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Dear Readers,



It's been a busy 2023 for us from a business and personal point of view. On speaking to lots of our clients and friends, it seems like a similar story across the board. As lockdowns of previous years recede into the distance, there's been a slow and gradual thawing and these days life seems busier than ever.

Back in February, Pete and I took over the running of *Abergavenny Voice* on Facebook. What a baptism of fire that was and, in all honesty, it almost broke me. Wiser people than I recommended that for once in my life I didn't try to do it all by myself and recruit some help. We did just that, and now have a healthy administration team to assist with its day to day running. Of course, it still presents its challenges, but we feel it works well, hand in hand with our business. We feel strongly about promoting local business to our local community and *Abergavenny Voice* allows us to do just that and encourage others to keep doing so too.

Personally we've faced challenges too. Financial hardship is something many of us have faced in 2023 and we haven't been immune to those pressures either. I don't think anybody hasn't felt the tightening of finances in the face of the current cost of living. We've also had family issues to think about; the passage of time and what that means for the older members of our extended family. And we've confronted personal losses to illness that has taken friends from us way too soon.

I very much hope that as the year draws to a close, you can reflect and find the positives in 2023. I am grateful for my friends and family and their unwavering support, and for the opportunity to seek new experiences and adventures. But of course, the year isn't over just yet and there's Christmas to enjoy first. So, from us to you, we extend the warmest of Christmas wishes and the very best to your family and friends.

Merry Christmas!

Hannah

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Abergavenny Concertgoers Club



Some of the thirty members who attended Malvern's theatre

Abergavenny Concertgoers Club is close to its eightieth birthday having been founded during the last years of the Second World War. More recently it resumed events after an enforced break due to Covid with a trial run in May 2023 to see who was interested, and forty came with us to Stratford-on-Avon for a most stimulating performance of Shakespeare's 'As You Like It' starring Geraldine James as well as many other well-known actors.

Encouraged by this show of support the club settled on three events for this Autumn, all well attended: a symphony concert in Birmingham featuring the acclaimed organist Thomas Trotter; an October concert by the Ukraine Symphony Orchestra in Hoddinott Hall; and in November a performance of John Mortimer's play 'A Voyage Round my Father' in Malvern's fine theatre. Events scheduled for 2024 include Somerset Maughan's play 'The Circle' in Bath's Theatre Royal; Hereford Cathedral for Rachmaninoff's 'Vespers'; Cardiff's Millennium Centre for Mozart's 'Così fan tutte' and Puccini's 'Il Trittico'; orchestral concerts in Cardiff's Hoddinott Hall; Stratford-upon-Avon for Shakespeare.

The club is a locally-based non-profit-making association of over one hundred members open to all interested in attending arts-related events; especially concerts, theatre, and opera. It has been contributing to Abergavenny's cultural life for almost eight decades and is run by a small volunteer committee. There's a small membership subscription of £10 a year, and the cost of events covers the ticket price and the coach fare including a tip for the driver.

Further details can be obtained by contacting the club's Membership Secretary by email: concertgoersmembers@gmail.com

Ian Smith

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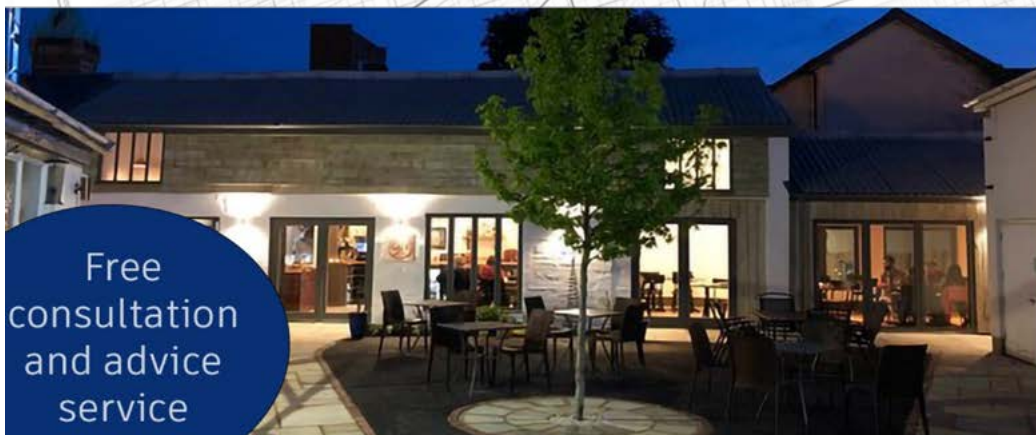
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Repair Café Abergavenny Wins Environmental Award



We are proud to announce that the Repair Café Abergavenny has won the Environmental Award for 2023 at the annual Monmouthshire Volunteer Awards ceremony held in partnership with Monmouthshire Housing Association on 4th October 2023.

Winning the award has been down to all the hard work of the volunteers involved, so a big thank you to all of them. Special thanks too goes to Mary-Ann Swanson, founder of Repair Café Abergavenny in 2019, who sadly passed away last year, and to Fiona Taylor who is doing an excellent job in continuing with managing the running of the Café.

Repair Café Abergavenny is run by volunteers and its aim is to

mend as many household items as possible, as well as give repair advice, and in doing so reduce household waste. Success in these aims, brings a lot of satisfaction to volunteers because repaired items are kept out of the tip. Owners of the items too, derive satisfaction from having their item repaired and also save themselves money. The actions of both volunteers and owners in their own small way also helps the planet.

Award and trophy being received by Repair Café Abergavenny volunteers on 4th October at the Gateway Church.

If you have a talent for fixing things then we'd be very pleased to add your name to the growing list of Repairers. If you don't have a talent for fixing things, but you have a talent as an organizer and/or for using social media we have

spots for your too. You may even enjoy yourself so much that you'll want to volunteer every month!

For more information and to register your interest please contact Fiona at repaircafeabergavenny@gmail.com.

Repair Café Abergavenny is held on the 3rd Saturday every month, except December and August, from 11.00am to 2.00pm at the Abergavenny Community Centre in Merthyr Road, Abergavenny.

Ian Horn



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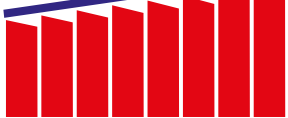


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Our research with Natural Resources Wales shows that our assets (i.e. our treatment works, Combined Storm Overflows or CSOs) are responsible for around 21% of the phosphates in the river Usk, with CSOs only responsible for 1%. The remainder, is caused by other factors such as rural land use and animal faeces, urban surface water drainage, misconnected drains, as well as private septic tanks.

We have permits in place at our wastewater treatment works to protect the river. These permits are set by our environmental regulators and can be changed by them when needed, to reflect the changing needs of the river, or when new evidence is found. When this happens, we work with our regulators to improve and upgrade our treatment works.

We understand that river water quality is an important matter for local residents and we are committed to playing our part to reducing our impact on the river Usk and the wider environment. To find out more visit dwrcymru.com/environment or scan this handy QR code.



Fel cwmni, rydyn ni'n cymryd ein cyfrifoldebau dros amddiffyn yr amgylchedd o ddirif. Dyma pam ein bod ni wedi bod yn datblygu cynlluniau i wella'r dŵr yn ein hafonydd.

Mae ein gwaith ymchwil gyda Chyfoeth Naturiol Cymru'n dangos bod ein hasedau (fel ein gweithfeydd trin, o'n Gorlifoedd Storm Cyfun neu CSOs) yn gyfrifol am tua 21% o'r ffosffadâu yn afon Wysg, o'r CSOs sy'n gyfrifol am gwa 1%. Mae'r gweddill yn cael ei achosi gan ffactorau eraill fel defnydd tir gwledig a bow anifeiliaid, dŵr yn draenio oddi ar wynebâu trefol, draeniau sydd wedi eu cam-gysylltu, a thanciau septig preifat.

Mae trwyddedau mewn grym yn ein gweithfeydd trin dŵr gwastraff i amddiffyn yr afon. Ein rheoleiddwyr amgylcheddol sy'n pennu'r trwyddedau hyn, a gallant eu newid pan fo angen i adlewyrchu anghenion newidiol yr afon, neu pan fo tystiolaeth newydd yn codi. Pan fo hynny'n digwydd, rydyn ni'n gweithio gyda'n rheoleiddwyr i wella ac uwchraddio ein gweithfeydd trin.

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Come and join in the 'Hwyl' and support our local Food Bank



Y Fari Lwyd being led by the Ostler into the Angel Hotel

Two ancient Welsh traditions continue to be celebrated in Abergavenny. Why not come and join in? All collections will be donated to Abergavenny Food Bank. Last year we were able to present a cheque for £500 collected over these two days.

Hen Galan (the Old New Year) and the Mari Lwyd

Hen Galan or the Old New Year gets its name from the change, in 1752, to the calendar: the old, Julian Calendar (named after Julius Caesar) being replaced by the Gregorian Calendar (named after Pope Gregory XIII). Not everyone was happy with this change, which happened following September 2nd 1752 - the next day was September 14th. Many parts of Wales stuck with the old calendar and even today, in one valley in Pembrokeshire, there is an unbroken tradition of celebrating New Year's Day, or Dydd Calan, on January 13th. This date is now increasingly being celebrated

as a Welsh New Year along with traditional folk customs such as Mari Lwyd and Plygain services.

On January 13th 2024, the procession of the Mari Lwyd, with its traditional Welsh singing, that was once popular in Abergavenny and throughout Gwent and Glamorgan, returns once again, jointly organised by Cymreigyddion y Fenni and Merched y Wawr.

The Mari Lwyd timetable for January 13th 2024 will be as follows:

3.30pm The Chapel Cafe and Gallery, Market Street followed by The Angel Hotel, The King's Head, The Hen and Chicks, The Kings Arms and The Grofield, arriving at Holy Trinity Church Hall, Baker Street by 6:30 for supper at 7.00pm

Anyone who would like to come for supper must email Jill Green – jill.keith@btinternet.com by Wednesday, January 10th, stating whether they require a vegetarian meal. The cost of the supper will be £12.

Y Plygain

On Sunday, January 14th, at 6pm the traditional Plygain service will be celebrated at Holy Trinity Church. It is a traditional Welsh language Church service and not a concert and all are welcome to attend and experience the occasion.

Y Plygain was originally a Welsh Christmas service held in Church between 3am and 6am on Christmas morning. Its popularity, first recorded in a 13th century Welsh manuscript, declined during the Victorian era but continued in a few places. The 21st century has seen a strong revival of this tradition including here in Abergavenny, where the service has been held annually, apart from lockdown, since 2015.

For this service Churches were traditionally lit by candlelight. The vicar introduces the service with prayer and a reading from Scripture. Three carols are sung by the congregation but the rest of the carols are sung by individuals or small groups. Plygain carols are unusual as they

frequently tell the whole story of Christ from His birth to His crucifixion and are firmly rooted in Scripture.

If you wish to participate and sing a Plygain carol, please contact Ruth Roberts (ruthroberts@gmail.com), so that no carol is repeated. This is one of the few restrictions passed down through the centuries.

Y Plygain will be followed by a finger 'Bring and Share' supper in the Church Hall to which all the congregation are invited. The hall will be open prior to the service for your food contributions.

A retiring collection will be made after the service and again this will be donated to the local Food Bank.

We look forward to seeing you at either or both events.

Ruth Roberts



Jeff Davies, Chair of Cymreigyddion Y Fenni and Eirwen Williams, chair of Merched Y Wawr, presenting a cheque for £500 to Abergavenny Food Bank, January 2023

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It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas with Synergy Choir

Abergavenny based a-capella choir Synergy will be performing their first concert in the town for over 4 years when they perform a festive concert on Saturday 16th December at St Mary's Priory Church in Monk Street.

Synergy Chairman Tony Cecil explained – “We performed in Builth Wells on 1st March 2020 and were looking forward to a busy concert programme throughout the remainder of the year. No-one could have predicted then that it would be two years before we would be able to perform in public again due to the Covid pandemic. The choir remained active with weekly rehearsals via Zoom but there is nothing that can match singing together to entertain an audience”.

“We started performing in public again in the Spring of 2022 and performed a record number of concerts throughout last year. We have been keen to come back to perform in Abergavenny ever since and the concert on 16th December has been in the planning for over a year.”

CONTINUED OVERLEAF...

A poster for the Synergy Choir concert. The poster features the choir's name 'SYNERGY' in large, bold letters at the top, with the tagline 'giving voice to beautiful music' below it. The text 'presents A Special Musical Evening' is written in a cursive font. The date and time 'Saturday 16th Dec. 2023 at 7.30pm (Doors open at 7.00pm)' are prominently displayed. The venue 'ABERGAVENNY St Mary's Priory' is mentioned, along with a note '100th YEAR OF CHRISTIANITY'. The ticket price 'Tickets £12' is shown. The poster also features photos of the choir and their guests, 'COR EBBW FACH' and 'Adam Gilbert'. At the bottom, it says 'tickets on sale, from Tuesday 26th Sept. from the Borough Theatre Box Office' and provides contact information for the box office: 'and online at https://abergavenny.ticketsolve.com/ticketbooth/shows', 'Box Office 01873 850 808', and 'www.abergavennyboxoffice.com'.

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"We are delighted to be joined by Cor Ebbw Fach, a mixed four-part close harmony choir from Abertillery. Founded in 2014 the choir are guided by their Musical Director Stephen David and will be performing a programme that includes popular songs from the second half of the twentieth century along with some popular Christmas, and some fun as well."

"We will also be joined by accomplished Tenor Adam Gilbert. Adam is the son of one of our members and we have watched with interest as his career has developed since he graduated from the Guildhall School of Music and then completed his training at the National Opera Studio in London. Adam has gone on to perform with a number of major opera companies including Welsh National Opera, English National Opera and Glyndebourne Festival Opera. Adam originally trained as a Baritone but over the past few years has made the move to a Tenor. Adam will perform a number of popular operatic arias along with some very well-known songs from major musicals."

Synergy Musical Director Owen McCarthy said – "Synergy have always been known for their ability to combine a high level of close harmony

a-cappella singing with the ability to entertain by the way we perform. Since I became MD in 2021 I have tried to continue this philosophy. We will also be performing a varied range of songs at the concert that will include popular festive songs from music greats including Bing Crosby and Dean Martin. We will also perform songs from well-known films and musicals and pop songs from the likes of Queen."

"We are all hoping for an evening that is Merry and Bright."

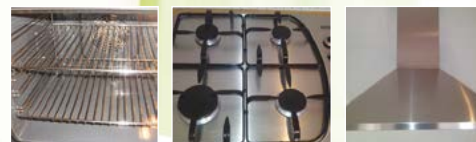
Tickets for the concert will be available at the door on the night (doors open at 7pm) or can be purchased in advance at Abergavenny Borough Theatre Box Office:

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Alan Williams



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Mae Gwasanaeth Gosod Sir Fynwy'n cynnig cynlluniau gosod tymor byr a hirdymor. At hyn, mae gennym lesoedd hirdymor, rhwng pump ac ugain mlynedd, ar gael drwy 'Gynllun Lesio Cymru' a ariennir gan Lywodraeth Cymru ac a reolir gan Wasanaeth Lesio Sir Fynwy. Mae grantiau ar gael i helpu dod â chartrefi gwag yn ôl i gael eu defnyddio.

Os oes diddordeb gennych mewn gosod eich eiddo, neu os hoffech fwy o fanylion ynglŷn â'r gwasanaeth a'r hyn yr ydym yn ei gynnig, cysylltwch â Clare Hamer

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★ presents

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at THE SAVOY THEATRE, MONMOUTH

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Adult Shows on 15th, 21st & 30th December

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Local Teens Join Acting Pros in Mother Goose



Island. But more importantly for any locals - the professional cast are joined by two talented youngsters from Abergavenny - Orlena and Roy Johns who are performing with the Savoy Youth Theatre on stage. Each year the youth theatre play a huge part in the pantomime, bringing a little extra sparkle and energy to every performance.

Orlena is 15 and is going from strength to strength with her performance skills, hoping one day to work professionally in the arts in some way or form. Roy, her brother, is only 12 and is finding his way through exhausting rehearsals and learning how much fun can be had even if some of the steps prove to be a little tricky.

It can be a stressful time for all of the students involved, juggling rehearsals around school work and home life and learning all the new skills needed for stage, but their director Sam, is incredibly proud of all the students saying, ‘the dedication and commitment of each one of them is something we can all learn from.’

We have shows for everyone - some families book twice: if you have someone who needs things a little quieter then our relaxed performance is just right - there is no judgment if you need to move around, the auditorium doors are open and we even have a BSL interpreter. And if you love panto but want to let your hair down without the kids we do that too - our adult only performances give that little extra bite, and the bar is open throughout - perfect for office parties or grown up birthdays, we still have the story sheet at the end, and you still need to boo and hiss!

Pantomime at the Monmouth Savoy has become a family tradition, with audiences travelling from far and wide to join in the fun. The Savoy Theatre is a magical place and ‘Mother Goose’ offers all you need for the perfect Christmas treat - whether it’s dancing along to ‘Cotton Eye Joe’ or joining in with ‘Barbie Girl’!

Starring West End performer Robert Traynor as Demon Bone Pincher and one of the best Dames in the business Kevin Tillet as Dame Ida Downing - Kevin is now celebrating 30 years of wearing the wig and audiences wouldn’t have it any other way.

We are also delighted to have international singer Joshua Takacs back with us after his debut last year as Jim Hawkins in Treasure

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Christmas Festivities 2023

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DECEMBER EVENTS CALENDAR

2ND DECEMBER CRICKHOWELL VINTAGE, ANTIQUE & MAKERS MARKET

An exciting mix of vintage delights and artisan creations
10am-4pm, Clarence Hall,
Crickhowell. Free entry

5TH DECEMBER ABERGAVENTY WI

Monthly meeting. This month with Daphne Baber presenting a floral presentation
2pm-4pm, Methodist Church, Castle St, Abergavenny

5TH DECEMBER CHARITY PUB QUIZ

Christmas quiz
Kings Arms Hotel,
Abergavenny

5TH
DECEMBER
7.30PM,
£10 PER
TEAM

All proceeds to
Newport and
Gwent Samaritans

SAMARITANS
Newport & Gwent

All welcome!

Christmas Quiz in support of Newport and Gwent Samaritans
7.30pm, Kings Arms, Abergavenny
£10 per team

7TH DECEMBER CRICKHOWELL CHRISTMAS MARKET

Crickhowell Town Centre 4pm-8pm

8TH DECEMBER Llanfoist Village Hall Film Night OPPENHEIMER

The story of American scientist, J. Robert Oppenheimer, and his role in the development of the atomic bomb.
Doors 7pm, Screening at 7.30pm. Bar available. Adults £5 at the door

9TH DECEMBER ABERGAVENTY CHRISTMAS MARKET

Various locations throughout the town: Market Hall, St John's Square, Nevill St, Frogmore St, Cross St & Market St
9am-5pm

9TH DECEMBER CROSS ASH CHRISTMAS SHOPPING & SANTA'S GROTTO

10am-5pm, Cross Ash Village Hall

9TH & 10TH DECEMBER LLANVIHANGEL COURT CHRISTMAS FAIR



Over 50 stalls of the best local artisan makers, foodies and treasures gather in this Grade 1 listed house lighting it up with magic...enjoy the vintage tearoom, street food mkt, candlelit carolling, roaring log fires, mulled wine a'mulling, festive tunes spinning, Christmas trees twinkling, children's craft, massage, live music, artists corner, swing dance and the big man himself flies in for a visit on Sunday.
10am-5pm, Llanvihangel Court,
Llanvihangel Crucorney
Adults £5, under 14 free

9TH DECEMBER Hardy Plants Society Festive Event 'WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS – TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED' A talk by Mark Goulding

£4 for members, £6 for non members. The Hardy Plant Society Monmouthshire group meets at the village hall on Berthon Road, Little Mill NP4 0HJ twice a month on Saturdays at 2.30pm. We invite those who love hardy perennials, shrubs and trees to share their interest by joining us. For more details of our activities, please visit <https://hpsmonmouthshire.co.uk/>

10TH DECEMBER ABERGAVENTY MARKET CHRISTMAS MARKET

11am-4pm, Abergavenny Market Hall

10TH DECEMBER CHRISTMAS SERVICE

Followed by raffle, tea, coffee and refreshments. 2pm, Llanfoist Chapel of Peace. All welcome

10TH DECEMBER Abergavenny Symphony Orchestra HEROES & VILLAINS: CONCERT FOR CHILDREN

This year's popular free family concert will be on the theme of heroes and villains, including music from James Bond, Star Wars, Mary Poppins, and 101 Dalmatians Free Event. There is no need to book tickets for this event
4pm, King Henry VIII School
Abergavenny

10TH DECEMBER CHRISTMAS CRAFT FAIR

12pm, Clydach Village Hall, NP7 0LR

12TH-16TH DECEMBER AAODS PERFORMS ELF JR. THE MUSICAL



7pm, Clarence Hall, Crickhowell

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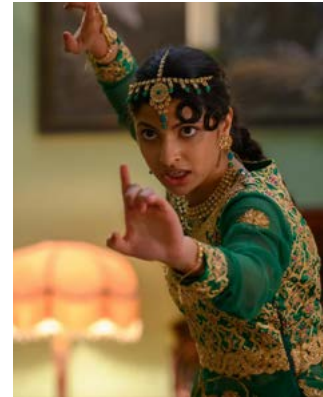
13TH DECEMBER

Govilon WI CHRISTMAS SUGARCRAFT WORKSHOP

2pm, Salisbury Community Hall,
Merthyr Rd, Govilon

13TH DECEMBER

Abergavenny Film Society Screening POLITE SOCIETY (12A)



Some fun for Christmas. Featuring 2 very lively British Pakistani sisters who are determined to live the lives they choose. When one is tempted into marrying a seemingly perfect geneticist, her little sister has her doubts and embarks on an investigation into him and his family. Chaos ensues.
Screenings at 4.30pm and 7.30pm,
Melville Centre, Penypound,
Abergavenny

14TH DECEMBER

Gwent Bach Choir CHRISTMAS SONGS AND CAROLS

St Mary's Priory Centre, Abergavenny.
Tickets £10 on the door. All profit will be shared between the Choir and Abergavenny Food Bank

14TH DECEMBER

ABERGAVENTNY FLOWER ARRANGEMENT SOCIETY

Open Christmas meeting with Lorena Dyer 'The Magic of Christmas'
7pm, Borough Theatre, Abergavenny
Tickets £15

16TH DECEMBER

A SPECIAL MUSICAL EVENING WITH SYNERGY CHOIR



7.30pm, St Mary's Church,
Abergavenny
See Article on Page 17

16TH DECEMBER – 3RD JANUARY
MOTHER GOOSE

Savoy Theatre Monmouth
Box Office 01600 772467 or
Monmouth-savoy.co.uk
See Pages 22-23 for full details

21ST DECEMBER

ABERGAVENTNY STREET FOOD AND CRAFT NIGHT MARKET

5pm-9pm, Abergavenny Market Hall

3RD JANUARY

Abergavenny Fifty Plus Club **THE LAND OF FIRE AND ICE – A TALK ON THE LANDSCAPE AND GEOLOGY OF ICELAND**

2pm, Trinity Hall, Baker St,
Abergavenny
All Welcome. £2 entry

3RD JANUARY

Abergavenny Film Society Screening 1975 (15)

This thrilling Chilean drama tells the story of a woman who unwittingly sets herself against the Pinochet regime by sheltering a young man on the run from the police. The film convincingly illustrates the nation's descent into hell through the life of an ordinary woman.
Screenings at 4.30pm and 7.30pm,
Melville Centre, Penypound,
Abergavenny

9TH JANUARY

Book-ish Event MATT PRITCHARD – **DIRTY VEGAN FAST AND EASY**

7.30pm, Manor Hotel, Crickhowell
Tickets from [www.book-ish.co.uk/
events](http://www.book-ish.co.uk/events)

13TH JANUARY

MARI LWYD



From 3pm, starting from The Chapel,
Market St, Abergavenny
See our article on Page 15 for full info

14TH JANUARY

PLYGAIN SERVICE

Welsh language Church Service
6pm, Holy Trinity Church,
Abergavenny
See Page 15 for more info

SHARE YOUR EVENTS

Go to thefocus.wales/calendar

A Note about Events

All the events listed are correct at the time of publishing. We strongly recommend double checking dates and times prior to attending an event to ensure these have not changed. Focus Magazines accepts no responsibility for errors or omissions

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Why not Think about Learning a New Skill this Year?

The Crickhowell Guild of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers is a vibrant Guild, promoting the crafts and offering beginners weaving and spinning courses.

The Guild meets every Thursday from 10am to 3pm at Llangynidr Village Hall and has over 20 members with a range of experience and abilities, who encourage, inspire and help each other. We have a number of looms and spinning wheels that members can borrow freely, as well as a library and access to current journals on textile crafts.



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secretary.crickhowellgwsd@gmail.com
or telephone 01874 731023

If you enjoy craft and would like to tackle something new this year the Beginners Weaving Course could be a great place to start. The course takes place over the weekend of February 10th/11th 2024, and the following 4 Thursdays. The course will be led by Jane Langridge, an experienced weaver, and we will provide all materials for the course. 4-shaft looms will be provided by the Guild, although you are welcome to bring your own if you wish.

For further details contact:
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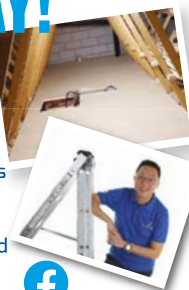


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Finding my Christmas Spirit



Having left the preparation of my article again to the last minute (sorry Pete and Hannah), I am writing this whilst on a yoga/activity retreat being held locally, hosted by Becky from Body & Earth Holistics, Crickhowell. A perfect couple of days to enjoy with familiar faces and meet new friends, learning different skills, practicing yoga, relaxing and destressing at this busy time of the year.

The weekend is being held in the beautifully converted Fforest Barn in a fabulous setting a few miles outside of Abergavenny in Fforest Coalpit. Sold via our Fine & Country brand just under 10 years ago, the former agricultural barn and stables have been converted to create the perfect retreat space with spectacular views towards the Brecon Beacons National Park (Bannau Brycheiniog). One of the weekend's activities was a wreath making workshop, held in a room full of character and charm with a central fireplace. A couple of before and after photos, (below left) capture the transformation of this superb space.

I found the wreath workshop both exhausting and rewarding. I have plenty of ideas and would go as far as saying I have a creative mind, (inherited from my mother who was an artist and fashion designer) but I struggle to execute my ideas in terms of practical skills. I would never have booked to attend a wreath workshop as I would have dismissed it as not being my 'thing'. It took me entirely out of my comfort zone, and I found myself struggling to focus - the impatient and exacting side of my nature wanted to produce the perfect wreath ...and quickly.

I surprised myself with the result and it got me thinking about when we are busy and have a long 'to do' list, we find excuses or procrastinate or avoid tackling something which is perceived as an effort. Today reminded me to find the time to enjoy new experiences or practice new skills and importantly, enjoy the results.



And, to ensure we have some familiarity and stability, our Chief Reindeer Herder, Ben Watkins, has brought our reindeer out of hibernation to join its friends in Nevill Street. We added some sparkle and lights and it is wonderful to hear children walking down the street 'reindeer spotting' and laughing with delight! The team were right, of course; it wasn't too early to start enjoying the Christmas spirit.

Ben, Vivienne and I, along with the whole Parrys and Fine & Country team, would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a very Happy Christmas and a fabulous 2024.

And I promise not to be the Christmas Grinch as 2023 comes to a close.

2023 has been a year of challenges and change. We have been living through unsettled times both in terms of the economy and world events.

During unstable times, we tend to default to our 'solace settings' - those things with which we are familiar, that offer reassurance, and we don't necessarily step out of our comfort zone. I found that focussing on something away from my usual activities, with a group of people, some of whom were experienced, others novices, took my mind away from the demands of real life and allowed me to switch off and enjoy the present moment. I know that's a cliché but how true it is; my mind is always whirring away, thinking about tomorrow, the week, what needs to be done. I'm often anxious about how I am going to fit everything into my diary and generally I am running on adrenaline. This weekend has given me an opportunity to reset. This afternoon's retreat activity will be a cookery lesson. Anyone

who knows me will appreciate this is not something I do on a regular basis! I am very much a novice unless, of course, we are making scrambled eggs with avocado.

Even though I was the Office Grinch when my team wanted to begin putting up Christmas decorations in November, my couple of days of escape and relaxation have reminded me to enjoy the next few weeks, to laugh and smile and, importantly, change my mindset from one of looking at Christmas as a time of chores, stress and anxiety to one of joy and appreciation.



Weekend retreat organised by www.bodyandearthholistics.com
Venue: www.holfordnaturalholidays.com/fforest-barn/retreats
Wreath making workshop: Sue from The House of Blooms, Crickhowell



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LOCAL CHRISTMAS GIFTING GUIDE



We are so excited to bring you our very first edition of **The Local Gifting Guide 2023**. This is being published in both *Abergavenny Focus* and *South Powys Focus* and is available online at www.thefocus.wales as a digital stand alone publication.

We very much hope you will find it useful and inspiring. The intention of the Guide chimes with what The Focus is all about: celebrating local businesses. We have so many artists, makers and independent retail owners in our area who struggle not to be swallowed up by the big boy brands and corporations, particularly at this time of year when big budget advertising campaigns drown out everybody else. In recent years, especially during and post covid, there has been more of a shift to support these smaller businesses, but there is still a long way to go.

We encourage you to take a look at our Local Gifting Guide for this year and to shop local in order to support your local economy. Happy Shopping and Merry Christmas,

Hannah

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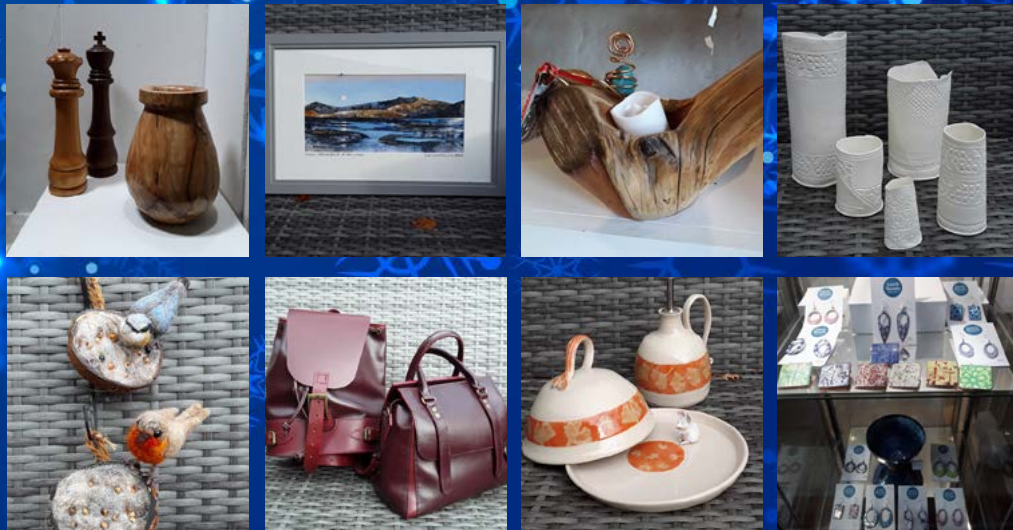
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Sadly, after Christmas, we are having to leave the lovely old barn that is the Court Cupboard but we will continue as the **Black Mountain Circle** and are hoping to find new premises very soon.



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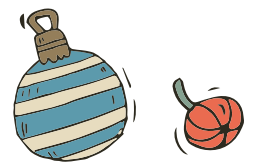
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Beef Carpaccio (gf)

Paper thin sliced beef fillet marinated with capers, olive oil, fresh lemon juice and shaved parmesan

Antipasto Misto (gf)

Selection of Italian cheese and Italian prosciutto served with pickles, rocket salad and crackers

Tomato Caprese (v)

Beef tomato stuffed with burrata, homemade pesto and fresh herbs, baked in the oven and served on a bed of rocket

Brandy King Prawns (gf)

Pan fried king prawns with garlic, chilli and fresh herbs in a creamy brandy sauce. Served with homemade bread

Butternut Squash Soup (v) (gf) (vg)

Creamy soup with butternut squash, white onion, carrots, fresh herbs, vegan cream and sage vegan butter. Served with homemade bread

Salmone al Miele

Salmon fillet marinated in honey, soy sauce, lemon juice and thyme served with roast vegetables and coriander brandy creamy sauce

Pizza Gamberi e Avocado

Pizza with brandy gorgonzola cream, baby shrimp, rocket salad, cherry tomatoes and avocado

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Slow oven-cooked beef short rib in red wine, white onion and fresh herbs. Served with homemade mash potato and homemade gravy

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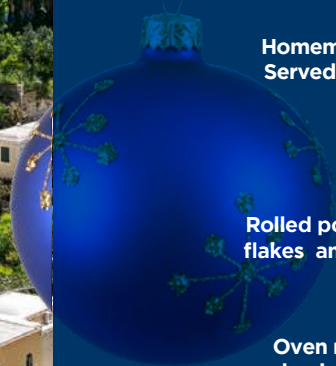
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December Weather Outlook

by Jonathan Powell



Photo: Croesonen Parc

After a wet November which saw temperatures generally sit around the average for much of the time, December looks likely to deliver a similar outlook across the region. November also managed little in the way of frost activity, with only a handful of chilly mornings, yielding at most a heavy dew accompanied by some mist patches. Modelling suggests December won't offer much in the way of frost, or indeed sleet or snow, with rain probably the dominant feature. Given that temperatures are unlikely to plunge or stay 'cold' for any length of time, the prospect of a White Christmas, as it has been in recent years, looks slender at best. This chiefly mild and wet theme may potentially encompass both January and February in 2024.

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all!

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For anyone who doesn't particularly like Christmas pudding or rich fruit cake, this Roulade makes a decadent alternative. It keeps in the refrigerator



Raspberry Hazelnut Chocolate Roulade

for up to 3 days, so can be made well in advance of the Big Event.

Ingredients

- For the meringue**
- 4 large egg whites
 - 200g caster sugar
 - 1 tsp cornflour
 - 1 tsp lemon juice


- For the filling:**
- 200ml double cream
 - 1 tsp vanilla bean paste
 - 1 punnet raspberries
 - 25g chopped hazelnuts
 - 100g white chocolate

- For the Coulis**
- 1 punnet raspberries
 - 2tbsp icing sugar

Preheat oven 160 degrees celcius/140 Fan/gas mark 3 and line the base of a swiss roll tin 33cm x 23cm with parchment paper

1. Whisk your egg whites until they hold soft peaks and the mixture stays in the bowl if turned upside down (be careful not to overbeat as this causes the eggs to collapse.)
2. Whisk in your caster sugar about a tablespoon at a time, whisking all the time until all the sugar has been added and the mixture is stiff and glossy. Beat in the cornflour and lemon juice
3. Spoon into the prepared tin, spreading the meringue evenly. Bake for 25 minutes until a light golden crust forms. Remove from the oven and cool in the tin for approximately 5 minutes
4. Cut a piece of greaseproof paper that is slightly larger than the baking tin and lightly dust it with icing sugar. Gently invert the meringue on to the paper. Remove the tin, leaving the parchment paper on the meringue until completely cold

5. Make the filling by melting the chocolate in a small bowl over a pan of simmering water, making sure the water does not touch the bottom of the bowl. When the chocolate has melted remove from the heat and cool
6. Whip the cream and vanilla bean paste until the cream just holds its shape. Gently fold in the cooled chocolate
7. Remove the parchment paper from the meringue and spread over the cream mixture evenly. Scatter over the hazelnuts and raspberries. Using the paper underneath the meringue to help, roll up the meringue from the short edge. Some cracking may appear but this adds to the log effect. Gently place on a serving dish and dust with icing sugar
8. Make the coulis by blending the raspberries and icing sugar until smooth. Sieve into a jug and drizzle a little over the log, leaving the remainder to serve.



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Committing to happiness



*"We all want peace,
we don't want misery."*

~ Howard Jones, 'Always Asking Questions'

the way you do — thereby offering temporary relief by shutting up for a while — only to change its mind moments later, deciding no, that's not it, or simply creating another unanswerable question to keep itself occupied, terrorising you, in the process. For as long as you reward it with attention, it will never stop.

Peace of mind, therefore is a choice. A fork in the road we arrive at, often in mid-life, where we get to definitively take one path over the other: do I want to continue dancing to the tune of the mind and its insatiable demands, or do I want to be happy?

Either answer is perfectly fine, but know this: commit, you must. The mechanics of the human experience are such that it only works one way and the path to contentment means divorce from the mind's chatter. Seeing through its essentially meaningless commentary means no longer turning to it for advice, and if you regularly enter into a dialogue with it, you're resigning yourself to living much of your life away from the place that life is actually happening: the present moment.

My client, having identified that years of trawling through the mind's lifeless data for answers is what had led them to seek help from me in the first place, resolved to let go of that strategy, and, in doing so, committed to happiness.

It's only fair that you should have the same opportunity, so right here, right now, I'm inviting you to ponder that same question, too.

Which path do you choose?



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Whenever I start work with a new group or an individual, there's an underlying, unwritten assumption that what we're working towards is 'happiness,' for want of a better word. A nicer experience than the one they're currently having, be that in the workplace, at home, or just within themselves. Peace of mind, if you like.

Sometimes that assumption gets dragged out into the light, as happened recently when a client of mine expressed their frustration at the persistence of strong, unwanted emotions. "I don't get it! Why am I so angry all the time, it just seems so pointless?!" they exclaimed, with obvious exasperation.

If you've ever been harassed by unwelcome feelings such as worry, sadness, irritability, grief, loneliness, jealousy, self-doubt or despair, you'll probably empathise. Nobody really likes these emotions, and it's only natural to want rid of them, especially if they're a regular fixture in your life.

And it *seems*, almost intuitively, that the answer is surely to figure out why they're happening; to dig into the distant, or recent past to identify and understand our triggers, so that we can work on our responses to them, or try and avoid them altogether.

Reflecting on my client's predicament however, I found myself musing out loud, furnishing them with a choice, in the form of a question it feels too juicy for us not to explore further, here. It was this:

"Do you want to know why, or do you want to be happy?"

Again, it *seems* like the first should lead to the second (which is why, after some hand-wringing, they replied, "I want both!") but from working with hundreds of humans over the years, it's become apparent to me that it's actually one or the other. You can't have both.

The simple reason behind this is that the mind is the *source* of our various discomforts, not the solution to them. It could furnish you with the perfect answer as to why you feel



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Images credit: Dorset Museum

Natural History Dorset Gallery

On His Doorstep

Far From the Madding Crowd opened a new chapter in Thomas Hardy's life. Helen Morgan from Abergavenny Local History Society reports.

The novel was such a success that he was able to relinquish his day job as an architect and turn to building a house of his own.

He bought the site of a former toll house on the outskirts of Dorchester, known as (Henry) Mack's Gate. The house he designed became known as Max Gate, a deliberate pun.

His was a family of builders and, as they cleared the site, they found Roman relics and even a neolithic stone.

First he built a simple redbrick two-up, two-down house in 1885. Then, with his continued success as a novelist and growing need for more rooms he extended the Queen Anne style house. It was here that he wrote Tess of the d'Urbervilles, basing the main character in part on one of the women who appeared before him in his role as magistrate in the Shire Hall courtroom.

Hardy continued to live and continue his writing at Max Gate until his death in 1928. While he knew about the Roman relics, what he never realised was that he

had built his house on one side of a neolithic stone circle.

This came to light in 1987 during digging ahead of the Dorchester bypass being built. The other half circle is the garden in front of the house. His study is now at Dorset County Museum whose galleries cover 250 million years of history. Highlights include: the skull of a pliosaur, one of the largest sea monsters ever unearthed; a pair of skeletons from Maiden Castle; Roman mosaic floors that visitors can walk on; William Hogarth's portrait of Thomas Coombes aged 108; and an entire room of Hardy material.

Shire Hall, the 18th-century courthouse on the High Street where Judge Jeffries and Hardy sat in judgment at different times, is also open to the public. It is now a museum that brings to life more than 200 years of justice and injustice. Newly refurbished to allow access to all, it offers the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of men and woman who sat in its primitive Georgian cells, "more enlightened" Victorian cells and the room that held the six agricultural workers who became the Tolpuddle "Martyrs" in the 1830s before being tried and deported to Australia.

Dorchester is part of a four-day visit to Dorset next May. For details please go to abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk. Lectures return in January.



Maiden Castle Skeletons



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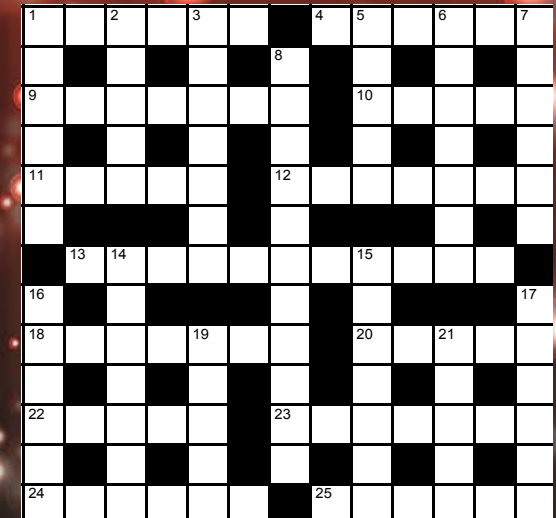
Quick Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 South American animal (6)
- 4 Clans (6)
- 9 Whirlwind (7)
- 10 Male duck (5)
- 11 Casseroles (5)
- 12 Surprised (7)
- 13 Source of power (11)
- 18 Cars, buses etc. (7)
- 20 Dangerous (5)
- 22 Tacks (5)
- 23 Graceful (7)
- 24 Eighth month (6)
- 25 Flow (6)

DOWN

- 1 Painter (6)
- 2 American handbag (5)
- 3 Masterpiece (7)
- 5 Wireless (5)
- 6 Woollen cover (7)
- 7 Fast (6)
- 8 Assembled (11)
- 14 Departing (7)
- 15 Right (7)
- 16 Lines of a verse (6)
- 17 Method (6)
- 19 Clenched hands (5)
- 21 Frighten (5)



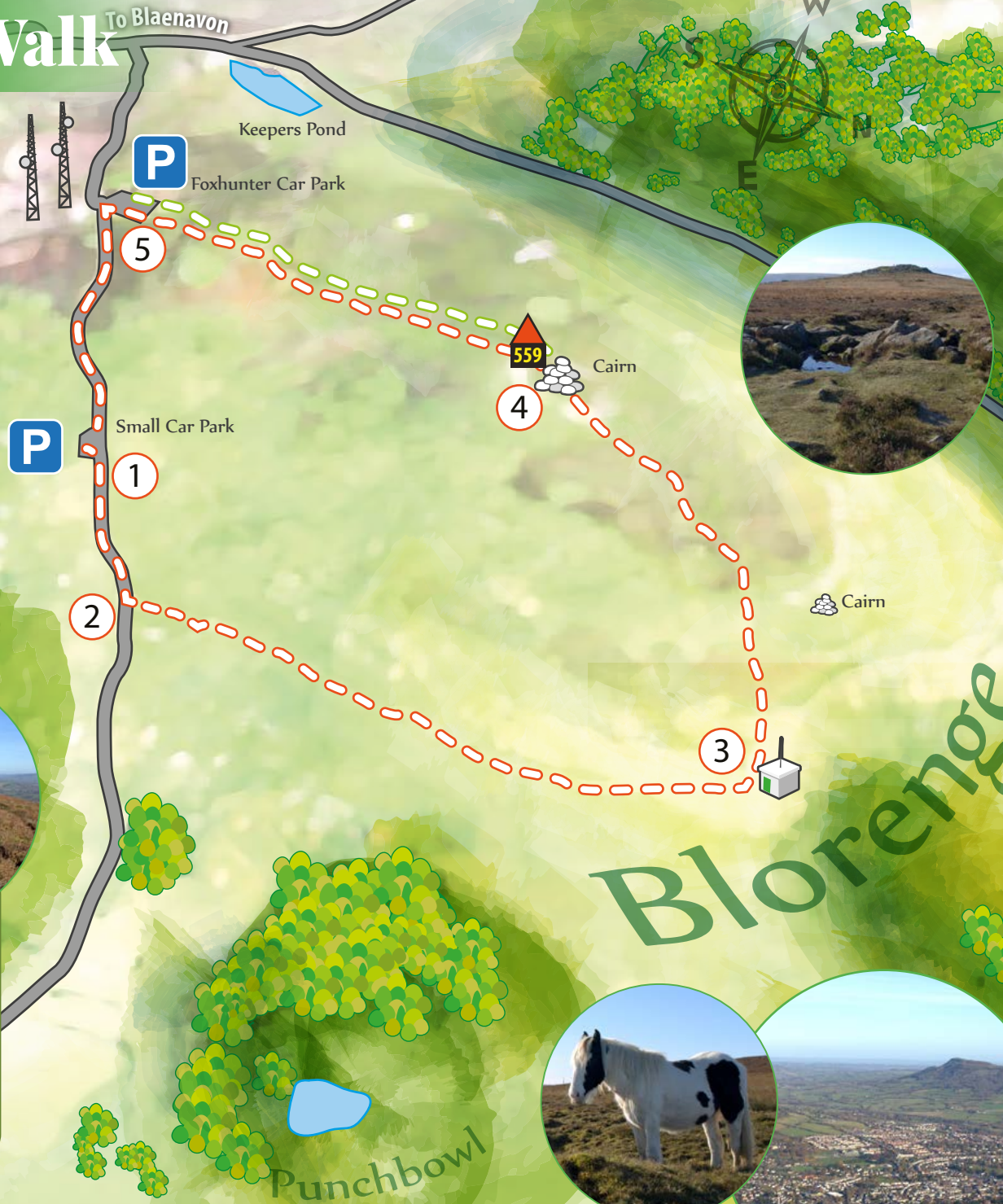
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Blorenge Walk

A nice simple, easy walk. If the weather is good, this route would be ideal for a Boxing Day walk. Being less than 3 miles long it's suitable for all the family – although if your family aren't feeling energetic, you can make it even shorter by following route B. There's fantastic views either way of course. The top of the Blorenge can be quite muddy – so dress for this!

To get there

From Govilon, drive up the B4246 towards Blaenavon. After passing the Keepers Pond car park, take the next left. For the short route, park in the Foxhunter car park beside the radio masts. For the circular route, continue down the hill for about half a mile, where there is another small car park on the right.



Route A

1. Leave the car park, and walk downhill along the road.
2. After about 400 metres turn left onto the track with a green, steel gate across it. Continue along the track as it rises gently, taking in views across the countryside towards Monmouth.
3. After about 3/4s of a mile, you will reach the 'prow' of the Blorenge, with a fantastic view across Abergavenny. The track bears left past a small hut and uphill. Follow the track to the summit. This is where it can get very muddy.
4. At the summit, you get a great view up the Usk valley. When you've finished admiring it, continue on the track towards the radio masts.
5. When you reach the Foxhunter car park, turn left down the road, and continue on back to the small car park.

Route B

Simply walk from the Foxhunter car park, along the track to the summit and back. It's only 1.5 miles in total. The track is good underfoot and has very little climb.

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