

## Graianrhyd Circuit, Vale of Clwyd, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2024

Group Participants: Lesley, Gerry, Christine, Colin, Ian, Sue & Iain (walk leaders) & Pippa. 2 cars departed the Pavilion car park at 9:00.

Circuit starting and finishing at the Rose & Crown car park, Graianrhyd, Llanarmon-yn-Iâl, Mold, CH7 4QW. I had phoned the day before and left a message at the pub to ask if we were OK to park there. Landlord confirmed this was fine by return voicemail. Planned walk approximately 9.3 miles with option to cut short to 7.6 miles. 1250' total ascent and descent.

The walk was based on a guidebook, *Walking in the Clwydian Range* by Carl Rogers, published 2006 and on some sections it seemed like it hadn't been walked for 20 years. Hardly a *Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*, but perhaps *The Land That Time Forgot* would have been an appropriate title if it needed one. From the description in the guidebook, it should have been an unchallenging, easy-to-follow route with some points of interest and nice vistas. This gentle stroll quickly turned into a bit of an off-piste exploration adventure and the warning signs (or lack of signs) were evident early on. While we all know the importance of good research, what could go wrong in this area nestled amongst sleepy Welsh hamlets?

Principles reinforced:

The importance of a good reccy

Don't rely on websites

Challenges:

Unclear or missing way-markers and paths

Overgrown vegetation

Blocked rights of access

Hotel (as marked on the OS app) up for sale since April 2024

Cows and inquisitive young bullocks

Initially setting out along a quiet lane opposite the car park, the skies were a little overcast but the temperature acceptable for walking. Meeting a minor road at the bottom of the hill, we were presented with a choice of stiles approximately 100yards apart, but both a little overgrown and rickety. We ignored the first which would have landed us into soggy ground and instead making for higher ground, picking our way along a poorly defined path through gorse, heather and bilberry/blaeberry bushes. The path topped out at a fishing/boat lake (Llyn Cyfynwy) which we skirted towards the clubhouse before heading down a lane to the right.

On almost reaching the road at the bottom, we headed right towards Fron Haul farm, diverging away from the road. A large private shooting range was visible across the valley. However, the route to Bodidris Castle which was described in the guidebook was totally overgrown and impassable (actually not marked), so we followed a farm track, crossing a stream towards the hotel. Unfortunately, the field was occupied by a herd of bullocks who noticed Pippa and started ambling down the hill towards us. Our pace picked up and we just managed to close the gate before they arrived. We then headed towards the hotel, re-joining the guidebook route, which was marked to the right of the building into the wood. Again, this path was not clear and hence we considered the option to take the path marked on the OS app which ran around the left side of the hotel, however access to the hotel was very firmly now off limits as it transpired the property had been put up for sale in April. We returned to the woodland where the track was overgrown. Well, more like a jungle actually, with fallen trees and deep soggy ruts. Colin successfully found a way through to a track on the other side of the hall, where we stopped for a well-earned coffee. It started to rain.



Our exploits in the jungle had warmed us up and thankfully the rain didn't last long. Heading up the track, we again missed a kissing gate which was overgrown, but which was denoted with a way marker arrow on the other side. Very useful. Heading along a track into a very large field with clusters of cows and their young calves, we skirted the main herd noticing a large bull as we passed. Thankfully he was more interested in his harem and ignored us (and Pippa). The field undulated across terraces of limestone and around small groups of more cattle. The path was indistinct, (well non-existent) and the general direction could only be discerned via the OS app, plus noting kissing gates which marked the exit points. On reaching another minor road serving a caravan/camp site we headed towards Allt Gymbyd Farm. Here, once again, the path given in the guidebook was not clear and after retracing our steps, we consulted some dog-walkers who were able to give us a vague idea of where the path went. We followed a track signposted to Tan-y-Cefn, which skirted the top edge of a slope before entering a dense hawthorn wood. Sadly, again there were no way markers and the route through the wood was not clear. We found ourselves on the wrong side of a robust barbed wire fence and unfortunately there was no exit at the end of the wood and so we carefully scaled the fence (we didn't have Dave's barbed wire safety equipment with us either!). Doubly unfortunately, a few yards on, we realised the field was occupied by more heifers who were very inquisitive. While we all escaped across yet another barbed wire fence into nettles, Christine bravely kept the cattle at bay by waving a long stick at them.





On making our way down through a nicely unoccupied meadow, we reached the hamlet of Creigog-Ucha. It was just another farm really. A little further on down the lane, we followed a nice path (!) up onto open ground on the western side of Graig Quarry (more limestone) and stopped for lunch against a nice backdrop of the Clwydian Hills.



Lunch

The early afternoon brought some warmth and some of us started to consider if we should call into the Rose & Crown for a lemonade, but also to thank the landlord for allowing us to use his car park.

Skirting around the quarry, we met some more humans walking their dog and dropped down to a quiet road heading up a steep incline. At the top, we followed a track to Pant-y-gwanlod at which point we elected to take the shorter route option. Dropping down through grassy meadows, we passed various mine workings including an old air shaft, to the road just outside Graianrhyd and back to the parked cars. The pub looked no livelier than it had done on our arrival at 10am, so Lesley popped her head round the open door to see if anyone was there. Deserted and smelling of boiled cabbage, which none of us fancied, so we headed back to the trusted Dysart for an early drink.

Thanks to Christine for providing action shot photos!

Iain & Sue

## Footnote on the Rose & Crown

The pub which was uninviting and basically closed, despite being advertised as open – previously featured in the 'Go Eat' section of the Continental Airlines in-flight magazine September 2008. "An hour from Manchester yet splendidly rural, the Rose and Crown serves chips served doused with a heady curry, brought out steaming on a groaning platter." See footnote for further entertainment.

## CAMRA Branch Welsh Pub of the Year 2006 and 2007

" The multi award-winning Rose & Crown situated on the crossroads in the hamlet of Graiainrhyd has been named branch Pub of the Year (Welsh section) for 2007. In doing so, it retains its title from last year as the pub goes from strength to strength under the auspices of landlord Rod MacGregor. He left the delights of Yates wine bar in Doncaster to take over stewardship of the pub three years ago and under his watchful eye this basic but friendly boozier has flourished.

The R&C has two rooms served by a single bar, both rooms are "warmed" by open fires and recently have had the benefit of having pictures put on the walls and cushions on the seats to alleviate the former spartan appearance of the rooms. However, it is the quality of the ale that sets the R&C above that of the normal boozier. Flowers IPA (the local's favourite) is always available and is complemented by two guests, these come from a variety of, usually local, breweries. Recent brews have been from Facers, Bryn, Jolly Brewer, Conway and Salopian. Manchester breweries also put in regular appearances and there is nearly always a beer from Phoenix either on the bar or in the cellar, Boggart Hole beers are also often seen.

As if the quality and range of the ale is not temptation enough, the food, served Tues-Sun eves, is hearty and great value. Rod majors on unpretentious pub grub, no drizzling of jus here. The fish batter is made with the Flowers IPa and the gammon and chips is a real tray-bender. There's no need to dress up to come to the R&C, just come as you are and enjoy the convivial atmosphere, Rod's eclectic selection of music and the truly excellent ale."

"We then hopped onto the coach for the short journey to the splendidly rural Rose & Crown. Guest ales here are generally from the Phoenix/Hanby/Salopian stables and are always in top nick. This visit was no exception with Hanby's Vanilla Mild and Cascade on offer, both were found to be on excellent form. A couple of people ordered some food here and were delighted with the huge chip butties produced by the jovial landlord Rod MacGregor. A splendid time was had by all, so much so that we stayed on until last orders before belatedly heading off for home."

If only.....