

The Three Peaks of Llanfihangel.....or Just the One.....or even the Verandah Walk....choice was the order of the day, with this September excursion being designed to cater for as many varied needs and abilities of people as possible.

The first option, the full three peaks walk, was based on the annual Llanfihangel community walk, held every year in September. Approximately 5 ½ miles long, it traverses unexpected river valleys and many interesting hummocks, which give way to spectacular views to Arran Fawddwy, Moel Sych and the Berwyns, Long Mountain and the Wrekin. So ten intrepid walkers set off, dressed for the monsoon, taking note of the neatly installed defibrillator on the village hall wall.

At the first peak 'Bryn', we experienced our first shower. But though we had observed its daunting 'black' tracking towards us from Oswestry, its effort was much gentler and the shower soon passed. From then on, the sun shone with the even breeze and we were well on our way and were even blessed with some good visibility in all directions. Given the length, level of difficulty and conditions, we concentrated on the walk, rather than stopping to examine and do much recording. However you cannot walk the walk without observation.....so we continued to swap various bird, flora, or butterfly identifications on the hoof, in our chatter and discourse with one another. The land is mainly well managed, old pasture, skirted by old tracks and lanes. There is much evidence of ancient hedge laying, with the resulting tree forms shaped further by the prevailing south westerlies and the sheep, which scrape out hollows underneath to shelter from those same winds. Trees lucky enough to be more sheltered were laden with autumn berries, rowan, hawthorn, sloe and holly.

We met local and helpful people on the way, including a small terrier, who just wanted to play ball, just as we were navigating a deeply manured and deeply wet gateway. But all survived, including the ball and dog.

My thanks go to fellow companions on this walk and to the local farmers who gave permission to walk across their land.

Lizzie led the second walk option, which was The One Peak version and it was this walk that the majority chose to follow. It was a shorter and less arduous walk than the first, but invaluable to allow more time for recording to be done.

The first third of this walk followed the longer version up an ancient track with once long-ago pollarded trees, including unusually birches. These had formed tortuous shapes intertwined with their neighbouring oaks and rowans. The bank beneath was dotted with delicate harebells, sheep's sorrel and yarrow amongst the short cropped grasses. This took us to higher ground where the views were good in spite of the cloudy weather. Downhill took us past Lletty, where a garden of fine looking shrubs caused interest and admiration. Down the drive we puzzled over some of the 'Hawkish complex', trying to sort our Hawkbits from our Hawk's-beards and our Hawkweeds. Where the drive meets the lane the longer and the shorter walks diverged. The second third of the shorter walk followed a gently rising green lane where we found Devil's-bit scabious, Wood melick and Burnet-saxifrage, always a difficult one to identify. We crossed a lane and through into a grazed field dotted with daises and down to a damp crossing of a stream and a scramble over a low fence where a stile should have been, into a second field of very curious cows and a bull. Some brazened it out whilst others got themselves into the adjoining field. All arrived safely at the gate on to the lane to commence the last third of the shorter walk. Here we found the highlight of our afternoon, the beautiful sky blue Sheeps-bit *Jasione montana* with its prominent petal lobes.

The third option offered was to spend some time at Brynffynnon. A gentle meander around the garden as well as a wildscape of pond and young woodland area. So still some flora and fauna of interest to be found...or maybe just time to sit on the veranda, drink tea and enjoy MFS company. Ruby the black Labrador was voted best host of the day!

After going our three separate ways, we all met up again for a lovely tea at Cartref, the tearooms in Llanfihangel. Many thanks to Carol and family for providing the tea and being flexible to our needs and ever increasing numbers.

Many thanks also to Menna Rowlands for opening up The Goat Inn for the last hardy, remaining stragglers of the day, which involved certain memory loss.....and a chimney sweep.....but we did get our pint.... as always, that's another MFS tale to tell.

Well the soothsayers had predicted lightning, rain and the presence of a bull. But as ever, the MFS gods were with us, but they only do weather, not cattle. I think we all had a lovely day, with different memories to share.

