

Clwb Gorphwysfa Club

The Gorphwysfa Club was first inspired by the exploits of Geoffrey Winthrop Young, and in particular his gatherings of like minded people at what used to be the Gorphwysfa Hotel, (the old building is now incorporated into Pen y Pass Youth Hostel) in the early part of the 20th Century through till the 1930's.

The origins of the present Gorphwysfa go back as far as 1972. It was in this year that Harvey and Rosie Lloyd moved to be wardens of the Pen y Pass youth hostel. In the same year the Smith family started to youth hostel again and met up with the Lloyds. The mountaineering connection began only a few months later. In 1971 Andrew Middleton, John Middleton, Steve Ogden and Brian Smith had climbed all the Welsh 3000 foot mountains in one day. That expedition was a great success and they decided in the following year to do the Cullin ridge in Skye, again in just one day. So it was at Easter 1972 Andrew and Brian decided to use the youth hostel as a base for their rock-climbing practise for the Skye Ridge. (The Ridge was traversed successfully in May by Andrew, Brian, John and John Darling.)

From this small beginning the group began to grow. Increasing numbers went camping in the Lake District and particularly in Skye. The weather in Skye was particularly unwelcoming and in 1973 the campsite in Glen Brittle was flooded after almost unceasing rain. It was there in August 1973, sitting in a tent again in torrential rain, that it was decided to form a "proper" club. We argued long and hard over possible names and I think it was Helen Middleton who suggested that we took the name of the old Pen y Pass hotel, Gorphwysfa. A month later at Pen y Pass we had the inaugural meeting of the club. We elected officers, agreed a constitution and arranged for the first club dinner in the following November. That was the first and last time the club carried out any formal business in the 20th century; but when 21st century arrived it was decided to draw up a constitution, appoint an executive committee and have a AGM once a year. In the same year the first club journal appeared. Since that time the club has held a dinner every year, usually with a well-known mountaineer as guest, and a journal has been produced at least once a year.

Initially the club was very much focused on rock-climbing and the history of mountaineering in North Wales and one of its aims was to introduce people to the mountains. It adopted as its "late Patron" Geoffrey Winthrop Young who, almost a century ago, organised mountaineering parties to the then Gorphwysfa Hotel. The club was very honoured that his wife Eleanor (Len) was able to attend two of its dinners. Over the years the focus on rock-climbing has diminished and many other sports, orienteering, hang gliding, and caving, to mention just some, have broadened the activities. The club has organised many trips to the Alps usually led by John Rowlinson. In 1981 an expedition led by John Jackson was organised to climb an unclimbed mountain, Devistan South (21,810 ft.), near Nanda Devi. The expedition was, we were told, the largest expedition to the Indian Himalayas for ten years. It was not possible to attempt Devistan South due to confusion over permits but an attempt was made on Mrigthuni (22,490 f t). It was not successful but John Rowlinson and Stephen Simpson climbed another mountain, Bethartoli Himal South Peak (20,700 ft), which provided some consolation for the expedition members.

Since that time a number of visits to the Himalayas have been organised by the club most led by Harvey Lloyd. Members have travelled widely all over the world.

A special feature of the early years of the club was the very active lady's programme. The Ladies' or Women's (as they came to be called) Meets took place at least once a year and usually involved going to a very remote cottage. Only those who participated know the balance between mountaineering and riotous living.

The club has always supported the Welsh Thousand Metres Peak race and a few years ago took over the entire organisation of the race. It remains a very successful fell race attracting a large number of army and civilian competitors. The club also organises a race round Llyn Llydaw each New Year's day. Although originally entirely a domestic event it now attracts many runners who are not members of the club.

The club has had no serious mountaineering accidents but one of its members Martin Norton died some years ago and more recently Gillian Naish, Jeremy Naish, Mike Leask and John Jackson died of serious illnesses. The founding members are now in a minority and many new members have joined the club and are very active in its affairs. Now Harvey is no longer warden of the Pen y Pass Youth Hostel and the club's activities have become more widespread, though Hafod y Gwynt has taken its place as the heart of our activities. The club now holds at least six meets each year as well as the traditional New Year get together, still at Pen y Pass.

On October 26th 1975 a bottle containing several important icons relating to the early years of the club was buried on the Gorphwysfa ledge high on the crags of Lliwedd. This was replaced by a further bottle in 2004 containing new and better icons and up-to-date information on the club's activities.

The purpose or the aim of the club (if one is needed at all) is purely to share our love of the outdoors, the mountains and all things related amongst like minded people. Membership has grown over the years, and encompasses people from many walks of life. However due to the club's by invitation only membership policy the membership has not out grown itself and remains at a comfortable level.

Anniversaries:

1st January 1975 1st Llydaw Race
October 25th 1975 1st Dinner Pen y Gwryd
1975/76 1st New Year House Party
1990 took over responsibility for 1000 metres race.

Honorary Members:

Sir John Rowlinson
Mrs Rosemary Lloyd