists before him. Greek Gods were out; cattle and sheep were in.

A word which must be inserted into your bluffer’s vocabulary is “sublime”, which apparently implies “vastness and obscurity” - massive mountains and crags, frightening enough to give sensitive souls the vapours.

Wilson came from a well connected family, and he was able to travel abroad. After building up a lucrative business in

London as a portrait painter, he spent seven years in Italy, and decided to concentrate on landscapes, having seen and admired the works of the French artist Claude (Lorraine). On his return he secured some commissions from wealthy landowners who wanted paintings of their houses and grounds, including several Welsh gentry such as Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn and William Vaughan.

But quite suddenly he went out of favour and his popularity declined. It is said that eventually he was so poor that his only food was “Bread and Porter.” But a year before his death he returned to Wales to stay with a cousin, Catherine Jones, in Colomendy. Presumably it was here that he visited the We Three Loggerheads pub and painted the rather indifferent portrait of two men which is on display there. He is buried in the grounds of St. Mary’s Church in Mold, where he has a window dedicated to his memory.

I hope these notes will help you to find your way through any tricky conversations that you may find yourself drawn into with intellectual friends over the coming months !

Mike Skuse

Next time.....Thomas Telford for Beginners



FRON HEN AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT

At 13.45 on 3 December 1942, 2nd Lieutenant Joseph E Lowe of the 7th Air Depot Group and his Signal Corps passenger 1st Lieutenant John L. Pearce, took off from Speke Airport, Liverpool, en route to Langford Lodge, Northern Ireland. They had been delivering some radio equipment and were now returning to base. Their aircraft was an Airspeed Oxford twin-engined trainer, serial number R6179, on loan from the RAF at a time when the recently-formed US 8th Air Force was still very short of communications aircraft.

The weather was poor with a reported cloud base of 1,500 feet and two miles visibility. As the aircraft was not equipped with radio, the flight would have to be conducted in visual contact with the ground or water. To avoid the Merseyside defensive balloon barrage, course was set initially to the west but the cloud ceiling soon lowered to 800 feet and the pilot, still worried about the presence of balloons, decided to climb into the weather. By this time they were nearing the Clwydian Range and struck what the accident report called 'Hen Mountain, near Loggerhead, Cheshire' (SJ176 605). (!)

The Oxford was a complete wreck and both occupants received severe injuries. Presumably the farmer at the foot of the hill reported the crash and the casualties were taken to the station hospital at RAF Sealand.

Lt Lowe, whose home state was Kansas, later returned to flying and was promoted to Major but sadly did not survive the war. He was piloting a B-17 Flying Fortress of the 306th Bomb Group which crashed in the North Sea on 22 October 1944. It was returning from a raid on the heavily defended synthetic oil plant at Merseburg, Germany and succumbed to battle damage. He is commemorated on the Wall of the Missing at the American Cemetery at Madingley, near Cambridge.

David Smith



DARK SKIES

In Feb 2015 I attended a Seminar at Plas Tan y Bwlch about Snowdonia's efforts to be awarded "Dark Skies Status."

The Award is achieved by taking action to reduce unnecessary lighting in a designated area in order to make the night sky clearer. The results are spectacular – the Milky Way suddenly appears, the Pleiades are so separate that they can be counted with the naked eye, and, most important, you can stand on a hilltop and be in total darkness, except for the friendly light of moon and stars. Dark Sky places are loved by astronomers; and looking at the stars is an ideal way to get children off their iphones and into the countryside.

The Award comes from an American organisation called the International Dark-Sky Association, and they do not make awards without a rigorous examination into the efforts that have been made to get the desired result.

Snowdonia has gone through this examination and the National Park (all of it) is now officially an “International Dark Sky Place.”

Naturally I thought that Friends should be involved with this super idea, so at a presentation on the subject recently by a chap from the National Park (at an AONB Partnership meeting) I tried to learn a bit more about it.

A Dark Sky reserve doesn't need to be completely dark – but it should have core areas within in it where the quality of the night sky is good. There are surely a number of core areas within the Clwydian Range and certainly the Dee Valley where this is the case.

It seems to me that we could not really hope to get approval for the whole area of the AONB. To make the sky at Prestatyn Hillside dark, for example, the whole of the town would have to pull their curtains at dusk, all the street lamps would need expensive modification, and all headlights must be dimmed!

Riots would probably ensue!

So perhaps the best way forward would be to find some upland areas of the AONB which are pretty dark anyway, say three or four, and then measure the existing light there in a methodical and scientific way. This way we would find our core dark areas – those areas that are darkest. Then, with this information, we could either apply for designation as “Dark Sky Discovery Sites” – which seems to be a sort of junior version of what Snowdonia has achieved – or we may find we can go the whole hog and go for Reserve Status.

Penycloddiau in the north and Moel Morfydd in the south would seem suitable candidates.

And this perhaps is where Friends might lend a hand. The first step is apparently to find out what we’ve got now. There are light meters which accurately measure ambient light, and the AONB staff can get hold of a couple of these. Then it would mean tramping round the chosen areas measuring the light, in nearly-complete darkness! One person could sing out the light meter reading and his companion could note the location and the reading. A third person could navigate between the sites. Not for the fainthearted. But more fun than litter-picking!

It’s early days yet, so much more on this later.

Mike Skuse



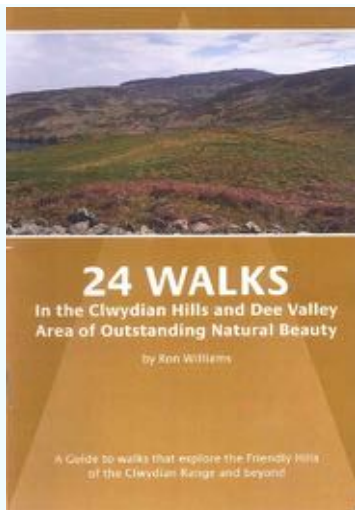
FUTURE EVENTS

I think that you all will agree that we have put on a broad cross section of events over the past few months. We hope to continue these in the future with some of the things up and coming including a visit to Caer Drewyn Iron Age Hillfort, a Medieval Castle, a Farmers' Market and a Geological Gem, all up and coming events with the Friends, visit www.friends.cymru for further information, or refer to the regular monthly circular.

We would welcome suggestions for future events from members. Get in touch with your ideas and if you are prepared to arrange one so much the better!

EXPLORE THE CLWYDIAN RANGE AND DEE VALLEY

Friends member Ron Williams, a long standing campaigner for public access and a former chair of Ramblers Cymru, has just released a book of 24 walks in



the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley. Written as a tribute to Arthur Roberts (1905-1991) who pioneered work on public access across North East Wales.

The book covers the whole of the area with a variety of days out suitable for all tastes. Modestly priced at £5 it will fit into anyone's rucksack, and we heartily recommend it. Copies of the book will be available for sale at the Friends AGM or email hello@friends.cymru for further details.

Friends of The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley

View Points

Above Valle Crucis Abbey (SJ 208 444)

To reach the view point requires a little walk. You could start from Llanfissillio Green C.P. or park discreetly near Dinbren Hall.

Look out for a little picnic area constructed in a small rock face on the side of the path.



It's a popular place for a drink so arriving early in the morning will find the spot deserted but arriving early in the morning also has the advantage that the light is falling to advantage on Velvet Hill with Valle Crucis Abbey below. The view is another drink you can take in.



The view of the Llanfissillio Mountains is partly obscured by a tree but walking along the path a little, will soon reward you with a wonderful view of the Llanfissillio Mountains with the distinctive peak of Mod Morfydd in the far distance.

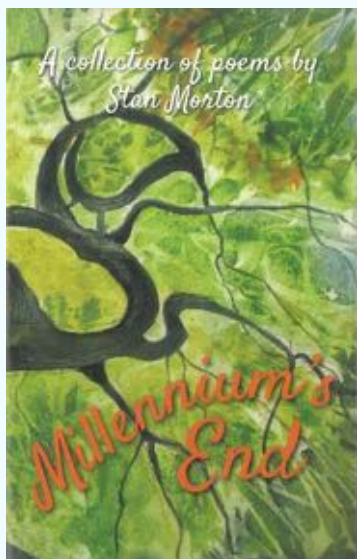


VIEW POINTS

In the last newsletter we told members that we were starting to build up a library of viewpoints within the AONB. Led by John Bowen, we have already been able to build up an impressive list of special places and a number of these are available to peruse on the [website](#). This of course is just scratching the surface and we would welcome further suggestions from members as they get out and about.

We all know of course that the summit of Moel Famau is one of the most iconic viewpoints in the country with views stretching from the Lake District and the Isle of Man to southern Snowdonia and the Shropshire Hills. If you are ever wondering just what you can see on a clear day have a look at the viewfinderpanoramas website and click on [Moel Famau](#). This gives you a detailed description of the whole 360degree

view.<http://viewfinderpanoramas.org/panoramas/WAL/FAMAU.GIF>



MILLENNIUM'S END

Stan Morton is a miner's son from North East Wales, now living in the Vale of Clwyd, and treats both landscapes with deep affection, and as such is a member of the Friends of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley. We will publish a poem in the next edition of the newsletter.

If you would like to purchase a copy of his book please contact us hello@friends.cymru. It includes some poetry inspired by the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley.



MOEL Y GAER - a wet day, but still spectacular

A very wet start to the day didn't provide any encouragement for people to turn up for the walk. However, as usual people did come, Paul Day and Ian Clarkson. I had met them before when I took the Top Hill walk last year. I knew they were both capable walkers, well able for my ramble. Neville did come too but only to take record shots of us setting off!

It was one of those days when you want to take off your waterproofs but the sky remained so threatening and with frequent light drizzle we kept wrapped up. All plain sailing with easy walking along part of Offa's path and some gentle contouring to the west of Bwlch Pen Barras. The real climb started at the foot of Moel-Y-Gaer. Not a long climb but very steep and unrelenting. The summit is only 339m, however, it does hold a commanding view point across and up and down the Vale of Clwyd. Thought to be of Iron Age origin and 2500 years old the 6 acre site is one of the smaller hillfort's but I think one of the best on the Clwydian Range. The wind was

blowing strongly with damp in the air so a sheltered spot on the east side of the fort was found and used as our picnic spot.

We left the fort heading east and eventually picked up Offa Dyke Path National Trail to drop to Bwlch Pen Barras. At this point I had planned to contour around Foel Fenlli using Offa's Dyke Path, however, Paul, a botanist, wanted to look for some march plants. This meant a frontal steep line up For Fenlli. No special plants found we pressed on over the top to pass the summit cairn at 511m. It was really windy now so we found a little shelter off the summit for a drink and chocolate. As we dropped down steeply from the summit Paul showed me some stag horn club moss easily missed unless you know where to find it. Eventually we regained Offa Dyke Path National Trail but another Paul detour took us to find mushrooms, too early, so none found.

Rather damp and weary we arrived at the carpark. Once sorted we set off for a drink at the Druid.

Bob Mossop



Next timeMeet Rhun Jones, Senior Countryside Officer, South.

We apologise that the last Newsletter cut short the last paragraph of the interview with Rachel Jones, here is the full text again.....

One of the regular articles we hope to include in the Friends newsletter is a feature on a member of the AONB team. Friends recently caught up with Rachel Jones, Community Partnership Officer based at Loggerheads, who agreed to be first to go under the microscope! Born and brought up in the Vale of Clwyd, Rachel has a genuine enthusiasm for the countryside and her work in it. Here's how she responded to the questions we asked her:-

How did you come to work for the AONB ? I started my working life in a similar role at Brenig after graduating from Harper Adams in Shropshire. A vacancy for a graduate warden came up with the AONB, I applied, got it and six years later I'm still here. I'm told my willingness to get my hands dirty was the telling factor – I won't go into detail !!

What does a community partnership officer do? Lots of everything really which makes the job so interesting. I'm based at Loggerheads and also help to look after Coed Nercwys, Moel Famau and Llangwyfan. Every day is different. One of the things I like best is coordinating the voluntary work programme which helps us so much and gives people the chance to positively contribute to what we do. There's also our Young Rangers programme for the 11 to 18 year age group which is another thing I love doing, together with our work with local schools on environmental projects. Maintaining good relations with the local community and with our partner agencies is also a vital part of the job.

What are the difficult parts of the role? I suppose like most jobs it's juggling with competing priorities and we can't be everywhere at once. Sometimes, like when we get invaded by hundreds of people wanting to sledge, it can get a bit hectic ! The pressure on the most popular AONB destinations can be a worry but it's great to see so many people wanting to share this wonderful landscape.

What advice would you give a youngster wanting to work in this field? Volunteer! There are lots of opportunities to get involved with the work we do whilst still at school or college. Apart from having a fun time you'll gain really good experience and demonstrate your commitment to environmental issues.

What do you like to do in your spare time? Get out into the countryside! It's either walking my dog or riding my horse so I'm never far from my place of work !!

What's your favourite spot in the AONB? It has to be Pen y Cloddiau – overlooking my roots, wonderful views and just a special place to be.



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.

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