

NEWSLETTER

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Dear Pilgrims,

As August draws near the plans for Anglesey and north Wales are falling into place and a sense of excitement and expectation begins to grow. Anglesey will be a new destination for the pilgrimage and follows two years on home ground: 2015 to Arundel for the diocese's 50th (and our 40th) anniversary, and 2016 from Winchester to Canterbury. I would like to thank Ceri on behalf of all the pilgrims for her hard work as coordinator over the two years and for making them so enjoyable. The route last year avoided the obvious north or south downs and followed a less well trodden path with highlights the Devil's Punchbowl near Hindhead, the rest days in Horsham and Tunbridge Wells and the hilltop villages of Tenterden and Goudhurst. Our paths crossed several steam railways on route, the Watercress line and the Bluebell line to name but two. Worth Abbey featured in both years as did the convent at Upper Beeding in the "extra" weekend pilgrimages. The 2016 "Mercy Pilgrimage" weekend finished at the diocesan shrine at West Grinstead and the 2015 "Jubilee Pilgrimage" finished at the diocesan celebration at Brighton's Amex stadium. These weekend pilgrimages, themselves an innovation, allowed many new pilgrims to experience pilgrimage and will set a seed for them to experience the full summer events in the future if not this year.

In fact, some of the new pilgrims have already made an impact with the Banstead group (Chris Nussbaum, Clare Neal, Brendan McWilliams, Mark Sullivan and Richard McKenzie) organising the 2016 reunion in Banstead, and volunteering to lead 2 days on the 2017 pilgrimage. At the reunion, we enjoyed soup and arrow-cutting on the Friday evening and went for a walk around the Banstead woods and across Epsom race course on Saturday before returning for dinner at the parish hall. We were all impressed with the organisation and smooth running of the weekend. Ceri provided administrative support!

On January 21st this year many present and past pilgrims joined parishioners at St George's Hangleton Hove to celebrate Fr David's 80th birthday. Alison Webb (who was celebrating her own birthday the next day) provided a spread, Clare Gamble baked a cake and Aidan made a speech. Fr David has been the Catholic chaplain since 2000 but his connection goes back much further. This year's route was special for him as we had a rest day in Tunbridge Wells his home town.

The following morning at the January committee meeting David raised the question of how much longer he would be our chaplain. Since then the diocese has appointed Fr Tony Milner of St Joseph's Dorking to be our chaplain for 2018 so this will be Fr David's last year at the helm. Fr Tony walked with us on the Jubilee Pilgrimage in 2015.

The first week of this year's pilgrimage will be on the island of Anglesey where we hope to visit as many of the holy places as possible. The terrain will be flat or flatter than it will be on the second when we are on the mainland. Even so the coastline of Anglesey offers some spectacular scenery. For those who like more challenging walks they could always climb Mount Holyhead on our rest day. Maurice and I took a taxi to the top when on a route-planning expedition and after visiting the RSPB centre, the observation tower, the sea cliffs and South Stack Lighthouse took the winding coast path back down to Holyhead passing the Maritime Museum on the way.

We will meet up in Bangor on Saturday 12/08/2017, leave our luggage at our overnight in the Methodist church and proceed to the cathedral which will be specially opened up for us at 4.00 pm for our induction ceremony (it is usually closed on Saturday afternoons. Our first day's walking will begin after a train journey from Bangor to Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch on Anglesey.

Our second rest day will be in Conwy and from there we proceed to St Asaph for the final walk into the well and shrine in Holywell where the more adventurous might like to bathe in the healing waters. A coach has been arranged to take those travelling by train to Chester station the next morning. Tineke has emailed to say she will be joining the support group and will be bringing her car.

At the time of writing, Jim Monaghan has started the Camino at St Jean Pied de Port and is hoping pilgrims will sponsor him on his way to Santiago de Compostela on behalf of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

The pilgrimage has been announced on the A&B diocesan website, and posters and application forms for this year's pilgrimage are now available on our website. There is also a fund of £1,000 to assist young pilgrims who might otherwise be able to go.

Finally and not least CONGRATULATIONS to Lauren and Kevin on the birth of James and to Hazel and Bruce who are now proud grandparents.

Francis O'Sullivan Coordinator

FROM THE CHIEF ROUTE PLANNER

A pilgrimage in north Wales beckons us in August! If your first thought is "uh oh, hills" I can allay your fears. This will not be a very hilly pilgrimage. There is just one particularly hard day, from Bangor to Conwy in which we will briefly enter Snowdonia, and will conquer some of the foothills at the northern extremity of that National Park. This unavoidably 18-mile-long day is led by new grandparent Bruce. Funny how the toughest day of the pilgrimage always seems to be led by Bruce isn't it? But fear not, this day is not as extreme as Bruce's day in the Lake District!

The first week of our pilgrimage consists of a clockwise circuit of Anglesey, encompassing a rest day at Holyhead. Anglesey (Ynys Mon in Welsh) is a fairly flat and surprisingly large island. We will be mostly following the coast path but can't take all of it in, as that would have taken longer than a week. Expect some spectacular rocky bits of coast, and several ancient churches and holy wells. Then we cross back over the Menai Bridge onto mainland Wales to the cathedral city of Bangor. After Bruce's day we will appreciate our second rest day in the historic town of Conwy with its castle and quay. After that we will head south east into an area of gentle hills to Llangernyw where we will encounter the oldest churchyard yew tree in all of Wales and England, then north east to St Asaph where we will again find a cathedral to worship in. Parts of our route will be along the North Wales Pilgrims Way. This new route starts at the ruins of Basingwerk Abbey and finishes on Caldey Island, and we will be following small stretches of it in the wrong direction! From St Asaph, the next day to Pantasaph Abbey, home of St Pio's Peace Centre, is fairly short but involves a traverse of the hills of the Clwydian Range. Then we have a final short walk on the Saturday morning into Holywell via the aforementioned Basingwerk Abbey. We will be at the shrine in Holywell in time for the regular 12 noon service.

How did this year's route come into fruition? There are various strands of thought that go our pilgrimage route selection process. One of these strands is the desire to break new ground. After our first pilgrimage in North West England in 2014, the next biggest area of unwalked territory was north Wales, and a few discussions have taken place over the last few years. The North Wales Pilgrims Way to Caldey Island was attractive, but we thought we wouldn't be able to find the halls to make that viable. Holywell was an attractive destination. Could we start at Aberystwyth to link to the route of the last St David's pilgrimage? Again it looked difficult to find a viable route with enough halls. Meanwhile I had this idea in my head that Anglesey was a mystical holy place, and it was Bruce who suggested a pilgrimage that starts with a circuit of Anglesey and then heads eastwards to Holywell, and the committee and wider group of pilgrims approved it.

Like Francis, I am looking forward to this pilgrimage, especially Anglesey where I have never been. One thing I recommend is that we all try and learn a little bit of Welsh. Simple phrase books are available. Understanding what all the place names mean will enhance our enjoyment of the pilgrimage, and we will be passing through areas where the majority are Welsh speakers. We even hope to go to a Communion service celebrated in Welsh in St Asaph Cathedral!

Do book early, as the halls on Anglesey are on the small side, so you might be disappointed if you leave it late!

John Chenery, Chief Route Planner

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