

## Taith Pererin

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### Basingwerk Abbey

#### Saturday 3 May - Departure

Over 20 Pilgrims and supporters have set off from Basingwerk Abbey this morning after a few words of prayer led by Chris. We stop at Pantasaph Priory for lunch, then continue via the Roman Pharos in Coed y Garreg and the magnificent Celtic cross at Maen Achwyfan, to Llanasa, where we take a rest in the memorial garden by the church before continuing to Trelawnyd, which we reach about 5:30.

A long first day, highlights including orange-tip butterflies in the woods above St Winefride's Well, the first early purple orchid, gorse now in flower everywhere and an imminent explosion of May blossom. These two scents will now accompany us for the next 11 days as we make our way steadily westwards.

We now have our Pilgrim Passports, and Jenny nobly carries the new stamps in her rucksack. These will, in due course, be left in churches and communities, shops, pubs, cafés for all to record their progress along the Way.

It's an early (8:30) start from Trelawnyd tomorrow, due to the need to be in St Asaph Cathedral by 3:30 for the service marking the culmination of the Diocesan Year of Pilgrimage.

## Sunday 4 May - Howard's Tree



It's an earlier start this morning after the now customary transport shuffle. We leave Trelawnyd at 8:30 and make better progress than yesterday, soon reaching the top of Rhuallt Hill. There are some really eccentric garden ornaments around Rhuallt - one chap has a Spitfire and a dinosaur (which has acquired a baby since last year), while his neighbour has (among others) John Wayne on horseback, Barack Obama on a park bench, three Jedi Warriors and King Kong.

At the top of the climb, where we cross the ridge before descending into the Vale, and just beyond the spot from which one can see three cathedrals, is Howard's Tree. Widely read, widely travelled, Howard Holdsworth was a 21st century Renaissance Man and one of our company on our first pilgrimage in 2011. As the view of the Vale and the hills beyond exploded upon us, Howard announced that he was going to stop and a number of us joined him, sitting under one of a line of wind-sculpted hawthorns for a few moments of quiet contemplation. Later in the week, on another glorious summer morning, Howard was to be found sitting cross-legged on a brick pillar in Llanfairfechan station car park, playing Bach on his guitar. The news of his untimely death early the following year from a heart attack came as an enormous shock, but left us all with treasured memories of our all-too-brief time with him.

On subsequent pilgrimages, we began to refer to this spot as Howard's Tree. The hawthorns are clearly visible on the skyline from the A55 and his name will be perpetuated when the guide book is eventually written.

One of the joys of pilgrimage, apart from meeting new friends, is that of reacquaintance.

Two years ago, at Holywell, I was introduced to a lady from the Isle of Man. Karen and I were both born in Peel, and I remembered her as something of a celebrity as she and her sisters were triplets, a rare occurrence in the 1950s. Karen was with us last year and again today. It was also an unexpected pleasure to walk into the church in Trelawnyd this morning and come face to face with Colin, an old climbing friend from the 1970s. The world of pilgrimage is a small one.

Reaching St Asaph, we are welcomed in the Cathedral for the service marking the culmination of the Year of Pilgrimage. Tomorrow, a number of the Cathedral congregation will embark on a railway pilgrimage to Glasgow to celebrate the link between our two cities through St Kentigern (Mungo), while we will continue ever westwards into the hills.

### **Monday 5 May (St Asaph's Day) - Bluebells and buzzards**



### **Bluebells in Coed Mawr Llansannan**

We meet in St Asaph Cathedral, where the Dean has kindly offered to delay the start of the Monday Eucharist in order to lead our prayers and send us on our Way - thank you Nigel. At the bottom of the hill, we call in at the parish church of St Kentigern to add to the growing collection of stamps on our Pilgrims' Passports before making our second major river crossing, over the Elwy.

There's a long two mile road walk up to St Mary's church at Cefn for a brief visit and another stamp, then more road walking down to a second crossing of the Elwy at Bont

Newydd. From here, the Way climbs for most of the morning to its high point near Llanefydd and our now customary picnic lunch by the bus shelter just outside the village.

Now into our third day, we have fallen into a rhythm of walking, sometimes talking, sometimes alone with our thoughts, sometimes simply enjoying being here in this little visited corner of our beautiful country. I must confess to being a bit of a pine-nut - they have their own unique sound in the wind - and there is a fine little stand of Scots Pines in the valley above Dolwen Reservoir. Later we watch, heart in mouth, a tractor working on an impossibly steep slope above the Aled.

There is a tranquil spot for a riverside rest by the Aled at Bryn Rhyd-yr-Arian, where we are met by Sally and her dog who join us for the last leg to Llansannan. The last couple of miles into the village cross a wooded hillside where the trees, including one enormous holly, grow out of a sea of bluebells. Another tree houses a family of buzzards, the youngsters, fledged and close to flight, scrapping noisily over their share of the food.

Arriving in Llansannan, Sally has gone ahead to ring the Church bell to welcome us, while in the churchyard, we are delighted to find the newly appointed churchwarden and companion on past pilgrimages, the tireless and saintly Katy, mowing the long grass. Also here to greet us is Suryiah, delivering leaflets and posters for next Saturday's Poetry Workshop at the Red Lion.

Tomorrow we lift up our eyes unto the hills on a day of two big climbs with a sting in the tail, not quite the longest of our journey, but probably the most arduous.

## Tuesday 6 May - The pale blue dot



### Beautiful Bro Aled

River crossings assume great significance when one is travelling across the grain of the country. Our progress from Dee to sea has been marked so far by crossings of the Clwyd and Elwy, and today the Aled and Cledwen.

Our progress is also marked by the hills. Our own familiar Clwydian hills have been steadily diminishing behind us, while the mountains of Eryri have been rising ever higher ahead.

Last night's rain has blown through, so after prayers and hymns in St Sannan's, led by Revd Sally Rogers, we set out on a glorious spring morning (the best yet), on our long ascent of Dyffryn Aled. On the edge of the moor at the top of a stiff climb stands a hill farm which looks down the valley and over the lower hills beyond to the sea. Cleiriach is farmed by the indefatigable Katy, who had already been to market before joining us in St Sannan's, and now greets us again here. Also waiting for us is Simon O'Rourke's new chainsaw sculpture of the pilgrim sitting on his bench. I suspect we may be the first group of pilgrims to join him, though I fear we may have distracted him from his study.

Above Cleiriach the view really opens out. This is Hiraethog, the heart of North East Wales and probably its best kept secret, and for the next few miles we are crossing a ridge of high heather moorland before descending to Gwytherin where the now redundant church has been transformed by Alison Goulbourne into the Gwenfrewi Project, a centre for arts and music dedicated to St Winefride who lived here in the 7th century. It seems a lifetime now since we left Holywell.

Another steep climb takes us back up onto Hiraethog, where the mountains loom ever closer and the Clwydian Hills continue to recede into the distance. It is now barely possible to make out the Jubilee Tower on Moel Famau and I am reminded of that iconic photograph taken by Voyager from beyond the orbit of Saturn in which our own Earth appears as a pale blue dot.

From Pandy Tudur, another steep but mercifully short climb takes us to Llwyn Du Isa where we begin the final descent of the day through the grounds of Hafodunos Hall. Here we are met again by Sally, who has brought the primary school children out to see some pilgrims. The children excitedly lead us to see Simon O'Rourke's second chainsaw sculpture. Following the pilgrim's pointing finger, we continue beside the stream then down the road into the village. Sally has gone ahead with the children who take turns to ring the church bell to welcome us to Llangernyw.

Tomorrow we make our most significant river crossing as we cross the Conwy and enter Eryri.

### **Wednesday 7 May - Crossing the Conwy**



#### **Afon Conwy**

This is a very different day from yesterday, no big climbs, no high moorland - instead a long stretch of road walking, a steep descent into Eglwysbach and then the crossing of the Conwy.

St Digain's churchyard is home to a huge yew tree, said to be the oldest living thing in Europe. At 9 in the morning with 12 miles ahead of us, some of us also admit to feeling 4000 years old. Sally again leads our prayers before sending us forth into a bright and breezy morning but with cloud and drizzle over the hills.

As we climb out of Llangernyw past areas of felled timber, we keep looking back over yesterday's Hiraethog moors. The "pale blue dot" of Moel Famau has at last dipped below the horizon, and we must now look ahead to the high mountains of Eryri which fill the skyline ahead. The low cloud is lifting and soon we can see the unmistakable profile of Tryfan framed by the Ogwen Valley. Finally the cloud clears the hills revealing the great whaleback summits of the Carneddau, where the few remaining small patches of snow are soon connected by larger patches of sunlight.

Not far beyond the little Capel Gosen, we are able to leave the road where a track crosses, high above the valley floor, through Bryn-gwian where we are entertained by notices warning of loose dogs and free-range children. Finally the track passes a pond with a palatial double-duckhouse and a final ominous warning notice. Presumably the presence of the crocodile explains the absence of ducks.

A steep road descent leads us into Eglwysbach where we walk along the street to the parish church and a warm welcome. After food for the soul at St Digain's, it is food for the body at St Martin's - tea, coffee, sausage rolls, jam and Bakewell tarts. It requires an effort of will to tear ourselves away and put on our boots, but we have an appointment with another river.

We have at last reached the bridge over the Conwy at Tal y Cafn which admits us to Eryri, the mountain heartland of North Wales and the next stage of our journey. Another two miles of meadow and woodland bring us to Rowen where we come face to face with tomorrow's challenge, the steep climb through the woods to the ancient church of Llangelynnin, topographically and spiritually one of the high points of our pilgrimage, where we will gather in the morning.

## Thursday 8 May - A special place



### The Carneddau Ponies

One of our daily pilgrim prayers, rendered even more poignant by the death just before Easter of its author Revd Jim Cotter, refers to the "saints who first touched these shores... planting the places of prayer where your Spirit caresses in the summer breeze and thunders through the winter storms"

Nestled in a hollow on the hillside above Rowen and almost invisible until you come upon it quite unexpectedly, the ancient and tiny church of St Celynnin is one of these special places. Now here for the fourth time, we are once again moved and inspired. It is a difficult place to leave.

The forecast this morning was not good, low cloud with light rain, turning heavy at times, and we will be over a thousand feet for much of the day. Leaving St Celynnin's, we hear a cuckoo as we head out onto the moor. The early rain has eased off and there is little wind so we shed an outer layer in order to move faster, for we have some miles to cover.

We are on open moorland, not the heather moor of Hiraethog, but a grassy moor with rocky outcrops and drystone walls and short, springy turf which makes for easy going. Our lunch spot is in the lee of a drystone wall with a stand of pines framing the now cloud-free Tal y Fan. Joining the North Wales Path, we pause briefly at the stone circles above Penmaenmawr, then continue westwards, encountering a number of Carneddau ponies with one very new foal.

As the cloud descends and the rain resumes, we are descending towards the deep glen

which cuts into the moor above Llanfairfechan. Crossing the river we have to regain all the height we have lost before we can cross the northern spur of Foel Ganol and descend at last to Aber. By the time we reach Bangor tomorrow, we will be over half way to Aberdaron.

### **Friday 9 May - The day we went to Bangor**



#### **Leaving the hills towards Bangor**

The weather looks most unpromising at Aber first thing this morning, and it is soon raining hard, so we don jackets and overtrousers and set off, stopping for prayers in the round in a rather curious shelter resembling an oak staved barrel. Aber Falls look surprisingly thin after yesterday's rain, but these hill streams rise and fall quickly, and this morning's rain is soon in evidence, the volume of water growing rapidly as we watch.

As quickly as the fall grows, the rain eases and we are able to continue in improving weather. We are on the North Wales Path which, after leaving the falls skirts the head of the cwm and then gently rises along the south side. This is a painless way to gain height, and as we reach the power lines which cross the valley in a majestic sweep, we find ourselves several hundred feet above the valley floor with no apparent effort.

Rounding the corner we are able to enjoy the view across Traeth Lafan to Ynys Mon. It is low water and the sands extend almost to the Anglesey shore leaving only a narrow channel off Beaumaris. The weather continues to improve and by the time we pass the gully where we ate our lunch last year in a hailstorm, the sun is visible and there are

patches of blue over the island. The hawthorns, which have been waiting for the sun, are now beginning to burst into blossom.

As the Glyders and the hills around Nant Ffrancon emerge from the cloud, we are afforded our first glimpse of Yr Eifl, peeking round the shoulder of Moel y Ci. The bwlch above Trefor is the gateway to Llŷn and the final stage of our journey, but it is still four days away.

Passing the 15th century Cochwillan Hall, we find a lamb stuck in a slate fence, which Janet expertly extricates. Reaching Afon Ogwen, a footbridge between sparkling rapids admits us to Arfon. A rather dreary path alongside the Llandygai industrial estate leads us down to Afon Gegin which we follow to Port Penrhyn. A drunk on the footbridge above invites us to catch him if he jumps off. He has clearly recognised us as pilgrims but I don't think we can perform miracles just yet. Our journey has suddenly become urban.

Tomorrow's forecast is for wind and rain and possibly thunder, but we have passed our halfway point and celebrate with fish, chips, mushy peas and ale. Sufficient unto the day are the evils thereof.

### **Saturday 10 May - Happy Band of Pilgrims**



**Crossing Moel Rhiwen in the Rain**

St Deiniol's Cathedral is buzzing. A large yurt takes centre stage in the nave and all sorts of activities are being set up inside and out. The Dean takes time out from the Family Fun Day preparations to lead our daily prayers and send us forth on the next stage of our journey.

It is Barbara's last day with us, and Mary's, but we are joined by Rhian and Maryanne, and Karen is now with us all the way to Aberdaron. This coming and going of pilgrims is a feature of our journey and those who are travelling the distance welcome our new companions

Our route takes us along the High Street, up a steep path and over Bangor Mountain to Lon Las Cegin, which we follow to the foot of Moel Rhiwen. As we climb up through the woods, the rain sets in and will clearly be with us for the rest of the day. Leaving the shelter of the trees, we realise that the wind has also got up, and for the next mile or so we are exposed to all that the weather can throw at us. A little way below the bwlch is the isolated ruined homestead of Maes Meddygon. This is another of our special places, where we have in the past stopped and whiled away time in the shade of the trees. Who lived here and what was their story? But there is no shelter here today so we press on over the bwlch and begin our descent into Deiniolen.

Another short ascent brings us to Bigil where we are able to look down on Llanberis and Llyn Padarn. The rain is breaking up into showers but they are still heavy and it is a rather damp band of pilgrims who arrive at Stuart and Helen's door. We have been promised refreshment and they do us proud with coffee and home-made cake. Rhian's knee has finally let her down, but Stuart kindly runs her down to Llanberis. We seem to attract these acts of kindness wherever we go - it is all rather humbling.

As we descend the steep path through Coed Dinorwig, I make the mistake of pointing out to Karen the route of tomorrow's ascent. She looks a bit crestfallen, but cheers up when I tell her "who so beset her round with dismal stories do but themselves confound" and three of them take up the hymn which accompanies the rest of the way down.

Tomorrow is our last day in the mountains and we expect to be a smaller party since Janet and Duncan also have to return to work. The forecast is again rain and wind, but we remain a happy band of pilgrims.

## Sunday 11 May - Between the hills and the sea



### The wild open moorland between Waunfawr and Penygroes

Beyond Bangor, Taith Pererin divides in two. The coastal route follows the Menai Strait through y Felinheli and Caernarfon while the more adventurous slate valleys route branches inland through Llanberis and Waunfawr before the two routes again merge at Penygroes.

The forecast promises another wet day and does not disappoint, so our company is the smallest yet. Five of us huddle in the porch of a locked Eglwys St Padarn for our prayers and are joined by our two rambler colleagues before setting off up Ffordd Capel Coch in heavy rain. The route here is not as originally intended since a flash flood in 2012 washed away the bridge carrying the bridleway over Afon Goch, but contractors' plant and a portacabin indicate that repair is imminent.

With a strong sou'wester driving heavy rain into our faces we are not inclined to linger at Bwlch y Groes so carry on over the hill before following the dragonfly signs of the Hafod Oleu nature trail into Waunfawr. Having crossed the Ogwen on Friday, and the Seiont yesterday, the bridge over the Gwyrfaï marks our final significant river crossing. The station waiting room gives us shelter for an early lunch, but a Caernarfon train is due so we take care to sit on the Beddgelert side.

From Waunfawr, the steep climb over the shoulder of Moel Smytho includes a couple of stiles which would not be out of place on a via ferrata. Our two rambler colleagues have a bus to catch so speed ahead over the moor leaving the five of us to proceed at "pilgrim pace". A breakdown in communication leads to the company being briefly separated but

we are soon reunited. Sue and Karen sing to keep our spirits up as we cross the high moorland with Mynydd Mawr looming over us out of the mist and rain.

As we come down from the moor through the quarrying hamlets of y Fron and Cilgwyn, the rain eases and the cloud begins to lift, revealing a wide view over Ynys Mon and a sunlit Caernarfon Bay. Yr Eifl, first glimpsed from the slopes of Moel Wnion on Saturday, is now only two days away and we can clearly see the steep bwlch which we must climb to enter Llŷn.

At Cilgwyn we discover a wayside shrine and an Eastern Orthodox retreat house, something of a surprise in this nonconformist heartland. Equally exotic is the vineyard which we pass as we enter Penygroes.

Our journey so far has taken us through every landscape in North Wales; the arable land of Flintshire and the meadows of the Vale of Clwyd, the limestone dales around Cefn, the heather moorland of Hiraethog, the verdant Conwy Valley, the high mountains of Eryri, the temperate rainforest of Coed Dinorwig and now the post industrial slatescape of Llanberis and Nantlle.

Tomorrow, we reach another of our special places, the mediaeval pilgrims' church of St Beuno at Clynnog, and finally the coast which will be our handrail until the end of our pilgrimage.

### **Monday 12 May - Clynnog and the coast**



### **Our first glimpse of St Beuno's at Clynnog Fawr**

It has been argued that the 20th century began in 1914 and ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. If this makes it the shortest century on record, then we have found its longest decade, for the 1950s are still alive and well, if not exactly kicking, in Penygroes.

We assemble in this timewarp of a village and set off into a beautiful blue spring morning, what a contrast to our four wet mountain days. We are a larger company than yesterday, 11 in all, and we are light of heart, for today will bring us to another special place, another link in the chain which binds Basingwerk to Bardsey.

Our route takes us west from Penygroes, almost to the coast, then south on narrow country roads which climb steadily towards the hills first glimpsed from beyond Bangor and which have now expanded to fill the view ahead. We stop for lunch in a high spot looking out over Caernarfon Bay and Ynys Mon.

The church bell rings us down the narrow lane into Clynnog Fawr - we are expected. Revd Lloyd Jones is waiting at the gate to greet us, as he and his predecessors have been welcoming pilgrims to St Beuno's for centuries. We feel a great sense of oneness with the place and with our forebears, the first of whom may even have been received here by Beuno himself.

This place never fails to move me. The church is both ancient and timeless, and unusually airy for the windows are all clear glazed. It is also large, with a side chapel almost as big as the nave, indeed the whole is only a little smaller than Bangor Cathedral. Lloyd gives us a guided tour and explains why such a tiny community should have such a large church. One theory is that the monks of Clynnog, seeing the inevitable approach of the Dissolution, sold all their lands and invested the proceeds in a building which, being effectively a parish church, would escape surrender and dismantling.

Each time we have been here, we have said our daily prayers in a different part of the building and Lloyd invites us join him for prayers at St Beuno's Well where we line the walls of its tiny enclosure. The high point is the dedication of a bowl specially commissioned to keep well water in the church. We are sent on our way with a blessing, refreshed in body and spirit. There is a spring in our step, which not even the passing traffic can dampen.

Finally we leave the road, taking the narrow lane down past Bryn yr Eryr to the beach. We have planned to arrive here at low water, and enjoy stepping out across the firm sand below the high water mark. The winter storms have in places washed mud onto the beach, but it is sun-baked and firm and makes for easy going. Catherine steps onto the final mud bank and in seconds has sunk to her knees.

The mud is thick and viscous and she has no option but to sit down to take the weight off her feet. We fear that she is going to lose her boots at the very least, but with a herculean effort, she is able to extricate first one foot, and then the other. She still has her boots, but they are inside huge balls of clay, and we are all chastened. It is not the end to the day that any of us would have wished, but it could have been so much worse.

We are faced in the morning with the sisyphian ascent of Bwlch yr Eifl but we have

planned shorter days for tomorrow and Wednesday and are all eagerly looking forward to two days of gentle ambling along the coast path.

## **Tuesday 13 May - The walls of Heaven are thin**



### **St Beuno's Church at Pystill**

This morning's task, which has been looming large in our thoughts, is the ascent of Bwlch yr Eifl. This 1150 foot high pass has to be climbed from sea level with no opportunity to warm up on the approach. We have however been pushing ahead during the first week, in order to split this part of the Coast Path into two shorter days, so we have a relatively short day ahead of us.

We can therefore afford to start the day with a gentle amble around Trwyn y Tal. The sea pink is beginning to flower, and we now have seabirds for company. Karen leads our morning prayers on the top of this windy headland, and the words are singularly apt, for we have a wide view of land, sea and sky and much to be thankful for. Karen invites us each to ask God for what we will most need this day, and I suspect we have all asked for the same thing.

We can prevaricate no longer, and must now tackle the pass. At the summit it seems we have to stoop to stay below the cloud base. But our work is done and we can now coast down towards Pistyll and Nefyn.

At the top of the steep hill which leads down to Nantgwrtheyrn, we pause, for we have reached another significant point on our journey. Just visible through the gap between Garn Boduan and Carn Fadryn is the tip of Mynydd Enlli - our first glimpse of the island.

But it is soon gone and the next time we see it, God willing and weather permitting, it will be from Colin's boat.

The tiny church of St Beuno at Pistyll with its rush-strewn floor is one of those places where the walls of Heaven are thin, and we are very conscious that we are joining tens of thousands of pilgrims who have come this way over the last fifteen hundred years. Revd Richard Wood joins us to lead our prayers. Pat and Catrin join us here too, and feel guilty about having walked a shorter distance, but Richard assures us that every journey to a place such as this, however short, is a pilgrimage in itself.

The last few miles pass quickly and we are soon entering Nefyn past the former church of St Mary, shortly to reopen as Nefyn Maritime Museum. Tomorrow, we have another short day to Tudweiliog, where the sea will be our close companion throughout the day.

### **Wednesday 14 May - Shelduck and seals**



### **Approaching Porth Dinllaen**

It is another short day, a mere 7 miles from Nefyn to Tudweiliog, but by going round the headland at Porthdinllaen we can stretch it to 9. It is just two days since the full moon, so the spring tide will be at its highest, but it will have turned by 11 o'clock, allowing us to slip through the gap between the rocks and the receding tide. By happy coincidence (or is it just good planning?), 11 is also opening time at the Ty Coch Inn.

First however, we must visit the Spar to replenish our lunch boxes, before gathering in the parish church of St David where Richard joins us to lead our morning prayers. We are sent on our way with a blessing and a packet of chocolate digestives (we'd

happened to mention the plain digestives given to us at Clynnog). It is another glorious day, with a big anticyclone forecast to cover much of the UK for the next three days.

After a coffee stop at Ty Coch, we pause to visit the new lifeboat station before rounding the headland. From here, we can see Tudweiliog, though even on a short day like today, it seems to take forever to get noticeably closer.

We edge our way along the narrow strip between the cliff top and the ever-expanding golf course, then descend into the tiny bay of Aber Geirch which we share with a pair of shelduck. If one ignores the sewer pipe, this is an idyllic spot for lunch and the daily liturgy from our little yellow book.

On two previous occasions, we have reached this point quite late in the afternoon of a very long day from Trefor, but now, refreshed in body and spirit, we have every intention of enjoying to the full our amble along the clifftop path to Tudweiliog. Just before Penrhyn Cwmistir, We pause among the bluebells, and our arrival at the bay just beyond is greeted by a very vocal group of seals including a number of pups, with whom Sue and Karen engage in a singing competition.

This evening, 12 of us dine together at the Lion, where we are at last joined by Chris and Jenny, whom we have missed, since they have been the inspiration and driving force behind this entire project, and by Gill who again lobbies for Llangwnadl to be included in the itinerary, which of course it should be. We're working on it.

Tomorrow, we will be in Aberdaron.

**Thursday 15 May - A bough of country**



**St Hywyn's Church Aberdaron**

"I have crawled out at last  
far as I dare onto a bough  
of country that is suspended  
between sky and sea"

Here on the north coast of Pen Llŷn, we are conscious that the bough is narrowing, for we are now only one day away from Aberdaron. We meet at the parish church of St Cwyfan in Tudweiliog, and start the day with a few verses of "Happy Band of Pilgrims" but decide to defer our daily prayers until we are out on the coast and in the presence of that other, pre-Christian, trinity of land sea and sky.

It is a grey morning, which is disappointing after the blue skies of Tuesday and Wednesday, for the cloud shows no sign of breaking or lifting. On the promontory which encloses the tiny and exposed harbour of Porth Ysgaden, we find a ruined fisherman's bothy, of which only the chimney still stands. Karen again leads our morning prayers, invites us to listen to the music of wind, sea and seabirds and reminds us that, though she and Sue have been doing most of the singing along the way, we each have a song in our soul.

Mine unfortunately turns out to be Paddy McGinty's Goat, and the wretched animal is with me for most of the day as we follow the undulating coast path, mostly on the cliff top, occasionally on the beach, and often descending into or climbing out of deep stream valleys. At Porth Widlin, the path used to turn inland, but access has now been

negotiated with the tenant farmer and a rudimentary path continues round the headland, mostly across steep slopes some way below the edge. As time is beginning to press, we turn inland at Porth Ferin to rejoin the original coast path, though Mike and Ian continue round the headland, later reporting it to be quite hard going.

By the time we approach Porth Oer, the cloud has lifted but been replaced by sea mist rolling in and out of the bay. At the cafe, we are met by Pat and Catrin, by Chris who joins us for the last part of our journey, and as we reach the little Afon Daron, we are also joined by Valmai and Derfel.

We walk into Aberdaron in a turmoil of emotions - happiness and gratitude that our journey is done, mixed with sadness that our arrival marks the parting of the ways, for not all will be able to cross with us to Ynys Enlli. We have shared much in the last two weeks of joy and discomfort, of faith, and the simple pleasure of each other's company.

But tomorrow is a new day - the weather is set fair and Ynys Enlli beckons.

### **Friday 16 May - At the Western edge of the world**



### **The view from Mynydd Enlli**

Almost two weeks ago, we began our journey, as we have done each year, with the words of R.S.Thomas:

"There is an island there is no going to  
But in a small boat the way the saints went"

The crossing to Ynys Enlli is regarded as one of the 10 most perilous short sea journeys in the world, but we are fortunate indeed to have as our skipper Colin Evans who knows these waters like his own back yard, which indeed they are. We gather in the church to collect our thoughts and reflect on our journey, remembering in particular those of our companions along the Way who are unable to be with us today, before taking the clifftop path to Porth Meudwy where we board Colin's boat. It has been our good fortune to cross Bardsey Sound at the end of four consecutive annual pilgrimages, for there are many occasions, even in the best of years, when it is impossible to land on the island for days on end. Indeed it is only 4 months since the BBC was reporting gusts of 108 mph at Aberdaron.

We leave Porth Meudwy in sea mist and soon lose sight of land. We can see the island on radar, but I suspect Colin is using his local knowledge and seafarer's instinct as much as anything. We are in safe hands.

From the landing place, we walk up to the farm where Jo welcomes us with tea and coffee, before "munching the gravel of... the salt lane" to the church where we are to give thanks for our arrival and where Chris will celebrate the Eucharist. It is a joyous gathering, but tinged with sadness that soon we, who have been close companions for these last two weeks, will part company. As we climb to the top of Mynydd Enlli, the mist clears, revealing the whole of North Wales, from Holyhead, through the mountains of Eryri, round the vast sweep of Bae Ceredigion to Mynydd Preseli. To the west, we can even see the Wicklow Hills.

Returning to Aberdaron, Judith invites us in for tea, an invitation we gladly accept, for it will prolong our time together. Finally, we can put it off no longer - the time has come to return to our homes.

This journal will conclude with verses from Robert Dickinson's "Path of Miracles". Though this was written for Santiago, the Camino was the inspiration for our own project, many of our Taith Pererin companions have also completed it, and the words are universal, reflecting the shared experience of pilgrims down the ages:

"At the Western edge of the world,  
we pray for our sins to fall from us  
as chains from the limbs of penitents.  
We have walked out of the lives we had  
and will return to nothing, if we live,  
changed by the journey, face and soul alike.

"We have walked out of our lives  
to come to where the walls of heaven are thin  
as a curtain, transparent as glass,  
where the Apostle spoke the holy words,  
where in death he returned,  
where God is close,  
where saints and martyrs mark the road.

"Santiago, primus ex apostolis,  
defender of pilgrims, warrior for truth,  
take from our backs the burdens of this life,

what we have done,  
who we have been;  
take them as fire takes the cloth  
they cast into the sea at Finisterre."