

A JOURNEY IN WALES  
A. M. Hajducki

# ***A JOURNEY IN WALES***

AND THE WELSH MARCHES

Being an account of a long journey through the Southern part of Shropshire, and parts of the counties of Shropshire and parts of the counties of Montgomeryshire, Cardiganshire, Merionethshire, Caernarvonshire, Anglesea, Flint and Denbighshire and the town of Chester, in the month of July 1972, to which is added an index, and illustrations of those places.

ANDREW M. HAJDUCKI  
JULY 1972



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## **PROLOGUE:**

SATURDAY 1ST JULY

The journey began shortly before 10am, when I set out from home to catch the train at Beckenham Junction. After a hasty last-minute check to make sure that I had everything with me, I boarded the train and was soon in London.

I discovered that battling my way across London with a heavily-loaded and bulky rucksack on crowded Tube trains was not the easiest thing in the world, but somehow I managed to arrive at Euston in time to catch the 11.40 train to Shrewsbury.

I was soon being conveyed at 100mph through the English Midlands – through Rugby, Birmingham and Wolverhampton. The train was quite busy – a number of foreign students, a party of schoolchildren from Coventry and, between Wolverhampton and Wellington, a crowd of chattering housewives coming back from the summer sales.

It seems almost as if I'm coming home

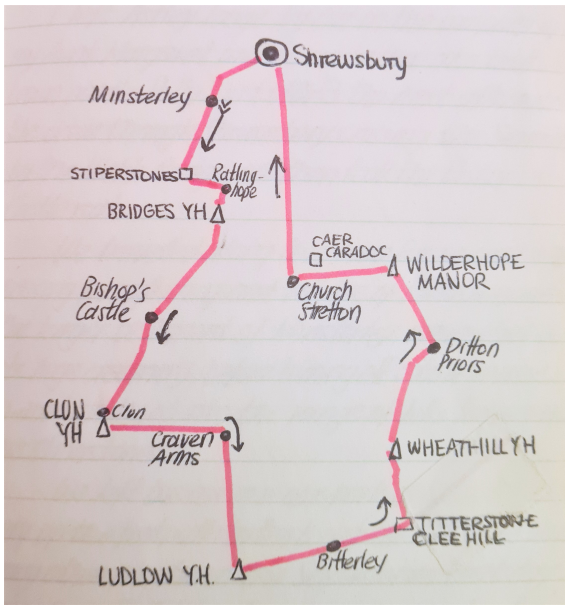
when the train enters Shropshire, and as it gets nearer Shrewsbury this feeling grows. I notice from the train window the familiar shape of Haughmond Hill and the village of Uffington, and remember the days I used to visit Staune.

At Shrewsbury station I was met by my cousin Amanda and was soon travelling by car to Hadnell and Astley Lodge with my Aunt.

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I found myself lying awake that night, thinking about my trip – the places I would visit, the people I would meet, and what the next month had in store for me.

# PART ONE: A JOURNEY IN SOUTH SHROPSHIRE







SUNDAY JULY 2ND  
HADNALL - BRIDGES

I left by car in the company of my Aunt Margaret and Amanda (and also their brown poodle, Polly) just after 3, the next afternoon. We drove through Shrewsbury, crossing the Severn by the Welsh Bridge, and then took the Bishop's Castle Road.

We travelled along this road for several miles, passing through the quaint village of Pontesbury, and the larger settlement of Minsterley dominated by its huge creamery, before turning off onto a minor by-road which lead into the range of hills known as the Stiperstones.

We left the car in a car park and made our way up the footpath to the top of the hills. There were many other people on the Stiperstones that day – on a Summer Sunday they are very popular for walks, rambles and picnics.

On the top of the Stiperstones are three large, irregular groups of rocks, that look a bit

like the Tors in Devon – the Cranberry Rocks, the Summit Rocks and the most famous of all, the Devil's Chair – one of the best known landmarks in Shropshire.

According to a local legend the Devil stumbled whilst crossing the Stiperstones and some rocks which he had been carrying in his apron fell out and formed the Devil's Chair!

We climbed to the OS summit cairn at 1731 feet above sea level – the highest point in South Shropshire, according to a local man. The view from the summit was panoramic – to the East, across the valley of the Onny, could be seen the Long Mynd, to the South by Wenlock Edge and the volcanic peak of the Wrekin and beyond this the Midland plain stretching into infinity. A conspicuous landmark on the Edge is the power station at Buildwas, with its tall smoking chimneys. To the South-West lay Linley Hill and Montgomeryshire, and the hill known as the Bromlow Callow – recognisable by the clump of trees at its summit.

As well as these distant landmarks there were other equally interesting features nearer at hand – Shelve Lake, Snailbeach

village, the Rattlinghope Hills.

We picked our way back across the scattered stones carefully, and returned to the car.

I took my leave of the party at a lonely crossroads on the Clun-Shrewsbury road. From here I set off on my own up a steep little by-road which led up over the Rattlinghope Hills, and into the pretty village of Rattlinghope – which seems to be called by the locals a variety of names including 'Ratchet' and 'Rattenhoe'.

From Rattlinghope I took a hill-track to Bridges and on the way cattle and sheep came and peered over the fences at me, with great interest. Bridges proved to be a small, rather uninteresting hamlet, but since my only reason for visiting it was to spend the night in the Youth Hostel there, it didn't really matter. The hostel was in the former village school, and was well-fitted out inside.

After a light meal I visited the pub next door, an 'olde-worlde establishment called 'The Horseshoe Inn'. Here I met up with some of the other hostellers – a Cambridge geologist named Dave, who was carrying out a geological study

of Wenlock Edge, and a party of girls, all employees of the National Westminster Bank in Solihull, who were engaged on a Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

I also met the warden of the Hostel – a sour and unobliging fellow, and a friend of his, a 78-year old gent who was boring everyone with his reminiscences of the how he worked in a quarry in the Clee Hills 50 years ago.

I made my way back to the hostel at 10.30, and was soon asleep.

MONDAY JULY 3RD  
BRIDGES - CLUN

I set off from Bridges the next morning, after breakfast, to walk the 19-odd miles to the next Youth Hostel in Clun. I soon met up with two girls – Janet Thorneycraft and Jayne Ansell, from Cannock in Staffordshire – who were also going from Bridges to Clun, and thus had pleasant company for the rest of the day.

For the first few miles we walked along a road which followed the valley of the East Onny – at one point we crossed this river by an iron bridge labelled “ABRAHAM DARBY, COALBROOKDALE – 1882” - this company, one of the first modern ironworkers in Europe, built the world's first iron bridge – also in Shropshire, near Broseley on the Severn Gorge.

We then passed near Norbury Village – a very different place to the Norbury near Croydon – and took a very different place to the Norbury near Croydon – and took a very overgrown and hard to find footpath which branched off the main road just pass the

impressive gates and drive leading to Linley Hall. This footpath took us to Lydham village, where we rejoined the main road to Bishop's Castle.

In about half an hour we were standing in the main street of Bishop's Castle. This was a peculiar little town – the name of the town is derived from a castle no traces of which survive today. Until 1967, when it lost its Borough status, it was the smallest borough in Britain.

The whole town is built on the site of a hill, and consists of quaint and winding streets with buildings dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. It has an unusual Town Hall, surmounted with a clocktower. The whole town has a strange half-dead air about it – many of the houses are neglected and in decay, and many of the shops are empty and boarded up.

We had lunch in a small café at the top of the hill. When we ordered, we found that it was a very uncomplicated business – there was no menu, only egg-and-chips. Our eating was accompanied by the ticks of a decrepid grandfather clock, and the suspicious glances of the proprietor – why he was suspicious, and of

what, we never found out. The only other inhabitant visible was a weird Brummagem, who rambled on about nothing and everything in a very enigmatic, but incomprehensible way.

After lunch we set off from Bishop's Castle, and re-joined the main road (which bypasses the town). About four miles from the town the rain, which had drizzled down all day, became very heavy. However, a kind local woman in a battered Ford Anglia, gave us a lift for the last couple of miles to Clun.

We stopped only briefly in Clun, as it was now 5pm and collected the keys to the hostel from a local draper's, and then walked the half-mile to the hostel.

Clun Youth Hostel was in a converted mill, officially described as simple (an apt description). However despite the pouring rain we spent a pleasant evening around the old coke stove in the main room, and retired to bed late. My last recollection was that of hearing a clock in Clun strike one, and an owl hoot.



TUESDAY JULY 4TH  
CLUN – LUDLOW

Everyone rose early today – not really very surprising as the hostel was rather cold and uncomfortable. It was still pouring with rain – not very inviting weather for walking in!

At 10, I set off with the tow girls to explore Clun. According to an old rhyme:

“Clunton and Clunbury, Clungford and Clun,  
Are the quietest places under the sun.”

In the case of Clun anyway, this cannot be disproved – there can be few quieter places!

At the lower part of the town was a beautiful old pack-horse bridge, built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and after crossing it, we visited the massive but simple parish church.

Re-crossing the river we visited Clun Castle – this proved to be rather disappointing – it had reached such a state of ruin that there was little worth seeing. It was, however, beautifully situated.

After visiting the rest of the village, and having lunch, we were going to part – I was going to catch the 2pm, once-weekly bus to Newtown in Wales whilst the girls were going to catch the 1.50 bus to Ludlow. However, owing to certain misunderstandings about the times of the buses, largely caused by an inability to understand the Chinese woman in the bus-office, we succeeded in missing both buses by a matter of a few minutes only!

There was nothing for it, but to hastily revise my plans – Newtown was nearly 20 miles away, over a lonely moorland road, and in the rain I didn't fancy taking the chance of a hitch-hike. I decided to accompany the girls to Ludlow instead.

We set off on the road down the Clun Valley, but before we walked half-a-mile a fruit lorry from Wellington stopped and the driver offered us a lift to Craven Arms, 9 miles away. As we travelled down the valley, he pointed out the villages of Clunton, Clunbury and Clungunford.

Craven Arms proved to be a fascinating disappointment – it was almost the exact

opposite of what we had expected from a town with such a nice name. The town had grown up alongside a railway junction, and the A49 road, and was characterless and boring in the extreme.

We caught a Midland Red bus from here to Ludlow, and on the way had a good view of the beautiful scenery that we passed. Near Craven Arms was Stokesay Castle – a well-preserved example of the now-rare fortified manor house. We also passed through the picturesque little villages of Onibury and Bromfield. Soon the tower of London church came into view, and in a few minutes time we were alighting from the bus.

The first building we noticed in Ludlow was the extremely old “Feathers Hotel” – voted the best-restored building in Salop in 1971 and also, incidentally, having connections with our next-door neighbour at home.

We walked through the town, noting the many fine medieval buildings and also the Victorian market hall. We then passed under one of the old town gates, and over the quaint and picturesque medieval bridge over the River

Teme.

The Youth Hostel, called Ludford Lodge, was a fairly modern building with new annexes, and very well fitted out – the only drawback here was the presence of a large and noisy school party from the Cotswolds.

After supper we had a quick look round the town – which, with 6,000 inhabitants, claims to be the largest town in South Shropshire – before returning to the hostel. Here we played cards in the common room, and chatted a while to the assistant warden, and to a Dutch girl. We also made the acquaintance of Tim, a Chemistry student from Kettering, Northants, who we were to see a lot in the next few days.

We returned to bed at 10.30 (largely because at this hour the warden switched the lights off and demanded that everyone should leave the common room and go to bed).

WEDNESDAY 5TH JULY  
LUDLOW - WHEATHILL

We decided to explore Ludlow first, before moving on. One of the first things that struck me about the town was how very like Hereford it was – not only in appearance but also in atmosphere.

Our first port of call was to the parish church – a landmark to us the day before. This magnificent 14<sup>th</sup> century building was almost the size of a cathedral, and one of the first things I noticed when entering it was the magnificent stained-glass windows. We were then treated to a fascinating discourse on the misericord carvings beneath the choir seats by a very enthusiastic churchwarden. Each carving had been done by hand in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century, and each had a different story to tell – a scene from contemporary life or a satirical look at their contemporaries by the carvers. The earlier carvings were of a straightforward nature showing millers, bakers, blacksmiths and others at work, while the later carvings were

more complex in nature – crests, shields and coats of arms, or else scenes with a moral to tell – one depicted an ale-house wife being cast into the fires of Hell for giving short measures to her customers!

We then looked round the small museum – the principal items of interest here included a selection of Victorian household items and local posters and handbills, and some revolting torture instruments that had been used in Ludlow Castle up to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.

Next we viewed the castle – not one of the most interesting, as it was of fairly modern origin in large parts. We saw an old-fashioned medieval-style wooden stage in one part of the castle, on which a performance of Shakespeare's "King Lear" was to take place that evening.

At noon we set out on foot on the main road to Kidderminster, and walked on this for two miles, until we had passed Rockhill. We then took a by-road, and went through the small village of Midleton.

From Midleton we walked along the

trackbed of the old mineral railway which had run from Ludlow to the quarries in the Clee Hills. We soon reached Bitterley where we left the railway and walked into the village. We were now hungry and thirsty and to our dismay found that while Bitterley had been voted the "Best Kept Village Award" by the "Shropshire Journal" in 1971, it possessed neither a pun nor a single shop. After a drink from a water pump, we sat down exhausted outside the village school.

However luck was on our side – a few minutes later the school bus, a rather battered old van, pulled up and after loading with children, its driver, a Mr Price, offered us a lift two miles along our route. After jolting along narrow country lanes at high speed he dropped us at Henley Cross, in the shadow of our next objective, Titterstone Clee Hill.

We set off to climb this hill – the first mile or so was fairly easy, through sheep-infested bracken and scrub. Near the top, however, the going got harder and we had to do a bit of rock scrambling to get to the top.

On the summit of the hill we came across a radar station that had been hidden

from view from our side – a weird contraption with revolving scanners and strange shaped domed buildings.

We found the OS triangulation point at 1749 feet above sea level and from here surveyed the view. To the West we could see Ludlow and the hills of Radnorshire, to the South-West lay the Brecon Beacons and Mynydd Preseli, to the South – Herefordshire. To the East lay the Worcestershire plain, and to the North lay the West Midlands and Black Country, Wenlock Edge and the Long Mynd.

Straight in front of us was Brown Clee Hill – two miles off and 40 feet higher, and behind us lay the Titterstone Clee stone quarries.

On our way down again we stopped again to admire the view, and Jan pointed out where Cannock lay nearly 40 miles away. We then noticed an airship in the distance – although at the time we were unsure of what it was, and even considered the possibility of it being a UFO! We later discovered that it was the Goodyear “Europa” - one of the few airships in existence, which was moored over the RAF



station at Cosford Salop, undergoing trials for its filming duties at the Munich Olympic games later in the year.

We made our way down towards the picturesque village of Cleeton, and reached the road near Cleeton Court Farm, where we bought eggs. We set off on a footpath, and got lost as it existed only on the OS map, and not in real life! Eventually we reached a farm near the village of Silvington, where the farmer put us right. We then crossed two "dingles" (the Shropshire word for a little valley), three cornfields, a wood, six fences, two streams and a road before we reached Wheathill.

Here we met the warden of the YH, who was out looking for his two dogs, before reaching Wheathill Youth Hostel – a beautifully converted barn adjacent to Malt House Farm. We met Tim here, who passed various inane remarks like, "What kept you – I got here three hours ago!" We also met a Danish boy who had also travelled from Ludlow, and who I was to meet in Bala again the next week. We went to bed when the warden returned with his two dogs at 11pm.

THURSDAY 6TH JULY  
WHEATHILL - WILDERHOPE

We were awakened the next morning by a yell from the kitchen – a girl had discovered the truth of a delicately phrased notice on the wall: "MAKE SURE THAT THE CAT IS OUT AT NIGHT – OTHERWISE YOU MAY HAVE AN EXTRA DUTY IN THE MORNING!"

After eating breakfast and cleaning up, we set off on the next stage of our journey. We walked a mile to the Ludlow – Bridgnorth main road, and then along it for a further mile, before turning off onto a minor road. This road wandered picturesquely through woodland, and was bordered in many places by rhododendrons which had grown wild. The view to the East was magnificent – rolling farmland and, at one point, the most imposing sight of Burwarton Hall in its well-kept grounds. To the West lay the bulk of Brown Clee Hill. At the oddly-named road junction of Cleobury North Liberty we caught sight of Cleobury North village. A few minutes later Ditton Priors came

into view.

Ditton Priors was a straggling village consisting of about 100 houses, with a few shops and a pub. At one time there had been a naval munitions dump in the village, and a light railway from Cleobury Mortimer had served the village.

We had a 'ploughman's lunch' in the comfortable village pub, and met up with Tim, who of course, had not only climbed Brown Clee Hill, but also managed to arrive in the village only a couple of minutes after us.

We set off again after 2pm and walked downhill along the deserted country lane to Stanton Long. From here we were in the picturesque valley known as Corvedale, and we then crossed the River Corve itself.

The next village we passed through was called Shipton, and the principal item of interest here was the 17<sup>th</sup> century manor house, with its unusual block of 18<sup>th</sup> century stables.

We took a footpath beside the manor, and were soon climbing Wenlock Edge. Once over the top we caught sight of Wilderhope Manor.

This rambling manor house, which looked, and had the atmosphere of "Wuthering Heights", dates back to the 1580s, and is nearly all of Elizabethan or Jacobean origin. It is a sombre stone building, with some magnificent multi-stack Elizabethan chimneys. It was bought in 1936 by Cadbury's, the chocolate manufacturers, who later gave it to the national trust, who lease it to the YHA. Although an impressive building, it is classified as "simple", and simple it is, no running water or electric light.

The warden and his assistant, a rather weird young couple named John and Heather, were located, and I asked them if they knew where my cousin Shiela, and her husband Tony Dixon, lived. I knew that their farm was within sight of Wilderhope, but was most surprised to find that it was actually the farm next door. Unfortunately they were in London that night, attending the final of the Miss Dairymaid 1972 contest, which Tony's sister Monica was one of the finalists in. They were, however, expected to return the next morning, and so I made up my mind to visit them the next day.

After supper we visited the village of Longville-in-the-Dale, a mile away, over a footpath. We had a drink in the "Longville Hotel", where we met another Cambridge geologist, who was also a friend of Dave's (Dave was the geologist I met at Bridges).

When we returned it was getting dark and unfortunately Jayne lost the way. However we got back to the hostel, and by now it was completely dark. The manor was an eerie place at night, lit by a few flickering oil lamps only!

I was very tired, and soon fell asleep in the chilly atmosphere of Wilderhope Manor.

FRIDAY 7TH JULY  
WILDERHOPE – CHURCH STRETTON –  
WILDERHOPE

We set off at 9.30 in the morning, and once again I said goodbye to the girls, who were going home – Jan's father was coming in the car to pick them up.

I then decided to walk into Church Stretton 7¼ miles away to try and get some money, as I had only 3p left. I met Tim once again in the village, and he was going to Church Stretton too, I walked with him.

We took a by-road to Cardington, a pretty little village three miles away. Cardington Church proved very interesting, and we had a chat to a woman there who was polishing the brass memorial plaques. We learnt of the strange legend associated with nearby Plaish Hall, a local manor house. Evidently Plaish Hall is never handed down from father to son, because something always happens to the person who will inherit it!

We then climbed to the top of Gaer

Caradoc Hill, 1506 feet above sea level. From the top we could see over the Stretton valley onto the Long Mynd, only a couple of miles away. The little town of Church Stretton looked very trim and tidy from Caer Caradoc: we also watched cars going past on the A49 below, and a goods train trundling down the valley towards Shrewsbury. It began pouring with rain, and the descent of Caer Caradoc proved very tricky – the hill was very muddy and slippery.

We had an excellent lunch in the “king's Head” in Church Stretton – a 15<sup>th</sup> century pub undergoing restoration work to make it into its original state again. We had in interesting chat to the publican about the demise of the local brewers, Wrekin Ales, who were being taken over by Greenhall Witley, a Warrington brewer.

We then visited the parish church, and had a look around the town – most of the buildings in it are late Victorian, including a huge building simply called “The Hotel”. I then took my leave of Tim, who was going on to Shrewsbury.

I visited the bank, and after obtaining some money, set off back to Wilderhope Manor.

I took the Much Wenlock road this time, through the village of Hope Boulder.

At Wall-under-Haywood, 4½ miles from Church Stretton, I turned off the main road and visited the village of Rushbury. This pretty village, built on a hill round a church, has some nice black-and-white timbered buildings. On the local school there is a plaque which reads as follows:-

“THIS SCHOOL AND ALMSHOUSES WERE BUILT AND ENDOWED BY BENJAMIN, THE SEVENTH SON OF THE LATE RICHARD AND MARY WAINWRIGHT OF STANWAY, IN THE YEAR 1821 A.D.”

I then discovered “Rushbury Lodge” (the old railway station) and walked along the trackbed of the old Craven Arms – Wellington railway, until I reached the Longville-Wilderhope footpath.

On arrival back at the Manor, I decided to pay a call on Tony and Sheila, who were now back from London. When Sheila opened the door she was very surprised – especially since my aunt had told her that I was Youth Hostelling in Wales (and if everything had gone



to plan in Clun, so I would have been!).

In Wilderhope I met Lee, a geography student, and his girlfriend Rose, again – I had met them last Sunday at Bridges, but neither seemed particularly happy as they were returning home to Bournville, near Birmingham, the next day.

I then spent my last night in Salop, under the ancient roof of Wilderhope Manor.

SATURDAY 8TH JULY  
WILDERHOPE – SHREWSBURY

By 8am I was walking back to Church Stretton again, where I was going to catch the train into Shrewsbury. A car opened, and the driver, a Dudley man, offered me a lift into Stretton, which I gratefully accepted, and by half past nine I was back in Church Stretton.

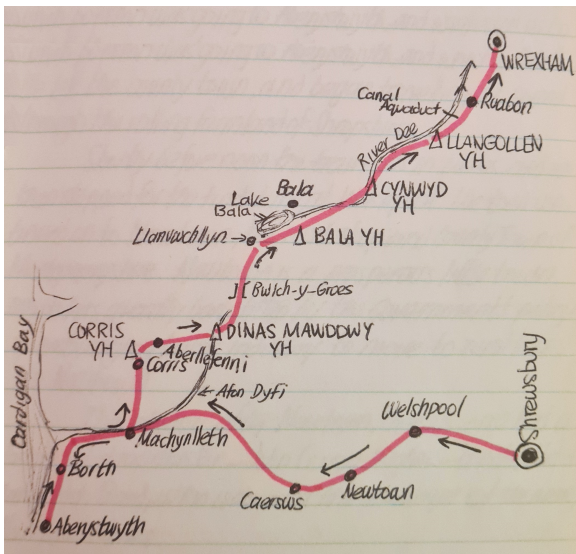
I caught the 10.10 to Shrewsbury – a train that had come from Cardiff, and was very crowded with holidaymakers going North. Apart from the fact that the guard issued me with a “CHURCH STRETTON – SHREWSBURY” ticket, the short journey passed uneventfully, and I soon found myself back in the county town.

Here I changed trains, and had a 50-minute wait. Eventually, however, the 11.40 train to Aberystwyth came in, and I boarded it, ready to begin the second part of my journey into Wales.

(continued)



## PART TWO: A WALK IN CAMBRIA





SATURDAY 8TH JULY (Continued)  
SHREWSBURY – ABERYSTWYTH – CORRIS

The train left Shrewsbury a couple of minutes late, after there had been a confusion as to which portion was going to Aberystwyth, and which to Pwelli. We left the county town and began travelling at speed through the rolling farmland of Shropshire.

Shortly before noon the train was in Walws, and we stopped for the first time in Welshpool. We then continued on to Newtown, the next stop, and county town of Montgomeryshire.

Newtown is a prosperous little town, which has greatly benefited from the government's policy of encouraging light industry to move to rural towns like Newtown.

The station after Newtown, Caersws, once had a famous Stationmaster – John Ceirog Hughes – a noted Victorian Welsh bard, who was also the manager of the local lead mines.

After Caersws the line climbs gradually, reaching the summit of 750 feet near Talerddig

Signal Box. From here it falls gradually until we reach the valley of the River Dovey (or Afon Dyfi) near Cemmaes Road.

Past Machynlleth, the valley widens, and after Dovey Junction, a remote exchange platform in the middle of the Dovey Marshes, the river becomes tidal. We follow the estuary to near Ynas-las, before turning due South.

At Borth a family from Hereford, with whom I had been chatting, left the train and it began to rain once more. Twenty minutes later we reached the the end of the line – Aberystwyth.

After lunch I set off to explore Aberystwyth – this was only my second visit to this pleasant little town. Aberystwyth has a population of some 10,000, and is the largest town on Cardigan Bay. The town is an important market and shopping centre, as well as housing part of the University of Wales and the National Library of Wales. There is a small harbour here, situated at the point where the Rheidol and Ystwyth rivers reach the sea.

After picking up some mail in the Post Office in Gt. Darkgate Street, I did some

shopping, and was fascinated to hear Welsh being spoken again – I had not heard Welsh being spoken since my last visit to Mid-Wales, in 1970. The Welsh language is an ancient tongue, derived from old Celtic tongues, and the only other language in the world close to it is Breton, spoken in the Brittany region of France.

Only a few years ago Welsh was a dying language, but about 1960 a great revival began, largely fostered by the Welsh Language Society, whose more recent activities have included breaking up road signs in English. Welsh has been re-established as the official language in Wales – although perhaps even more encouraging, not only is it now official, but many people, especially young people, use it in everyday conversation to each other. One of the most noticeable things about rural Wales today, is the number of Welsh-speaking people – indeed to some of them English is a second language which is often spoken haltingly and with some difficulty.

After looking around the town, I went and had a look at the beach. However in



common with every beach, the rain had succeeded in turning it into a very dismal place.

I spent the whole afternoon in Aberystwyth, before going back to the station. Here, before I boarded my train, I saw the afternoon train from Devil's Bridge return – this line is narrow-gauge, and runs through the beautiful Vale of Rheidol to Devil's Bridge. It is worked by steam engines, the last on British Railways, and is very popular with tourists and holidaymakers.

I caught the 6.30pm train, and was soon retracing my steps as far as Machynlleth, where I alighted. I then had a brief look around this pretty little market town, which boasts many early 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings and an imposing Victorian clock tower. Machynlleth was once the capital of the famous Welsh leader Owain Glendŵr.

At 7.30, I caught the Aberllefenni bus, and after a journey along a tortuously twisting road through a beautifully wooded gorge, it reached Corris, where I got off.

Here I walked through the village to the Youth Hostel – a converted schoolhouse at

Vrondeg. After a quick supper I set off to explore Corris village.

Corris was once a slate-mining town, with a higher population than it now has. Even though there is evidence of this former activity, the village is very pretty. This is partly due to its lovely setting in the deep wooded valley of the Afon Dulais – the tops of the mountains flanking the valley were lost in mist, which added to the romantic nature of the place.

I went in to the one of Corris' two pubs – the "Slater's Arms", in the company of a Canadian girl who was staying in the hostel. The public bar was crowded and noisy, but about 9pm, one of the regulars began singing in Welsh and soon the whole pub was singing Welsh songs. During the lulls in the singing, a similar performance in the Lounge Bar could be heard. Altogether it was a delightful traditional Welsh evening.

We arrived back at the hostel 5 minutes late, and were given a ticking-off by the warden, in her strange, lilting Welsh accent. Eventually I got to bed, and was soon asleep, exhausted after such a long day.

SUNDAY 9TH JULY  
CORRIS – DINAS MAWWDWY

The day began very early at about 1am, when one of the Americans staying at the hostel got hungry in the middle of the night and decided to have a bowl of soup. All went well until, in the dark, he stumbled into a pile of dishes, knocking them over and waking everyone up.

By 10am, I had had breakfast and cleared up, and decided to take a look around Corris village before setting out on the next stage of my journey.

I visited the small railway museum – this was dedicated to the old Corris Railway, a narrow guage line which ran from Corris to Aberllefenni to Machynlleth down the Dulas Valley. It carried slate from the mines and also passengers, until closure in 1948. There are still many visible signs of the trackbed, even today. A dedicated band of enthusiasts were engaged on re-building a short section of the track, with the eventual aim of re-starting passenger

services on the line – much to the delight of local people, who remembered the original line with affection.

At noon, I set off up the valley to walk the 2 miles to Aberllefenni, via Upper Corris. It was very noticeable how everything in the region – houses, fencing, bridges etc is built from slate from the local mines.

I had lunch at Aberllefenni, buying some of it at the Post Office there. The chief object of interest in the village was the working slate quarry, still employing 30 men, which produced roofing and ornamental slate tiles. A short tramway, last remnant of the former Corris railway and worked by manual power, crossed the road and wandered towards the slate quarry. This small concern was very reminiscent of those rural industries in Britain at the start of the industrial revolution.

I followed the valley of the Afon Dulas another mile to near Troed yr Esgoar, before taking a track marked "FORESTRY COMMISSION PATH TO MALLWYD". Soon I passed another F.C. Notice: "DOVEY FOREST", and entered a thick plantation of pine and fir

trees. The road climbed steeply, and in the gaps in the forest I caught occasional glimpses of the vast bulk of Caedir Idris rising up to the West.

For four hours I walked through the forest, meeting no-one except for two foresters at work felling timber. The silence and beauty of the forest were unbelievable – in a way it was rather eerie!

I reached civilisation again at Cwm Gaerwhyn Farm, the first sign of habitation, except for a phone box, since Aberllefenni. I reached the relief of the River Dovey at the hamlet of Aberangell, and saw the same river that I had seen the day before at Machynlleth.

I walked up a by-road, close to the trackbed of the former Cemmaes Road – Dinas Mawddwy branch line. Soon I saw the village of Mallwyd, on the other side of the valley, and then the river began to meander, becoming very torturous near Dinas Minllyn. Here I caught sight of Dinas Mawddwy, and then saw the green YHA triangle of the Youth Hostel, situated in an old schoolhouse, like the one at Corris.

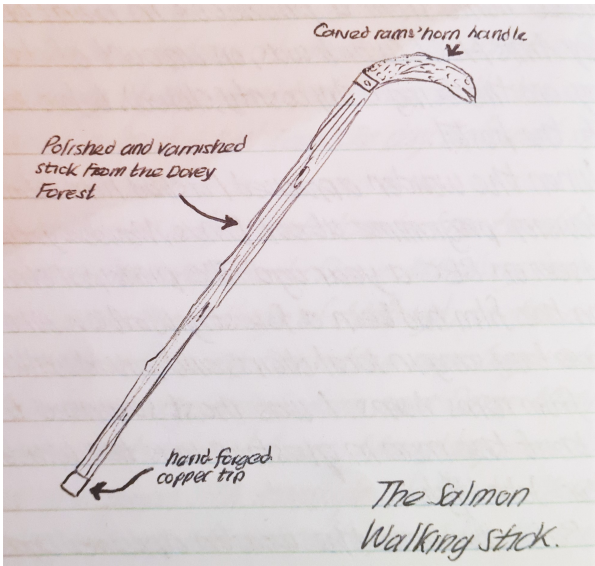
I collected the key to the hostel from the warden in Brook Cottages, and was surprised to find that I was the only person there, even though it was now 8pm. However soon I had company, for nine girls from Sutton Coldfield, in Warwickshire, aimed to spend the night – they were all engaged in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme involving camping, map-reading etc.

I phoned home from a phonebox in front of the Buckley Arms Hotel (which was, on account of it being Sunday, and this being a dry county, closed) before returning to the hostel.

When the warden appreciated I asked him about a television programme about Dinas Mawwdwy that I had seen on BBC a year ago. The principal character had been a forestry worker, who in his spare time sang in local choirs, and carved walking sticks from rams' horns. I was most surprised to find that the man in question was the warden's brother – John Hughes.

Before bedtime the warden appeared again with an example of his brother's work. One of the walking stick handles had been

carved in the shape of a salmon, and had been painted very authentically. The other one depicted a lion's head, still in a very early stage. Both were examples of an unusual rural craft which, according to the warden, was very unusual even in Wales.



MONDAY 10TH JULY  
DINAS MAWWDWY – BALA

After a quick breakfast, I decided to visit the village of Dinas Mawwdwy, before continuing my odyssey. The village proved to be quite interesting – several of the people in this typical stone-built village, could speak no English, only Welsh. There was a large chapel in the centre of the town – it was a typical non-conformist chapel with the inscription “EBENEEZER EGLWYSDY CYULLEIDFOAL 1867” above the door. About three buildings along was a similar building – the Methodist Chapel. I stopped at the Post Office to buy some food.

I then took up the Llanmawddwy road for four miles up the Dovey Valley until I reached the picturesque village of Llanmawddwy. I then passed by the impressive grounds of Bryn Hall and stopped for a few minutes to have a chat with a man fishing for salmon.

After Llanmawddwy the scenery became much wilder, and the valley began to narrow. On either side of the valley the



mountains were rising up, and to the West the peak of Aran Mawddwy (which at 2970 feet is the highest mountain in Wales outside Snowdonia) could just be seen.

I crossed the Dovey for the last time at Pont-y-Pennant – how very different the river was now from when I first saw it from the train two days earlier.

The road began to climb steeply now, following the rocky defile carved out by the river Rhilwlech, and the going became tougher. In about an hour I sensed that the climb was nearly done, and after passing the junction with the road to Lake Vrynwy, I reached the summit of the road at Bwlch-y-Groes – at 1790 feet above sea level this is one of the highest mountain passes in Wales.

The road is described in an old "WARD LOCK GUIDE TO NORTH WALES, 1932" thus:-

*"The road from Dinas Mawddwy to Bala over the Bwlch-y-Groes... reveals even greater scenery than on the pass to Dolgelly, but it is for pedestrians rather than motorists or cyclists, as it rises from 634 feet to 1790 feet in just*

*over a mile. The steepest part, 1 in 4½ for 200 yards, is near the summit. Cars which attempt to pass this way, and fail to negotiate the steepest portion have either to be towed up to the summit, which is usually done by hiring three horses from the farm at the foot of the pass, or must descend the pass in reverse gear – a dangerous proceeding for the nervous driver, as the road has no protection on the valley side and the drop is almost sheer.”*

I climbed up a hill to the East of Bwlch-y-Groes, and caught a glimpse of Llyn Efyrynwy, three miles away – this lake, formed in the 1880's to supply Liverpool Cooperation with water, is the largest lake in Wales. Suddenly a mist started drifting up from the valleys, and soon all the wonderful view of the expanse of wild moorland around Bwlch-y-Groes was blocked from view. I returned from the road, reaching it again on the descent just North of the summit.

A few minutes later the mist lifted for a moment, and I saw the lonely farmsteads at Tan-y-Bwlch lying some 400 feet below the road, in a lush and green valley.

The road descended gradually, and I passed through a series of gates put across the road to prevent sheep from wandering. Soon I passed three small hamlets (little more than two or three houses, and a phone box) – Ty-nant, Talardd and Pont Afonfechan.

I caught sight of Lake Bala for the first time near Bryn, and in a quarter of an hour, passed the edge of the large village of Llanuwchllyn. In about ten minutes the road was running parallel to the end of the lake – Lake Bala (Llyn Tegrd in Welsh) measures some 4½ by ½ mile, and is the largest natural sheet of water in Wales.

I walked along the trackbed of the old Barmouth to Ruabon railway, closed in 1965, which ran parallel to the lake. From here I obtained several beautiful views of the lake, even though it began to rain. At 5pm I reached the end of the lake, and joined the B4391 road. From here I walked another two miles to Rhos-y-Gwalia village and the Youth Hostel.

Bala Youth Hostel is situated in a historic old building called "Plas Rhiwaedog" - the translation of this name is "The Blood-Stained Hill". While Rhos-y-Gwalia means "Place

Of The Wounded” - both reminders of the days when Welsh tribes were at war with each other. Indeed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD one such battle took place on the site of the hostel.

Plas Rhiwedog, the actual Youth Hostel building, is described thus in a YHA pamphlet:-

*"The present building is comparatively recent. Over the front entrance is a stone encribed "LI/L 16645". The LI refers to the Llwydiad (Lloyd's) of Rhiwaedog, who were the residents at the time. The partitions are adorned with various carvings including the Coat of Arms of Owen Gwynedd and Rhirid Flaidd. The underground cells have walls fifteen feet thick, and there was a subterranean passage from the mansion under the neighbouring hill serving as a place of refuge when the house was attacked. Until recently a well existed in the cellar within the house."*

Before 'lights-out' at 10.30pm, the warden organised a sing-song in the common room for all the hostellers. Unfortunately his piano playing did not match his enthusiasm.

TUESDAY 11TH JULY  
BALA

This day was devoted entirely to exploring the district around Lake Bala.

I left the hostel at 9.30, and walked the two miles into Bala village. Here I bought a camera and some film, before boarding the 10.17 bus to Barmouth. I only travelled on the bus for 5 miles or so, to the other end of Lake Bala, alighting at the village of Llanuwchllyn. It has an extremely interesting and very old little parish church, which dates back 500 years. The village is beautifully situated, meeting in a valley, at the head of Lake Bala, with the mountains rising up on all sides, and the impressive peak of Aran Mawddwy in the background.

At the old railway station I found that a new railway was being built on the trackbed of the old British Railways line from Barmouth to Ruabon. This new line will be a narrow-gauge one, to convey passengers alongside the shores of Lake Bala, from Llanuwchllyn to Bala and back.

I returned along the main road, on the Northern shore of the lake – the same road I had come on by bus a couple of hours earlier. On my way back I passed several horses in fields, and also a Welsh-speaking Youth Camp.

I had an excellent meal of roast lamb and apple pie in a little cafe called “Sospan Fach” in Bala, followed by a drink in the “White Lion Royal Hotel” - the same hotel that Queen Victoria had visited when she paid a royal visit to Bala in 1889.

I then explored Bala – it proved to be a pleasant little town with a wide, tree-lined main street, and a well-planned and patterned street plan. There were several buildings of interest in the town, including the old school which had been converted into a restaurant. Bala was famous in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as one of the centres of the Methodist religious revival, and Wesley visited the town.

I took a walk by the lake, and watched small sailing boats, dingies and yachts darting over the surface of the water. Many of the sailors here were on a YHA “Adventure Holiday” and also staying in the hostel.

I also walked down to the sluice gate marking the point where the River Dee leaves Lake Bala. I was to see the River Dee again every day that week – at Cynwyd, at Llangolen and at Chester.

I returned to the hostel at about 6pm, and spent an interesting evening talking to some of the other hostellers, including a Danish boy who had been at both Ludlow and Wheathill Youth Hostels at the same time as I had. I also had an interesting talk to the warden – a man from the North of England – who told me that one of the strangest things about living in Wales was that although he and his children were English, they had to learn Welsh at school.

WEDNESDAY 12TH JULY  
BALA – CYNWYD

I travelled today ten miles up the Dee Valley. I left Plas Rhiwaedog after breakfast, and on my way down to the main road I talked to an American who was touring round Britain by motor-cycle with his brother.

After parting with the American, I made my way down to the old railway again, reaching it near the derelict station at Bala Junction. I began walking along the trackbed, and for over an hour met only one person, a man on horseback who was travelling the other way.

After walking through a short tunnel I reached Llanderfel, and had lunch sitting on the platform of the old station. I met here two boys from Manchester who were travelling on foot up the old railway in the opposite direction.

Continuing along the trackbed, I crossed the Dee again twice in the next hour, over old, disused railway girder bridges. Eventually I reached the old station at



Llandrillo, and then walked the mile or so into the village of the same name.

From Llandrillo I walked along the main road towards Cynwyd, where I was to spend the night. On the way I noticed three interesting houses – on the first was an inscription written in glass bottles stuck into the wall – HD 1869. On the second, a similar inscription, HJD 1909, and on the third HLI 1934 – presumably all were members of the same family.

Cynwyd was a picturesque little village – bisected by a tumbling mountain stream named Afon Trystan, which joined the Dee valley very near the village.

The Youth Hostel was situated in an old mill, which had been converted, but with most of its original machinery still intact.

The other youth hostellers staying there that night were an American girl, a Dutch couple, and a German boy, and although none of us had ever met before, we soon got into conversation and talked far into the night.

THURSDAY 13TH JULY  
CYNWYD – LLANGOLEN

The next morning we all set off from the hostel together, after breakfast, and walked the 2 miles from Cynwyd to the A5 main road at Corwen. Here I parted company, as the others were all going Westwards towards Snowdonia, while I was planning to travel Eastwards to Llangollen.

Corwen town was not without charm – it had some very fine old buildings, and an old market place. However the town is spoilt by the fact the A5 road, together with its continual stream of heavy traffic, passes right through the town, enveloping it in noise, dirt and diesel fumes. Corwen was, and still is, a fairly important market centre for the surrounding region.

I continued along the A5 after leaving the town, and also continued to follow the Dee valley, which at this point was fairly heavily wooded.

I was now in the Glyn Dyfrdwy – a vale

famous for the fact that the family of Owain Glyndŵr came from, and took their name from here. Nearby was the village of Glyndyfrdwy – a quaint little settlement situated in a very picturesque part of the Dee valley.

At Glyndyfrdwy, a man in a car stopped and offered me a lift, but as he was only going another 250 yards along my road, the offer was of little use to me!

I was continually in the shadow of the Benwyn Mountains which, culminating in the peak of Moel Ferna (2070 feet), rose to the South.

Near Llantysilio the road and rover take a tortuous bend to avoid a hill, and once I had rounded this bend I saw the town of Llangollen for the first time, where I was going to spend two nights.

I didn't linger in Llangollen, as I had resolved to set aside the next day as a sightseeing day in Llangollen and district. It was now nearly opening time at the hostel, so I turned out of the town, on the road that led to the hostel.

Tyn-Dŵr Hall – the Youth Hostel for

Llangollen – was a most impressive building – a large and rambling Victorian pseudo-Gothic manor house set in a wooded demesne. Originally a private residence, it passed to the YHA in 1939. It is now the largest hostel in the North Wales Region, with room for 190 hostellers, but the nights I was there, there were only about 30 hostellers.

The interior of Tyn- Dŵr Hall was also impressive – oak panelling, stained glass windows and mounted stags' heads all contributed to the period atmosphere.

In the evening I went back into the town, with three other hostellers who I became friendly with, and we spent a pleasant evening in the “Prince of Wales” - one of Llangollen's many pubs.

FRIDAY 14TH JULY  
LLANGOLEN

I set off from Tyn- Dŵr Hall after breakfast to explore Llangollen and district. My first port of call was at "plas Newydd", on the outskirts of the town – this rambling Elizabethan-style villa was originally the home of two notable eccentrics: Lady Eleanor Butler and a Miss Ponsonby. These two were known as the "Ladies of Llangollen" and lived at Plas Newydd in the early 1800s. Among their many famous visitors were Sir Walter Scott, William Wordsworth and the Duke of Wellington. In the grounds of Plas Newydd was the remains of an ancient Celtic stone circle.

I then visited the town itself. The town is beautifully situated on the banks of the River Dee, in the vale of Llangollen. The bridge over the Dee – four irregular masonry spans built in three reigns on Henry I, and added to by Bishop Trevor in 1346 – is world famous and is, according to the well-known rhyme about the "Seven Wonders of Wales", a "Wonder of Wales".

I then walked up to the Shropshire Union Canal, which, most unusually, runs along a hedge on the hillside far above the river and town. I then went along the towpath for a couple of miles, passing en-route one of the pleasure-craft which make up the principal traffic on the canal today.

At the end of the towpath it was only a couple of minutes walk to Valle Crucis Abbey. This preserved ancient monument situated in a beautiful wooded valley, is the ruins of what was once an abbey of the Cistercian order, founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. There are few abbeys in Britain which can equal it – not so much, from the point of view of the remains of the abbey, but from the point of view of the beautiful settings.

Nearby was Eliseg's Pillar, which I also visited. This inscribed pillar dates from the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. And was erected to commemorate an ancient battle. Although it was originally 18 feet high, it was badly damaged by religious fanatics in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and now there is only an unimpressive remnant a few feet high. The Pilar, or Cross, gives its name to the locality

– the “Valley of the Cross” - the Welsh version of this is “Pant-y-Groes”, and the Latin “Valle Crucis”.

I returned to Llangollen by way of the Dee Valley, and rejoined the river at the Chain Bridge Hotel – this takes its name from an ornamental suspension footbridge over the Dee, which is made of iron and painted white, and dates from the last century.

I reached the town at 1pm, and after having lunch I went back to the river and spent an enjoyable time sitting by the river that afternoon – after weeks of continuous rain, this hot weather had suddenly, but regrettably only temporarily, arrived, was more than welcome.

I did some shopping in town, before returning to Tyn- Dŵr Hall where I had supper and went to bed early.

SATURDAY 15TH JULY  
LLANGOLLEN TO CHESTER

I set off from Tyn- Dŵr Hall in the company of an American who was going the same way as me for a couple of miles. We took a short cut across a hillside, on which sheep were grazing, and through a plantation of fir trees, before reaching the village of Pontscylleth.

From here I walked on the towpath of the Shropshire Union Canal once again, past an antiquated lifting drawbridge over the canal, before walking over Telford's massive Pontscylleth Aqueduct.

This aqueduct, 10 feet wide and a third of a mile in length, carries the canal in an iron trough 180 feet above the River Dee valley at the point where the canal changes from the South to the North side of the valley. At a time when it was built it was regarded as a major feat of engineering, and is still, even today, one of the best known canal aqueducts in the world.



On the other side of the aqueduct is Trevor village, and here I spent a little time looking at cruisers and narrowboats in the canal basin, and was also looking up the valley to the impressive Chirk railway viaduct a couple of miles away.

From Trevor I walked to Acrefair, a small industrial town dominated by the grim Monsanto works. This town, together with its neighbour Rhosllannerchrugog, was badly bombed by the German Luftwaffe in 1940, during that famous "Ruabon Mountain Air-Raid", when they mistook the area for industrial Liverpool, and bombed it with bombs intended for that city.

From Acrefair I walked past the new housing estate at Plas Merion, and through a mile of open countryside to Ruabon. This is a small village of not many houses grouped around a railway station. I had lunch in a pub in the village, before making my way to the station to catch the 2.46 train to Wrexham. While waiting for this train, I met one of the boys who had been on a sailing course on Lake Bala the week before, and who had shared the

same dormitory as me in the Youth Hostel.

Wrexham, only 5 miles down the line from Ruabon, proved to be very interesting. Although it is fairly near the border with England, it claims to be the largest town in North Wales – both from the point of view of population and industry.

That old rhyme, the “Seven Wonders of Wales” which goes:

*“Pistyll Rhiard and Wrexham Steeple,  
Snowdon's Mountain without its people,  
Overton yew-trees, St Winefred's Wells,  
Llangollen Bridge and Gresford Bells.”*

“Wrexham Steeple” is the tower of Wrexham parish church -St Giles. This church is generally regarded as being one the finest examples of genuine Gothic architecture in Wales.

Inside the church are many monuments to Elihu Yale, founder of Yale University in the United States, who at one time lived in Wrexham. There is also a memorial to the American servicemen killed in the Second War, who were stationed in Wrexham.

I also saw the famous epitaph written on a memorial on the West wall of the church:-

*"Here lies interred beneath these stones,  
The beard, ye flesh and eve ye bones,  
Of Wrexham clerk, Old Daniel Jones"*

I then explored the town centre – part of this had just been shut to all traffic in an experimental Saturday traffic-free shopping scheme. This was one of the few redeeming features of an otherwise characterless city centre. However many of the locals still kept instinctively to the pavement, rather than walk down the middle of the road, even though there were no cars about.

Of special interest to me was Wrexham's three railway stations – Central and Exchange on the line to New Brighton, and General on the Shrewsbury – Birkenhead line. It was to this last station that I made my way, to catch the 4.446 train to Chester, and England.

**PART THREE:  
INTERLUDE IN ENGLAND**



SATURDAY 15TH JULY (Continued)  
CHESTER

I crossed the border back into England at 10 to 5, near the village of Gresford. By 5 I was in Chester, and there I left the train. By now I was fairly exhausted, so I decided not to do any more sightseeing today, but to make my way straight to Chester Youth Hostel, where I was staying for the weekend. I walked through the town, past the race course (I had already seen a race in progress there, from the train window), and over the River Dee on the Grosvenor Bridge (in fact the second Grosvenor Bridge I had crossed on my tour – the first one, two weeks earlier, had been over the River Thames in London, on the train to Victoria).

Eventually I reached Hough Green and the hostel – a large 19<sup>th</sup> century town house. That night I met a familiar face – the American who'd been travelling round Britain on a motorbike with his brother, who I had met three days earlier at Plas Rhiwaedog, and I had an interesting chat with him about the places he had been.

## SUNDAY 16TH JULY CHESTER

The whole of the day was devoted to sightseeing in Chester. I left the hostel at 9.30, and made my way back into the town, over Grosvenor Bridge.

I began my tour of this city at the Eastgate – one of the medieval city gateways, which was, rather unusually, surmounted by an ornamental cast-iron clock, erected to commemorate Queen Victoria's jubilee in 1897.

I then made a quick tour of the "Rows" - these are probably unique to Chester. The main shopping streets have the majority of their shops not at street level, but in arcades at first floor level, running parallel with the street. This system, which segregates shoppers and traffic, and is now very much in vogue, was pioneered in Chester.

Chester seems to have more medieval buildings still extant, than any other city in Britain, for the predominant building style is genuine black-and-white timber-framed houses.

Next I made a complete circuit of the city walls – there is a path which runs the entire way around the walls which still encircle the centre of the city. From this path I saw many interesting features – Chester Cathedral, a vast Gothic edifice began many centuries ago; the Victorian Town Hall, built in the 1880s; and an unusually fine flight of canal locks on the Shropshire Union Canal at Northgate, complete with a commemorative plaque recording the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the canal in 1972. Near to here was the modern Northgate, built over a new road in 1966.

I also viewed the remnants of the original Roman settlement at Chester – the name of the town is derived from the Roman word “castra” meaning camp. The medieval town was built on top of the Roman town – many of the principal streets in Chester have a plaque giving their original Roman names e.g. Bridge Street is “Via Principalis”. The medieval city walls are built on top of the original Roman and Saxon walls.

I spent the afternoon in Grosvenor Park – this was to be the last time that I would see

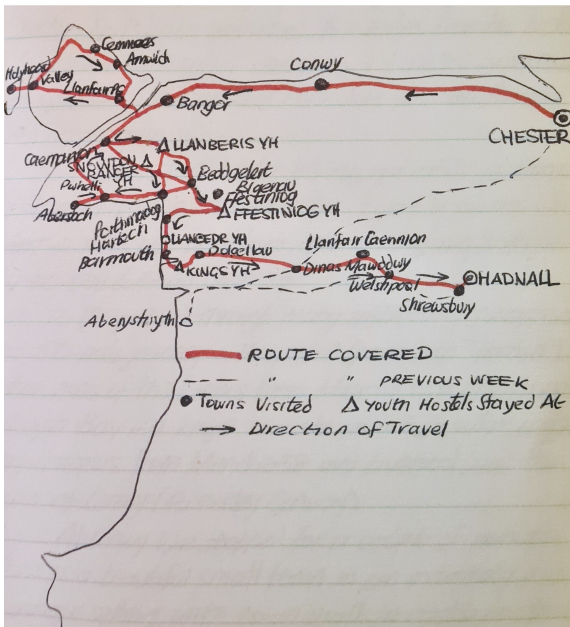


the Dee that I had followed all the way from Bala.

I crossed the river by the Queen's Bridge – an iron chain suspension bridge opened in 1923, and walked through the suburbs to see a large old 18<sup>th</sup> century house called Belgrave Park.

I returned to the hostel at half past seven and spent the rest of the evening there.

## PART FOUR: NORTH WALES





MONDAY 17TH JULY

CHESTER – CAERNARVON – LLANBERIS

I began the day by walking along the A55 Chester – North Wales main road. Two miles from the hostel I passed a large sign:- OROESO Y CYMRU – WELCOME TO WALES, and entered Flintshire and the Principality once again.

I then started hitch-hiking, and after getting a lift in a mini-van for two miles, I got a second lift from a sales representative, who was going to Anglesey to sell building chemicals.

We passed through many interesting places on the 50-mile journey – Hawarden (pronounced “Horden”) - the name of the famous Prime Minister, W.E. Gladstone; Colwyn Bay – a large seaside resort popular with day-trippers from Manchester and Liverpool, and the town of Conwy (formerly Conway).

At Conwy we stopped for a couple of minutes. This is a beautiful small town in an extremely picturesque setting, with town walls,

a castle and three interesting bridges over the River Conway – modern road bridge, an old suspension bridge built by Telford, which formerly carried the road but since 1936 has only been a footbridge; and the railway bridge – a tubular bridge designed by Stephenson to carry the Chester – Holyhead main line over the river. The two latter bridges are of special interest – larger versions of both span the Menai Straits, and in both cases the engineers used the Conway bridges as a trial before starting on the trickier Menai bridges.

After Conwy the scenery becomes wilder, and the road hugs the rocky coastline, with many spectacular seascapes visible to the traveller. There are two more seaside towns before Bangor – Penmaenmawr and Llanfairfechan, and a village called Aber. Near Penmaenmawr there are three short road tunnels built in the 1930's to carry the road through projecting parts of the headland.

Bangor is an interesting town, situated near the only bridging point on the Menai Straits. The town is unremarkable architecturally, but the whole effect, rather than

the individual houses, is pleasing. Two of the most important features of the town are the two long piers which jet out into the sea, built for the exporting of slate brought by narrow-gauge railway from the Bethesda region, and the University of North Wales, to which Bangor owes a lot of its present prosperity.

Beyond the town lies the Menai Straits with its two famous bridges - Thomas Telford's road suspension bridge, built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and reconstructed in 1939, which still carries the A5 London - Holyhead road traffic, and is the sole road link to the island of Anglesey; and Robert Stevenson's Britannia Railway Bridge, built in the 1850s and destroyed by fire in May 1970. It has just been re-opened, and the original iron tubular bridge is now supported with a new steel arch.

I was dropped off at the Southern end of the suspension bridge, and after walking halfway across it, I returned to the Caemarnonshire side and from there hitched a lift in a meat van to Caernarvon, via Port Dinorwic.

Caernarvon is one of the most famous

tourist centres in North Wales. Once again, like Conwy, the town has walls and a castle – the castle here is not only massive in size, and well preserved, but is also the scene of the Investiture of the Prince of Wales – the most recent Investiture being that of Prince Charles in 1969. The rest of the town, however, is rather disappointing – an uninteresting collection of Victorian shops and houses.

At 5.30pm I set off on the road to Llanberis, after spending a pleasant afternoon sitting on the quayside of the town, looking out over the Menai Straits to Anglesey. I walked through the town, but before I had passed the last of the suburbs, I was offered a lift to Llanrug, 3½ miles from Llanberis.

From Llanrug I caught a bus to Llanberis, and on the way fell into conversation with another Youth Hosteller, who was also going to spend the night in Llanberis hostel – an Australian named John.

I reached the hostel at 8pm, after a total journey of some 80 miles.

TUESDAY 18TH JULY

LLANBERIS – SNOWDON – CAERNARVON –  
LLANBERIS

The P. J. Clarke Memorial Youth Hostel at Llanberis was a modern building, very nicely fitted out with such refinements as showers, a modern kitchen etc, and was, with the possible exception of Ludlow, the best Youth Hostel I had seen to date. From the hostel Llyn Padarn, and part of Snowdon, could be seen – indeed the sight of these made a dramatic beginning to my stay in North Wales, the day before.

I decided today that I was going to climb Mt. Snowdon – at 3650 feet above sea level this is not only the highest mountain in England and Wales, but also one of the most famous peaks in the British Isles.

I set off from the hostel with two other hostellers – the Australian I had met on the bus the previous evening, and a German who was also at the hostel. We walked down to the village, and on to the Royal Victoria Hotel, where the Llanberis track up Snowdon begins,



near to the terminus station of the Snowdon Mountain Railway – a steam-powered narrow-gauge line worked on the Swiss “Abt” Rack-adhesion system, and opened in 1896. For £2 (or £1.25 single), passengers are conveyed in small red-and-white carriages hauled by quaint little green engines from Llanberis right up to the summit.

For the first half-mile the Llanberis track is a lane which runs past a row of terraced houses. There is a sign with: LLWIDR CHOEDDUS YR WYDDFA (Public Footpath to Snowdon) written on it which marks the spot where the track becomes rougher, and the gradient steeper.

A mile from Llanberis the track passes under the SMR, and then runs parallel to it, past Hebron station. It was here that we saw two trains passing – a passenger train making the ascent, and a goods train descending. This train, composed of a locomotive and two wagons, was the train that takes supplies to the Summit Hotel.

For another hour we continued to climb, and with each step the scenery became

wilder and grander. We then crossed the SMR once more, at Clogwyn, and were then only about half a mile from the summit.

Eventually we reached the summit, just before 1pm, and after standing on the summit cairn to have my picture taken, and watching the seagulls which had flown around here, we went for a drink to the Summit Hotel, a long, low, grey-coloured concrete building adjacent to, and owned by, the Mountain Railway.

The prices of food at the Hotel (which despite its name does not provide accommodation) are not too exorbitant – especially when you consider that they have a monopoly on trade here, and everything has to be brought up the mountain by train from Llanberis, and the fact that the staff have to live on top of the mountain, and also the fact that in winter the hotel and railway are closed.

Snowdon is a triangular-shaped peak, surrounded on three sides by cwms (corries) – it is rather like a miniature version of the famous Matterhorn, and in reality is only the remnant of a mountain. It is very bleak and desolate on top of the mountain, and even on a

warm day, is quite cold. However the views from the top of Snowdon more than make up for this. On a clear day, dramatic views of Snowdonia, the Preseli Hills, Cadair Idris – even the Wicklow Hills in Ireland – can be had. However the day that I climbed Snowdon there was a typical Welsh mist hanging low over the mountains, blotting out much of the view from sight, but those mountains nearest Snowdon could be seen quite clearly.

We decided to descend by one of the other six paths up Snowdon – the “Beddgelert Track” - this path was a great deal more dramatic than the “Llanberis Track”, and it ran along the edges of an arête passed numerous glacially-formed features. The path was very tortuous – many twists and turns occurred along its entire length. We passed several people making the ascent, including one family with a 2-year old child. It is hardly surprising that every year a dozen or so people get killed on Snowdon when such fools as that family try to take very young children up a mountain.

We arrived back in civilisation at a point on the Caernarvon – Porthmadog Road near the

village of Rhyd Ddu. We had a drink in the village Post Office, and then decided to hitch-hike into Caernarvon as it was only half-past three.

We got a lift from a young man in a mini, who drove in a reckless manner at a speed of about 90mph, and were quite glad when he dropped us off at Caeathro, about 1½ miles from Caernarvon. From here we walked past a hospital and a plastics factory to the town.

We explored the remnants of the Roman fort at Segontum, round which the modern settlement of Caernarfon was based, before exploring the castle, town walls and quay again. We also did some shopping, as well as exploring the rather depressed back-streets of the town. One of the most noticeable features of the town is that it is almost impossible to hear people here talking English – Caernarvon is a noted centre for the Welsh language, and has a militant local group of the Welsh Language Society. Indeed the week before, Caernarfon had been on the news when members of the WLS had broke up and auction

sale of holiday houses to English people. One of their main grievances seems to be that whereas rich non-Welsh speaking people buy up the houses to use as holiday homes, poor Welsh-speaking people are forced out of the area because demand for houses for holidays has priced them out of the locals' market.

We set off back to Llanberis at 6, and got a lift back to Cwm-Y-Glo, and walked from here back to the hostel. The walk back was very interesting and scenically spectacular – along the shores of Llyn Padarn, a lake 2 miles long by half a mile across, enclosed by splendid mountain scenery. The peak of Snowdon appeared on the horizon near the setting sun, in a very romantic manner.

On the other side of the lake we could see a train on the Llanberis Lake Railway – a small steam engine from the Padarn quarries, heaving a couple of passenger coaches, which was taking tourists for a 4-mile scenic trip from Llanberis to Penrhyn via Gilfach Ddu and back (at a cost of 20p) along the shores of Llyn Padarn. The trackbed of this line originally carried a line from the Padarn slate quarries to

the sea.

We arrived back in the hostel at 8pm, and after having supper, we took part in a "Tea-Drinking Championship" which had been organised on an informal basis amongst the hostellers. I retired after drinking 9 cups of tea in a sequence – the winner was a boy from Birkenhead who drunk 13½ cups, followed by my Australian friend with 12 cups.

I retired to bed at 10.30pm, exhausted after such a long and strenuous day.

WEDNESDAY 19TH JULY

LLANBERIS – BEDDLEGERT – LLANBERIS

The next day I retraced my steps back to the Royal Victoria Hotel in Llanberis. I then took a path that began on the other side of the road from the Snowdon path. This led past the terminus of the Llanberis Lake Railway, to Dolbadarn Castle.

I paid the 5p admission fee, and looked around the castle. Although now in ruins, this was once an ancient stronghold. The view from the top of the castle was spectacular – from the keep, Llyn Padarn, Llanberis village, Snowdon with the Mountain Railway trains puffing up it, the Padarn Lake Railway, the Glyders, Try-fân and Dinorwic Quarry can be seen. The last mentioned was once the largest slate quarry in the world, although it closed down in 1969. According to local opinion this was due to bad management rather than a lack of slate – many people feel bitter about its closure, as unemployment is even higher now in the Llanberis region.

I then took the Snowdon track once again, but this time only for a couple of hundred yards, before turning off on the footpath leading to the well-known waterfalls on the Afon Arddu.

I spent the rest of the morning exploring the village of Llanberis. There is a good selection of shops here, especially when one considers that Llanberis is only a small town. One of the most famous shops is Joe Brown's shop for campers and climbers, which has a very good reputation.

Llanberis is a comparatively modern village, dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century – the original settlement was two miles further up the valley, at Nant Peris, which is now a fairly insignificant place. The village of Llanberis is now a famous tourist centre – that day there were queues of 100 or more people at the SMR terminus – proof that even 20p per mile does not deter tourists.

After lunch I tried my hand at hitch-hiking, and was given a lift in a van full of boy-scouts driven by two girls at breakneck speed, to the village of Beddgelert, 13 miles away.



Beddgelert is an extremely pretty little village, grouped around the Afon Glaslyn. It has connections with Prince Llewelyn, the last Prince of Wales, who was reputed to have a hunting lodge there, and whose dog was supposed to have been buried there.

Llewelyn's dog is buried in a lovely spot on the banks of the Afon Glaslyn. A slate gravestone, engraved with the following inscription, was erected there in the 1890s and is still there today:-

*"GELERT'S GRAVE. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Llewelyn, Prince of North Wales, had a palace at Beddlegert. One day he went hunting without Gelert, "The Faithful Hound", who was unaccountably absent. On Llewelyn's return, the truant stained and smeared with blood, joyfully sprang to meet his master. The prince, alarmed, hastened to find his son and saw the infant's cot empty, the bedclothes and floor covered with blood. The frantic father plunged his sword into the hound's side, thinking it had killed his heir. The dog's dying yell was answered by a child's cry. Llewelyn searched*

*and discovered his boy unharmed. But nearby lay the body of a mighty wolf which Gelert had slain. The prince, filled with remorse, is said to have never smiled again. He buried Gelert here. The spot is called "Beddgelert".*

Unfortunately, though the tale sounds most romantic, it is not very original, as identical tales are found in other countries. The only true part of the tale is that Beddgelert really means in Welsh "Grave of Gelert", but before an enterprising manger came to the Royal Goat Hotel in Beddgelert in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, no-one had known that Gelert was either a dog, or an associate of Llewellyn. Nevertheless thousands of tourists visit the village for the purpose of seeing Gelert the dog's grave!

After visiting the grave I spent a few minutes sitting by the river, before I decided to walk down the valley to the famous beauty spot of Aberglaslyn Bridge. The path is the trackbed of the old Welsh Highland Railway – a narrow-gauge line that ran from Caernarvon to Porthmadog, which was open for a brief period

between the two wars, finally closing in 1939. Between Beddgelert and the bridge was one old girder bridge and three tunnels – the last of which was 1/3 mile in length.

I emerged into the daylight at Aberglaslyn Bridge – the view from here up the Glaslyn Valley, was incredibly beautiful – a deep, wooded river valley, with a series of boulders and rapids in the fast-flowing river. This part of the river is a favourite spot for anglers.

I walked back to Beddgelert by a track which followed the river on a narrow and precarious ledge, which despite the “PUBLIC FOOTPATH” sign, was non-existent in places.

At Beddgelert I managed to hitch a lift back to Llanberis in one go, from a man and his two sons, who were climbing in the area. The scenery on the route was spectacular in places – for the first couple of miles the road runs along the Nantgwynant Valley, passed the lake of Llyn Dinas. The road then begins to climb above the valley, and incredible views of Llyn Gwynant and Snowdon, unfold. It is not hard to see here why the Welsh name for Snowdonia is

“Yr Eyri” - the Eyrie. The clouds that day were fairly low, and the fact that many summits were lost in the clouds, contributed to the beauty of the scene.

At Pen-y-Gwyrdd, nearly 1000 feet up, the Llanberis to Betwys-y-Coed road joins the road from Beddgelert. After turning sharp-left, and climbing a hill, we passed the fine and impressive modern Youth Hostel at Pen-y-Pass (This hostel, a “special” grade hostel at 65p per night, is unpopular with many YHA members, who feel that a youth hostel should be as cheap and simple as possible).

We then travelled through the rocky Pass of Llanberis, and then passed through the little village of Nant Peris, before reaching Llanberis.

I made my way back to the hostel, and then spent my last night here.

THURSDAY 20TH JULY  
LLANBERIS – SNOWDON RANGER

After spending three hours at Llanberis, I prepared to move on, and set out after breakfast to walk four miles over the mountains to the Snowdon Ranger Youth Hostel.

I walked up a lane behind the hostel, which led onto the hillside, to a farmstead called Ceunant Bach. Here I turned South-East along a track, to a house named Tyn-yr-Aelgerth.

I watched two SWR trains crossing at Hebron Station, on the other side of the Afon Arddu. To the East the peak of Snowdon was obscured in a curious rolling mist, which seemed to have sprung up within a surprisingly short time. When I looked back I saw that Llanberis village had disappeared in the mist.

The path swung Southwards, and followed a tributary of the Arddu up a narrow valley hemmed in on one side by the rock-mass called Foel Goch, and on the other by Moel Cynghorion.

At the Llanberis parish boundary the path reached a summit of 1850 feet. It was extremely quiet up there – the mist blotted out all signs of human habitation save one – a line of electricity poles which crossed over the mountains parallel with this track. Occasionally I would pass an odd sheep or two, but no other living creatures.

The path then began to fall towards the Gwyr-fai Valley, and soon joined up with the famous Snowdon Ranger Track. This track was used by, and named after, one of the most famous of all Welsh mountain guides, the famous Snowdon Ranger, who lived two centuries ago, and who is mentioned in George Borrow's book "Wild Wales".

I reached the Beddgelert – Carnarvon main road at about 1.30, only a few hundred yards from the Youth Hostel. As it was still very early, and a warm and pleasant day, I decided to sit by the banks of Llyn Cwellyn (Quellyn Lake) for a few hours until the hostel opened.

Llyn Cwellyn is very beautifully situated – a deep and unpolluted lake which supplies Caernarvon with drinking water. It is

surrounded by mountains, including Myndd Mawr at 2290 feet. I sat beside the lake for most of the afternoon, and except for an RAF jet on training flights which screamed down low over the lake every hour, enjoyed the cool and quiet spot.

At 5pm I went and booked in at the hostel. Snowdon Ranger was originally a hotel. At the front of it was a long, low glass-and-iron verandah and in the evenings hostellers would sit on it watching the traffic (or lack of it) going by – rather like something from “Gone With The Wind”. Across the road was the remains of a landscaped garden, but there were few ex-hotel refinements actually in the hostel itself!

FRIDAY 21ST JULY  
SNOWDON RANGER – ANGLESEY –  
SNOWDON RANGER

I had intended to climb Snowdon by the Ranger Track, and return via the famous "Pyg Track", but one look at the mist which still enveloped much of "Yr Wyddfa" made me hastily change my plans.

I decided to explore the island of Anglesey. I had only once been to Anglesey before, when I had gone on a day-trip by train to Holyhead, a couple of years ago.

I started hitch-hiking outside the hotel, but I had to wait nearly 45 minutes for a lift, owing to the sparsity of traffic passing along the road. On the way towards Caernarvon we were stopped briefly at an official traffic census point.

I was dropped at the end of one of the approach roads leading to the Menai Bridge. The second lift, from a family on holiday, took me to Holyhead, over Telford's famous suspension bridge, through the renowned



village of Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch, past a series of windmills near to Gaerwen and across the flat and rather featureless centre of the island, through the village of Gwalchmai and on to Valley and Holy Island.

Anglesey is a large island, 30 miles by 20, and is a county in itself (the Welsh name for which is Môn), but the county town, Holyhead, is situated on another island, Holy Island, 8 miles by 2 in size and lying offshore from the North-West of Anglesey. We didn't stop at Holyhead, however, but went on to the South Stack Lighthouse, 3½ miles from the town, passing Holyhead Mountain (720 feet), with its famous ancient hut-circles, en-route.

After looking at the lighthouse, and the rocky coast around it, we returned to Holyhead, where I took my leave of the family. Holyhead is an important port – the point where the busiest Irish ferry service, the Sealink route to Dun Laoghaire, near Dublin, is based. The effect of the present Irish troubles on the Eire tourist trade could be seen clearly here – both the regular mail-boats, the M.V. Hibernia and

M.V. Cambria were in dock – an almost unheard of thing at the height of the tourist season, and when, later on in the day, I saw a boat-train passing, there were very few people on it.

Holyhead itself is an uninteresting town - more English than Welsh in appearance, with narrow streets and many shops. One of the more interesting features about the shops is the fact that they accept Irish money in payment for goods – one of the few places in Britain.

Before leaving the town I visited a rummage sale and bought a couple of books. I also visited the modern public library, and saw an exhibition of modern technology, and also a children's art exhibition on the theme of Tutankhamun.

I decided to walk back to Anglesey, and on the way passed the new Holyhead Aluminium Works. I then crossed from Holy Island to Anglesey by the mile-long Stanley Embankment, which carries the road and railway linking the two islands.

Back in Anglesey I walked through the village of Valley, next to which is a large RAF station – visible evidence of this was provided

by two RAF jets screaming overhead. After Valley I left the A5 London – Holyhead main-road and turned off onto the A5025 road, which runs round the North part of Anglesey, before re-joining the A5 near Menai Bridge.

I got my first lift of the afternoon from a sales rep. who took me to Llanfaethlu, 10 miles from Valley. Then I got another lift from a retired Mancunian to Cemaes Bay, a resort on the North Coast. On the way, he pointed out to me the new nuclear power station at Wylfa – one of the largest in Europe, but well-designed so as not to intrude on the neighbouring coastline too much.

From Cemaes Bay I got another lift to Amlwch – the biggest town on the North coast, passing on the way Bull Bay – site of an existing chemical works and a planned oil terminal.

Amlwch (pronounced “Am-luck”) is a pleasant little town with a harbour, and little else. Like nearly all of the little towns on Anglesey's North Coast it is surrounded by a rocky and beautiful coastline. Amlwch has a most interesting new Roman Catholic church of

unusual architecture – the locals have nicknamed it “The Star of the Sea” - an allusion to the fact that it resembles an upturned fishing boat! Almwch is also the terminus of a goods railway from Gaerwen, serving the Bull Bay Chemical Works – on certain days an acrid smoke sometimes blows over the town from the chemical works, depending on the direction of the wind.

From Almwch I travelled back to the South side of the Menai Bridge on a lorry that had been taking steel tubing from West Bromwich to Anglesey. We passed through the villages of Benllech and Pentraeth en-route, and the sea was visible from the road for nearly the entire journey.

From the Menai Bridge I travelled back to Caernarvon in two lifts, one from a local farmer to Port Dinorwic (where the Llanberis slate had been exported from) and the second from a typewriter salesman into Caernarvon, which I reached at 6.30pm. After making a phone-call home, I obtained my last lift of the day, as far as Waenfawr (“wine-var” in English). This village is not noted for much, except for

some defunct slate mines and a telephone exchange.

From Waenfawr it was a four-mile walk back to the Snowdon Ranger Youth Hostel, and on the way I was passed by the local bus – a well-known joke in the area, owing to the ancient origins of the vehicle in question! I walked along the valley of the Gwyrfai the entire way, roughly parallel to the old Welsh Highland Railway. En-route I passed Betws Garmon – two villages rolled into one it seems, for after passing the Betws Garmon on the map you arrive at a sign welcoming you to the village, which consists of little more than a Post Office , chapel and pub.

Near Plas-y-Nant I passed a sign which read, "TO THE WATERFALL. This land is private, but members of the public are cordially invited to come in and view the waterfall". The last part of the route lay along the shores of Llyn Cwellyn, and I reached the hostel at 8.30pm, almost 11 hours after leaving it that morning.

SATURDAY 22ND JULY  
SNOWDON RANGER – LLEYN PENINSULA –  
SNOWDON RANGER

Today marked the beginning of the fourth week of my tour, and I decided that as the weather showed little signs of improving, I would hitch-hike to another part of North Wales I had never been in before – the Llyn Peninsula – a piece of Carnarvonshire which juts out nearly 20 miles into the Irish Sea, separating Caernarvon Bay from Cardigan Bay.

I travelled first to the town of Porthmadog (formerly called Portmadog) via Beddgelert and Tremadog. The latter was a quaint little town, well-planned out, built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by a Mr. Madock, who was also responsible for Porthmadog.

Porthmadog was formerly one of the most important slate-exporting ports in the world, with quays and harbour facilities. Nowadays it is a tourist centre, with shops, restaurants etc, and a fine beach at Craig Ddu, or Black Rock, three miles away. It is also the

terminus of the narrow-gauge Porthmadog – Ddualt “Ffestinog Railway” - one of the “Great Little Trains of Wales”.

After doing some shopping, and having a look at the F.R. terminus, I decided to move on, and was lucky enough to obtain a lift almost immediately from a woman and her daughter, a geology graduate of Cardiff University.

En-route to Abersoch, where I was going, we passed Criccieth, a small seaside resort with a ruined castle, and Pwhelli, a larger resort a few miles away. We stopped near Abersoch for a drink, before I left them in the village itself.

Abersoch is reminiscent of a Cornish fishing village – narrow streets winding down to a little harbour. It is a famous centre for boating and sailing, and is full of tourists all summer – even though much of the harbour is dry at low tide.

I found Abersoch disappointing in a way, as unlike nearly all the other towns I had visited in the last few days, Abersoch was full of English people, and it was as easy to hear

Welsh spoken here as it was in London! The Welsh language being spoken gives towns in the province added atmosphere!

I returned to Pwhelli, where I had a good look round the town – viewed the shops, took a walk along the seafront and explored the railway station – terminus of the BR Cambrian Coast line from Dovey Junction via Barmouth.

I then got a lift from Pwhelli on the Caernarvon road from an enthusiastic member of the Welsh Language Society. He explained to me that Welsh was very much more alive than many English people supposed – he used it exclusively when talking to his family and friends, and only spoke English when absolutely necessary. When asked the purpose of breaking up road signs in English he said that his had been done as a last resort – he admitted taking part in this activity and said that for 20 years the WLS has been trying to get bi-lingual signs with little success.

I was dropped off back at Waenfawr Village, and walked the 4 miles back to the hostel, via Betws Garnon once again.



SUNDAY 23RD JULY  
SNOWDON RANGER – FFESTINIOG

After staying three days at Snowdon Ranger it was time to move on again, so I set off on foot at about 10am, to walk the 15-odd miles to Ffestiniog Youth Hostel, where I was spending Sunday night.

The first village I passed through was Rhyd Ddu, 1¼ miles from the hostel, before continuing along the road to Beddgelert. On the way I passed Beddgelert Forest, and two curious rock features known as Pitt's Head and Lion Rock.

I spent a few minutes in Beddgelert, before taking the riverside path once again, and then the WHR path to Aberglaslyn Bridge, via Gelert's grave – the same route that I had taken the Wednesday before.

From Aberglaslyn I took a by-road through the hamlet of Nantmor to a farm named Bwlchgwernog. Here I took a hillside track which, after winding over a mountain moor in the pouring rain, eventually led to the

tiny village of Croesor, about ten houses, a Post Office, and a chapel. There was still some evidence left of the old Croesor Tramway, long since closed, which once passed through the village. I plodded on through the rain, and continued on an undulating hill-road, until I reached Creuau Farm, about two miles from Croesor.

I now took a footpath and soon found myself at Tan-y-Bwlch station, one of the principal stations on the Ffestiniog Railway. After watching the 4.15 to Ddualt steam out full of holidaymakers, I had some refreshments in the station café, and then set out on the next lap of my journey.

The road ran down a beautifully wooded hillside, past a pretty little lake at Llyn Mair, and on until it joined the A496 Barmouth – Llandudno road, close to a hotel named “The Oakley Arms”. At first I wondered where I had seen the hotel before, and then I remembered that it was here that I had changed buses when travelling from Porthmadog to Blaenau-Ffestiniog two years before.

I was now in the beautiful vale of

Ffestiniog, and I took a minor road that ran on the other side of the valley from the main road. At an impressive slate bridge called Pont Tal-y-Bont I crossed the main road, and took a footpath leading through a wood, which after passing two farms, eventually came out in Ffestiniog village.

Ffestiniog is a typical Welsh village with grey slate houses, a few shops and a chapel. It is much quieter than its more famous slate-mining neighbour, Blaenau-Ffestiniog, three miles up the valley.

I took the Blaenau road for half a mile, until I reached the Youth Hostel – a converted Victorian country-house tucked away off a minor road. The thing I most remember Ffestiniog Hostel for was the size of the meals served there – not only well cooked, but unlike all the other hostels I had stayed at, very imaginatively planned. I regretted that I was only spending one night here!

MONDAY 24TH JULY  
FFESTINIOG – LLANBEDR

I left Ffestiniog Hostel at 9.30 and made my way back through Ffestiniog village to Pont Tal-y-Bont. On the way I noticed the impressive dam-wall of Lake Stilwen, which I had seen floodlit from my bedroom window the night before.

I walked along the main road for a couple of miles before turning off into the pretty little village of Maentwrog. Here I watched a Ffestiniog train puffing along on a hillside ledge far above the village. I then hitched a lift for the 5-mile journey to Harlech on the coast.

Harlech is a small town, justly famous for its castle, impressively situated on a hill dominating the town. The town was made famous by the traditional Welsh song "Men of Harlech", but in a way, rather like Caernarvon, proves to be a little disappointing when you visit it. The main road twists and turns along a hillside and contains a good variety of shops.

After buying something to eat, I walked to the beach (which was a good half-mile from the town) and sat in the hot sand-dunes for a couple of hours.

At 4.30 I set off to walk to Llanbedr, where I was to spend the night. After climbing a flight of concrete steps up the cliff, I reached the village of Llanfair, where I stopped to buy eggs at the Post Office. The postmaster, seeing the green YHA triangle on my rucksack, offered me a lift to Llanbedr village, where he was going to deliver some goods.

I arrived back at the hostel at 6.30, and after an early supper, decided to go for an evening walk. I took a minor road, signposted "TO SHELL ISLAND, 2 MILES" and after passing a row of cottages found myself in open country. Half a mile from the village of Llanbedr was the small railway half of Talwrn Bach, on the Cambrian Coast Line. While waiting for the evening local train from Pwhelli to cross the level crossing over the road, I had a chat to the gatekeeper about the road to Shell Island – he said that it was an interesting walk, and I soon found that he was right.

I passed Llanbedr RAF station, formerly used by bomber aircraft, as an old French Air Force plane preserved on the runway testifies. Nowadays however, the airfield serves a rather different role – warning signs reading:-

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
Photography prohibited under  
the Official Secrets Act.  
KEEP OUT!

have been erected (and also similar signs in Welsh!). The airfield is now a launching base for small pilotless aircraft which are shot down by guided missiles at a firing range further down the coast.

Further along the road I came to Shell Island itself. Mochras (to give it its Welsh name) is not really an island at all, but a sandy peninsula a couple of miles long, joined by a causeway to a point near the RAF station. It is now a holiday centre – a caravan and tent site with various facilities. Evidentially over 200 varieties of shells can be found there (hence its English name), as well as 170 varieties of wild

flowers and numerous birds. Much of the island is kept as a nature reserve, for the benefit of those staying on the island.

I returned to the hostel from this unusual private island by the same road, reaching it just after 10pm.

TUESDAY 25TH JULY  
LLANBEDR – CADAIR IDRIS – KINGS

This turned out to be one of the longest but most interesting days on the trip. I set off from Llanbedr at half-past eight in a minibus owned by a London school, and was dropped off in Barmouth at 9.

Barmouth (Abermaw in Welsh – a corruption of Abermawddach – mouth of the Mawddach) is an interesting little town at the mouth of the Mawddach estuary. The houses in the town are built on many different levels, rising up from the quaint little hgarbour.

I made my way to the end of the famous Barmouth Bridge, which carries the railway and a footpath on a wooden structure (except for two opening metal spans) across the Mawddach estuary.

I then paid the 2½p toll to cross the footbridge. From the deck of the bridge I obtained magnificent views of the Mawddach estuary, and of Cadair Idris – the mountain I was to climb later that same day. On the



seaward side was Penrhyn Point – connected to Barmouth by a ferry, and to the village of Fairbourne by a 15" gauge miniature railway built by Mr Bassett-Lowke, the toy train manufacturer, in the first war. Out of view was Penmaenpool Toll Bridge, the next bridge over the Mawddach, about 4 miles away, carrying a road over the river.

At the South end of the bridge was Morfa Mawddach station – formerly Barmouth Junction, where the now closed line to Ruabon via Bala and Llangollen began. From Morfa Mawddach I took a footpath to Arthog, a village spread out along the Tywyn – Dolgellau road.

Two miles from Arthog, at Cae'n-y-Coed farm, I entered a lane which ran through a wooded valley called Abergwynant, until I reached King's Youth Hostel, where I was spending the night. It was now noon, so I had a quick lunch before setting off again, sans rucksack, to climb Cadair Idris.

I continued up Abergwynant Valley for another mile, before joining the "Pony Track" to Cadair Idris.

Cadair Idris is, after Snowdon, the

most-climbed mountain in Wales. Although only 2927 feet high, it is far more impressive looking than Snowdon, for the twin peaks of Pen-y-Gader and Mynydd Moel (2804 feet) rise almost sheer out of the surrounding foothills. The mountain plays an important part in Welsh mythology – Cadair Idris meant the “chair of Idris” - a legendary giant who wrote poetry. There is a belief held locally that whoever spends a night in the chair will be, by morning, either a poet, or will have been turned mad.

The “Pony Track” is about 3 miles in length, and is a long trudge, as it rises fairly steeply for nearly its entire length. At the saddle (1842 feet) it alters its course from SW to due East, and runs along the ridge of Cadair Idris, before climbing to the summit of Pen-y-Gader.

The view from the summit is panoramic – to the North the mountains of Snowdonia can be seen, to the East the hills of Shropshire, and to the South Tal-y-Llyn, Dinas Mawddwy and Plynlimon Fawr. Nearer at hand the Barmouth Bridge and Mawddwy Estuary could be seen clearly.

I descended by the infamous "Fox's Path" - the first part of this path was quite dangerous, as it ran down a loose scree slope! At the bottom of the slope was a corrie lake - Llyn-y-Gader, and from here the path became much easier. When I reached the Abergwynant Valley I looked back, and saw Pen-y-Gader lost in mist, giving it an even more dramatic appearance.

Kings YH was a series of old buildings set in a beautiful garden adjacent to the Afon Gwynant, and hemmed in by woods on all sides. Of all the hostels I had visited it was perhaps the prettiest, but at the same time was rather sad for me as it was the last Youth Hostel I would be staying in on the present journey.

WEDNESDAY 26TH JULY  
KING'S – SHREWSBURY

I set off from King's after breakfast to walk the four miles into Dolgellau. I retraced my steps up the valley to the start of the Cadair Idris tracks, but then turned North-Eastwards along a public road, which after many ups and downs, led me to Dollgellau.

I had a good look round this pretty little town, which in some ways rather resembled Llangolen, although of course the latter town was rather nicer. Dollgellau's main claim to fame, apart from it being the county town of Merionethshire, is its 300-year old bridge over the Afon Wnion.

I then tried hitch-hiking for an hour on the road out of the town, but met with little success. I then tried a well-known method. On a piece of card I wrote "SHREWSBURY, Please" and waited until I saw vehicles with the -AW Shropshire registration going by, before holding up my sign.

Sure enough my luck changed and I

was picked up by a woman driving a van all the way to Shrewsbury. I knew then that I could be back at Astley Lodge by teatime.

I drive back was most interesting – we took the A458 road all the way. The first part of the journey was scenically spectacular, through the Bwlch Oerddrws pass, very reminiscent of the nearby Bwlch-y-Groes pass I had travelled through a fortnight earlier. We passed through Dinas Mawwdwy once again, and I saw the hostel I had stayed in when travelling through the town before.

We then followed the Doverly Valley as far as Mallwyd, and then took another mountain road through the pass of Bwlch-y-Fedwen and, crossing into Montgomeryshire, entered the Banwy valley.

Soon we were passing through the small market town of Llanfair Caereinion, and passed the station of the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway – the only one of the “Great Little Trains of Wales” that I had not seen already on my travels in Wales. One of the very continental-looking little steam engines that they had acquired from the Zillertalbahn

Railway of Austria could be seen shunting stock next to the main road. We followed the W&LLR, and the Valley of the Banwy, through Castle Caereinion and Sylfaen, into Welshpool.

Welshpool (Y Trallwng in Welsh) was originally called "Pool" but renamed "Welshpool" so as to avoid confusion with the more famous Poole in Dorset. The town is very English in appearance – it is often said that Welshpool is an English town in Wales, and Oswestry, Shropshire, is a Welsh town in England! The main roads in the town are lined with black-and-white Shropshire-style houses, and is very like many of the towns I had passed through at the beginning of my trip. Close to Welshpool is the famous and well-preserved castle of the Earls of Powys.

Near Welshpool I crossed the railway – the same line that had taken me into Wales 18 days before. After Buttington Level Crossing we reached the village of Middleton, and passed a sign announcing "SHROPSHIRE" and at 3.22pm I passed out of Cambria, back into England.



**PART FIVE:  
THE FINAL WEEK**





WEDNESDAY 26TH JULY (Continued)  
SHREWSBURY

We reached Shrewsbury just before 4 o'clock, and I was dropped off close to the new Riverside shopping centre. From here I walked towards the castle, until I reached the A49 main road opposite the station. I then walked under the bridge and out towards Hadnall.

The Northern suburbs of Shrewsbury stretch out for nearly three miles – first I passed through St. Michaels, an old suburb of the town, made up of typical Midlands red-brick houses in neat terraces. After St Michael;s comes the curiously named, but equally depressing, suburb of Ditherington, about two miles from the city centre.

I then passed through Harelscott – rows of council houses ending in the large County Cattle Market buildings. Now I was walking through open countryside, and I soon passed a large notice-board informing me that Battlefield Church, built on the exact spot

where the Battle of Shrewsbury had been fought over 500 years ago, was away to the left, under a railway bridge. I then passed a small group of houses called Braidway, then Astley Grange, before I finally reached Astley Lodge, the end of my long trek through Wales and the Marches.

FRIDAY 28TH JULY  
SHREWSBURY - BORTH

After a day "at home" in Astley Lodge, we were all setting off once again for Wales – this time to spend the weekend in the Johnston's new caravan at Borth, near Aberystwyth.

In the afternoon we made a trip to make some arrangements about the new car that my uncle Balfour was taking delivery of on the next Tuesday. The garage was at Langton, near Stoke-on-Trent – one of the "Five Towns" in the pottery-making conurbation. We travelled there on minor roads until reaching the A53, and then through the Shropshire town of Market Drayton, before entering Staffordshire.

After crossing the M6 motorway we arrived in the "Black Country", and black it really was! Although there were no smoke and fumes there now – old buildings like churches were coated in a thick layer of black soot, which if nothing else, certainly gave an added atmosphere to the place!

We all left Astley Lodge after supper, and drove into Shrewsbury. From here, however, we avoided the main road to Aberystwyth via Welshpool and took a minor road via Westbury and Montgomery, to Newtown where we joined the main road. From here we passed through a succession of little villages – Caersws, Pontdolgoch, Carno, Talerddig, Commins Coch and Cammaes Road, before reaching Machynlleth, where I saw the 7.30 bus to Aberfenelli leaving – the same bus I had caught when I went to Corris! I now caught sight of the River Dovey again, near Glandyfi, and I soon arrived in Borth.

Strangely enough, although I had been in Borth many times before, I could not remember what the main street looked like – mainly because I had only passed through it by train en-route for Aberystwyth. I was generally surprised by Borth – it was far better than I had imagined it.

We stopped at Alwn Dwen – “The Harrod's of Borth”, before going on to the caravan site where their caravan was parked. Their caravan, called a Belmont “St Tropez”

luxury villa, was 34 feet long fitted out with a shower, two bedrooms, kitchenette etc.

That night we dined regally on steak, before setting out for Ynas-Las, a beach near Borth. This beach is opposite Aberdovey (famous for its bells), across the Dovey – although the distance across the water is only 200 yards at low tide, and looks an easy swim, it is in fact very dangerous for swimmers, and people have drowned attempting to cross the Dovey.

Aberdovey looked very nice in the dusk, with all the lights of the little town twinkling, and the lights of a train going towards Machynlleth. We made our way back to the gas-lit world of the caravan.

MONDAY 31ST JULY  
BORTH – SHREWSBURY

The weekend at Borth had now ended, and we were travelling back to Shrewsbury, early on Monday morning. The villages and towns that we had passed through on our way to Borth were by now deserted and quiet and the only people we passed were milkmen and postmen.

I passed out of Wales for the last time, near Montgomery, and before breakfast we had reached Shrewsbury.

EPILOGUE:  
WEDNESDAY 2ND AUGUST

Almost exactly a month after I had travelled from London to Shrewsbury, I was making the journey back to London. This time, however, I was not travelling by train, but going back down the M1 motorway with my Uncle Balfour and Cousin Graeme, in their brand-new "L" registered Lancia Fulvia.

We set off from Hadnall quite early, and avoided Shrewsbury by taking several back and minor roads. We then joined up with the A5 relief road – a parallel series of country lanes intended to duplicate the A5 in peak traffic periods. We joined the A5 near Oakengates, and after passing through industrial Shropshire, entered Staffordshire and joined the motorway near Cannock (the M6).

We passed through "Spaghetti Junction" - the vast new complex road-junction of the M6, A38 and "Aston Expressway" – the vital, but hideous "Midlands Motorway Link" which had only been opened for a few months.



The M1, first of the British motorways, was in bad repair – potholes were being filled in we continually passed roadworks.

At the Newport Pagnell service area we had lunch, before setting out on the last stretch of the journey to London, still on the M1.

Graeme and I were dropped in Portman Square, and from here we caught a bus to Charing Cross, and the train home. I arrived back in Beckenham at 4pm, and it was here that my journey in Wales and the Marches had finally ended, 32½ days after it had begun.

**MILEAGES COVERED  
DURING THE PERIOD  
1ST JULY – 2ND AUGUST 1972**

## WEEK 1

	On Foot	By Car	By Train	By Bus	Total
Jul 1 <sup>st</sup>	002	005	160	-	167
Jul 2 <sup>nd</sup>	005	022	-	-	027
Jul 3 <sup>rd</sup>	016	003	-	-	019
Jul 4 <sup>th</sup>	006	009	-	008	023
Jul 5 <sup>th</sup>	016	002	-	-	018
Jul 6 <sup>th</sup>	015	002	-	-	017
Jul 7 <sup>th</sup>	016	-	-	-	016
=====					
Totals	076	043	160	008	287

## WEEK 2

Jul 8 <sup>th</sup>	008	004	110	007	129
Jul 9 <sup>th</sup>	012	-	-	-	012
Jul 10 <sup>th</sup>	019	-	-	-	019
Jul 11 <sup>th</sup>	007	-	-	005	012
Jul 12 <sup>th</sup>	013	-	-	-	013
Jul 13 <sup>th</sup>	014	001	-	-	015
Jul 14 <sup>th</sup>	007	-	-	-	007
=====					
Totals	080	005	110	012	207

## WEEK 3

	On Foot	By Car	By Train	By Bus	Total
Jul 15 <sup>th</sup>	007	-	010	-	017
Jul 16 <sup>th</sup>	005	-	-	-	005
Jul 17 <sup>th</sup>	001	082	-	003	086
Jul 18 <sup>th</sup>	012	011	-	-	023
Jul 19 <sup>th</sup>	005	027	-	-	032
Jul 20 <sup>th</sup>	004	-	-	-	004
Jul 21 <sup>st</sup>	006	073	-	-	079
=====					
Totals	040	193	010	003	246

## WEEK 4

Jul 22 <sup>nd</sup>	006	060	-	-	066
Jul 23 <sup>rd</sup>	015	-	-	-	015
Jul 24 <sup>th</sup>	012	005	-	-	017
Jul 25 <sup>th</sup>	015	007	-	-	022
Jul 26 <sup>th</sup>	009	055	-	-	064
Jul 27 <sup>th</sup>	-	-	-	-	000
Jul 28 <sup>th</sup>	002	147	-	-	149
=====					
Totals	059	274	-	-	333

## WEEK 5

	On Foot	By Car	By Train	By Bus	Total
Jul 29 <sup>th</sup>	002	-	-	-	002
Jul 30 <sup>th</sup>	002	-	-	-	002
Jul 31 <sup>st</sup>	-	079	-	-	079
Aug 1 <sup>st</sup>	-	-	-	-	000
Aug 2 <sup>nd</sup>	001	160	008	002	171
=====					
Totals	005	239	008	002	254

## GRAND TOTALS

On Foot	By Car	By Train	By Bus
260	754	288	025

**Total Miles 1,327**

## **YOUTH HOSTELS STAYED AT:**

BALA, Merioneth, Jul 10/11  
BRIDGES, Rattlinghope, Salop, Jul 2  
CHESTER, Cheshire, Jul 15/16  
CLUN, Salop, Jul 3  
CORRIS, Merioneth, Jul 8  
CYNWYD, Merioneth, Jul 12  
DINAS MAWDDWY, Merioneth, Jul 9  
FFESTINOG, Gwynedd, Jul 23  
KING'S, Merioneth, Jul 25  
LLANBEDR, Merioneth, Jul 24  
LLANBERIS, Caerns, Jul 17/18/19  
LUDLOW, Salop, Jul 4  
SNOWDON RANGER, Caerns, Jul 20/21/22  
WHEATHILL, Salop, Jul 5  
WILDERHOPE MANOR, Salop, Jul 6/7