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Editors

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"And there was I waiting in reception with my arms folded and a worried, 'Where have you been til this hour?' look, but finally welcomed the 'children' home."

***Get
The
Outdoor
Habit!***

ABERCONWY & SWITCH – THE ALL WELSH BAND

**May 2014
By Liz Salmon**

We had a designer Spring Bank Holiday weekend at a now all-Welsh destination - although this wasn't the case many years ago when the English were in charge!

Our journey started on the Friday with Paul and I travelling from Newport, and Brian and Colin P travelling from bonny Scotland. Paul and I made a leisurely journey through the Welsh and English marches, stopping for tea and toasted teacake at Queenswood Country Park and Arboretum, just north of Hereford. What a lovely place! This is sponsored by various organisations and local businesses and offers a lovely tearoom, spacious gardens and various outdoor events throughout the year. It has a 47 acre tree collection with over 1200 rare and exotic trees from all over and is ideal for cyclists, walkers and of course dogs, with waymarked routes throughout. And admission is free! However we didn't get to see all this today but will definitely revisit it in the near future. We then stopped at Chirk Aqueduct to eat our lunch and did a very very short walk across the aqueduct, along the canal a little until finding the Bridge Inn, which of course had to be explored inside, and as Paul offered to drive the rest of the way I was forced to take in some refreshment, purely for research purposes!

Continuing our journey we arrived at Conwy at about 4pm, and after checking in went to do a bit more research around the town with regard to suitable eateries and watering holes. We had fish and chips from the nearest chippy (excellent!) just inside the town wall on the west side of town (nearest the hostel), and then walked across the road to The Albion pub, which we noticed had been awarded CAMRA Pub of the Year 2013. It was a difficult task but some more research had to be done for the benefit of the others on the trip. There was a fine selection of real ales and real ciders, offering 1/3 pint glasses for those who couldn't decide which to have or wanted to try them all! Having eaten and watered sufficiently we made our way back to the hostel to await the others. Incidentally we noticed the town was very heavy with traffic which we thought a bit unusual for that time of night, and then heard that the Chester to Conwy expressway had been closed due to flooding in the tunnels, so all traffic was being diverted through the town and was consequently backed up for miles in all directions.



We were mindful of our friends en route and realised they would be very late arriving, and consequently settled down for the night. At about 10.25pm I had a call from Colin saying they were caught up in the traffic, being only a few miles away, but were worried the hostel would be closed by the time they arrived. I said I would try and check in for them. So I went down to reception but as they didn't close until 11pm and the 'boys' were fairly close by, reception preferred to wait for them rather than let me check in for them - I think they thought I was going

to be letting in a wild party or something – mind you, the booking was in the name of a Norman Roberts so they were right to be cautious!! Anyway, at 10.50 pm the boys arrived, very weary, Colin sporting a very sore big toe and Brian playing porter, carrying all the bags from the car. And there was I waiting in reception with my arms folded and a worried, 'Where have you been til this hour?' look, but finally welcomed the 'children' home. They thanked me for waiting up for them, and after sorting all the bags and putting stuff in the fridge we were all ready for our beds, and finally retired for the night.

Saturday

Mindful that Colin and Brian were weary from having just had a fabulous two weeks in the Hebrides, Paul and I were happy to have a leisurely day, and as the Bank Holiday weather wasn't great (what a surprise!), we decided to have a lie in, a leisurely breakfast and spend the day exploring the town and all its wonderful history. It was at breakfast that Colin mentioned he had a double bed all to himself. I of course offered to swap – not to cwctch in with Colin or Brian of course, but to have the comfort of the double bed. To my surprise then next thing we're moving belongings, changing sheets and exchanging keys (hence the switch in the title!). We didn't inform reception, though, as that would have looked really dodgy bearing in mind the inquisition the previous night!

So, with the forecast for rain most of the day we left the hostel with full waterproofs to head down into the town for a look around. We started with the 'walled walk' which we accessed from the steps near the chippy which we'd noticed the day before – that's where the research/pre-walking came in handy. It was a 3 mile walk at high level which afforded great views and some insight into what the town must have been like many years ago with all the dwellings enclosed. There were various access/exit points along the way and we dropped down about half way round, near the station, to find some refreshment. I happened to have 4 slices of banana cake in my bag which I'd packed quickly at breakfast time, so we sat in the damp to eat that then looked for somewhere to have coffee. Paul, a now experienced NOG, noticed a sign advertising an art display in the church hall which was also serving teas and coffees. Thinking we'd give our money to support the locals we headed there, had a quick look at the various art work – some were good, some not so good. They had some large sofas around at the back of the hall so we sat there very comfortably out of the rain for about half an hour or more – and all for £1. Who needs Starbucks, eh? At one point whilst we were chilling out, some other 'customers' came in, obviously swayed by the art work (tea for £1!) but the man serving had disappeared (gone to sell one of his paintings at the front of the hall we think), so Paul played 'waiter' and served their drinks. After taking over the whole place we carried on our tour and headed towards the magnificent castle. We decided not to go in for the full tour even though Uncle Brian offered to get a family ticket, but carried on towards the quay for a look there. On the green opposite the castle there were some birds of prey being displayed by a local falconry. The birds were very tame (tied up of course) so we took a closer look and were actually allowed to stroke them on their heads and chests – in fact the birds loved the contact, having been hand reared from very young. By then it was lunchtime and the rain had eased so we got a sandwich and sat on the quayside. Being bank holiday there were various stalls set up along the quayside selling various local foods and drinks including local beers, cheeses, chutneys, pesto, baklava, olives etc., a few of which we sampled. There was even a man offering to clean our spectacles which Colin took up and was so impressed he bought some 'magic' solution to take home (Brian didn't notice this stand – a fact that will become pertinent later in the story ...).



We then headed further along the quayside, past the "smallest house in Britain", which was very small and very red and climbed the steps to continue the last part of the walled walk and complete our circuit, exiting at the start point by the chippy – and it just so happened the lovely pub that Paul and I researched the night before was just over the road.

Not wanting Colin and Brian to miss out on the huge range of ales and ciders, and needing a sit down after all that mileage, we went inside. After a drink or two (or three!) we headed back to the hostel for our evening meal, a nice relax and then retired for the night.

Sunday

The weather forecast was better today and visibility was good, so we decided to do a walk from the hostel over Conwy Mountain, following part of the North Wales Path, detouring over Penmaen-Bach to get great views of the estuary with Penmaenmawr and Llanfairfechan on our left, the Great Orme straight ahead and Anglesey in the distance. We couldn't quite see the Menai bridges, but just about picked out the pier off Bangor. We then picked up the North Wales Path again as far as Pensychnant. Here we headed through the nature reserve and stopped for a late lunch at the ponds. A rain shower had drawn in a little but it was quite humid and the visibility was still good – well for some of us. Whilst sat there, Brian noticed a bluey patch on the ground in front of us on the other side of the ponds. The rest of us thought it was a patch of gravel but no, Brian was convinced it was a patch of bluebells, so much so he wandered off to have a closer look. Now bearing in mind all along the walk we had seen cows, horses and sheep in the distance and Brian had got a bit mixed up which were which each time, we noticed a theme was beginning to emerge ...anyway, needless to say the 'bluebells' had miraculously turned into gravel by the time Brian had walked over there, so on his return the rest of us gave a rendition of "tiptoe through the bluebells", just to make him feel even worse. We all agreed the motto of the weekend was "should've gone to Specsavers", or at least to the man at the glasses stall the previous day to have his glasses cleaned!



Monday

Today we went our separate ways as Colin and Brian wanted to visit Bodnant Gardens on the way south as the spring flowers would've been in full bloom (they may even have seen some bluebells!) but Paul and I headed home via the Snowdonia scenic route past Idwal Cottage hostel, Betws-y-Coed etc calling at Llangollen on the way. Being a sunny bank holiday Monday the whole world and his wife had decided to visit that day, but we managed to find a parking space by the pavilion and walked back to the town from there. We bought a couple of Welsh 'Oggies' – about twice the size of a large Cornish pasty – and sat by the river in the sunshine. We finished our visit with a walk along the canal where there were horses pulling barges along – a lovely visit, despite the crowds.

Heading back home we called in at the Queenswood tearooms we visited on the way up, just to round off the weekend. We must visit there again – maybe a NOG day out there sometime?!