

‘What is a Christian mountain?’ In the latest article in our series “Everyday Neighbours”, in which we share and celebrate some of the acts of service our parishioners undertake, putting faith into practice for the benefit of our neighbour, Mike Bishop writes about his nearly 50 years of volunteering with the Christian Mountain Centre in Wales.

Adventure in North Wales



‘What’s a Christian mountain?’ is often the first question people ask when they hear about the Christian Mountain Centre (CMC).

It was all started over 50 years ago by Mike Perrin, a Baptist minister from Suffolk, and his wife and family, who wanted to show the mountainous scenery of North Wales to young people living in the city in London, and share with them the good news of God’s creation and love for us all.

He started with a rented farmhouse, sleeping about 8 people, but moved to a large house in Tremadog a couple of years later. That was where I first visited CMC in 1972, driving a school minibus because the group leader didn’t drive. It was a life-changing experience, and I have been involved with CMC ever since – as a group leader, volunteer instructor and, since 1992, on the board of trustees.

For the next 30 years, CMC developed courses for schools, both local and UK-wide, alongside multi-activity courses – primarily mountain walking, canoeing and rock climbing at that time. There were very few paid staff, but they lived there year-round as part of the local community, even becoming involved with the mountain rescue team (with at least one trained rescue dog).

Groups started to come from all over the UK: from schools, churches, young people ‘in trouble’, even some from overseas. The summer months got booked up quickly but winter weekends were more ad hoc. For most of the late 1970s and early 1980s I kept a bag packed at home, and would get a call at work on a Thursday from the Centre Director, Brian, asking me if I could come down that weekend to help with a group. These groups were usually fairly local, but I remember one group coming from Preston, who had a fuel pump failure on their bus. Brian and I drove across the Welsh hills at high speed in thick mist to pick them up from the A5, eventually getting them to Tremadog in the small hours. They were up bright and early in the morning, not wanting to waste the limited time over the weekend before they had to travel home again.

CMC was, and still is, a place people want to come back to. I used to bring a group from the school where I taught. Whenever I advertised another trip, there was one boy who was always first to sign up. Even though he generally declined to go canoeing or climbing, and didn’t like the food, he still kept coming. It’s that sort of place.

By the early 90s 'Gorffwysfa', the house at Tremadog (birthplace of Lawrence of Arabia), was too small to accommodate larger class sizes and their teachers. After some searching, we found a ready-made centre at Pensarn, just south of Harlech, and moved there in 1998. Pensarn is on an estuary, so water sports of all kinds have developed – sailing, sailboarding, windsurfing and so on – alongside land-based activities. We have also developed curriculum-based courses for schools from all over the UK, including some from deprived inner-city areas (and even some from in or around Guildford).

In the late 1990s, we began an instructor-training programme, taking on 'apprentices' and training them up to nationally recognised standards in various activities. In the last 20+ years we have trained over 100 instructors, with a very good track record of placement in jobs. Many are still involved in outdoor education. This led to our involvement with a Christian centre in Pune in India, where they had no history of outdoor activities.

With the growth of water-based activities, we have significantly developed waterfront facilities, with an emphasis on safe access to the water for all, especially those with physical or mental impairment. Watching the Friends and Members holding up a new access ramp to be bolted in place, or paddling the pontoon around the harbour like a 40-foot dragon boat are spectacles I will never forget (and I have the photos – *see below!*).

CMC Adventure (as it is now called) is struggling, like all leisure activities, in the current crisis, but remains true to its charitable object of 'educating young people through outdoor activities to develop their physical, mental and spiritual capabilities' or, more simply: Enriching Outdoor Education. The staff live as a Christian community, but the guests come from all backgrounds, from all faiths and none. They come because those who organise group visits recognise the value of a residential trip in an outdoor education setting, challenging young people to attempt things they never thought they could do.

Having been involved with CMC for nearly 50 years, I would be happy to say more to anyone interested (or you can look at cmcadventure.org).

Mike Bishop
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