

North Wales weekend – 16th & 17th August 2025

Over the last few years, club member Brian Poole (with the assistance of his wife Hanna) has organised several Club Day Drives around Cheshire/Derbyshire/Staffordshire and North Wales. This year, Brian and Hanna decided to go one better and devised a full weekend meeting to take in some of the highlights of the coast and mountains of North Wales.

Day 1 – Saturday 16th August (approx. 90 miles)

The meeting started in the car park of the Tesco supermarket at Llandudno Junction. Seven cars and their occupants were in attendance, and all but one had stayed locally the previous night – both myself and Jenny, and Mike and Marian Storey had separately spotted a silver barchetta parked up on Llandudno seafront on Friday evening (this turned out to belong to Kevin and Sarah Thornton, who were attending their first ever Club meeting).

Attendees were: Brian and Hanna Poole – red, Stoke-on-Trent; myself and Jenny King – metallic green, Rochdale; Dave and Sue Skelding – yellow, Warwickshire; Paul and Helen Harris – yellow, Preston; Mike and Marian Storey – silver, Notts/Derbyshire; Kevin and Sarah Thornton – silver, Oxfordshire; Andy Logan and Rebecca Ingram – silver, Widnes.

We certainly had the weather gods on-side this weekend – beautiful warm, sunny weather allowed top-down driving for the entire time. Leaving Tesco, our convoy made its way to Llandudno proper, along the seafront, up the Great Orme to the car park at the summit, then took the Marine Drive (toll road) around the Great Orme. There were lots of people doing a sponsored walk around Marine Drive (about 4 miles), some of them looking pretty frazzled by the heat. We then drove through Deganwy to Conwy (Conway), passing the castle and doing a brief circuit of the town, before making our way along the coast on the A55 North Wales Expressway heading for our next destinations on Anglesey (Ynys Mon).



We crossed the Menai Strait from the mainland onto Anglesey via the Britannia Bridge, which was designed by Robert Stephenson, son of George Stephenson “The Father of Railways”. The bridge was built between 1846 and 1850 to carry the railway and did so until 1970 when a disastrous fire, started accidentally by boys playing inside the bridge, destroyed virtually all of its original wood and wrought iron structure – the stone piers survived intact. Over the course of the next 10 years, the bridge was completely rebuilt to more modern standards and now serves the dual purpose of carrying both rail and road traffic – rail on the lower deck, A55 road on the upper.

Our first stop on Anglesey was at one of the most famous railway stations in the world – you know, that one with the world’s third longest place name at 58 letters – beaten by somewhere in New Zealand which has a native Maori name with 85 letters and by the real name for Bangkok in Thailand which has a staggering 168 letters (although there are 7 spaces included too)! Time here for a quick browse around the souvenir shop and a group photo.



Photo: Dave Skelding

Next destination was the pretty little town of Beaumaris with pastel-coloured houses and its famous castle. En route we paused at a viewpoint to see (in my opinion at least) the more famous and more beautiful of the two bridges which cross the Menai Strait, Thomas Telford’s Menai Suspension Bridge, which took seven years to build and opened in 1826. It was the world’s first major suspension bridge and today still carries the A5 road and pedestrian traffic. Before arriving at Beaumaris, we encountered a convoy of at least 50 tractors both old and new heading in the opposite direction to a local village fete. Unfortunately, the fabulous weather had brought out the crowds and it proved impossible to park in Beaumaris, so we headed back to the mainland and on to a brief lunch stop at Caernarfon. Paul and Helen left us here as they had been camping on Anglesey for the previous few days and needed to get home.



Photo: Steve Auty

Leaving Caernarfon, we took the A4086 to Llanberis (again, very busy), then began the climb up the Llanberis Pass and Pen-Y-Pass on a typical Welsh road, surrounded by mountains, boulders, scree slopes, heather, dry-stone walls and, of course, sheep! At the end of the passes, we turned right onto the A498, pausing again at a viewpoint looking down the valley towards Beddgelert and with the peak of Snowdon visible to the right. Kevin and Sarah said goodbye to the group here as they had also been in Wales for a week and needed to head back to Oxfordshire. The remaining five couples carried on through Beddgelert towards Porthmadog.

Just before reaching Porthmadog lies the village of Tremadog, where Brian pulled the convoy of five to a halt in front of a detached property, Snowdon Lodge, which is now used as a self-catering hostel for large groups. Standing outside the house, Brian proceeded to tell us a story about a trip he and Hanna had made one New Year to Wadi Rum in Jordan and its connection with Lawrence of Arabia. The relevance of this story was a bit lost on the rest of the group, until Brian pointed to a plaque on the house – it was the birthplace of T. E. Lawrence in 1888! Our final destination of the day was Porthmadog and Allports chippy, then a few minutes drive to Borth-y-Gest to eat our fish suppers overlooking the pretty little harbour, after which the group disbanded to their various overnight accommodations – Jenny and I, Mike and Marian, and Andy and Rebecca all headed to Harlech, while Brian and Hanna were staying near Ffestiniog and Dave and Sue went back to their caravan near Llanberis.



Photos:
Steve Auty

Day 2 – Sunday 17th August (approx. 90 miles)

Another stunning day weatherwise! As three of the remaining five cars were in Harlech, the other two came to meet us there and we all set off south down the coast of Cardigan Bay (Bae Ceredigion) to the seaside town of Barmouth. Unfortunately, again the crowds were out in force and it proved impossible to find space in any of the car parks, so we left Barmouth behind us and headed north-east on the A496 towards Dolgellau. At Llanelltyd we took a small detour to visit the ruins of Cymer Abbey, home to Cistercian monks for almost 200 years until 1388. It finally closed in 1536 when Henry VIII abolished the monasteries. In the nearby car park, we spotted a left-hand drive Fiat 238 van which the owner told us had originally been the service van for the Ferrari Formula 1 team!



Photos:
Steve Auty

Leaving Cymer Abbey, we drove back to the A470, bypassing Dolgellau, then forked left onto the A494 and the 17-mile stretch to Bala and its lake (Llyn Tegid) where literally hundreds of people were enjoying themselves on the water. Bala was a convenient place for a lunch stop, although the out-of-service car park pay-station proved a challenge for those of us unused to frustrating parking apps – how the hell are you supposed to download an app when there is no phone or Wi-Fi signal? Fortunately, Andy came to the rescue! When we returned to the car park after the lunch break, our five barchettas had been joined by another club outing of SEVEN Alpine A110s – very nice and almost as rare as our little boats. Our flotilla of five was now reduced to four as Andy and Rebecca had to leave us here to get back to Widnes to relieve their dog-sitter. Unfortunately for them, they missed out on the best driving roads of the whole weekend.

Leaving Bala, we took the A4212 north-west, passing The National White Water Centre and skirting the controversial reservoir of Llyn Celyn which was created in 1965 to supply water for the city of Liverpool. Unfortunately, this entailed flooding the village of Capel Celyn, which is still a sensitive issue for many Welsh people. Soon after the reservoir, we forked right onto the B4391, which is a superbly maintained drivers' road with lots of bends, straights, dips and rises (and stray sheep!) to the Cwm Cynfal viewpoint near Ffestiniog which gave us views out to Cardigan Bay and the Lleyn Peninsula. Leaving the viewpoint car park, we backtracked the B4391 for about three-quarters of a mile, then took a left onto the B4407, another great, very well-maintained road which crosses moorland for ten miles before it joins the A5 just outside the popular and busy little town of Betws-y-Coed.



Photo: Jenny King



Photo: Jenny King

Again, there was nowhere (and in any case, not enough time) to stop in Betws-y-Coed, so we took the B5106 north out of the town, which reaches Conwy after fifteen miles. Jenny and I left the four-ship convoy here to head for our third night's accommodation back in Llandudno again (to celebrate our wedding anniversary), while the remaining three couples went to the Mulberry pub at Conwy Marina for a farewell drink (although that was apparently slightly spoiled by a yappy little dog and its very rude owners).

I know that at times Brian was disappointed that we couldn't stop in some places due to the sheer number of visitors during what was, after all, peak holiday season, but I'm sure I speak for everyone who participated in the meeting in sending our huge thanks to Brian and Hanna for all their hard work in planning the routes for what was a fantastic weekend in North Wales. Many, many thanks!

Steve Auty