



GET THE OUTDOOR HABIT IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

BRISTOL TRIP – PART 2

By David Djunisijevic

“Explore at Bristol” is one of those wonderful hands-on science places where you can see demonstrated all the principles that move the wheels of the universe. Best of all, there are plenty of wheels for *you* to move, and levers, and buttons. There's water to pump and lights to switch on and off, and treadmills to run on and.....well, the phrase, “kids let loose in a toyshop” comes irresistibly to mind!

But best of all, there's “Astro Canyon”! Imagine a planet. A nice little planet with a gravity so low that you could build huge, slender structures to impossible heights without them collapsing. Now imagine someone decided to build the galaxy's biggest roller-coaster there, and imagine what a great ride that would be! Now stop imagining and experience it on the Astro Canyon simulator. It was the first time I'd been on one of these simulators, and I was not disappointed-Isaac Newton on an acid trip or what!!!!!!

We could have stayed longer but, then again, we couldn't. It was evening now, and NOGs would be arriving at the hostel. We got ourselves back and started making plans for the main event, the Bierkeller! Or at least, most of us were. There was a splinter group (oh, surely not, I hear you say!) comprised of Clive and Jane Sadler who were planning to go to the Bristol Old Vic to see a solo performance of “Under Milk Wood”. The more I thought about it, the more I fancied joining them. I love “Under Milk Wood”, and hadn't seen it performed since my schooldays. Besides, the wine I'd had the previous evening was telling me that another skinfull would perhaps not be the most judicious course of action.

So, I elected to join the culture vultures. We had some time before the performance started, so we had a bite to eat and a drink. Eventually we filed into a surprisingly full auditorium and took our places before a stage with a black background and a chair and nothing else. Then, Guy Masterson walked on and launched straight into one of the most outstanding performances I've ever seen in my life. Word perfect, no fluffs or fumbles, Mr. Masterson sustained a solid hour and a half of pure theatrical magic as he played every character in Dylan Thomas' great work with the passion of a preacher and the precision of a quartz watch. At times he actually seemed to be two characters at one and the same time! His voice covered the whole vocal range from baritone to counter-tenor, his accent was impeccable, and he threw his body round the stage with a vigour that left him sweating. At the end of the performance, I was firmly of the opinion that, whatever they were paying him, it wasn't enough!

Well, we'd had a great evening, but it wasn't over yet, so we stopped off at a pub on the way back.(are certain pubs getting noisier, or are certain NOGs getting older?). Eventually, however, we capitulated to the blandishments of bed, and the promise of a really good kip. The dirty stop-outs who'd spent the night carousing at the house of iniquity came reeling in at gone one o'clock, having enjoyed their night of drunken sin!

Sunday morning *might* have dawned bright and clear, to tell you the truth I can't remember. Our course of action was clear. “Saturday the town, Sunday the Walk”, has been the officially approved format of a NOGs Christmas weekend for as long as I can remember, and I could see no virtue in changing a winning formula. Once again, my little book of walks came to our aid, and a walk in the area of Clifton Gorge was decided upon. The walk started just over the suspension bridge, and took in the Ashton Court Estate and the Gorge. We'd have to drive to the start of the walk, but that would be no problem.

It was, of course. It seemed that Karen was even more unlucky with her parking than Nigel and I had been. Fact was, the local constabulary had taken such offence at her choice of parking place that they'd towed her car off to the pound, and only a hefty payment of over one hundred pounds secured its release!

But eventually we got ourselves sorted out and assembled at one of the car parks in the Ashton Court Estate. The day was cold, but we were hot to trot, so we struck out boldly. Now I'm not quite sure what Ashton Court actually does these days, whether it's still a stately home or it's owned by the local authority or what. I know they hold the balloon fiesta there each year, but apart from that, it's a bit of a blank. What I do know is that it's a fine old house set in acres and acres of rolling parkland with deer enclosures and wide views over Bristol .But, anyway, back to the walk. We struck out boldly, and continued a relentless regime of bold striking for about four miles, during which we passed through a quite remarkable variety of scenery including parkland, woodland, gorse, and even a lake! As lunchtime approached we picked up the pace, hoping to make the pub at Abbott's Leigh. This we did and for a time luxuriated in the glow of its open fire. Then it was back on the trail and the long, steep descent into Clifton Gorge. On the west bank of the Avon lies the Avon walkway, and it was this path we now followed, heading south towards the bridge. The sun was sinking now, and the slanting light caught the white facades of the great balconied houses of Clifton perched on top of



the gorge. For some reason I found myself reminded of pictures I'd seen of Cannes and Niece, though the rapidly decreasing temperature soon brought me back to reality!

And then, the great "defining image" of the weekend, Clifton Suspension Bridge, almost but not *quite* silhouetted against the pale glow of the sinking winter sun, rewarded us. In what seemed like next to no time we were having to crane our necks to see it, and just before the gorge passed beneath the famous span, we turned right up a steep, wooded ravine, the charmingly named Nightingale Valley. It was a surprisingly hard slog up to the top, but the reward was more than commensurate with the effort! No-one actually said "Let's stand on the bridge and look at the view". No-one had to, it would have been unthinkable *not* to! So we stood and looked, talking in ones and twos or just gazing in solitary silence at what has got to be one of my favourite views. To the north, great Clifton Gorge with its uncompromising craggy walls and moody-green woods, cut its way to the sea. To the south, the lights of Bristol wove that spell that only distant city lights can. But there's a time and a place for musings, and there's a time and a place for coffee! This was the time, we agreed, and Clifton would be the place. After all, in a cool, trendy, and terrifyingly affluent place like Clifton Village, there would surely be a coffee-shop open, even on a Sunday evening.

There wasn't, of course. What there was, however, was a curious little pub whose name escapes me. I say curious because it didn't conform to any of the stereotypical "yuppie" images of Clifton pubs I carry in my head. This one was small and intimate, even slightly ramshackle in a rather charming way. Be that as it may, they did coffee, and we drank it gratefully, as much in need of the warmth as the caffeine.

Cups drained, hands warmed, and conversation temporarily exhausted, we climbed into our cars and headed for home. "That was a really crap weekend!" is something I've never heard anyone say. I mean, just about everyone can find something in just about any weekend to suit their taste. That having been said, however, some weekends really do stand out as special, the phrase "something for everyone" having a particular resonance. For me, this was one of them. We'd had an urban walk, a rural walk, a good meal, a bierkeller knees-up, a theatre visit and a science museum.

And yet, so many things *seemed* to go wrong! We left someone behind, we parked in the wrong place, we had a case of food poisoning, and someone had her car towed away! Sometimes you can lose the battles but win the war!

2002 BMR

by Phil Anderson



BMR stands for the Brecon Mountain Rescue Team, volunteers whose search and rescue activities make a major contribution to safety in the mountains of South Wales. But it also stands for the Black Mountains Roundabout, a challenge walk organised by the Newport Outdoor Group (YHA) to raise funds for the other BMR.

Each year for over 20 years (excepting last year), hundreds of walkers have taken part in this event, a gruelling 25-mile route over a circuit of peaks in the Black Mountains, beginning and ending at Crickhowell; the route follows some moorland ridges but also necessitates some long, slow climbs.

This year the event took place on Saturday 20th April, beginning in rain, but turning sunny for a while, and so it alternated. There were 416 entrants, of whom 355 started to walk, or run; not all were able to complete the full circuit, and gain the certificate, but all were welcomed back to tea and biscuits, and refills of both. Even dogs were entitled to a certificate, water and biscuits! A big congratulations to the NOG's who completed the event; so well done Ian Reese, Sophie, Kevin, Matt and Terry, the largest number of NOG's entering the event for many years.

While checkpoints were manned by the BMR team, whose radio communication and "sweepers up" ensured no one goes missing, members of the Outdoor Group managed the early-morning entries, en route refreshment points and end-of-walk catering - I'm sure all walkers were grateful to Pam for the latter, but their thanks should also be due to Martyn and Norman whose work in advance and on the day ensured the event ran smoothly.

INSURANCE

By Dave Green

The new committee that was elected at the last AGM decided to it was time to have a good look at Activity safety and the liability insurance that we have through the YHA. After long discussions with little progress and no real help from the YHA, it was decided that it would be better to get some expert assistance; the problem was this would cost money. Therefore it was decided to make an application for a so called "Capacity Building Grant" to Torfaen Voluntary Alliance. I am pleased to report that we were successful with this application, and we have now tasked the National Mountain Centre at Plas Y Brenin with looking at activity safety and liability insurance. Therefore if anybody has any points that they would like to be considered or any question that they would like answering, then pass it on to me and I will give it to the consultant helping the group. In a few weeks we will be inviting all members to a meeting with the consultants to discuss their work. The grant also includes money for members to go on training courses, so if anybody is interested in Mountain Leadership, navigation, First Aid courses etc then please let me know. It should be noted that this grant can only be spent on the topics described above so the group still needs funds from subs and the TT for our general running costs.



WELCOME, BABY PENGILLY

Congratulations to Sally and Martin Pengilly on the recent birth of their son, Benjamin Jacob (a brother to Victoria). The photo to the right shows the little chap, taken when just 1 day old.