

Cwm Eigiau Meet 10-12th Sept. 2010

Participants: Josie & Bernard Smith, Claire McClellan, Dave Lomas, Andy Bond & Christine, Edgar Davies

The expedition started somewhat later than planned, getting away from Y—at Tal-y-Bont well after dark at about 9.30pm on Friday night and then driving our way to the gated road SW to the barrier and car park. From here the route was on foot, into the night against a decidedly fresh head-wind and periodic showers! We duly set off about 10 pm for what should have been a comfortable one hour walk.

The A team comprised five club members and a wheel barrow. For the first mile it was the barrow that took the lead, until it went the wrong way, breaching the dam wall and nearly ending up in the lake. While Bernard consulted the map, Edgar followed his instincts, turning back to find the turn-off to Hafod.

From here the track begins to undulate - heavy going for the barrow- so on reaching the bridge and stile at the south end of Llyn Eigau, Dave was bringing up the rear, while Edgar recognised the last leg of the journey and surged ahead. At twenty to twelve, he turned round and shouted back into the night "the hut, the hut" and went on to unlock the front door. Even the barrow found the final section of the track more favourable and in a few minutes all were assembled in our weekend habitat.

The bar was duly declared open and bottles, cans and a carton of wine in a dishevelled condition were spread on the table. The chink of glasses soon cheered this gathering of the select few and a variety of cheeses arrayed on one of the breadboards. Under such circumstances, supper takes a long time and we finally turned in at twenty to two.

It follows that we wouldn't plan to get up particularly early on Saturday morning. The weather outlook had been for a significant improvement but that didn't seem to apply to Cwm Eigiau. I continued to hear fresh breeze and periodic showers, then looked at my watch and saw that it was half past nine. The rest of the team remained in deep slumber. It was obviously my job to get up and prepare the first brew, pour it into the mugs and serve it to them on a tray in bed! And then some of them wanted refills! It did though serve to wake them up and, in due course, all were assembled in the dining area as Josie's communal porridge bubbled in the pan.

Cwm Eigiau Cottage comprises one single building with front door access through a little porch into living quarters, to one side having two tier bunk sleeping accommodation with fixed iron ladder to the upstairs. Adjoining this is

the out building providing storage space and a chemical toilet. A very effective stove heater is situated to the side of the main room, having a flat top that provides space for a kettle. Above, there is a clothes rack, for drying attire. Conventional cooking is on gas rings and a large water urn is also heated by gas. The hut does not have electric light, power naturally generated locally! The front of the cottage is south facing - bathed in sunshine on a fine day.

After a plentiful and leisurely breakfast, the sky had cleared somewhat, now providing sunny intervals, if still quite breezy. But as soon as hill-walking was mentioned, one of the group flatly refused --- the wheelbarrow! Dave accordingly offered to drive the barrow back to his van and try and catch up later, while Josie, Claire, Bernard and Edgar would follow a route over the south Eigiau summits, Pen Llithrig Wrach and Pen-yr-Helgi Du and decide from there how time permits. The walk started alright taking our track east to the bottom, then getting onto the south bound mine track on the other side. It seemed pointless following this as far as the old quarry, so we struck out making our way up the hillside. Without a footpath it was difficult to spot a gentler route. Edgar veered slightly to the east, picking the short straw, and getting landed on a wide belt of Welsh heather! The front group had a long wait for me near the col overlooking Llyn Cowlyd. From here the heather was behind us (for the time being) and we made good progress, up and over Pen Llithrig Wrach, and then a significant drop to the next col where we found good shelter on the north side for a lunch stop. Duly replenished, we tackled the ascent of Pen-yr-Helgi Du that, if my arithmetic is right, is 2,732 ft high.

It was both windy and chilly on top. To continue around the horseshoe of Upper Eigiau would be significantly time consuming, the alternative being to make a steep descent roughly NE to the old Eigiau quarry, despite having no recognised path. The latter was much the favoured option and the first part of the descent, trending ultimately east, uneventful. But then Bernard, up front, changed his tack to north, setting off alarm bells with Edgar at the rear - not only was it steep ground but the terrain confronted me with an army of its weaponry: rough heather, loose ground, unstable stone shoots, hidden rocks and wet and slippery sections and thistles! You can imagine I was relieved to be down the lot and told Bernard next time that we go there I lead the way!

Meanwhile the barrow boy was back at the cottage. Also Andy and Christine had arrived in the afternoon. Now the sun was shining and we could all sit outside and take some welcome refreshment. There remained a significant duty to perform. Whilst we had bid farewell to the early rain, much of the ground was

sodden, resulting in squelchy boots and wet sox. These required some attention, the sox rung out and hung on the rack.

Thoughts in due course turned to food. Let banqueting commence. Appetites were whetted with Dave's delicious home-made soup, then a leisurely intermission as wine was scoffed. Pans of thick Bolognese and mushroom sauce bubbled on the rings and a mighty cauldron of one and a half hundredweight of spaghetti to be decorated with parmesan cheese. This was a feast fit for a monarch --- or an LMC member. The plates were piled high and second-helpings served until the pans were bare! Gluttony requires refreshment and, as the contents of Bernard's wine carton were dwindling, Edgar opened home-made port and the cheese was spread out. Finally, bringing back memories of Islay, a bottle of Bowmore twelve year old malt whisky put in an appearance to complete the splendid evening. All duly turned in around the bewitching hour!

Edgar leapt out of bed at 8 am the following morning to resume the tea making ritual. Today there was to be a choice of breakfast: more porridge or a magnum multi-pan fry up for those found with new found appetites! At Eigiau Cottage no food is to be left, so if you take it up there you have got to consume it.

We walked out through the door and into sunshine so the clothes rack was dropped and the still damp sox transferred outside and arrayed on the bench and rocks to dry in preparation for the days walk. Alas not all went to plan. A rucksack found its way onto the outdoor bench on which Edgar's sox, earmarked for the day were arrayed and from within its water container decided to spring a leak - to wet Edgar's sox again. Not to worry, Edgar waved his magic wand and pulled out a secret alternative --- a pair of woollen leg-warmers drawn down over the feet and folded under the toes. As soon as we got off walking, I was oblivious to the difference.

Today we all set off at about 10.30 am back west to the quarry at the meeting of Nant Fawnog and Afon Eigiau but now turned north towards the upper basin before trending back west and onto the spur rising SW to the Carnedd Llewelyn ridge. The wind up here was decidedly fresh so we did not linger on the summit, rather continued NNE round the tip of Ffynnon Llynffant and dropping eastward towards the Nuttall, Craig Eigiau. We made better time on this walk than might have been expected, getting back to the hut shortly after 3 pm allowing time for a cup of tea. All cleared our belongings from the hut to enable a good clean-out whilst the ritual hole was covered over! We got away at 4.30 pm and arrived back at the car park at 5.25 pm.

At least a few more of the LMC know what awaits them when they go on a Cwm Eigiaw meet!

Edgar Davies