

Newport Outdoor Group (YHA)



Editors

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Web Site

<http://walk.to/nogs>

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Get The Outdoor Habit!

LIVING LANDSCAPES: SUN OVER BLAENAVON

by Chris Nevines

With the magnificence of Monmouthshire, the Wye Valley and the Brecon Beacons on our doorstep, it has to be said that Blaenavon does not spring to mind as one of our Renowned Local Beauty Spots. It is a place I would normally pass through rather than visit - on a grey day that windswept and rather desolate landscape at the Heads of the Valleys would not look out of place as a backdrop to the set of BBC Outcasts. But what the Blaenavon landscape lacks in ethereal beauty, it makes up for in its history and heritage, serving as a poignant reminder of the harsh lives of those industrial workers who toiled in the local mines, quarries and ironworks.

On a (surprisingly) sunny day in March, the brooding landscape was softened by sunlight, birdsong and the lively chatter of 7 NOGs and 4 newcomers, plus one very happy NOG Dog, determined to partake fully in the ancient art of pond dipping (doggy style).

We set off fairly promptly from the excellent (but not immediately easy to locate) Heritage Centre, and passed up onto Coity Mountain. Here the scars of industry, interwoven into all the lumps and bumps of the landscape, stand testimony to the "rape of the fair country". Now restored to nature, it is a peaceful, pleasant spot with its picturesque ponds, but there is a sense of something deep within, as when visiting an ancient battlefield or the ruins of Tintern Abbey.

Martyn ("the walking Wiki") explained about the geological significance of the area as we headed towards the baths and buildings of Big Pit, one of the oldest deep mines in the South Wales Coalfield, which now forms part of the National Mining Museum of Wales. We then passed down to Furnace Sidings, part of the original line used to transport coal down to Pontypool and now the Headquarters of the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Company, before stopping to snooze in the sun by the Garn lakes. Mollie had a dip, while Martyn played with a rubber ring and showed off his nautical knots.

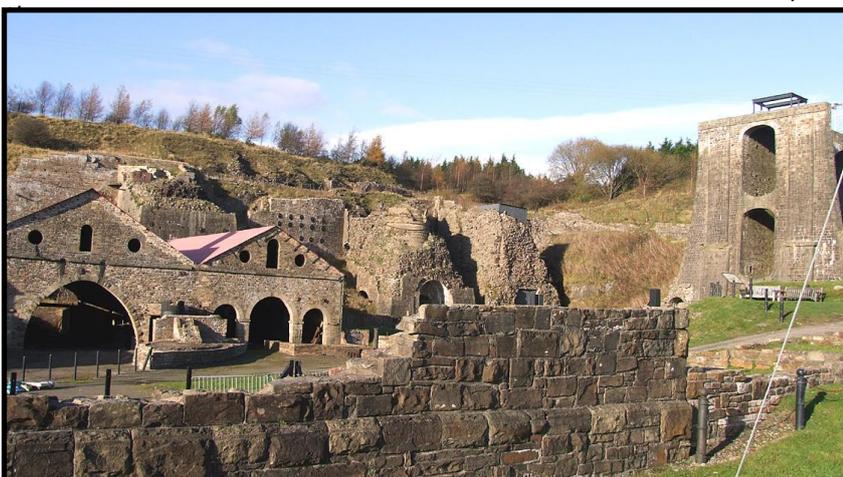


Molly at the Coalhouse

We returned via the site of the ironworks, with its impressive water balance tower (aptly named "the guillotine") and the ruins of the massive furnaces where ore was turned to molten fire, towering ominously over the little whitewashed cottages that featured in The Coalhouse series. It was this part of the walk that fired up my imagination, trying to imagine what it must have been like living and working there.....women and children (as young as 5 – what work could they do in a place like this?) alongside the men who worked the furnaces, blinded by the glare and often maimed or killed by the spitting explosions of molten iron. One can only imagine how it must have looked then – a vast Dantes Inferno setting the mountain alight! – and reflect on the bleak harshness of life for those working there, so

vividly captured in Alexander Cordell's novel.

If you walk around the town, there are a number of interesting listed buildings to see, but (for a Saturday afternoon) I found it strangely silent and empty of traffic or pedestrians - few shops open, no teashops to tempt the tourist, and its tiny terraces wrapped in a sense of abandonment. It would be nice to think that the interest and publicity that was generated from



the BBC Coalhouse programme could bring this street back to life, a sort of St Fagans re-enactment of what it was like living in the industrial valleys that people could visit.

And to stand as a reminder of what the Chartists were fighting for when they demanded rights and a vote for ordinary working people....lest we forget!

Photo (left) of Blaenavon Ironworks courtesy of Martin Bro at www.panoramio.com/photo/2161936

THE CADBURY CUP 2011

by Colin Prosser

This years' Cadbury Cup competition, which is open to all YHA Local Groups, was based around Cholderton Youth Hostel in Wiltshire, which is situated only 3 miles from Stonehenge, and took place on Sunday 25th September.

The NOGs were represented by 2 teams. Dave Fereday and John Smith were NOGs 1, and Kevin Smith & Colin Prosser were NOGs 2. We had an uneventful journey there, and the hostel is nice with a Rare Breeds Farm attached. Very interestingly, Kevin was a hit with the ponies and donkeys with his Polo's. However, the self catering facilities were a little sparse for a 70 bed hostel, which was obviously intending to push hostellers to avail themselves of the catering/bar available. The local hostelryes are pretty expensive for meals and a pint - Kevin was gutted when he finally realised that he'd paid £4 for a pint of cider!

Saturday was spent on a 15 mile recce, which proved quite useful. Dave picked out a possible spot for the first checkpoint, which proved spot on!

There were 7 teams in the competition this year: Bristol (BROGs 1), Bedford (BOGs 1 & 2), Gloucester (GOGs 1 & 2), and of course NOGs 1 & 2. Bristol were supposed to have had 2 teams entering, but Richard's car clutch went and he was recovered on the Sunday, and so they ended up with only 1 team of 3 people.

Our target was to complete 10 checkpoints over a distance of 13.5 miles in 5 hours, with 10 questions to be answered at each checkpoint. There were 10 points for each checkpoint reached within the time limit, with 1 point for each correct answer. The total score for both teams, or, if only 1 team, were then taken.

On the day of the competition, each team was dispatched at 5 minute intervals. NOGs 1 were the first team away, starting at 9am. The BROGs left at 9.15 am, but were overtaken by NOGs 2 who left fourth at 9.20 am, and overtook them before they had even left the hostel car park. They were still folding their map!

As expected, NOGs 1 were the fastest team around the course, but were rubbish at answering the questions at most of the checkpoints (according to the Marshalls), and so finished with half an hour to spare.

FINAL RESULTS

GOGs 1 = 158; 2 = 156.5; Total = 314.5 (1st)
 NOGs 1 = 150.5; 2 = 126; Total = 276.5 (2nd)
 BOGs 1 = 118; 2 = 126; Total = 244 (3rd)
 BROGs 1 = 133; Total = 133 (4th)

The questions were mostly reasonable, but the NOGs were a bit flummoxed naming 10 little islands outlined in the Western Islands/Hebrides archipeligo, and assigning the Latin names to 10 flower pictures! All in all a fun and enjoyable - but tiring - weekend. A big thank you goes to the Worcester & Malvern Outdoor Group for

organising this year's challenge, and also for the excellent catering at the end, with loads of scrumptious home-made cakes. NOGs 1 & 2 thankfully achieved the Committee's wishes to only come 2nd. The GOGs now have the privilege of holding the Cadbury Cup for a year, but having to host, organise and marshall next year's challenge.

