

A Mini Expo Summit - 2014



A Mini Expo to Snowdonia 2014

DAY ONE (Wednesday 23rd July 2014)

3+5 head for the hills

And so the time had come to induct Expo offspring into the hill walking ways of their forbearers. Invitations to take part were sent out and two families, the Bryants and Browns were up for an expedition to North Wales. The destination was Idwal Cottage Youth Hostel offering self-catering accommodation with shared kitchen facilities, followed by a couple of nights camping at Llyn Guynant campsite offering open spaces and friendly midges. The camping add-on was a popular choice, but did result in quite a lot of additional luggage (tents, beds and kitchen sinks etc).



Looking back - they are our pillows, they are our pets, they are our ... rear facing pillowpets

I am always surprised when we manage to get everything in the car, and this trip was no exception. I was slightly perturbed however when Emma's violin appeared in the luggage pile and despite my concerns was packed in readiness for playing to Grandma and Grandad on the return trip.

Mike, Adam and Samuel had travelled up the day before and had made the most of fine weather to get some local walking in before we arrived. Matthew was pleased to find Adam was another keen footballer and they were soon testing each other out in the car park opposite the Youth Hostel.



Adam and Matthew polish up their football skills



Two Brownies and a Bryant @ Idwal Cottage Youth Hostel



Two Brownies arrive are prepared to do their best at Idwal Cottage Youth Hostel

Although the Youth Hostel did indeed offer self-catering facilities, the rival catered facilities offered by the Tyn y Coed pub at Capel Curig down the road were chosen for the evening meal. This also had a playground opposite to help use up some excess energy which had been stored up in the long journey from Chelmsford.



Two satisfied customers @ Tyn y Coed (adapting well to the traditional Expo pub environment)



Two customers from Tyn y Coed pub in the non-traditional Expo environment

After a pleasant evening getting into the holiday spirit it was time to settle into the Youth Hostel with some non-traditional accessories...

Father Brown was beginning to realise why the luggage allowance had been exceeded on this occasion. A stowaway bear called Trixie had somehow failed to be left behind, emerging that evening from Emma's suitcase and bagging the bottom bunk.

After several rounds of negotiation Father Brown found himself on the top bunk where he lay shaking his fist at the bear faced cheek of Trixie (who, I might add, was not even a paid up Youth Hostel member).



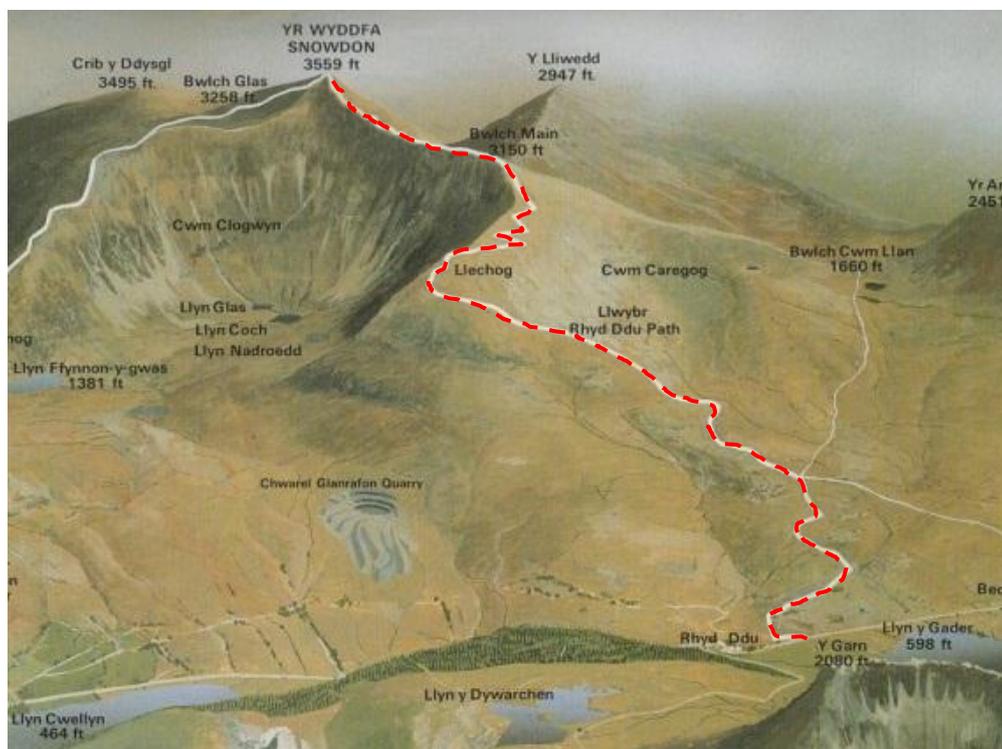


DAY TWO (Thursday 24th July 2014)

Sweltering on Snowdon

The forecast earlier that week had been for rain on Thursday. However the revised forecast the night before was that the fine weather would be holding on (hoorah), and so an attempt on the highest peak in Wales was planned and various options for tackling the ascent considered.

The relatively short ascent offered by the Rhyd Ddu path was selected as the best option for our diverse team – what could possibly go wrong?



The Rhyd Ddu path to Snowdon

The Rhyd-Ddu path started at the car park in the village of Rhyd-Ddu located on the A4085. The first few meters of the route followed the track of the Welsh Highland Railway, before starting properly at the kissing gate just past the carpark toilets (a handy toilet location at the start of a long walk). Ann decided that the scorching weather warranted the purchase of a hat, although I had to raise an eyebrow at the £24 price tag.

With high temperatures, clear skies and no shelter from the sun, the conditions were a bit too hot at times, particularly in parts where the cooling wind dropped away. The team were doing well but the heat was taking its toll.



Katy and Samuel on the right path



Adam and Samuel heading towards Snowdon



Emma and Katy taking in the view



Matthew and Adam striding onwards and upwards

With much encouragement we finally made it to the summit to record a Mini Expo first, the summit of mount Snowdon (although you had to push your way up the last few steps past several grannies who had taken the easy option on the Snowdon railway).



Snowdon summit (phew!)

Another benefit of Snowdon is the café at the top, a handy facility for replenishing water supplies and considering the options for the return journey. "No problem" said Ann with a plan, "There is always the train going down for those of a worn out disposition". Unfortunately the plan had a flaw – the return trains were full up and there was no guarantee forthcoming from a grumpy ticket officer that any spaces would be available. So we waited for the next train at 4:30 pm and there were just 3 spaces left (for one adult and two children). The youngest two (Samuel and Katy) and the oldest one (me) had to make a quick decision to split the group – I felt I was in an episode of the Lord of the Rings where the fellowship would go their different ways and I had been assigned two halflings.



We took our seats at the rear of the train and I snapped the rest of the group looking back at us and wondered when our paths would cross again. In retrospect the £50 price for an adult and two children single was probably the most expensive train journey ever in terms of cost per mile ("How much?!").

The descent from Snowdon – the easy option?





The long track down



Passing point for ascending and descending Snowdon trains

When we got to the end of the line all local shops and cafes were closed so we sat outside the station reviewing our meagre survival rations which comprised Samuel's bag of sweets. Katy and I drooled over the sweet bag which was being firmly grasped by Samuel. After a bit of pleading on our part Samuel did the decent thing and shared out a packet of Refreshers.

"Don't worry," I said. "They will be here to pick us up soon – it can't take that long to stroll down the mountain and back to the car" ... or could it? Unfortunately I did not have my mobile with me, a fact which Samuel would repeatedly remind me of.

"I know", I said "Why don't we have a guess at what time they will turn up and see who is closest". Samuel guessed 7:30pm, I guessed 7:45pm and Katy guessed 8:00pm. The minutes ticked by and 7:30 came and went. I pointed out to Samuel that technically he could still win up to 7:37pm. At 7:38pm I felt that I would surely win with my guess of 7:45pm. When 7:52pm came and went the inevitable winner was Katy.

Meanwhile back on the mountain – well actually in the café on the mountain...

Ann's perspective and descent narrative:

The choice of who should take it easy on the train down was not as clear-cut as the former narrative would suggest. My memory tells me that the conversation went as follows:

Ann: "I suppose I wouldn't mind walking down"

Andy (racing for the train pulling Katy and Samuel with him): "Well, we'll be off then"...

So there we were: Mike, Adam, Matthew, Emma and me. We stocked up on water and ate sausage rolls for energy in preparation for the gruelling heat downwards. We debated whether to ask the fearsome ticket officer (again) whether we could cadge a ride with any train. A poster on the wall stated that the train company would not be liable for getting people off the mountain and that, if in trouble, mountain rescue would need to be called.



Just as I imagined – the mountain party wasted no time in setting off from the café



Off we set

("Well all you have to do is put your foot out and let it fall downhill").

The distant horizon shimmered in the heat. Adam did his mountain goat impression, moving nimbly from rock to rock. Matthew walked on doggedly, pushing on despite his poor aching ankles and trying out the whistle on his new rucksack every now and then. And Emma walked daintily as only someone who did gymnastics and ballet could.

There was Mike, out at the front, encouraging us with rousing comments and a small bag of sweets which he rationed as carefully as on any expedition where the time of arrival is a complete unknown. I just kept plodding. How could it be that going downhill was slower than uphill?? This still remains an unsolved mystery.

Finally we were down,

Siiiiggghhhh!



Meanwhile back at Zero camp...



By 9:00 pm the light was beginning to fade, and questions were being asked like "What happens if they don't pick us up?" I assured the concerned faces that this was highly unlikely, but privately I was beginning to formulate a plan to order a taxi from a local hotel. The Royal Victoria Hotel at Llanberis was just down the road. This happened to be the venue of the Baddow Outdoor Activity Club (BOAC) annual Christmas get together in a lifetime ago back in the 1980s which both Ann and myself attended long before we knew each other. But I digress; the dilemma on this darkening day was that the emergency plan would involve leaving the agreed pick-up location.

Meanwhile in a speeding car bearing tired walkers...

We drove as fast as we could through the gloaming to pick up Andy, Katy and Samuel who I envisioned had been sipping drinks and had had a slap-up meal by now... They jumped up in the headlights looking famished and desperate. We were all reunited at last!

(Better not tell them there was a Spar ("Open until 10pm") 5 minutes walk away)

At 9:20pm to the relief of all, the rescue party arrived and we were whisked back to the Youth Hostel for a late supper.



DAY THREE (Friday 25th July 2014)

Relocating to Llyn Gwynant campsite

After a good night's sleep to recover from the previous day's exertions – Ann had worried that she would not be able to move the next day – we had our last self catered breakfast at the Youth Hostel. Mike organized an escape committee for an external breakfast outing – you can't beat a full English cooked breakfast.



YH escapees spotted in local café



Welsh hill spotting

With the weather still fine the prospect of camping was looking good and Mike was easily persuaded to extend his stay for extra nights of camping. Having loaded up the car again we stopped off for a pint of milk and sunglasses? – why is it we cannot pass a shop without spending a fortune? – then on to a another stop off viewing point en route to the camp site – which also happened to have an inviting ice cream van.

Good views of the local scenery were taken in – and since I cannot recognize one mountain from another I have annotated the skyline around Snowdon. From this viewing point we could also see the position of the Llyn Gwynant campsite in the distance down the valley.

<http://www.gwynant.com/index.html>



Emma holding up Snowdon

The advantage of arriving at midday was that we were ahead of the weekend campers turning up on a Friday evening, and were able to scout around the site for a good pitch. We eventually settled ourselves next to some trees which provided some shade from the heat.



Llyn Gwynant camp site (down the valley near Llyn Gwynant lake)



Settling in – Mike remembers to bring comfy chair



A tents eye view of the scenery - Gallt-y-Wenallt looming above us

The camping gear, airbeds etc were unloaded and installed into the sleeping quarters, but it was much too hot to be inside.



In-tents excitement for pillowpets

The peace and tranquillity of the campsite was soon to be disturbed by squeals of laughter as a result of the outbreak of water fights.



Water fights! - not usually on an Expo agenda

But there was another way to cool off available. Adjacent to the campsite there was a river running down to the lake – not too deep, and ideal for a refreshing dip.



Tales of the riverbank

In the evening we gathered round a camp fire to toast marshmallows before retiring to our three tents. The campsite was quite crowded by now and without double glazing or other sound proofing, there was quite a bit of background noise. The campsite had a policy of no music, no loud noise after 10pm and no noise after 11pm. This did not seem to stop our neighbours from chatting away and I had to hold Ann back from marching across to complain about the noise. Also a barking dog had not read the terms and conditions and in the small hours his deep woofs echoed across the campsite.



A toast to marshmallows



DAY FOUR (Saturday 26th July 2014)

Up the creek with a paddle

The next day dawned and we found that we had been on the menu of the local midges, especially Ann and me who were sleeping outside the enclosed section of the tent.

The noisy neighbours were packing up to leave and kindly gave us their spare logs – which made me smile – make logs not war!

The popular activity of the day was canoeing up and down the river and across the lake. The best option for us was to hire three two man canoes. Matthew and Adam were looking cool in their shades cruising along without making hardly a ripple – in Matthew's case this could have been because he had stopped paddling while posing for the camera.



Messing about on the river

Another dynamic duo were Ann and Katy. Their simply sensational synchronised strokes sloshed smoothly seaward. Actually it was towards the lake, but I could not think of a lake literation (apart from that one).



Presenting Penelope Pitstop pair's paddle power



Emma and Katy – down by the riverside



Mike and Samuel successfully negotiate river rocks

Well, its confession time. I have to admit that since I had missed out on the Snowdon return trip my legs were twitching for an extra walk and the lure of Galt-y-Wenallt was drawing me upwards. So I muttered that I was going for a walk and set off up the hill from the campsite. The first viewing point was at the top of a large outcrop (see opposite) which overlooked the river and campsite. I stopped there a few minutes to take in the view (below).

Then I continued upward. The slope getting very steep and soon I was clinging to the hillside vegetation as I approached the peak. As the time was ticking away I stopped just short of the actual peak and took a picture of the view (next page).



Photo stops en route



Hillside view of Llyn Gwynant camp site

Going up very steep inclines is sometimes easier than coming down and I needed to get down fast — so I resorted to sliding down to speed up the descent. Unfortunately my shorts did not provide much in the way of bum protection and although it did not feel too bad at the time I was quite surprised to later see the extent of buttock grazing. I was a bit embarrassed about this and spared Ann her medical opinions on my backside — although she will now read this so all will be revealed — so to

speak. Anyway at the time of writing everything has healed up so it's all turned out all right in the end – so to speak.



Higher hillside view of Llyn Gwynant camp site – scene of backside abrasion

But I digress, when I arrived back at camp feeling a bit worn out in several places, Matthew was keen to go canoeing again and despite my undisclosed seating problem I agreed to join in the evening's canoe trip. Katy, now a seasoned canoeist herself from her earlier day's experience, was soon giving me tips and I was quite impressed with her paddling prowess. A few minutes later we were joined by Emma and Ann in another canoe for two and were in pursuit of Matthew and Adam who were in single canoes. Apparently Matthew pretended to be exhausted and Ann and Emma towed him back to the river – I overheard Matthew later telling Adam that he had tricked his Mum in to towing him back.

The final evening was quite damp. As the heavens opened up we had to eat pizza inside the tent and the camp fire proved slightly harder to get going.



DAY FIVE (Sunday 27th July 2014)

Homeward bound

Fortunately first thing next morning it was dry enough to pack up and put the tent away before the rain started again. We had been very lucky with the weather overall, so this was not too disappointing as we were heading homewards. There was just time for a quick group shot in the rain before departing on our respective journeys.



Leaving in the rain – farewell to Llyn Gwynant camp site

The End

