

## Trip Report

Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2019

Those present:

Mike and Lesley Arrowsmith, Tony and Lynn Quinn, Richard (leading) and Della Calder, Steve and Sarah Hammond, Ann Bodfish and Andrea Percival.

As Della and I were staying near Abergele on Friday night we arranged to meet the Bunbury contingent at the start of the walk in the Conwy valley close to Dolgarrog. Google suggested it would take them 1hr 27 minutes to get from Bunbury pavilion to Pont Dolgarrog but they beat this time due to reduced faffing and increased speed, a combination Google's algorithm could not hope to predict! Della and I on the other hand arrived late after following a car which was clearly stuck on tickover and on a brake test run at the same time!

Walking commenced at 09:43hrs (according to Strava) in surprisingly benign weather, rain was forecast but it was reasonably dry. The route was billed as "fairly low level" so it was a bit of a surprise to most that we began with a 700 foot climb in the first mile up alongside the Afon Ddu river and then through Dolgarrog Forest to the "low level" part, but fair-play they all plodded steadily upwards discarding layers regularly, having put everything on in the carpark! Now as you will probably realise to climb 700 feet in less than a mile it is going to be steep, and it's fair to say I have never seen a steeper concrete road that wasn't a wall! It must have been 33% in places. Having spent the last 20 years at work advising engineers on the properties of concrete I was filled with admiration for the guys who built the road we were trudging up! But enough, more of the concrete road later.

Eventually the way began to level off and the surface changed to stone and gravel for a while until we reached a stile into a field and passing on the way a most magnificent sloe tree weighed down with that wonderful gin additive the sloe berry. Picking time was offered but no one was particularly interested.

The short path across the field lead us to a wood where we picked up a faint path which descended to a rather rickety footbridge with one handrail taking us over the Afon Ddu river and leading up the other side of the shallow valley on an even fainter path to a farmyard. Here we picked up an old byway running parallel to the river through pleasant fields and scattered trees until we reached a small burial ground and derelict chapel where it seemed like a good idea to sit down and have a brew for a few minutes. Surprisingly it still hadn't started raining which is unusual for Wales so we kept our fingers crossed.

Teas and coffees drunk we ambled on along the track past various abandoned homesteads and farms climbing slightly until the last building was reached and the track became more of a path/stream. As we continued the path became fainter until eventually it disappeared altogether and was replaced by classic Welsh bog/gorse/heather/tussock terrain and no obvious way on. Serious doubts about the existence of a path must have been going through everyone's minds, particularly mine! On we trudged, feet getting wetter and

wetter, and doubts growing more and more until we reached a small three plank bridge hidden in low scrubby trees crossing a stream proving there was a path after all! More trudging/bushwacking eventually lead to the holy grail, a stile! Followed quickly by a gate onto a tarmac road, yippee at last they believed me.

We were now very close to the dam wall of Llyn Cowlyd a short stroll along a gravel track and after climbing to the north shore we were soon at a suitable abandoned hamlet where we stopped for lunch. It still hadn't rained.

Once all the food was gone folks became restless and it seemed like a good idea to get going again, before the rain. We were now on the way back but had a small climb to take us north out of the Llyn Cowlyd valley and descend into the Llyn Eigiau valley north of Moel Elio. Here we picked up the abandoned trackbed of the old tramway built to carry construction materials for the reservoirs and headed back towards the Conwy valley. We were gradually descending until we reached the top of the pipeline which feeds water down to the Dolgarrog hydroelectric power station. At this point the track contours around the end of the Moel Elio massif back into the Llyn Cowlyd valley and the top of the concrete road. The rain began at this point, just when I was hoping the concrete road would stay dry.

The concrete road was the only way back to the cars and a perilous descent began. Those with walking poles were reasonably safe but grippy as concrete is there were one or two unplanned accelerations by the less well equipped and it was soon found preferable to use the stony ground at the side of the concrete to provide some grip. Slow progress was the order of the day and eventually everyone arrived back at the carpark safely.

As the walk leader I have to say it was an excellent route blessed with kind weather, I'll take my tongue out of my cheek now!

I thank you all for your company.

Richard Calder