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Susan x

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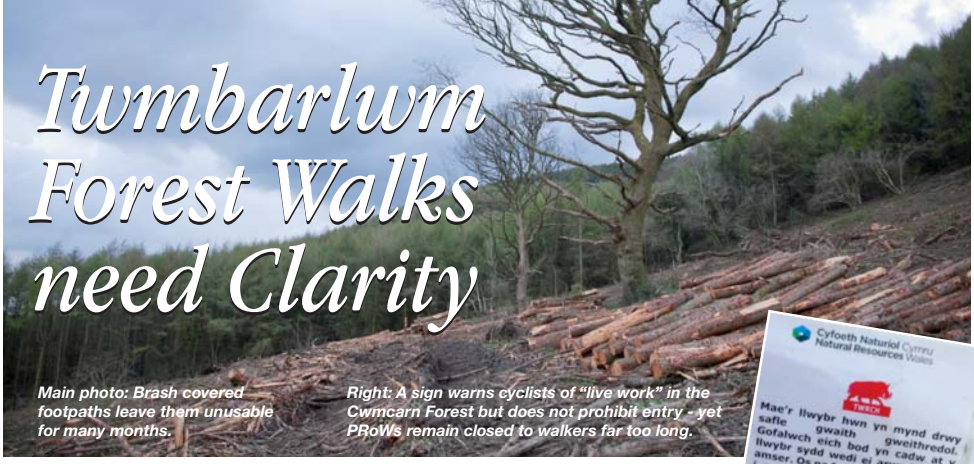
Twmbarlwm Forest Walks need Clarity



Main photo: Brash covered footpaths leave them unusable for many months.

Right: A sign warns cyclists of "live work" in the Cwmcarn Forest but does not prohibit entry - yet PRoWs remain closed to walkers far too long.

READERS OF THIS COLUMN have become aware of the work of the Twmbarlwm Society, such as litter-picking, fence and path repairs and our struggles against off-roaders. But how many realise that CTS campaigns on many issues that have an immediate effect on the wider landscape of the mountain? Our members work continuously to lobby local authorities and government departments to get the best for our environment.

One such campaign concerns the actions of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) precipitated by Phytophthora Ramorum (aka Larch disease) that has affected forestry throughout the UK and in particular, south-east Wales.

Clearing the diseased trees in the lower Sirhowy and Ebbw Valleys has had a major impact on the landscape. The harvesting process has taken longer than elsewhere due to the steep, and therefore, tricky terrain, which has meant that every tree has to be felled by hand and then winched up to forest tracks. Locals have, for the most part, been understanding about the length of time the forest paths have been closed, but there should be an expectation of professionalism and balance from NRW.

With felling on Machen, the Gwyddon Valley, Mynyddislwyn, and the Cwmcarn Forests around Twmbarlwm, occurring within a relatively short space of time, walking routes have been substantially reduced. NRW has the right to close forestry tracks without consultation. However, permission must be sought to close public rights of way (PRoW). Initially permission can be granted by the local authority for up to six months. If NRW needs longer it must apply for an extension. If a short extension is needed, because of the magnitude of the exercise, it is understandable that the correct procedure isn't always followed. However, public rights of way have been closed in some areas for substantially longer than six months.

There is more than one reason for this. NRW tends to apply to close PRoWs well before contractors are ready to move to that particular area.

For instance, Restricted Byway 189 in the Nant Carn Valley has been closed since December 2017, but at the beginning of March 2018 not only were there no WARNING posters advising visitors of the closure, no work had started on the byway. It is highly unlikely that NRW will meet the six month deadline for reopening the byway at the end of May. This is just one example, but it is far from an isolated incident.

Another reason for the extended closure of PRoWs is that NRW appears not to check that contractors have cleared the route of the brash generated by the harvesting process. It is impossible to find the line of a right of way when it is covered in brash and it would be dangerous to try to negotiate a way through. Many walkers, including Ramblers members, moan about the problem but do not make a formal complaint. So the paths can stay "closed" for a very long time. The route may be legally open but that's no comfort when it is impossible to use it.

Additionally, extra forestry roads need to be installed to extract the felled timber and in doing so PRoWs are compromised. Unfortunately, there seems to be little attempt to reinstate many of the rights of way and thus although they still legally exist, they are in fact unusable.

NRW recently sent out a request that walkers obey the WARNING signs and not enter a prohibited area, but when someone is on a planned 8 mile walk and they come across a WARNING sign, there is often no choice but to carry on. Dragging a group back up a steep incline and extending the walk by a few more miles is just not possible, especially when the walkers are looking forward to the final stretch. Walking groups have to plan their programme in advance. It is an impossible task when information is non-existent or significantly out of date or maybe even totally incorrect.

The public expect professionalism from a government body, and we expect the same level of commitment to different types of users. NRW expects members of the public to play fair with them, but maybe NRW should lead by example.

Maggie Thomas, CTS Trustee and Correspondent for the Open Spaces Society for Caerphilly and Torfaen County Boroughs

CTS meet at the car park below Twmbarlwm's summit for a litter pick and volunteer workday on the last Sunday of every month to which everyone is invited, it's not all hard work and it's a great opportunity to find your way around up there. We organise walks and other events up the mountain and at Crosskeys RFC throughout the year so watch our website and Facebook page for details.

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Gwerinwyr Gwent Diary

Gwerinwyr Gwent's first booking of the year was on the 26th February for the Links ladies group at Bethesda Chapel Rogerstone. We had been asked to do an English version of the Welsh evening devised by Barbara Griffiths that we put on for Newport Welsh society last year. The evening consisted of us demonstrating some dances, and audience participation dances interspersed with the ladies opening boxes containing clues to events in Gwerinwyr Gwent's history, which they had to guess. The evening concluded with a nice buffet, and a good time was had by all.

We were due to give our Welsh culture evening for Llantillio Pertholey WI on 1st March, and run a twmpath for Ysgol Bro Allta PTA on 2nd March...but of course heavy snow intervened and the events were cancelled. Hopefully both bookings will be re-arranged at a future date.

Therefore, our second booking became Saturday 24th March when we organised a ceilidh with Rogerstone Roses WI at St Anne's church hall. This was a fund raiser for the Tredegar House Folk Festival (11th – 13th May). Everyone there, including GG, had a great evening, and raised a decent amount for the festival. Much of the time every single person (apart from the musicians of course) was up dancing to instructions called by Barbara or Rhian, with an all ladies set from GG demonstrating the occasional traditional Welsh folk dance to give participants a breather.

The following day we made our annual visit to Llanover House for the National Garden Scheme charity open garden day. Such a contrast to the previous Sunday when we had yet more snow, the afternoon was warm and sunny, and the crowds flocked in obviously glad to be out in the countryside after all the bad weather. Owner Elizabeth Murray said that the 500 visitors was their highest number since 2014 when the day coincided with Mothering Sunday.

The hard winter had taken its toll on the plants, with over half of the thousands of daffodils that line the drive still only in bud, and the magnolia trees not in flower yet either. Nevertheless, the gardens are always beautiful, plus there was a lovely atmosphere and many people chose to linger, either sitting with tea and cake or just standing, to watch us dancing, and there were several appreciative comments about our performances which are always so good to hear.

Gwerinwyr Gwent is always seeking new members, and beginners or experienced dancers/musicians are very welcome to join us on practice nights on Thursdays 8 – 10pm at the Graig Community Hall, Bassaleg (opposite the Ruperra PH).

For more details, visit our website www.gwerinwyrgwent.org.uk, ring 01495 271953, or just come along and give it a try.

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WHITE CASTLE

This castle can be reached from Skenfrith by returning along the B4521 road, in the direction of Abergavenny, and after nearly six miles taking a signposted left turn for White Castle. Gwyn ap Gwaethfoed was the original owner of this castle and as his name means *'white'* in Welsh; White Castle is a simple translation of Castell Gwyn. There is also a theory that the castle takes its name from its original colour, as traces of white plaster have been found on the stone walls.

Gwyn was another brother of the Bach family, who built Skenfrith. The brothers were sons of Cadivor ap Gwaethfoed, a onetime prince of Cardigan, who was also an ancestor of the Morgan family who became lords of Tredegar. This family being the ancestors of the notorious pirate Henry Morgan. The original fortress was again most likely constructed of wood placed on top of an earlier defensive earthwork. Legend tells us that Gwyn was old and blind, when his castle was besieged and seized by the Normans. He appealed to King Rufus for the chance to fight his Norman opposer on equal terms in a darkened room. His claim to the right of trial by combat was granted, and the two fought it out in a locked and unlit room. The elderly blind Welshman succeeded in overcoming his Norman opponent and his property was then restored so the legend claimed. This old story may be true, but

Gwyn could not have retained the castle for very long, for soon after this time the Normans began to strengthen the fortress. White Castle was the most vulnerable of the three castles and the Normans' construction turned this into the most formidable of the trilateral of castles.

The present castle dates from the early 13th century and is a good example of a concentric castle. The fortress is shaped like an elongated hexagon, with an inner ward completely surrounded by a lofty curtain wall linked with six circular towers of great strength. Two of these towers, on the north side, were constructed to form the Gatehouse, and the remaining towers are equally spaced around the outer wall. The whole castle is surrounded by a wide and deep water-filled moat. The south side of the ward contained the hall and keep.

Over the moat on the north side of the gateway towers lies the outer ward, a large open space again enclosed by a strong wall with four projecting towers. This also is protected by an outer moat. These combined defences are designed to provide a powerful barbican. The

castle contains no identifiable remains of accommodation for the defenders, who were likely to have been housed in wooden lean-to shelters.

Look down into the waters of the moat and see if you can spot any of the giant carp that swim here, but beware of any of the swan guardians who sometimes inhabit the moat. Rudolph Hess, the deputy Reichführer, who was allowed to exercise in the castle grounds when imprisoned at a nearby mental hospital, once fed these carp and swans. Climb to the top of the gateway tower, where a wooden platform has been constructed to allow us to enjoy the impressive views.

The most dominant landscape feature is the Skirrid Fawr sometimes known as the 'Holy Mountain', because on the summit, 1,600 feet above sea level, are still a few stones from St. Michael's chapel. The soil from this site was considered holy, and was gathered by local folk to spread on the floors of their cattle sheds. This was intended to ward off disease, I wonder if it would have kept 'foot and mouth' at bay? The great gash in the southern flank has been variously blamed by the grounding of Noah's Ark or caused by lightning strike in the storm following the Crucifixion, - take your pick!

Llanvetherine

After leaving the castle and heading towards Abergavenny, it is worth while briefly, pausing here to examine the village church, which contains a few interesting, features. The church is normally kept locked, but access can be obtained from the occupant of Brook Cottage. Just follow the path from the church entrance, go through the gate then continue on and turn left and cross over the brook bridge to the cottage.

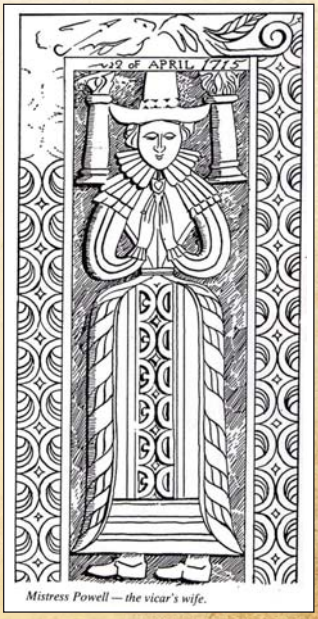
The oldest part of the church is probably the tower which has an upper section corbelled out to project over the lower construction.

Llanvetherine Church

The tower contains two bells dated 1582 and 1653. An oak tablet, fixed to the west wall of the knave, illustrates the five wounds of Christ. The chancel holds two life-sized effigies of a 17th Century Rector and wife. The Rector, Reverend David Powell, is dressed in splendid period costume but his facial embellishments are most impressive. A noble moustache sweeps back to his ears and his beard is composed of five plaits. The Rector's wife stands on the left and is dressed in authentic Welsh costume of the time. It is interesting to note that she wears her wedding ring on the second finger of her right hand, as was customary at that date. The lady's feet are depicted, by the sculptor, as would be seen from the side.

The odd thing about these two stone memorials is that whilst the Reverend Powell is recorded as dying in 1621, his wife's memorial is dated 22ndApril 1715. The dress style of the couple is contemporary, but the dates suggest that his wife outlived the Reverend Powell, by some 94 years. It seems more likely that some vandal has adjusted the date of Mrs Powell's memorial.

From Llanvetherine carry straight on along the B4521 to reach Abergavenny and thus complete your visit to the trilateral of three castles,



Mistress Powell — the vicar's wife.

Rev. David Powell.

What's On

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The Council meets on the 2nd Monday of each month (except August) at 6pm in Henllys Village Hall. Contact Laura Grey 07703 194263

Henllys Village Hall
Contact details www.henllysvillagehall.org.uk

Henllys W.I.
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PACT
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St. Peter's Church
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2nd Sunday in the month
11.00am Eucharist Service
3rd Sunday in the month
6.00pm Evensong
4th Sunday in the month
11.00am Eucharist
If the month has a 5th Sunday
11.00am Eucharist
Contact: Reverend Graham Opperman
Tel: 01633 861978.

Worship Centre
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Branch Meeting at the Civic Centre
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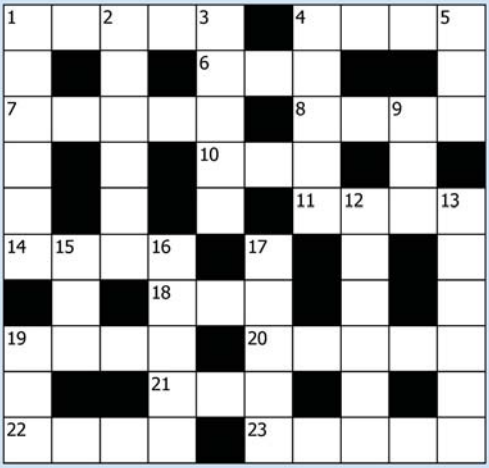
Crossword

Across

1. Seat (5)
4. In addition to (4)
6. As well as (3)
7. Romantic partner (5)
8. Bird of peace (4)
10. First woman (3)
11. Telephoned (4)
14. Appointment (4)
18. Large seed (3)
19. Worry (4)
20. Desired, wished for (5)
21. Devon river (3)
22. For always (4)
23. Having ascended (5)

Down

1. Named (6)
2. Business promotion (6)
3. Scarcer (5)
4. Poisonous snake (5)
5. Single number (3)
9. Commercial vehicle (3)
12. Takes as ones own (6)
13. Place for fruit & veg (6)
15. Atmosphere (3)
16. Go into (5)
17. Surgical spirit (5)
19. Enemy (3)



Puzzle solutions on page 22

Sudoku

9		4		5				2
	8			2				
		1		3			7	6
				7		4		9
3		8		4			6	
4			3			7		
7		9	1					
			4	6			9	
2		5		9			4	

The object of sudoku is to insert the missing numbers in the boxes to satisfy just one condition: each row, column and 3x3 box must contain the digits 1 through to 9 exactly once. This can be done by applying logic – you do not have to guess.

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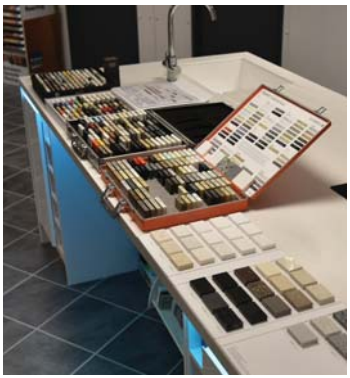

You choose the colour

we can template and cut to size

and achieve the perfect finish

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Picture to the left shows a Du Pont Corian Glacier White island and sinks we recently manufactured and installed for Mr & Mrs Edenborough of Bassaleg.

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Be Your Own Hero!

Chwarae Teg's Agile Nation 2 Career Development Programme is a unique opportunity for working women to develop skills for team leading and management. It's fully funded by the European Social Fund and Welsh Government and offered free of charge to eligible women across South Wales in 2018.

The dedicated team at Chwarae Teg provides expert mentoring and accredited learning designed to empower you to reach your potential. Our participants leave us full of motivation, using what they have learned to move forward with confidence:

"Since completing the programme I have changed my career path, leading to greater responsibility within my role and have received a significant salary increase".

By completing the programme you will achieve a qualification accredited by Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM Level 2) and have the opportunity to take part in additional learning modules to gain further knowledge and experience, for example our popular "Saying 'NO' Brilliantly" and "Presenting with Confidence" workshops.

Most importantly you will be part of a group of like-minded women, sharing experiences and learning in a supportive, confidence-building environment. Many of our groups form friendships and support networks that continue after the programme.

The programme is currently available to women living or working in Wales who are employed in the private or third sectors. See our website www.agilenation2.org.uk for further information.

Take the first step today. Register your interest at www.makeyourself.wales and we'll be in touch with information on how to apply. Alternatively email an2@chwaraeteg.com or call us on 0300 365 0445.

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6	8	7	9	2	1	3	5	4
5	2	1	8	3	4	9	7	6
1	5	6	2	7	8	4	3	9
3	7	8	5	4	9	2	6	1
4	9	2	3	1	6	7	8	5
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E	■	R	■	R	■	11 R	12 A	N	13 G
14 D	15 A	T	16 E	■	17 E	■	D	■	A
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22 E	V	E	R	■	23 R	I	S	E	N

Nash Point

Nash Point is a headland and beach in the Vale of Glamorgan, popular with visitors who come to see the superb lighthouse and with walkers who enjoy the stunning scenery on the Coastal Path. A short circular walk (approx. four miles) from Nash Point to St Donats can be accessed along the cliff tops. Ample parking is chargeable when refreshment hut & WC is open. Dogs are welcome all year round.

Nash Point Lighthouse is an iconic 19th century, grade 2 listed, historic building. It is a major part of our social and maritime history and was the last manned lighthouse in Wales, being de-manned in August 1998. The station was built between 1831 -1832 using stone quarried from the beach below the station, which was then winched up the cliff and dressed on site by very skilled masons. There is also one of only a few sets of compressed-air, 'Siren-type' Fog Signals in the whole country. These are no longer used as an Aid to Navigation, being discontinued in the mid 1990s. They were restored between 2002 – 2006 by Trinity House engineers in their spare time and using any available spares and though it will not damage or harm your ears (it may make you jump) it can be heard from up to 20 miles away. **The fog horn is currently out of use in order for an assessment of its mechanical condition.** Nash Point Visitor Centre is open on weekends and Bank Holidays during most of Spring, Summer and Autumn as well as on Wednesdays during local school holidays. Opening times are from 12.30-5.30pm during British Summer Time and from 12.00-4.30pm during G.M.T.

For more information about the beaches please call Vale of Glamorgan Tourism on 01446 704867.

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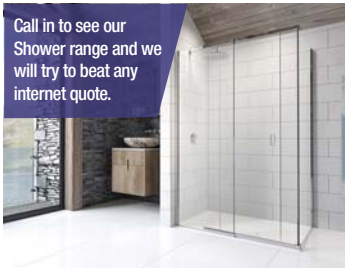

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