

Trip Report: North Wales**Date:** 21st February 2009**Group:** Richard (leader?) Mike A, Lesley, Tony, Lynn, Jim G, Lynda, Ian, Selina, Graham, Colin**Route:** Moelwyns ramble**Total Distance:** Unknown**Total Ascent:** Unknown**Weather:** Unknown

Our recent trip to the Moelwyns in Snowdonia made for an interesting outing through an area rich in industrial history. We parked at the end of the metalled road leading up to the Cwmorthin Quarry "village" and wandered upwards into the mists of time.

We were surrounded by the efforts of man to wrest a living from the harsh landscape through quarrying the omnipotent Slate residing in the hillside all around us. Everywhere we looked we saw evidence in the form of spewing spoil heaps and burrowing tunnels leading into the depths of the mountain in their search for the rich veins of slate. We were constantly amazed at the ingenuity used to assist in the removal of the slate to cities throughout the UK during the nineteenth century.

Our trek lead us up to a plateau riven by collapsed slate caverns and onto an "airy" traverse around Cwm Stwlan and its' pumped storage reservoir. At the end of the traverse we climbed a short distance to a col or Bwlch before the ascent of Moelwyn Bach our first objective. The leader was last here in 1997 and consequently missed the sketchy path leading to the summit from the Bwlch and was seduced into following a far more attractive path around the south side of the mountain. All was not lost. A way was found up a weakness on the south side and in fact this seemed to be a much shorter way up than the way down on the "normal" route! The summit greeted us with unrelenting mist and it was fortunate that the leader could point out the direction of the surrounding points of interest to the assembled group. Unfortunately the surrounding throng seemed less than interested!

Descending to the Bwlch we then set off in pursuit of Moelwyn Mawr, the bigger Moelwyn, and the hope of a view! It was not to be. After a brief rest on the top we all made tracks for warmer climes at lower altitude and a welcome lunch break on a leeward hillside.

Lunch devoured we trekked across the moor to the foot of Moel Y Hydd which many of us were happy to just look at, But OH! NO! Jim G thought it would be a good idea to ascend its' golden slopes and partake of the potentially wonderful views it might offer.

We all succumbed to Jims' persuasion and duly followed the maestro to the summit. We were not disappointed. The mist cleared and we were rewarded with a fantastic panorama of Bleanau Ffestiniog in all its' grey glory.

Descending the same way we had climbed we quickly resumed our descent back to the cars. On the way down some of us were adventurous enough to question where the various tunnels into the hillside went and what an eye opener.

The first tunnel we explored lead after about 30 metres to an exposed balcony looking down into a vast cavern with daylight streaming in from above, impressive. The slate had been excavated from here.

Further down the hillside some of us ventured into another tunnel which again lead to a cavern lit by the sky above. Unlike the first one this one also descended into unknown depths with a calamity of fallen boulders at the bottom, some the size of London buses. We were hooked and couldn't resist the next tunnel we came to. Again this lead to a huge chamber scattered with equally huge boulders and fallen blocks, quite incredible. It seems there is a whole labyrinth of chambers forming a network under the mountains. Maybe one day we can have a trip through the underworld? By now we were almost back at the cars and were soon on our way back to the usual place for rehydration therapy!

Richard