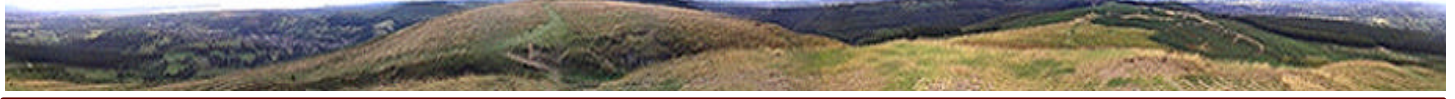


Newport Outdoor Group (YHA)



Editors

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Web Site

<http://walk.to/nogs>

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*Get
The
Outdoor
Habit!*

NEW YEAR AT LANDS END

by Jackie Roberts

The drive down on Tuesday 29th December to the village of St Just was very cold. Most of us arrived during daylight hours and were able to see the imposing layout of the hostel building in all its glory.

The first day was dry and sunny and we walked north along the coastline enjoying a coffee break at Cape Cornwall monument, then further on to the village of Botallack, just south of Pendeen. We enjoyed our lunch with our backs sheltered against a sunny bank and the sea – it was bitter! A swift half in a couple of local hostelrys helped us to complete our days walking.

That evening we enjoyed a celebratory meal for Jane's 50th birthday, expertly prepared by Sheila and Pam. Many thanks to them for coming up with the goods at short notice!

Thursday was to be a dull damp day, turning to a drizzly rain. We drove to Lands End and walked under Geoff's guidance to Porthcurno where the Minack Theatre is located. A very beautiful location, it can be better appreciated in warmer months. Fortunately there

was a bus returning shortly after we arrived and a very pleasant hour or so was spent enjoying hot creamy chocolate in the hotel overlooking the Atlantic.

As is by now traditional on New Years Eve, an early ordered Chinese takeaway meal took us through the first part of the evening, and then we had a trek down to one of the four pubs in the village to see in the New Year.

The splendid Cornish tradition of fancy dress prevailed, though not with our group, although Daisy the beagle was splendidly attired with gold ribbon, maybe in anticipation of the attention of her beau to be introduced later in the week.

New Years Day we decided to walk from the hostel at St Just down the coast to Lands End. A glorious day, though the late start for most of us meant walking back inland to avoid any mishaps on the coastal path which would have been very difficult in the failing light. Brian and John, being early risers, completed the return journey early enough.

The Saturday meant returning home which a few of us did, via Kingsteignton, to enjoy a leisurely lunch at a well favoured pub on the estuary of the River Teign.

As I sit writing this back at home, the snowflakes have just started to fall.



Ian Kerr's Great Gentry Houses No.1 Ruperra Castle

Early last year the NOGS enjoyed a 12-mile walk in the Rudry area, amidst glorious weather. There is an enormous amount of local history around here, much of it centered round Ruperra Castle, and as this had been in the local news at the time, I thought I'd say a bit about it.

Ruperra Castle was finished in 1626 by Sir Thomas Morgan, and King Charles I stayed there in 1645 (after the Battle of Naseby). It was rebuilt after fire in 1785, but subsequently burned down again in 1941 when troops were billeted there during the war. Since then the castle has slipped steadily into decay: one of its towers collapsed in the 1980s and another is badly cracked. Much of its land was sold off in a series of estate auctions in the 1950s and '60s, but the setting remains beautiful: serene and unspoiled, surrounded by parkland and with views to the Bristol Channel. The current owner (Ashraf Barakat, a polo-playing property developer) bought the castle in 1998 and has been seeking planning permission for its development ever since. His proposal envisages the conversion of the castle into apartments and – controversially – construction of new houses in the grounds (known as 'enabling development'). It is the profits from these houses that would fund the restoration works to the castle and generate an overall return to the developer. But clearly the repairs to the castle would come at the cost of its unspoiled setting, while the costs of its renovation are huge – likely to be at least £10m. With the viability of a commercial solution becoming ever more marginal, the planning debate drags on and the castle's fabric decays further. In 2007 one commentator wrote, "In Wales, and indeed the whole of Britain, nothing quite rivals the desperate plight of Ruperra Castle". After revised plans were turned down in 2007, the developer lodged an appeal, which was heard at a 4-day public inquiry recently.

RUPERRA PUBLIC ENQUIRY

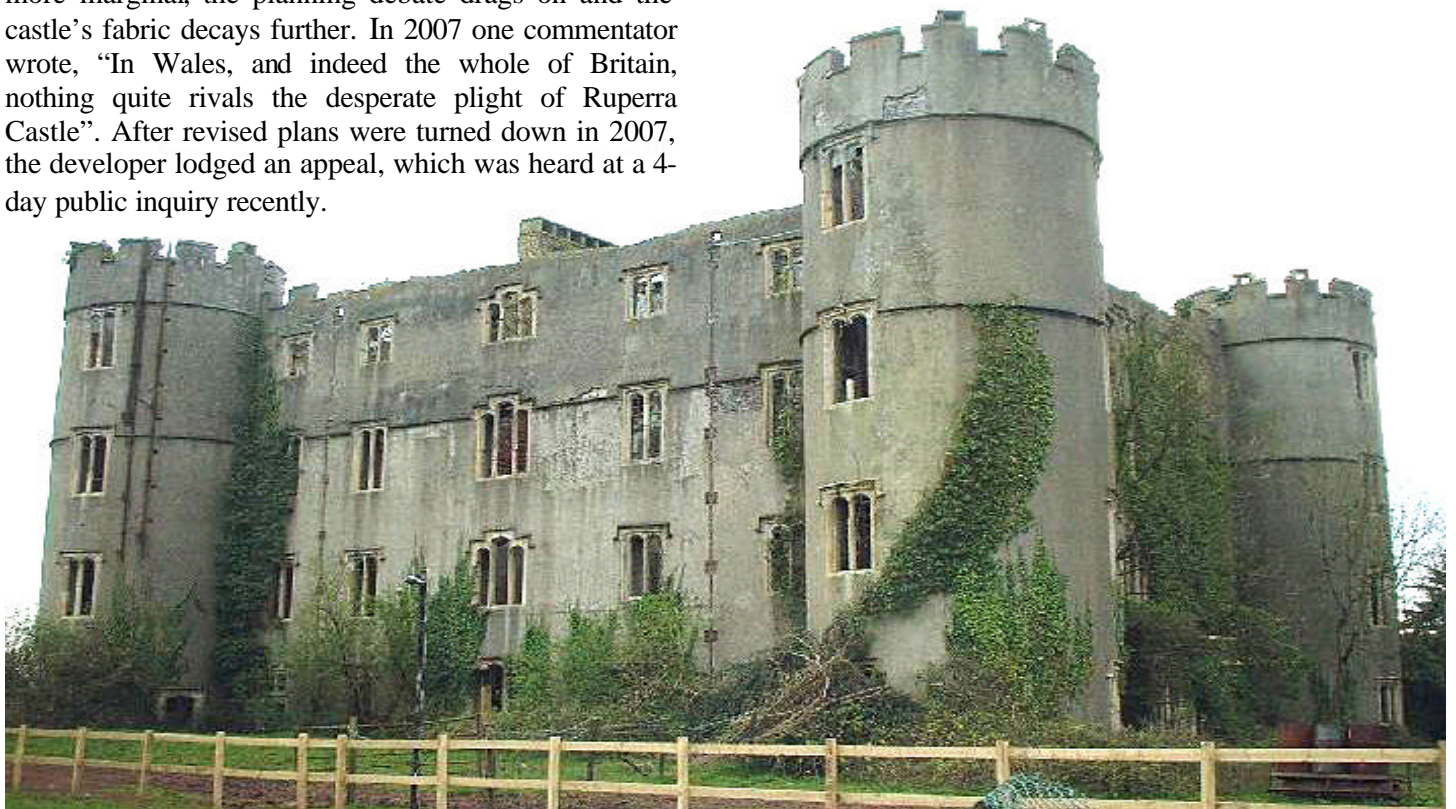
I spent 3 afternoons at the inquiry. Various interest groups were represented, including CADW, Caerphilly Council, the Ancient Monuments Society and Ruperra Castle Preservation Trust. A theme common to most of the expert witnesses who spoke was that the development proposed was not sympathetic enough to its surroundings and that the plans lacked important detail. Another concern was that it would raise insufficient funds, leaving the developer needing to build further houses as the project went on.

All the interest groups recommended the planning inspector dismiss the appeal when he makes his report to the Welsh Assembly. I felt some participants placed far more emphasis on the castle's past than its future. Potential alternative, non-commercial solutions outlined were well-intentioned but render one impossible.

I spoke with Mr Barakat after the inquiry ended. He was extremely disappointed, as he had gone to considerable expense and effort to address issues previously raised by CADW and the local council (including re-housing bats and great crested newts), and believed he had done everything asked.

The inspector should report in June 2009. In the meantime, it looks as though the only thing that may save Ruperra now is a white knight with extremely deep pockets.

Postscript: Following much delay, it was finally announced, in December 2009, that planning permission would be rejected. The inspector stated, "On balance, I consider that the harm to matters of public interest that I have identified would far outweigh the benefits of the proposed development."



This photograph appears courtesy of Laurie Oliver at <http://www.castlewales.com/ruperra.html>

ANGLESEY IN NORTH WALES

February 19th to 21st 2010

by Richard Weeks

This enjoyable trip was attended by Norman, Jackie, Charles, Sheila, Brian, John and Richard.



After the long journey from South Wales to North Wales, all 7 NOGS were in the Anglesey hostel (see photo above) by 7.30 pm. During the evening, five NOGS ventured into the town. We visited 2 pubs and sampled the local beers. In the second pub, on one side of a beer mat was a photograph of 3 Welsh rugby players, one being Jamie Roberts. I kept the beer mat as a souvenir.

Saturday 20th February

Seven intrepid adventurers (SIA) set off for a 12 mile circular walk, via Porth Dafarch beach. The weather was just right and the views spectacular. The tide was coming in and 5 kayaks were in action, braving the elements of the sea. In the distance the outlines of the North Wales mountains, including Snowdon, could be seen.

Following the Anglesey coast path via Ellins Tower and South Sea Stack lighthouse (see photograph on next page), the walk continued. Several NOGS walked 420 steps down to the lighthouse, only to find it was closed! So, back up the steps they went, totalling 840 steps altogether.

After lunch, we ascended to the highest point above sea level at 220 m. This was Mynydd Ywr/Holyhead Mountain. We then continued North to North Stack and then East, returning via Holyhead. Jackie found a coffee shop and we stayed there for at least half an hour. The remaining 2 ½ miles to the hostel were completed in about a further hour.

5 NOGS ate out that evening, at the Paddlers Retreat, 200 yards from the hostel.

Sunday 21st February

Sheila and Charles departed early. Five intrepid adventurers (FIA) attempted an 8 mile circular walk from Llanfaelog via a burial chamber at Barcloediad-Y-Gawres. Then we moved along around Llyn Madog on the outskirts of Rhosneigr. It was interesting to see several windmills, which had their sails removed, and were now being used as living accommodation.

We had lunch at the Nature Reserve, and were joined there by a friendly farmyard cat, who decided to follow us to the local farm. We then returned via the burial chamber north of Bryn Ddu. Along the way we spotted 5 egrets in flight. After returning to the cars, we drove to Llan Beris, having mugs of tea at Pete's Eats.

Norman, Jackie and John departed, making their own way home. Brian and Richard chose a scenic route, via Snowden and Beddgelert. A view of the railway from Blaenau Ffestiniog was seen en route.

The journey later incorporated the valleys of the rivers Severn, Wye and Usk, arriving safely back in Newport at 9.30 pm.

A poem by John Arnold Fenton (1931-2007), written in 1985.

Porthdafarch in Anglesey

**Softly by the swish
Between the earth and the sky
Fulfilling the wish
Of a homestead close by
Where I in this place
Know the warm sense of grace
Its sounds and its air
Speak a mirth so aware
The the earth in its song
Filled my heart for so long
Broad reach of the seas
Soft cloud racing by
Such winds as these
Cause my spirit to fly
To where gulls take wing
With long plaintive cry
To haunt my quiet thought
With life's longing wish**

