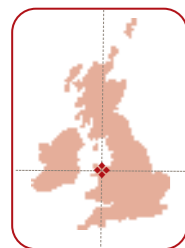


ACTION STATIONS



Ordnance Survey
Landranger Map 115

Don Jolly kicks off our revamped, activity-based Home Touring series with a visit to North Wales

SEEKERS OF Snowdonia action could do worse than park their caravan at the Club's Affiliated Site – Riverside Touring Park – in

Betws-y-Coed, North Wales' outdoor capital. Walking, biking, climbing, canoeing, fishing, birdwatching – the outdoor world's your oyster. Fancy a hike? A good appetiser starts at the site's back gate and heads along the path beside the Afon Llugwy

into Betws-y-Coed. It then proceeds across the Pont-y-Pair bridge, where the Llugwy gushes through a narrow gorge. Immediately over the bridge, you rejoin the riverside. You can follow either a 980-yard mixed-ability path or, at the water's edge, a rougher track made tricky by rocks and exposed roots. It's delightfully leafy and leads to the Miner's Bridge, a steeply-raked footbridge accessing further potential woodland wanderings south of the river. To return, retrace your steps along the riverside or climb the steep slope from the bridge to a minor road back to the village. The total distance is almost three miles.

The Gwydyr Forest, which the aforementioned touches on, is a vast area ranged across Snowdonia's eastern flanks that offers a wealth of walking opportunities. A free map, available from Betws-y-Coed TIC, details routes varying from a mile-and-a-

half to six miles. Some paths are former miners' tracks – you can still see former mine buildings in the woodland.

Of course, in this region there is plenty of mountain hiking, too, and Snowdon, or Yr Wyddfa as it is known hereabouts, the rooftop of Wales, is not far away. Two routes to the 3,560ft summit – the Pyg Track and Miners' Track – start in the car park at Pen-y-Pass, at the top of the Llanberis Pass. Car parking costs £10, allowing for an average five hours to walk to the summit and back. The Pyg Track contours round the north of Bwlch-y-Moch before climbing the flank of Crib Goch. Meanwhile, the Miners' initially takes an easier route through the landscape beside Llyn Llydaw before climbing to join the Pyg Track above the small Glaslyn lake and zig-zagging steeply to the summit. If those routes seem too strenuous, park at Llanberis, ride to the

summit on the mountain railway and then walk down an easy five miles.

For refreshment, there is a modern café – Hafod Eryri – at the summit, another at Pen-y-Pass and several in Llanberis. The Pen-y-Gwryd Hotel, near Pen-y-Pass at the A498/A4086 junction, also has atmospheric climbers' bars. The hotel was the training base for the first successful Everest expedition in 1953, and adorning its walls are hobnailed climbing boots and photos of Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay. On the ceiling you will find climbers' signatures, among them Hillary's and expedition leader John Hunt's.

Want to get even closer to Snowdonia's rugged landscape? Then why not try a spot of rock-climbing? Plas y Brenin, the National Mountain Centre at Capel Curig, 10 minutes' drive from Betws-y-Coed, offers a weekend course combining 'bouldering' (traversing low-level rocks) and climbing with ropes on some of Snowdonia's classic routes. Two-day Discover Rock Climbing courses, running from March until October, cost £295.

Plas y Brenin's Taster Days are great for sampling several activities. Available to anyone aged eight to 80 during school holidays between Easter and autumn half-term, they cover two-hour sessions on an indoor climbing wall, canoeing on the centre's own lake and skiing on its dry ski slope. Sessions cost £15 each or you can pay £35 for all three (2010 prices). There are other weekend courses, too, for canoeing, kayaking and mountain biking techniques.

Another company specialising in outdoor activities is Surf-Lines, based at Llanberis. One of its most popular courses is the Llanberis Adventure, which comprises half a day kayaking on Llyn Padarn and the remainder climbing on nearby crags. A full family day for two adults and two under-16s costs £222.

Mountain bike enthusiasts will find routes of varying grades in the Gwydyr Forest. One of the most challenging is the 15½-mile Marin Trail, graded Red/Difficult, which features big climbs and descents as well as testing sections with names such as 'Pigs Might Fly', 'Grey Mares Wail' and 'Pandora's Rocks'.

INFORMATION



White-water fun at Plas y Brenin

Photo: Plas-y-Brenin

DID YOU KNOW?

Betws-y-Coed translates as 'prayer house in the woods'

SITE

Riverside Touring Park, Old Church Road, Betws-y-Coed LL24 0AL. Call 01690 710310. Full details can be found on p235 of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2011/12*.

CONTACTS

- **Beics Betws, Betws-y-Coed** – call 01690 710766 or see bikewales.co.uk
- **Betws-y-Coed Anglers Club** – call 01690 710143 or see betws-y-coed-anglers.org
- **Conwy RSPB reserve** – call 01492 584091 or see rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/c/conwy/
- **Plas y Brenin (The National Mountain Centre), Capel Curig** – call 01690 720214 or see pyb.co.uk
- **Surf-Lines, Llanberis** – call 01286 879001 or see surf-lines.co.uk
- **Ultimate Outdoors, Betws-y-Coed** – call 01690 710888 or see ultimateoutdoors.co.uk

CAUTION

When participating in activities in mountain areas, ensure you have appropriate clothing and footwear, have a suitable map and compass or GPS, and are carrying sufficient food and water. Be weather aware.

You can hire bikes from Beics Betws or Ultimate Outdoors in Betws-y-Coed.

Prefer something less strenuous? You could try fishing or maybe birdwatching. The Llugwy and Conwy rivers are among the best in Wales for sea trout and salmon fishing, while the lakes of Llyn Elsi, Llyn Goddionduon and Llyn Bychan are excellent for brown trout. Fishing permits can be obtained from Pendyffryn Stores in Betws-y-Coed or by calling the Betws-y-Coed Anglers Club (see panel).

Birdwatching goes well with hiking, and species you might spot around Snowdonia include the chough, crossbill, redstart, red grouse, black grouse, peregrine falcon, merlin, goshawk and hen harrier. Farther afield, Wales' only breeding pair of ospreys can be seen from a RSPB viewpoint south of Beddgelert in the Glaslyn Valley.

The RSPB also has a reserve on the Conwy estuary, where resident species include the grey heron, black-tailed godwit, water rail, shelduck, lapwing, skylark, goldfinch, reed bunting, buzzard and various warblers. The reserve also has a waterside café and shop. ■