



Wheelrights

the Swansea Bay cycle campaign group



Newsletter No. 8 Summer 2009

www.wheelrights.org.uk

John Grimshaw visits Swansea

A highlight of the first half of this year was the visit of John Grimshaw on 29th and 30th April. In these two days he roamed on his bike from Gowerton in the west to Fabian Way in the East, gave an interview on Swansea Sound, attended a meeting with the Council and gave a talk in the Environment Centre.

It was my privilege to meet him off the train on the morning of his arrival. We looked at some of the cycle infrastructure in the City Centre and then cycled along the new cycle path south of Fabian Way to the Sidings Bridge. He approved of this path and imparted some useful advice about the City Centre – eg: zebra crossings for cyclists!

There followed a hectic schedule: coffee and a press interview in the Environment Centre; then in Nick Guy's car to Gowerton for the Swansea Sound interview. JG would have cycled there but there wasn't time, so his bike shared the back seat with me and he cycled back; then a photo call at the Civic Centre and after a bite of food the Council meeting. Nick Guy reports on this on p.2.

In the evening he gave his talk at a well attended meeting; then on the Thursday morning – in pouring rain – Eifion Francis, myself and JG reconnoitered a potential new route from Gowerton to King's Bridge. I report on this on p. 3



Chairman Nick and John Grimshaw check an underpass under the A484

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Copy deadline

Copy for the next issue should be sent to *Wheelrights* Secretary (e-mail address below) by end of August 2009.

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David Naylor

Editorial

Once again we have a variety of contributions: more on John Grimshaw's inspiring visit on p. 3 and 4, and also on p. 4 some important recent findings on safety; then an article on how a very significant proportion of the employees of *Burns Pet Foods* in Kidwelly cycle to work – a model for other Companies – next a defence of bendy-buses (hopefully sufficiently controversial to stimulate some correspondence!); and on p. 7 a timely message, for in particular mums, from Claudine.

Finally (p. 8) we highlight the forthcoming visit of Jane Davidson, WAG's cycle friendly Environment Minister.

David Naylor

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Local News

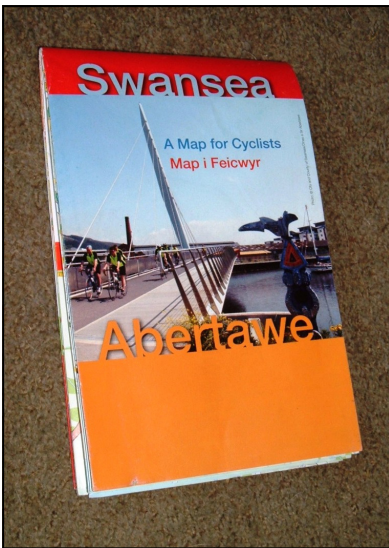
Laura

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Laura Bolton on 30th May. Many of us knew her. For many years she was David Judd's assistant when he was Sustrans' Manger for SW Wales. She provided him with key support and was to be found at the various Sustrans' work camps, most recently on the North Gower path. There she was a welcoming figure, looking after the inner needs of the volunteers in addition to her unseen efforts behind the scenes.

Since she finished working with David she set up *BikeAbility Wales*, which, on a shoe-string budget, has provided specialised bikes for disabled people and a centre (by Dunvant Rugby Club) for their use. She married Keith last year and the two of them ran *BikeAbility* together. Keith is determined to keep the concern going; and one way to help him do this and to pay a tribute to Laura is to send a donation. Visit their website (www.bikeabilitywales.org.uk) for a loving article by Keith about her, and for contact details (or phone the Environments Centre on 01792 480200) .

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Swansea cycle map



This has now been issued. It is available free from various outlets, including the Civic Centre and Tourist Information Centres. *Wheelrights* were involved in it's preparation; our logo is included on the map and we advised on the selection of advisory cycle routes (shown yellow).

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Mumbles Road

At the time of writing the road works east of the University are still not complete. The dropped kerb which will allow cyclists to get on to the foreshore path close to the traffic lights at the end of Guildhall Road South is tantalisingly close to completion. This small job has been underway for around two months and now (end of June) appears to be complete apart from a surface dressing. Hopefully by the time you read this the barriers will be down and we can use it.

A Toucan crossing is to be installed near here just east of the Slip Bridge abutments. This will provide alternative pedestrian/cycle access to the foreshore from the St Helen's Road/ Sandfields area.

The Council are considering altering the footpath on the north side of Mumbles Road to shared use, but do not at present have plans to improve the unsatisfactory crossing arrangements at the bottom of Brynmill Lane.

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We are encouraged ...

by a very positive response from senior Council Officers to our lobbying for better provision for cyclists. This relates in particular to the Mumbles Road improvements described above and to the City Centre. John Grimshaw has played a major part in this as the Council has taken his suggestions seriously (as have we). A key one is an offer by him to provide training on infrastructure design for cyclists. See next page.

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A fresh approach

A report on a key Council meeting

We were delighted to be able to arrange for John Grimshaw to attend a meeting of the Council's Overview Board *Task and Finish Group*. This took place on 29th April during his recent visit to Swansea.

The meeting started with a presentation of the results of the Council's *Cycling Questionnaire*. This had, amazingly, received over 900 responses; most of which highlighted the usual pleas for more cycling facilities and safety measures.

Then John Grimshaw presented examples of good practice of cycle provision in Wales and England, a dominant theme of which was the continuity of paths across minor junctions; even zebra crossings for cyclists!. This engendered a positive reaction from the Councillors and officers present.

Rob Wachowski highlighted WAG's recent *Walking and Cycling Action Plan for Wales (2009-2013)* which should underpin the Council's cycle plans. There followed a healthy discussion of specifics during which the Council agreed to involve *Wheelrights*, the CTC and Sustrans in producing a new **Action Plan for Cycling in Swansea**

Ideas suggested for inclusion in the plan include:

- Provision of secure cycle parking in the City Centre
- More thorough *Cycle Audits* of future developments. (It was noted that money could be saved by getting things right first time.)
- Putting in a bid for Swansea to become a *Sustainable City*, thereby attracting WAG funding for cycling and sustainable transport.
- Feasibility study of a bike rental scheme

It was recognised that the mindset of the highway and engineering design teams needed changing. John Grimshaw offered to give two hour Seminars to explain what is needed to provide cycle-friendly infrastructure. This offer was accepted, with it tentatively being agreed to provide them on an annual basis, the first hopefully this September.

Three Councillors attended the meeting: Rob Speyt (Landore) Cheryl Philpott (Sketty) and Daren Price (Upper Loughor). All were very supportive of *Wheelrights* views.

The Council will continue to develop the Action Plan over the next few weeks. They want to differentiate between short and long term actions and would appreciate feedback.

To respond to the last point If you have any ideas please pass them either to David Naylor or to Eifion Francis our *Cycle Forum* rep. (E-mail: Eifandjill@aol.com)

The agreement to take up John Grimshaw's seminar offer was probably the most important outcome of the meeting. I welcome this fresh approach by the Council; the challenge for *Wheelrights* is to keep up the pressure and a constructive dialogue.

Nick Guy (*Wheelright's* Chairman)

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Evening Post rides articles

A spin off from John Grimshaw's visit is that since May the *Evening Post* have been publishing descriptions of short rides in and around Swansea. He had suggested this. These have been appearing on Thursdays. We have provided the text together with a photo to illustrate the ride. Given the difficulty of describing a ride in the limit of 200 words which we were given, we have added a "Local rides" page to the website and there provided a fuller description.

We are running out of rides! So if you can suggest some please contact Claudine, our Publicity Officer: Email: claud@volcanotheatre.co.uk.

A missing link

The plan for the Thursday morning, the second day of John Grimshaw's visit, was a cycle ride. We had it in mind to get his advice on our proposed North Swansea route linking Gowerton to Landore via Penlan. (This route is shown on *Wheelrights* flier.)

Accordingly on that wet morning Mr Grimshaw, accompanied by Eifion Francis and myself, cycled up the Clyne Valley towards Gowerton. His appetite wetted by our discovery the previous day of a suitable-for-cyclists culvert under the A484 (pictured on p. 1), he felt that rather than cycle up to Penlan our morning would be better spent reconnoitering the line of a future cycle path from Gowerton to Kingsbridge. This is the missing link which would connect NCN 4 in Gowerton to the existing cycle path which runs north past Gorseinon.

So this is what we did. We found that the construction of this cycle path would be quite feasible. It would for the most part follow the line of the old railway. The bridge abutments which once carried this railway over the existing Swansea – Llanelli line could support a new bridge and the path could be taken under the A484 through the culvert.

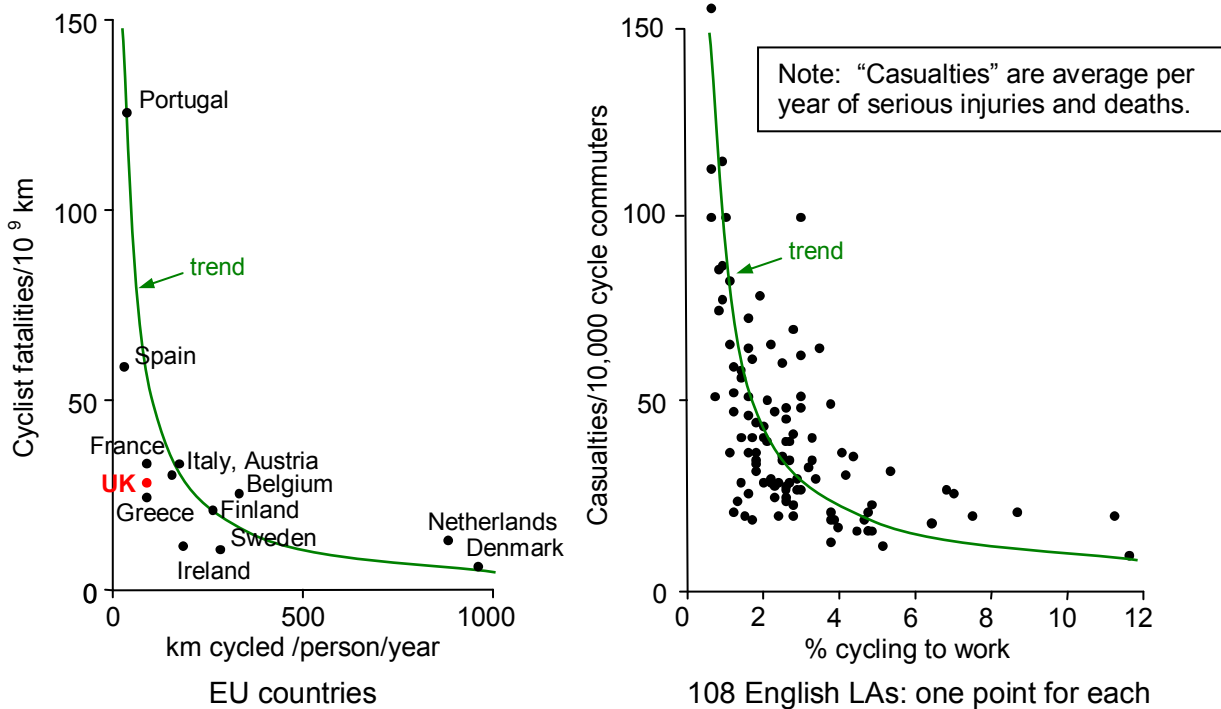
This ticked the "construction feasible" box, but there remain the challenges of funding and land ownership. As the path crosses Common Land the agreement of the Commoners would be needed.

We were expected for lunch at the Dylan Thomas Centre and the direct way there involved a 150m climb up over Penlan. So if Mr Grimshaw thought that Swansea lacked hills then we shattered that delusion. At least the sun came out before he left Swansea.

David Naylor

Safety in numbers

What many have suspected for a long time has recently been confirmed by research carried out by the CTC and in Denmark. This is that the more people cycle on our roads the safer cycling becomes. The data for the graphs below are taken from CTC's recent report: *Safety in numbers in England*. They are self explanatory,



Other information provided in the report is that in at least London and the Netherlands there has not only been a *reduction in casualties per miles cycled* but that that there has been an *actual reduction* in casualties despite a significant increase in the number of cyclists.

Cycling to work

Whilst studying for a masters degree at Lancaster University I had a car but didn't use it. The traffic in Lancaster city centre was dreadful, the fuel price was ridiculous and the campus had limited parking spaces. Luckily I lived across the road from a good bike shop and Lancaster has an excellent network of cycling routes. Cycling to university daily was great - over 40 minutes of exercise every day, saved money on petrol, and it was quicker than by car or bus.

When my degree finished last August I moved back to work for the family business: *Burns Pet Nutrition*, in Kidwelly. Each day I noticed a steady stream of employees driving to work, many of whom lived in the town. When I arrived at work there were problems with car parking spaces and this was only going to get worse as there were plans to extend the offices!

John Burns, the Managing Director, was worried this situation was becoming an issue. He felt that it was having a negative effect on the company's public image and increased traffic was a concern of the planning officers with regard to the new office building. I recommended that the company take up a government initiative to encourage people to cycle to work. This appeared to be a good idea but there was too much red tape so we devised our own scheme under which the company would pay for the bike (up to £500) and the employee would make a £100 contribution. Anybody wanting a more expensive bike could pay the extra themselves.

When I asked the staff if they were interested there was a lot of enthusiasm and the scheme went ahead. Employees were told to go to a local bike shop, *County Cycles* in Cross Hands, to get fitted out with the bike of their choice and 30 of the 60 staff on site took up the opportunity - all men but for one woman. Stephen Pickard, a scheme participant, says "Cycling along the Millennium Coastal Path on the way to work provides views easily overlooked from a car. On top of this I am able to improve my health and fitness at a leisurely pace, save on fuel and help save the environment at the same time. The only downside can be the Welsh weather but with the summer approaching I will effectively be paying myself to improve my fitness."

Although the initial outlay for the bikes was substantial it has proved hugely successful both from the company's point of view (with reduced congestion, parking demand and associated green house gas emissions), but also for the individuals involved who are happier and healthier with their new bikes. As a result of this initiative the company received an award from the Carmarthenshire Transport Department for the most innovative project to reduce road traffic. A few weeks later we were given planning permission for the new office building.

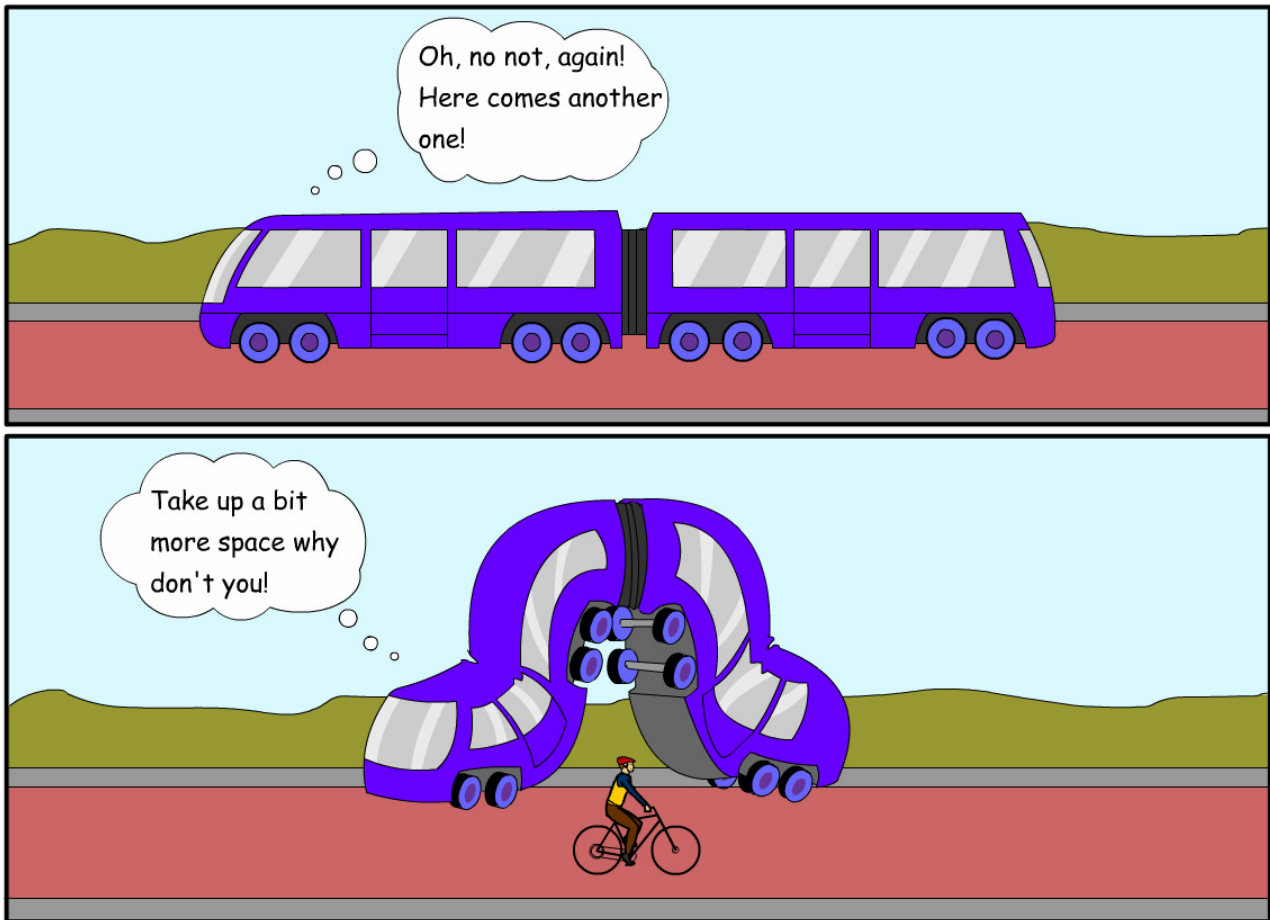
Spring and fine weather always bring renewed enthusiasm and there have already been enquiries from some members of staff who missed out last year. The scheme looks set to go from strength to strength.

Ciaran Burns



The cycling employees of *Burn's Pet Nutrition*

Bendy Buses



A personal view

I realise bendy buses are perceived by some cyclists as a danger and a threat to other road users. Others blame them for what they don't like about the new road system in Swansea City Centre.

However, I for one welcome the Metro's arrival in Swansea for several reasons:

1. The new Metro bus lanes between the Railway Station and Civic Centre provide a long needed cycle route linking Route 4 to the City Centre and train station.
2. I believe the new Metro buses will attract people out of their cars. It's partly an "image" thing. I have a friend in Cardiff who is a style icon, fashion conscious and who previously abhorred the idea of catching a bus. Now he regularly uses the bendy buses in Cardiff, perhaps because they are clean, fast and have TV screens which show the news!
3. Some bendy buses are just as fast as cars! For example in London the bendy bus driver doesn't take fares and this speeds up their journeys.

One aspect which *Wheelrights* members could monitor is how the drivers treat cyclists sharing the new Metro lanes; hopefully not by squashing us – we shall see!

Nick Guy

Editor's note: How do other cyclists feel about the bendy buses or shared bus lanes in general? Please send me your opinions for inclusion in a Letters column in a future newsletter.

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Have you got this in anything but pink?

Women, we all know, don't cycle (some of them do, of course, but indulge me in some shameless generalisations for a moment, and with any luck the point will become clear). Women who *do* cycle are too fearful to cycle on roads. Women who *do* cycle on roads do so apologetically, hugging the kerb and keeping out of everyone's way, which is one reason they are more likely than men to be killed by left-turning lorries. Women who conquer all these fears and obstacles and manage to get to work or the shops on two wheels are then assailed by another set of fears and insecurities – this time about whether they are too sweaty, look silly or fat in their cycling clothes, or have a bad case of helmet hair.

All this is very worrying. Not the helmet hair – I don't mind looking dishevelled and don't often wear a helmet anyway – I mean it's worrying on a much deeper level. Despite all the gains of the women's movement and so many material improvements in women's lives, we seem to be raising generation after generation of girls that are convinced there is something in the XX chromosome pairing that prevents them from doing the same perfectly simple and useful activities that their brothers manage without thinking. It's a familiar story when it comes to older women – their parents discouraged them from cycling because it was thought dangerous or unladylike to ride a bike – but shouldn't it be getting better with each generation? The terms have changed, of course, and the word "unladylike" thankfully crops up less often than it did in my childhood, but essentially the opportunities for female children to have fun, take risks and gain confidence are still constrained by notions about what is and isn't appropriate behaviour for little girls. A recent survey of schoolchildren in Swansea found girls rejecting cycling for disappointingly familiar reasons: the clothes don't look good; it's dirty and sweaty; they might look silly.

Cycling campaigners have, for understandable reasons, generally taken a pragmatic approach to this problem, and decided to assuage rather than challenge women's anxieties. Even the politically robust CTC found itself assuring women, in a campaign tellingly entitled "Five Miles to Fabulous", that cycling would do wonders for their bums and hips. The bike industry, of course, was quick to spot that anxiety about femininity could easily be transformed into desire for products that promised glamour and stylishness, hence the woeful proliferation, even at the high end of the market, of bikes and accessories adorned with silly floral motifs and sparkly swirls. At their best, of course, and when designed with the shapes, sizes and practical needs of women in mind, a product might be genuinely beautiful and functional – in fact the two are inseparable when it comes to bicycles – but most products for girls and women are compromised in their practicality, or inane and trivial in their notions of femininity. An alien visiting a bike shop, informed which items were for women and which for men, would inevitably conclude that females are impractical, shallow and frivolous and that men are serious, practical and adventurous.

All this still leaves us with the unanswered question of how we get more women on bikes. My hunch is that the pink-bikes-and-tight-buns approach can only ever get us so far, as it contributes to the very problem it is trying to solve. [*For the edification of old fogies like me "buns" here is not to do with ladies hair but is synonymous with "bums"! Ed.*]. The problem was never about bikes as such, but about what it means in our culture to be a girl or a woman. I will not pretend that it will be easy, but let's just say that if you want your bonny bouncing baby girl to become a bonny bouncing bicyclist, you might think twice about buying her that Barbie doll. And when you get her her first bike, why not make it a blue one?

Claudine Conway

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Wheelrights 2009 programme (from July)

Dates and details liable to change; check *Wheelrights* website:
www.wheelrights.org.uk, 'Events' page for up-to-date information.

Of particular note this Autumn is the Public Meeting
 at 6.00pm (note change of time) on
 Thursday 17th September

In the
Environment Centre
 Pier Street, Swansea SA1 1RY

when

Jane Davidson

WAG Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing

will speak on

Promotion of cycling in Wales

Meeting open to all

Entry free

Jane is a cyclist herself and is responsible for the recent publication
A Walking and Cycling Action Plan for Wales 2009 - 2013.

This important report aims to:

- Triple the number of adults who cycle to work (from 1.4%)
- Triple the number of children who cycle to school (from 2% for 7-11 and 1% for 11-16 year olds)

Key to RV (ie ride start point/event venue): GR = Grid Ref. on OS 1:50,000 sheets 159 or 170.

CivCe Civic Centre east car park (GR 653923) **YaC** Yacht Club, E. Burrows Rd (GR: 662927)

EnvC Environment Centre, Pier St (GR 661929) **X** See Explorer Rides programme

Date	Event	RV	Time	Description
Sat 11 th July	BegCI	CivCe	9.30	Adult beginner's class
Mon 20 th July	Meet'g	YaC	19.00	Wheelrights meeting
Thu 23 rd July	ExplR	X	18.30	Penllergaer Forest
Sat 8 th Aug	ExplR	X	10.00	Green Cwm
Thu 20 th Aug	ExplR	X	18.30	Jersey Marine
Sun 13 th Sep	ExplR	X	10.00	City Centre: visit open houses (note change of day)
Thu 17 th Sep	Talk	EnvC	18.00	Jane Davidson: Promotion of Cycling in Wales
Sat 19 th Sep	BegCI	CivCe	9.30	Adult beginner's class
Thu 24 th Sep	ExplR	X	18.30	Clyne Valley
Sat 3 rd Oct	ExplR	X	10.00	Tircanol to Clydach
Mon 23 rd Nov	Meet'g	YaC	19.00	Wheelrights meeting