

Loggerheads Circuit, 26th May 2023

Group Participants: Fred & Anne, Lesley, Jim, Andrea, Heather, Gerry, Steve & Sarah, Janet, Christine, Sue & Iain (walk leaders). Pippa stayed at home, due to the warm day.

Circuit starting and finishing at Loggerheads Country Park, Mold CH7 5LH. Approximately 11 miles with a high point of 1673'

Warm day with mainly hazy skies in the morning, clearing to bright afternoon. The soft, muddy paths of just a couple of weeks ago had dried and now provided firm, if a little rutted and cracked walking.

The main party departed in 3 vehicles from Bunbury Pavilion car park on time, at 8:30. We met Sarah and Steve at the agreed location in the Loggerheads Country Park car park and set off just after 9:30.

Initially heading out over the footbridge, we crossed the river Alyn, noting a good level of water flowing. The group then climbed the long and steep staircase away from the river to join a woodland path heading towards the A494. Thankfully there was a good handrail and I, for one was pleased not to have had a Full English before departing!

After carefully crossing the road, we walked along quiet paths through the grounds of the Outdoor Education Centre and on towards the village of Maeshafn. We entered the cool but bright Birch Woods of the Big Covert with lovely freshly-opened lime green foliage and full of melodious woodland songbirds. Dropping out of the woodland on the eastern side we crossed the first of a series of several rickety stiles and headed round the back of Burley Hill Quarry. The woodland birdsong had given over to the calls of cuckoos (to which Lesley drew our attention several times) plus the lilting songs of the rising Skylarks. The quarry has been inoperative for the last 16 years, but there is currently an application to re-commence extraction of building aggregate. Limestone was originally extracted from the quarry to provide building stone, plus crush used in the iron and steel-making process. Most of the quarry is now fenced off, warning visitors that it is not a playground. We stopped for coffee by a fossil exposure close to the path on an open area of hillside. The limestone is of Chadian-Brigantian Age (345-336mya) from the Lower Carboniferous period and the rocks were originally deposited in shallow warm seas. Most of the fossils to be found are shells and corals, typical of more tropical waters and the prize brachiopod shell is the *Gigantoproductus* (image below) – note not found on the walk, though Iain had carted a couple of Kg of fossil examples previously picked from the exposure.



After a slightly extended coffee break, we continued over lush grass pastures and down the edge of the Big Covert woodland, passing to the south of the quarry. We noted a freshwater spring issuing from the ground

below the limestone, which gradually swelled to become a tributary of the Alyn. As we crossed the Alyn for the second time, we noted Dippers and Yellow Wagtails bobbing around the rocks in the river.

We re-crossed the A494 Ruthin road and commenced the gradual climb towards Moel Fenlli along a good farm track. The day was now getting warmer, and more intake of water was required. Turning right, away from the farm track, we made progress through fields of sheep to the corner of a small conifer wood. It was at this point that there were some sharp intakes of breath as we caught our first view of the southerly ascent of Moel Fenlli. Steady progress was made up the slope, taking on more water and swinging west to enter the Iron Age Hillfort from the single inverted gateway looking towards Ruthin. Once at the summit we gazed over impressive ramparts while eating a well-earned lunch.

The Iron Age fort at Moel Fenlli was built circa 2500ya and the series of large ramparts on the north & eastern flanks indicate that the community of Celts fortified the hilltop, possibly under siege from time to time. The ramparts are less extensive to south where the slope is steep (as we know!).

The ramparts enclose an area of 9.5 hectares. Remains of 61 roundhouses have been uncovered during excavations over several seasons and a hoard of 1500 Roman coins were found in 1816, close to the summit where there is evidence of a barrow. A spring/reservoir was evident in Tudor times which would allow longer-term occupation e.g. under siege.

On departing the summit, we descended the hill through the ramparts to the north and passed through woodland, crossing the Loggerheads road and passing onto a series of forestry trails. The long gradual climb up the first section was now exposed to clear sun and we certainly started to get quite warm! Picking up another narrow lane on the SE side of Ffrith Mountain, we descended back to the river Alyn valley. On crossing a footbridge, the group noted that the river, which was downstream of the Loggerheads car park where we first saw plenty of water flowing, was now bone dry, with vegetation growing out of the gravel banks. We followed a lovely shaded riverside walk along part of the valley where in the past, bogeys had been used to move both limestone and lead ore. Seemingly somewhere along the circa 1mile route, the main river Alyn disappears into limestone sinkholes and follows a network of caverns, reappearing at the Dee Estuary.

We arrived back at the carpark after 6 hours' walking and some of us were eying the ice creams on sale in the old Pentre Mill visitor centre. However, the need for a beer or two at the Dysart gained preference!

A nice day out with plenty of good chat.

Iain & Sue

