

NORTH WALES BRANCH REPORT

All aboard for another surreal appointment with North Wales. Last time it was all the fun of the fair with our big dipper and smoke and mirrors. Well since then the dipper has been more or less careering downhill with the committee desperately trying to apply the brakes. Even the water splash hasn't slowed us, and now we're whirling away on the merry go round that is our usual autumn mayhem. Stop I want to get off (and almost have quite literally at times). In fact I write this the night before escaping for a long holiday for some well earned R&R. Of course the last couple of weeks have been frantic getting articles, courses, newsletters and goodness knows what finished before takeoff. Whilst this is being composed (ideas above my station) at the last minute, it is in fact being written a couple of weeks before copy date so it will be even more out of date than normal by the time you read. I thought I'd been clever in arranging the Branch AGM for my absence, but oh no the committee went and changed the date to more or less co-incide with my return, so jet lagged I'll have to attend. Two days later I'll be giving the first talk of our winter programme, as we try to drum up some enthusiasm. I shall be even less coherent than normal.

Sorry to burden you with my holiday plans but they're integral to the plummet we've been experiencing. It's demoralising organising your life around a Branch programme only to be smacked in the face by an almost total lack of enthusiasm. How can a recession make free events too expensive? Observation suggests it does. Doom and despondency have engulfed at least 50% of the committee (or about 30% of the active membership) as can be seen in the photo taken during a recent branch walk as our Chairman is literally climbing the wall at the lack of attendance. How could anyone resist visiting such an amazing structure? Perhaps I shouldn't complain 5 Branch members in the same place at the same time was some sort of record.



In the 6 weeks since the start of September, apart from my involvement at the Ambleside Congress, we've had our competition - a soggy mess, next to no competitors and held at a small local fair that shrunk further in the wash; 2 guided walks - 9 takers; 2 taster days and a weekend course - 9 trainees; a test day - 5, should have been 6 but the one Branch member due to attend, one of the 2 or 3 keen ones we actually have (I exaggerate there is only 1, but if I say that it will upset everyone else), and the main reason we bothered to run the day, broke his ankle. Now even the keen ones are going to extreme lengths to avoid me.



However every cloud has a silver lining, or so they tell me. Usually oxidised aluminium at best if you ask me, however in this instance it was shiny indeed. A contingent from the South Wales Branch descended, (or should that be ascended), on/to our Clawdd course (stone faced earth bank, stones bookended in courses, sign up for next year if you want to know more). Even I, however hard I try, cannot but smile at Ceri and his antics, and he has the perfect body shape for compacting the earth core, although star jumps are likely to prove detrimental in this respect in the long run. Of course apart from the committee there was no-one from North Wales, but it is a bit far you know. As well as a day and a half of `barking` - I don't really do instruction, they got 2 slide presentations and a guided walk. It was a fillip, if a somewhat exhausting one.

My internet searches suggest there is a severe lack of dry stone walls in Hong Kong and Vietnam, bliss.