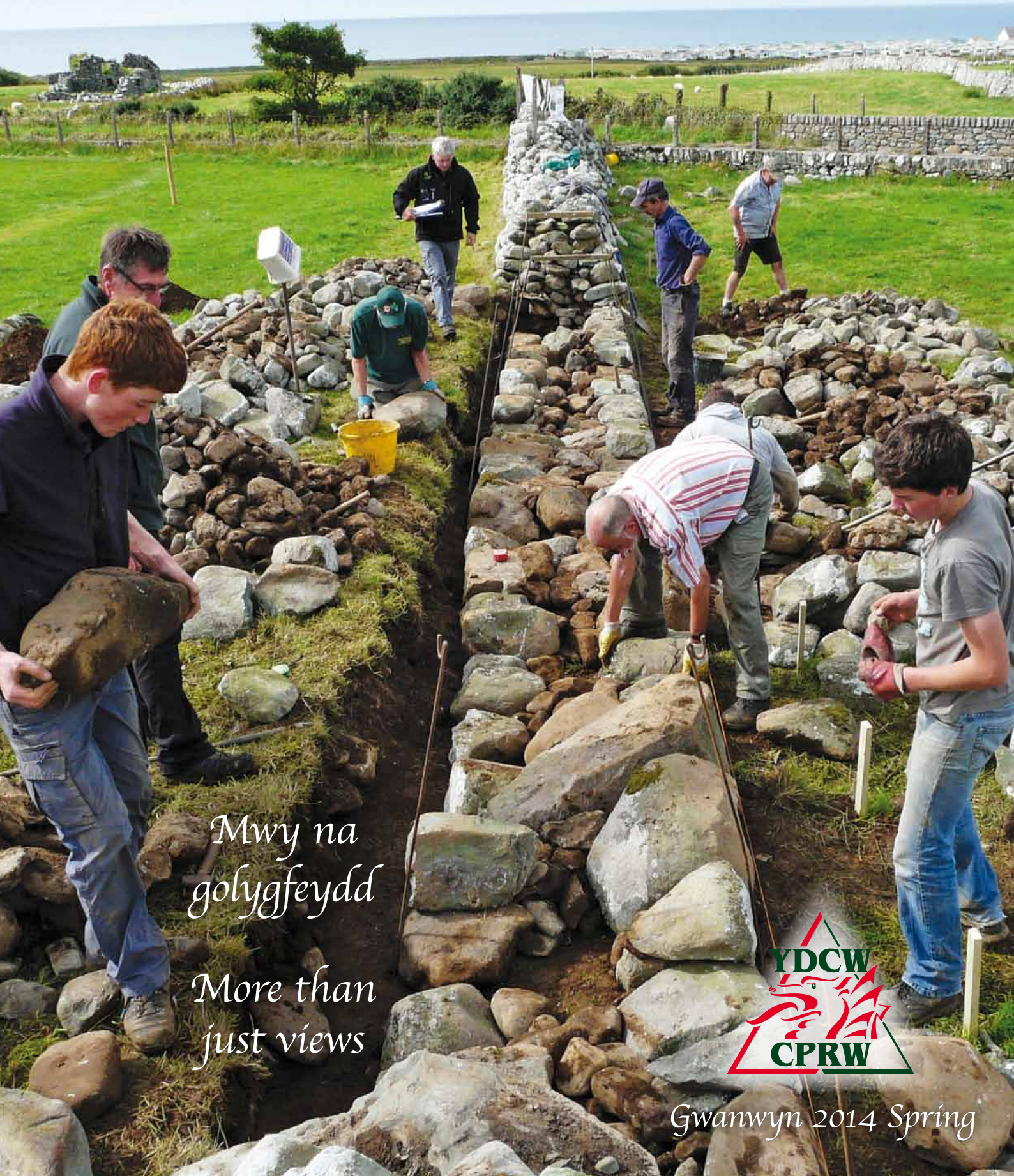




Cymru Wledig



Rural Wales



*Mwy na
golygfeydd
More than
just views*



Gwanwyn 2014 Spring



National Parks for Health

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Campaign for National Parks

I had a phone call from a woman named Sham a few days ago. 'You know,' she said, 'The National Parks are great! I work in a very stressful job on violence against women. Going to Pembrokeshire, being outdoors even in the wind and rain takes me out of it and makes me unwind. It enables me to do the job I do.'

Sham is one of over fifty volunteer Community Champions with the Campaign for National Parks' Mosaic project in Wales. They come from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in Wales' cities – Cardiff, Bangor, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham. They promote National Parks in their own communities, each one being connected to either Snowdonia, the Brecon Beacons or Pembrokeshire Coast. Sham is one of many who have had this new experience of finding space in the wild beauty of National Parks to unwind and release stress. She sees her role as a Champion for the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park to share that experience with others who have not yet visited these wonderful landscapes. 'And', she says, 'it's easy in many ways because when you organise a trip to Pembrokeshire you get such good feedback. Everyone says what a good time they've had and how much better they feel. It makes you want to do another one'.

Three other Community Champions with the Brecon Beacons National Park, Zarin, Sapna and Fateha, run a BME carers' centre. Last year they raised money to take a group of carers to the Brecon Beacons for the weekend. They stayed in Brecon YHA and did several activities – short walks, a trip on the mountain railway among them. By the end of the weekend, many of the carers commented how relaxed they felt, and not only that but physically healthier. They also weighed themselves and found that the physical exercise had had its effect! It inspired the group to do two things – raise money for further visits for themselves and those they care for through community events, and to take more walks and do more physical exercise from home.

In recent years our understanding of the positive correlation between accessing green space and health has grown, and several studies have demonstrated the positive health impacts of using green space. 2011 statistics from the Public Health Wales Observatory show growing health inequality in Wales between those living in least and most deprived urban areas, which typically have less access to green space. Through Mosaic, we've found there are several reasons why people of BME background in areas of high urban deprivation do not visit National Parks, or indeed other green space. These reasons include not knowing how to get there, not realising that they are open for public use, and not having a culture of using them, as well as economic reasons, or perceptions that the countryside is boring. We've also found that often one visit is enough to inspire people to use them more, if it takes a little longer than that to get really



confident about being in the countryside.

In a recent survey we carried out amongst Mosaic Community Champions 100% of the respondents said they felt more positive after visiting a National Park and over 70% of those said that feeling lasts longer than a week. 70% said they have started visiting green space closer to home since experiencing National Parks while over 60% said they have exercised more since becoming a Community Champion. National Parks are our best landscapes and provide a critical resource for our health and wellbeing.

The Campaign for National Parks runs Mosaic to build new links between National Parks and people who would not normally visit them. We currently run two projects in partnership with the YHA and National Park Authorities – a project for 16-25 year olds in England and our project in Wales for black and minority ethnic (BME) communities (due to run until January 2015). Mosaic in Wales

builds on over ten years of experience of facilitating engagement between BME communities and National Parks in England and Wales. It was initially set up in response to 2001 census data and visitor statistics that showed that although over 10% of the UK's population is of BME background, they represented less than 1% of National Park visitors.

What started out as a programme to increase the number of people of BME background who use, enjoy and understand National Parks has become a recognised model of how National Park Authorities can and do engage both BME communities and other 'new audiences' to National Parks. Not only that, but our understanding of how important and how beneficial National Parks are to those living in the cities has increased exponentially.

The stories from Zarin, Fateha, Sapna and Sham are just a few examples. At a meeting of Mosaic Community Champions from across Wales in October

2013, they cited the most important reason for getting involved in National Parks as improved health and wellbeing of themselves and individuals in their communities as well as the community itself. They aren't just talking about physical and mental health either. They recognise the opportunity National Parks present to bring people together socially – for an experience in an inspirational place – or holding a community event to raise money in order to get there!

Sham noted, when we spoke last week, that her involvement with National Parks through Mosaic has helped her push her own boundaries, partly through the confidence she's gained through leading visits for others to them. It's a familiar pattern. Dawn, a Snowdonia Champion from Wrexham tried out kayaking for the first time on a Mosaic Group Leaders' training weekend. She was frightened of the water and couldn't swim, but decided that she wanted to join the group. She conquered her fear and on returning to Wrexham, signed up for swimming lessons.

National Parks are indeed inspirational places and can play a significant role in the health and wellbeing of people and communities in urban (and rural) Wales. Reason enough why we should campaign to protect them and ensure that as many people benefit from them as possible.

For more information about Mosaic and the Campaign for National Parks' other work, please visit our website www.cnp.org.uk