





Wales

Croeso I Gymru,
Welcome to Wales

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Croeso I Gymru, Bryn said, and put your seatbelts on, it will be a long drive. About an hour into the ***journey from London***, I asked him what he said to me when we first met—my eyes, glued to the ***unfamiliar road*** and all those drivers that persisted on driving on the wrong side.

Welcome to Wales, he said. How do I know when we are in Wales? I enquired. You'll know, you won't be able to read the signs and besides, we'll stop for a *peint o gwrw*. *Peint* sounded a lot like *pint* and that was good enough for me.

By noon I was totally enchanted by the land. Gone were the fast food establishments and instead of the "M roads" as the English call their large highways, the narrow, winding roads of Northern Wales guided us through a stunning countryside, dotted with tiny hamlets dating back as far as six-hundred years and bevy of pubs even older. By mid-afternoon I had learned to speak Welsh, well at least I could pronounce

gwrw and knew that when entered a pub and asked for a *peint o gwrw* (*pay-nt oh goo-roo*) we would receive a pint of ale.

Wales is to the west of England, and although it is part of the UK, don't ever suggest to the Welsh that they are English. Wales is only 260 km long and only 100 km wide, but with a total population of 2.9 million, it has fewer inhabitants than the city of Toronto. Subtract from that, the nearly 350,000 that live in the capital city of Cardiff and you end up with a country with lots of space to do all the things your mother told you never to do. I mentioned the pubs already, and if you believe the Welsh, there is one pub for every ten houses in most villages. In Wales, you can do anything, from mountain



At the *Clwb Golff Nefyn a'r Cylch*, (pictured) a ball that should have reached *a green isolated on a rock*, could tumble down and *land on* either one of the three pubs or a house in the *small fishing village* a hundred metres below.

climbing and snowboarding to surfing or wakeboarding and anything in-between.

Village life, for that matter, life almost everywhere in Wales, is unhurried and incredibly simple. Here, the picturesque stone houses of light grey limestone and black slate, are probably 400-years-old on average. In Dolgellau, a village between the Snowdonia National Park, and Cardonian Bay, we stayed in a B&B, the Y Meirionnydd that dates to the 17th century. Its cellar, which used to be the county jail, is now a superb restaurant. You couldn't miss it if by chance you wandered out in the night— to reminisce or whatever one does in the Celtic stone circle, a block down the road— because the house to the right of the old B&B is a pub; so is the one to the left.

Up in Conwy I learned my Welsh history. The English built its

gritty and dark stone castle in 1289 as an outpost in their quest to conquer the Welsh, and as most Welsh folk will tell you, they succeeded, although they are rather quick to explain that some time later they managed to recapture the castle. To this date the original town of Conwy still stands below the castle encircled by a stone wall.

Opposite the bay, the barely visible foundation of the Welsh fortress is easy to miss, yet between the two fortifications is one of the most difficult golf links I have ever played. If the sight of Conwy Castle is not enough of a distraction, the fairways— if one can call them that, they were often as narrow as a cart path winding through the most impenetrable gorse, a spiny bush you couldn't run over with a tank let alone a golf cart— proved to be most challenging. Yet the bunkers were a real delight; if they ➤

above **The spectacular views of the Nefyn Golf Course that skirts the Welsh coast.**
opposite page **Cardiff Castle at night.**



“Wales is miles upon miles of *beautiful* and *unspoiled* countryside.”



above **Searching for your ball at Royal St. David Golf Club presents a few challenges.**

top **Where's the pin? Another spectacular view from a tee at the Nefyn Golf Course.**

next page **Brecon is a thriving town near the Brecon Beacons National Mountain Park an area of outstanding natural beauty.**

weren't five feet deep with straight walls, they were made out of concrete during WWII. It was here, by the golf course that the allies built the landing crafts that were later used in Normandy. To this day, concrete sections of actual bunkers, complete with shell holes from the attacking enemy aircrafts, stand as silent reminders of humanity's dark side.

The immense bomb craters are somewhat overgrown now with those wretched gorse bushes, but believe me, it is better to leave your ball where it is and take a penalty.

Further south, right by the sea at the *Clwb Golff Nefyn a'r Cylch*, (the Nefyn Golf Club to those of us that are not of Celtic ancestry), the challenge of playing golf definitely became more pleasing. To hikers and golfers alike, this surely must be heaven; it was for me. Half of the holes play along a rugged plateau and high up above the shore of the sea. A missed shot could drop into the realm of the hang-glider crowd or a ball that should have reached a green isolated on a rock, could tumble down and land on either one of the three pubs or a house in the small fishing village a hundred metres below. The Nefyn course is one that a golfer must experience at least once in a lifetime.

The *Royal St. David Golf Club* in Harlech presents a challenge of a whole different nature. One plays along, through, over, into and sometimes around the largest sand dunes one could imagine, and all that directly below a medieval castle and town.

From Harlech on, it would be wise to leave the coast and once again head inland and take the most beautiful and scenic route through the *Brecon Beacons National Mountain Park*. From there, you head south over high passes and its many quaint villages and never-ending dry-stone walls, toward the city of Cardiff. I am not sure what the Welsh were thinking, perhaps they planned their town long ago in one of the many pubs, but Cardiff, the capital of Wales is nothing but grandiose in its design. Perhaps it shows once again the rivalry between the English and the Welsh. Few cities can boast larger castles than Cardiff Castle, a more magnificent city hall or a greater more imposing museum. It is just outside of Cardiff, (barely half an hour's drive), at Newport's Celtic Manor Golf Course that the 2010 Ryder Cup will play out later on this year, a venue that promises to be as spectacular to the players as it will be to the spectators.

Wales doesn't end in Cardiff, nor does

