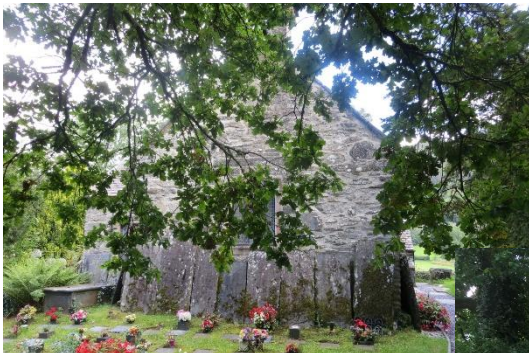


Visits to Wales



Michael Pierre de Villiers

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Title page: Top to bottom: Picnic at Conwy Castle; Ferry at Holyhead; Winter evening Llandudno from the pier; Mount Snowdon from a lookout site; Betws-y-Coed old St Michael's Church and the 1873 new one in Holyhead Road.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Pierre de Villiers was born in Durban, South Africa. He was trained to World Meteorological Organization class one meteorologist and multi-discipline weather forecaster in the South African Weather Service where he reached the rank of Director. He served on a weather ship in the South Atlantic. He served on World Meteorological Organization expert teams and was World Meteorological Organization rapporteur for the Africa region. He was also a commercial pilot and flying instructor. More recently he was a weather forecaster in the United Arab Emirates, then in England. Now retired.

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2026-06-22

Visits to Wales

Michael Pierre de Villiers

Day trip to south-east Wales

Our first trip to Wales was an exploratory one primarily to visit Newport, the birth place of my maternal grandmother on Sunday the 20th November 2005. It was getting quite cold now with regular autumn fog and frost. The plan a driving tour, primarily to Newport then Cardiff, Swansea onto Llanelli.

Departed early. There was thick freezing fog on the way there that caused ice to form on the windscreen and blocked the washer nozzles so that the windscreen could not be cleared. We had to stop twice to scrape it off. Eventually, we stopped at a roadside service to buy an antifreeze washer fluid to clear the windscreen. When we reached to the coast it was warmer. When we stopped for a break, pieces of ice fell off the car.



The end of the road. Nearest number 30 then 31 and 33 with a shop on the corner.

are going, so why do we need them. Apart from the truncated street, it is considerably changed. Half the south side is now a large supermarket.

We went to the Newport address on my grandmother's birth certificate, number 37, but it would be a bit difficult living there now. Number 37 Ruperra Street is now a main road that crosses Ruperra Street, the road coming to a dead-end at number 33. The road is not far from the railway station and as great granddad's birth certificate says locomotive driver; I suppose it was convenient for work. I'm sorry to say, we had trouble finding the road. Newport being rather mean with their road name signs. No Global Positioning System (GPS) to us then. The people that live here know where they



Mumbles Pier.

From Newport we passed through Cardiff and on to west of Swansea at Mumbles Pier. At this time of the year a lot of tourist sites are closed for the winter and only open again toward Easter. In a way it is great going to these places and avoiding crowds, because there are no tourists. It is a bit of a drawback that when you get there you can't see the attractions, because they are closed. But we tend to do things that way. We picnicked in the middle of the summer heat in the UAE and picnicked in Shrewsbury with snow falling around.

The Swansea coast toward Mumbles Pier and

the view is quite pretty. We had a picnic there in the car park overlooking the pier. Too bloody cold outside. Sunny, but with a “brisk” wind. We came back through interior country roads. On higher ground some of the frost lay as thick as snow on sheltered north facing slopes. A long day with lots of driving. Rather ambitious to do it all in one day.

Pre-Christmas, it was cold weather again with the winter’s first real snow, thick over Wales and Scotland, but not in the Midlands where it was bright and sunny at times, but cold in the fresh northerly wind.

The north of Wales

Twenty days later, Saturday 10th December 2005, we set off on a two day trip to northern Wales. We went from Llangollen (end of a boat canal route), through Ruthin to Conwy (a beautiful castle town) to Llandudno (a seaside resort where we stayed). The next day we went on to Holyhead, Caernarfon, Snowden, Porthmadog and then back home. The Snowdon area to Porthmadog is really something worth seeing. Once again, the trip was too rushed.



Pontcysyllte canal aqueduct seen in winter sun from the road bridge and looking down the valley from the aqueduct to the road bridge.

Llangollen, on the river Dee, is best known for its annual Eisteddfod according to the tourist books, but nobody was singing when we were there. They all looked very busy shopping on a Saturday morning. It is pretty. To us it is best known for the nearby high Pontcysyllte aqueduct that carries the Llangollen canal, which we walked onto. No, we did not walk on water. There



Conway Castle. We walked along the castle’s walls.

is a path along the side. Built by 1805, at its highest it is 39 metres (127 feet) above the river and among the earliest aqueducts to use a cast iron trough.

Conwy is a beautiful little town with an imposing castle built in the 13th century during the reign of King Edward I of England as part of a network of defences to control attacks from the mountainous north-western interior by the revolting Welsh. Not revolting to look at, look you. Well, maybe to the English defenders. Under Llywelyn the Great this area was close to completely independent. In 1267 his grandson, Llywelyn



Conwy's Llywelyn the Great statue.

the Last took over and was acknowledged as the Prince of Wales by Henry III. Due to an English Lord doing a bit of land grabbing from Llywelyn and no support from Henry III, Llywelyn also became revolting. In 1272 Edward I became king and decided to build all the castles, such as at Conwy and Caernarfon for defence, thereby laying the foundation for the future Welsh tourist industry. In 1283 Llywelyn the Last was killed in a skirmish and that was that, the last of the Llywelyns. Edward I ruled and made his son the Prince of Wales. In 1400 until 1416, Owain Glyndwr, descended from the Welsh princes, became revolting and gave Henry IV a considerable headache by capturing places such as Harlech and Cardiff and formed his own parliament. But French allies made a truce with the English and that was that as well (Over Wales, 2011). We had a closer look at Conwy in 2019.

We spent the night at a small B+B in Llandudno that was owned by a lady from Liverpool and met an interesting man who had a small shop on the pier selling tourist things. Among other things he told us about his troubles with the Inland Revenue over the money he made from the shop, but it was not entirely his fault, look you. Llandudno is also lovely and about a 15 minute drive from Conwy. In fact, the spread of the two places means they are almost connected. Apart from a long walk along the long pier we also went for a long late afternoon walk through the shopping area where we heard some Welsh spoken, but English was still heard the most. We eventually had dinner at the charming The Albert pub

come restaurant. Pubs are few and far between in this part of the world.



The cable car road downhill to the town and beachfront in the distance.

The light was failing on the early winter's evening when I took gloomy scenic photographs of Llandudno from its pier. Not worth showing here. However, the next morning, I did photograph the steep hill to the Great Orme headland. The last remaining cable-operated street tramway, The Great Orme Tramway operates from the centre of the town to the summit of the Great Orme. It is closed from late October to later March, but I did get a photograph of a section of the street.

Holyhead was disappointing and is really just a ferry town for the crossing to Ireland, although it is not small. Then it was on to Caernarfon where we had a good walk around the old walled city. We were there fairly early on Sunday in winter, so the natives were mostly absent, but friendly. We had the place pretty much to ourselves. Although, my wife did have a closeup eyeball to eyeball confrontation with a gull while standing next to a sea wall. The gull obviously did not like what it saw, or felt intimidated. Eventually, it flew away.



Caernarfon Castle.

centre. I was stuck in traffic. I idly watched a man with plastic gloves emptying the trash from an outside access panel on the side of a public toilet. He then used a long tweezers to pick out what I now realise were needles and place them in a separate trash bag, before dumping them in his van. It is quite a shock to realise that drug abuse had reached the level where trash removal personnel are routinely equipped with special equipment and receptacles are routinely placed in toilets.

Caernarfon is another pretty place. In fact, we loved nearly everything we saw in Wales, except Holyhead. The castle is massive. Considering that all the castles were made by manual labour the structures are even more impressive. One thing that struck us and it was quite a shock, was that in a nearby public toilet there was a special separate non-returnable bin for used needles to be discarded. I am not talking about knitting needles, but surgical drug injection needles. I then recalled and understood, something that I had seen sometime previously in Birmingham near the Bull Ring shopping



The indistinct Llanberis ticket office and station for the railway to the top of Snowdon.

From here we headed inland to Llanberis, near Mount Snowdon. For those who do not wish to walk to the top of the 1085 metres (3560 ft) mountain, there is a railway that will take you from Llanberis to the top.

While stopped at Llanberis, 5 sheep came out of a field and walked down the road as if this was the most normal thing to do and traffic had to stop and wait. Don't know where they went as they disappeared around a bend in the road.

The scenery from here to Porthmadog is wild and fascinating, being a mixture of mountains with mist and cloud on them, to sharp wooded valleys with streams. In one we found people kayaking, this in early winter! Then a rather long haul back to Solihull via Shrewsbury, most of it in the dark after 4 pm.

Aberystwyth

We went to Aberystwyth by train the weekend of 26th and 27th June 2010. Just over 3 hours to get there. Aberystwyth is close to the mid-point on the west coast of Wales. A good trip. Transport for Wales (Trafnidiaeth Cymru) train seats very comfortable and a good view. We travelled by bus from home, about 7 am, to Birmingham International Airport Station to catch the 8:09 Arriva train to Aberystwyth via Shrewsbury.

After arrival at Aberystwyth, we had lunch on the seafront at an outdoor diner. Something like the Cuban Hat and The Nest (without the car parking) on Durban's Lower Marine Parade,



Aberystwyth beachfront diner.

North Beach many years ago) The seafront has a long line of mostly 4 to 5 storey high Victorian and Edwardian buildings, many of which are now hotels and B & Bs.

Aberystwyth is the administrative centre of the Wales west coast and is a university town with about seven thousand students. It is also the home of the National Library. The harbour was once one of the busiest in Wales with the Ystwyth and Rheidol rivers flowing into it. Apparently, the Rheidol River is the steepest river in Britain.

After lunch we checked in at the B&B to leave our overnight backpack, before we headed back to the station to go on the Vale of Rheidol Stream Train. The railway journey is 19km (11¾miles) inland from Aberystwyth to Devil's Bridge. This train journey has already been spoken about in the article on locomotives. So nuff said.

Arriving back at Aberystwyth, we went walk about along the beach front then in the opposite direction to the castle ruin. Ages before the Normans began building castles, Iron Age settlers used a hilltop, called Pen Dinas to the south of Aberystwyth, to build a fortification. Then early in the 12th century the Normans built their first earth and timber castle on the site. There is now a monument to Wellington on the hilltop. The castle site was too vulnerable and a new site in southern Aberystwyth itself was chosen. This castle was built by the Welsh, led by Llywelyn the Great. Early in the 14th century, the concentric fortress began to decay and by 1343 the main gateway, drawbridges and the outer bailey were falling down. In 1404, Owain Glyndwr controlled the crumbling fortress, but within a few years the English regained possession. After 1408, Aberystwyth Castle lost its strategic value, because it was now useless against modern weapons and only minor repairs were made. During the Civil War, because the garrison sided with King Charles I, Oliver Cromwell caused further destruction of the castle and most of the castle stone was taken by locals to build their homes (Aberystwyth.com).



Aberystwyth beachfront with Constitution Hill behind and the castle ruin right.

Then it was back to the B&B for a rest and freshen-up before going to find a place to eat. We chose a restaurant on the pier where my wife had a pizza and I had the best minted lamb sausage and mash that I have ever tasted. About 9 pm we went back to the B & B for a shower and bed after a long day that started at 5:30 in the morning.



Left, the pier where we ate our evening meal. Right, the funicular on Constitution Hill looking south toward Aberystwyth with the pier in the distance. Beyond it the castle ruin is visible. The funicular path's track can be seen in the beachfront photograph on the previous page.

The following morning, after breakfast, we headed in the other direction (north) to constitution hill. We walked up the path to the top where there is a great view of Aberystwyth. On a clear day the Preseli Hills, in Pembrokeshire, to the south can be seen and Snowdonia to the north.

We went for a walk along the cliff top before returning and came down on the funicular, or, as they call it the Electric Cliff Railway and the longest electric cliff railway in Britain.



A view from the cliff top walk, left and right, part of the harbour.

We then walked north past the castle ruins to the harbour, before walking back to a pub near the station where we had a pub lunch. After that we sat on the beachfront reading the Sunday paper until it was time to collect our backpacks from the B&B and go to the station.

The weather during the two days was hot with hardly a cloud in the sky for the most part. People were out making the most of it, eating their ice cream as they walked along in sleeveless vests and tattoos, sitting on the benches with their 'ankies on their 'eads and the bikers congregated at PD's Diner on both days. There were people paddling in the sea as they call it. But really, for the most part, they just stood knee deep in the water. There was a lifesaver, sitting in a kiosk reading, who looked like he could not swim very far and beacons between which people must swim, although there was no backwash, currents, or waves, just a piddling

swell of about a foot. When I thought of Durban's swimming conditions I had to laugh and I thought of Marriott Edgar's poem *Albert and the Lion* read by Stanley Holloway. "The waves they were piddlin' and small. There were no wrecks and nobody drowned, 'Fact, nothin' to laugh at at all!"



The intriguing station sign.

We got to the station for the trip home during the second half of the England versus Germany World Cup match (England lost. Got a hiding). A Weatherspoon pub forms part of the station. Where we sat on the station platform, we could hear it was almost deathly quiet, even though some of the Welsh were supporting Germany.

There was an intriguing sign for locomotive drivers. It read: Obtain Shunt Token and permission to proceed. Really!? It is clear that there will be no proceeding, no matter what token one possesses.

The train from Aberystwyth to Birmingham International was delayed for about 50 minutes at Machynlleth, due to the conductor taking ill, awaiting a replacement conductor and for the single line ahead to clear. A problem arose when the train arrived at Birmingham New Street. We were waiting for the train to carry on to Birmingham International Station when some boarding passengers asked if this was the train to Chester. We said no, it was going to Birmingham International Station. Other passengers who had also got on board then said we were wrong, the train is going to Chester and it says so on the front of the train. We had not heard the change of destination announcement and termination over the noise of football fans that embarked at an earlier station. We quickly disembarked and boarded another train for the rest of our journey. As my wife pointed out, if that person had not queried the destination, we would have found ourselves, at about 9:15 pm, on our way to Chester.

Welshpool, Powys

January 2017 12th to 14th we were in Welshpool. It was cold at Welshpool with light snow at times and invigorating walks and enjoyable. Travelled again on Transport for Wales train via Shrewsbury. The train from Birmingham International, usually consists of 4 carriages, which split into two at Shrewsbury. One half going to Holyhead and the other half, our section, going to Aberystwyth via Welshpool.

Welshpool station building, built in 1860, is big considering the size of the town and impressive (seen on the next page). Now it is The Old Station Visitor Centre and consists of small shops, which we visited later during our stay.

An unusual station. The platform for the two lines has been displaced to the north-east of the station building with a road (the A483) passing between the tracks and the station building. Access to the platform is via a footbridge. Tickets are bought at automated vending machines and timetables are on boards on the platform. All train arrivals and departures are displayed on screens with automated announcements.



The old station building, with its added lean-to structure on the previous platform, seen from the bridge over the railway with the road between the building and railway tracks. The front roadside of the building on the right.



The Royal Oak Hotel and Grace Evans' Cottage.

After a gently uphill walk to the town, we checked in at the prebooked Royal Oak Hotel and began sightseeing. First stop was the Grace Evans' Cottage. Grace Evans' claim to fame is that she was a maid to Lady Nithsdale, whose father was Lord Nithsdale who was imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1716. She helped to rescue him and fled to France with the family. It is claimed the cottage was given to her by Lord Nithsdale when she returned to Welshpool. From there we walked steadily uphill along the curving high street to the top of the hill, which became more and more residential. On the way passing some 16th century half-timber framed buildings. Two seen below and the ex-Mermaid Inn.



It is worth digressing to explain timber framing and half-timbered. Timber framed, or post and beam, was a traditional construction method using squared-off, load bearing heavy timbers joined with large wooden pegs.

Half-timbered is when the wooden wall frame is left exposed on the outside and the spaces filled with wattle and daub, brick or it may be called half-timbered.



The 16th century timber frame Talbot Inn.

We passed two ornate half-timber framed shops, then The Talbot pub. A Talbot was a type of hunting hound common in England during the Middle Ages. It is now extinct, although it is thought to be an ancestor of the Beagle. A short way further, we came to the 16th century half-timber framed, originally thatched Mermaid Inn. It was once called The Black Boy Inn. Originally probably a merchant's house. It was thatched. It now has a slate roof and after at least 200 years as an inn, it is now closed. The town authority is to be commended for the information plaques attached to noteworthy buildings.



The 19th century Christ Church Welshpool

At the top of the hill, we came to the redundant Welshpool Christ Church, where there is an excellent view of the surrounding countryside. The church was built from Welshpool granite between 1839 and 1844. It was closed in 1999. In 2002 Karl Meredith and Natalie Bass bought the church now covered with ivy and weeds. With their three sons, they set about restoring the church building. They "have halted the structural demise of Christ Church." With their three sons it is still work in progress (Christ Church Welshpool).



The 18th century brick cockpit.

Back downhill near to the hotel in New Street we came across the octagonal brick cockpit. A plaque states it was "specially erected in the early 18th century for cockfighting. It was used for cockfighting until 1849 when cockfighting was made illegal." The building was restored and repaired in 1978. Another plaque states "it was probably part of the Castle Inn built in 1727." The building is listed as of Architectural or Historic Interest. Since 2015 it is the home of the town's Women's Institute.

After a short walk along the canal, passed the Powysland Museum, we retired to the hotel to dinner and bed.

The following day was a mixture of cloud and sunny spells as well as dry with overnight snow on the ground. So, a good day to see the sights. We first visited the Grade I listed 13th century



A bleak and frosty view of Powys Castle.

Powys Castle with deer in the grounds. It has been described as a most magnificent castle in Wales (Over Wales, 2011). It was closed at the time. Visually I think Conwy and Caernarfon Castles are better. It is also known for its formal gardens and for its interior. Mid-winter is not a good time to judge its garden and the castle was closed for the winter, so cannot really express an opinion. Liked the deer. The castle is different from others on the Marches, in that it was built by a Welsh prince rather than by English invaders. The Welsh Marches is a vague area along the border between England and Wales.

We then went by bus to Berriew, because we were told at the hotel that it is worth a visit. It is about 8 kilometres south of Welshpool on the River Rhiw. We had been told it was a pretty village with attractive timbered framed cottages and good walks. We were not disappointed. Very picturesque. Had lunch at the Lion Hotel.



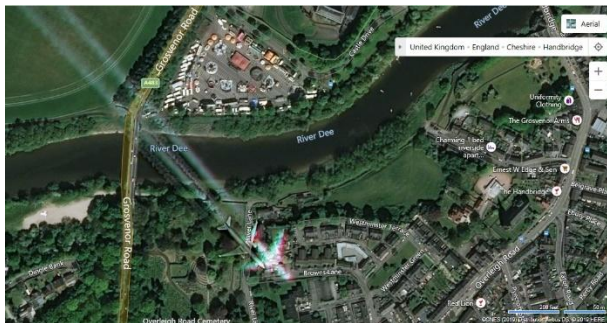
A residence next to the Afon Rhiw (River Rhiw) and the Lion Hotel at Berriew.

The last day we went for a long morning walk eastward along the Montgomery Canal, which passes through Welshpool, mostly in light rain and drizzle. Then spent an easy and relaxing afternoon wandering around the shops and looking at anything else that caught our interest. Including the Town Hall built in 1837. It now houses market stalls. Home the following morning.

Colwyn Bay, Conwy and Betws-y-Coed

September 2019 from the 9th returning home on the 12th, we went to north to Colwyn Bay, Conwy and Betws-y-Coed. Bus to Birmingham International railway station then a three hour Transport for Wales (Trafnidiaeth Cymru) train journey to Colwyn Bay via Shrewsbury and Chester with our snacks and packed lunch. For the duration of our visit, we lodged at Colwyn Bay Travelodge. We chose Colwyn Bay as our base, because there was little in the way of suitable accommodation at Conwy, our favoured destination. However, it was a good choice being a suitable hub to Conwy and inland to Betws-y-Coed.

Before reaching Colwyn Bay, while travelling along the shore approaching Mostyn, at the mouth of the River Dee, there appeared the incongruous sight of a large ship that appeared to have run aground. Unfortunately, outbound the sighting was unexpected and returning, although keeping a lookout, it passed too quickly for me to get a photograph. Later, back home, I learned that it was the 4450 tons TSS (turbine steam ship) Duke of Lancaster. Initially a passenger ship, she was converted to a passenger and car ferry before being beached at Llanerch-y-Mor, in August 1979 to be used as a "Fun Ship." Presumably, arcade games, etc. (Wikipedia). To date nothing has happened.



Satellite aircraft image. Courtesy Airbus?

Also, while searching for the exact location of the ship using satellite imagery, either Bing or Google (cannot remember which), I found a remarkable image of what appeared to be an aircraft in flight. Zooming in as much as possible it revealed a twin jet airliner with winglets as well as contrails a peculiar green, white and red shadow, probably an optical effect. The image has © CNES (2019) Distribution Airbus DS. © 2019 HERE inscribed. Apparently, on the 08 July 2019,

the French Space Agency (CNES) awarded a contract to Airbus to deliver a global high-resolution Digital Surface Model (DSM). Most intriguing. Could not obtain any further information.



Plenty of beach to the west and to the east.



The Toad pub and dinning.

After checking in we headed to the beach front for a long walk after our confinement on the train. We walked from the Porth Eirias Waterfront Complex westward to Rhôs-on-Sea harbour, all the while to the north having the seaward Rhyl Flats Wind Farm dominating the horizon. An enjoyable walk bare feet along the beach. The weather mostly cloudy with brief sunny spells and a nip in the air. Returning along the road to our hotel we passed the attractive The Toad pub and dining establishment. Attractive until we saw the prices. No doubt the food is very good. Their website shows it is now light with darker blue trimmings. Do not like it.

Back at Colwyn Bay railway station we bought train tickets for the next day to Conwy and the following day to Betws-y-Coed. £10.40 for both of us off peak return and £20.60 to Betws-y-Coed. Then a search for a place to eat. We chose The Station Inn, about 200 metres uphill from the station. In fact, we ate there every evening during our stay.

Next morning we were on a Transport for Wales train for the 9 minute ride to Conwy passing Llandudno Junction. Very smart and clean inside. The Conwy stop is interesting. It is a request stop. One has to inform the conductor when boarding that one wishes to disembark there. On the return, one must extend an arm to request the driver to stop. My observation is that the train always has to stop for passengers boarding or disembarking. The station is automated and unstaffed with the usual passenger system providing train information via neon signs and automated voice announcements, as well as timetable poster boards and telephone. Anyway, safely on the platform at Conwy, we were ready to explore.

We briefly visited Conwy during December 2005. This time we wanted to see more. Conwy is a town near the mouth of the Afon (River) Conwy. The attraction is the beautiful walled town dating back to medieval times on the west bank and the castle. A notice board at the station says “welcome to the town of Conwy built by Edward I between 1283 – 1292. Cost £15 000. A bargain at today’s prices”. Not then.



Conwy Castle. Part of Telford’s bridge just visible in front of the castle.

The largely well preserved and beautiful fairy tale type castle, on higher ground, dominates the town and the scenery. Trains passing below next to the castle have to pass slowly to reduce vibration.

Entering from the east over the river is the also beautiful bridge built by Thomas Telford. Completed in 1826 the suspension bridge was designed to blend with the castle. Sadly, one cannot see too much of it now as it is mostly hidden from view on the north side by a newer road bridge and the covered railway bridge to the south.



Britain’s smallest house.

Conwy is also home to Britain’s smallest house. Built as a fisherman’s cottage in the 16th century, the single story house measures 3 metres by 1.8 metres.

The last occupant and owner, 1.8 metres fisherman Robert Jones was forced to move out in 1900 for hygiene reasons. The rooms were too small for him to stand. The house is still owned by his descendants. Visitors can view the inside of the house for a small fee.

Being members, before exploring the town, we headed east across the river to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Conwy Nature Reserve consisting mainly of wetland. It was a good lengthy walk. Birds were not plentiful. Saw ducks, egrets, grey herons, lapwings and



The wetland. The town and castle in the distance.

ponies. The latter definitely not birds. The ponies are at times allowed to graze in the reserve to keep the grass short for breeding lapwings.

We then walked back to town to wander the interesting narrow streets and have lunch at the ye olde looking George and Dragon pub in Castle Street. Very good and not expensive. Then down to the river edge and Lower Gate Street walking northward alongside the river along the Marine Walk to its northern end before returning to Conwy station and the trip back to Colwyn Bay.



Panorama view of Afon Conway from the road bridge. Conwy town on the left. On the right the coast northward to Llandudno.

Wednesday 11th we were back at Colwyn station for our trip to Betws-y-Coed (English translation Prayer House in the Wood) with a change of train at Llandudno Junction then an approximately 50 minute journey mostly alongside the Afon Conwy, passing next to the Conwy Nature Reserve we visited the previous day, through small villages and even smaller settlements such as, Tal-y-Cafn, Dolgarrog, North Llannest and Llanwst (a medium sized town), before arriving at the Betws-y-Coed railway station with its very attractive station building, which has been turned into shops with holiday flats above. The same as at Conwy station, Betws-y-Coed station is automated and unstaffed. All of which is reminiscent of Welshpool railway station.

Set in woodland with a large village green, which seems to double as an informal football pitch judging by the indistinct markings, Betws-y-Coed is very pleasing on the eye. We were immediately pleased we decided to visit. Most of the buildings appear to have been built in local bluestone giving the village its attractive blue shade of grey.



The Pont-y-Pair bridge.

After a quick look around the green and its surrounding buildings, intending a closer look later, we headed out of the village along the Holyhead Road, uphill for a 3.5 kilometre walk to Swallow Falls. Along the way passing the 1873 St Mary's Church (a Grade II listed building), the Royal Oak Hotel and the Pont-y-Pair bridge (circa 1468) over the fast-flowing Afon Llugwy. All with that blue grey colour. Originally built as a packhorse bridge, the Pont-y-Pair was widened in the 1800s. The name means Bridge of the

Cauldron, because of the waterfall and bubbling water below (Third Eye Traveller).



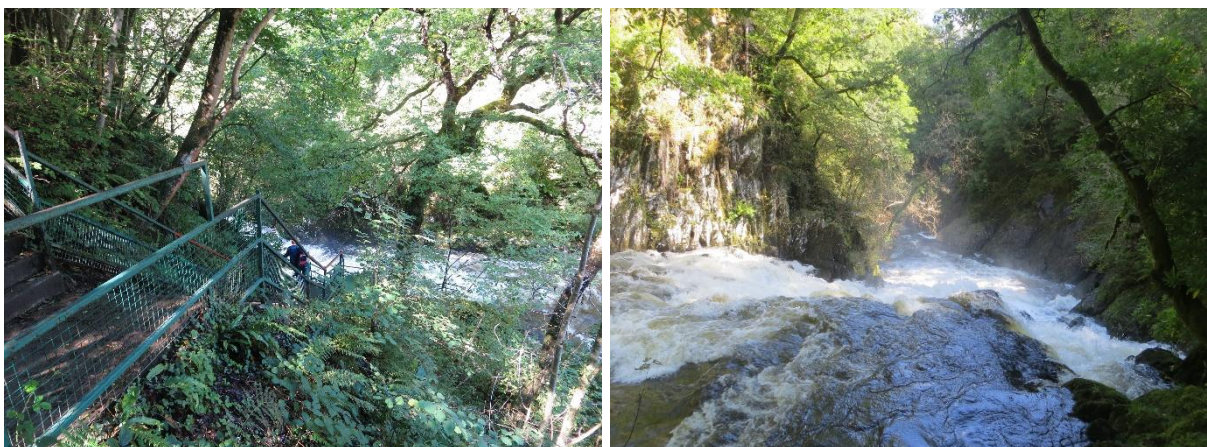
On the Pont-y-Pair bridge looking upstream and downstream.



Footbridge across the Afon Llugwy.

It was warm and sunny while we walked along the righthand side of the road, which was often close to the river. We made frequent detours along paths into the forest to scenic spots at the river. Such as a steeply angled wooded railing bridge across the white-water river with steep rock sides and a nearby small, but pretty, waterfall. Elsewhere, we passed sheep grazing in a green field, bright in the sunshine, before reaching the Swallow Falls opposite the, would you believe it, Swallow Falls Hotel?

One pays £2 per adult to enter the falls area. The falls, among beech, conifer and birch trees, are a series of small waterfalls of varying height with fast flowing and turbulent white water over grey and fissured rocks. Tourist guide words used to describe the falls are spectacular, dramatic and exhilarating. I will not argue, except I have seen more spectacular waterfalls. One can see the falls from an upper view platform, or descend a steep series of steps with metal railings down to a platform close to the Afon Llugwy where one can be subjected to a pleasing occasional light spray, particularly pleasing after the warm walk. A worthwhile walk.



Descending to the river and cooling misty spray.

Back at the village, we stopped next to the Pont-y-Pair bridge at the Hen Siop Pont-y-Pair Café

and Takeaway to buy lunch (siop = shop in English), which we ate seated on a bench at the green. Cannot remember what we ordered.



Hen Siop Pont-y-Pair at the Pont-y-Pair bridge and the Waterloo Bridge. The inscription on the arch is “This arch was constructed in the same year the battle of Waterloo was fought.”



The 14th century St Michael's Old Church

We then set about a closer look at the village, including walking to the southern edge of the village to see the Grade I listed early cast iron Waterloo Bridge, built in 1815, by Thomas Telford across Aflon Conwy and visiting the 14th century St Michael's Old Church on the edge of the river, from which the village took its name the Prayer House in the Wood. The oldest building in the village, the church was replaced in 1873 by the new St Michael's Church mentioned earlier when we began our walk to Shallow Falls. It was in a dilapidated state when, in 1994, it was restored by the St

Michael's Betws-y-Coed Trust who, since 2000, lease it from the Church in Wales who declared it redundant (St Michael's Betws-y-Coed Trust).

15:24 we caught the return trains back to Llandudno Junction and Colwyn Bay. We would have stayed longer. However, we did not want to wait for the next train back at 18:03.

The following day we headed home on Transport for Wales Derby Express Sprinter to Birmingham International station and bus home. Another most enjoyable trip.

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