

Glyn Ceiriog, Llanafan Fawr & Wirswall

Austin Bennett

GLYN CEIRIOG, one of the oldest trials in Wales, takes place in August every year in combination with its charming agricultural show. I say charming because, somehow, the event seems to have avoided the gradual accretion of noisy add-ons found at so many other rural gatherings. No screams and laughter from a bouncy castle here; no, not even that. The show probably hasn't changed much since the local Edwardian populace first visited and competed at it in 1904. Alongside the main trials course the little collection of stands sells garden plants, home-made jams and cakes and quiet things like that. The noisiest happening must be the mechanical shearing competition and that's hardly a decibel up on hand shearing these days, and there was some of that going on as well. All in all, the only disturbance of the peace was the continuous, happy babble of the crowd, an occasional explosion of raucous laughter and rounds of appreciative clapping and cheering; all just as it should be.

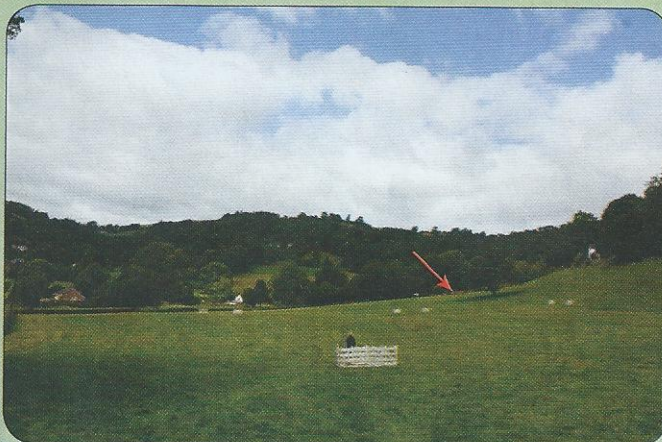
If you come to visit the show on the main A5 you take the turning for Chirk, a small town with a big, splendid 12th century castle, and take the little road that runs close to the River Ceiriog for about six miles. The whole Ceiriog Valley region was described by Lloyd George as 'a little bit of heaven on earth' and the biggest village within it is Glyn Ceiriog, once an important slate mining and flannel producing centre. Today, it's mighty important to sheepdog handlers because it's a prestige event that's won by one of twelve handlers from two qualifying fields running off in a final that gives the winner £150 and a socking great trophy.

The main course, Tal y Garth, is the trickiest and it's right alongside the little road you arrive on. As you turn in there's a lot of pony bustle going on because the show also has a Gymkhana and equestrian events, but the trial takes place on the adjoining field, and the one beyond, because this is a course that involves outrunning from one field and lifting in another. The exit from the first field isn't set up to make things easy and, if the dog doesn't head for a gap that's almost directly ahead of the handler, it means running the boundary until it comes across it. Once through, the dog continues out to the left before making a steep climb for the lift. Then it's a question of getting the dog on a downward diagonal to a gap in a tall hedge between the two fields (not easy because sheep and dogs are momentarily out of sight), on through a set of fetch gates and making a left turn into the first field back to the handler. After that it's left hand driving and a pen. The Welsh Mountain sheep could be a little unpredictable at times but careful handling produced some good runs. Too many packets, once released at the top, clung to the hedge and followed it along the top of the course, sometimes almost to the corner of the field. Since maintaining a good outrun in the second field means that dogs take a while to get up the bank for the lift, many of them had to run the boundary, find their sheep and squeeze tightly behind them to fish them off the fence. Those whose sheep stood to be collected had the distinct advantage of a much more settled packet around the rest of the course.

The other qualifying field, Tyn y Groes, is just a short drive away or, if you feel like giving your dogs a walk, five minutes on an official footpath. The course is a good size, rising gradually from left to right with the holding pen so positioned that a left hand outrun is heavily favoured. Runners to the right have to ascend the highest part of the field which probably obscures the lifting point and has the risk of bringing them down a little tighter on the sheep. Left hand driving involves a rising, rather deceptive cross drive and a line back to the pen that brings them up tight behind it for a turn around and into its mouth. The mule sheep worked well, any real objection from them becoming most obvious at the pen. The five top handlers from this field join seven from Tal y Garth for the final which uses the same course but with the addition of a Maltese cross before the pen. It's a great trial and, if the weather behaves (as this year it did) you go home feeling you've had a real day out. It's all made possible by the generosity of those who own



The Tal y Garth course at Glyn Ceiriog showing the outrun exit and lift points



The Tyn y Groes qualifying course at Glyn Ceiriog showing the lift point



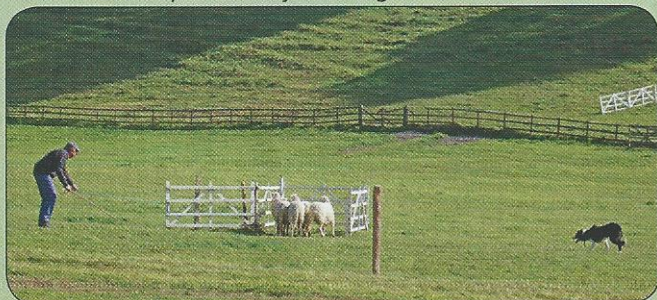
Monty turns them in the right direction for Alan von Dinther to qualify on Tyn y Groes for the Glyn Ceiriog final in which they came third



Glyn Jones and Sam complete the Maltese cross in the Glyn Ceiriog final



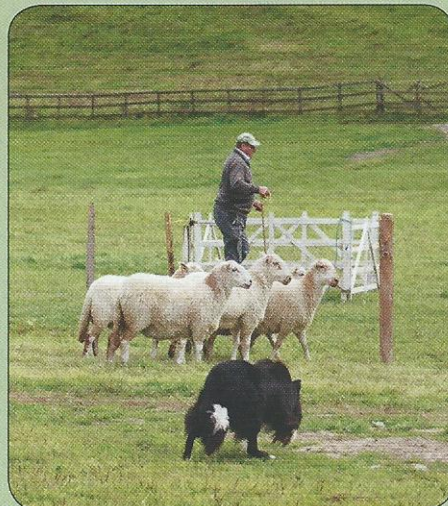
A tidy Maltese cross from Gethin Jones and Jess helps to make them runners up in the Glyn Ceiriog final



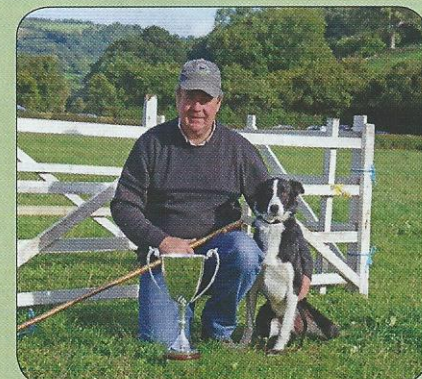
Kevin Dodd and Ben pen to take the Glyn Ceiriog championship



Glyn Ceiriog President, Iorweth Jones, hands the championship trophy to Kevin Dodd, with Secretary, Bethan Roberts



George Bonsall and Tim, winners on the Tyn y Groes qualifying field, prepare to pen in the Glyn Ceiriog final



Kevin Dodd and Ben, winners at Glyn Ceiriog

the various fields on which it all takes place, so thanks are due to Jeff Eamons, Gareth Thomas, Elfed Roberts and Alastair Gilchrist.

The two top qualifiers on the Tal y Garth course, judged by Emyr Evans, were Gethin Jones and Jess who lost fifteen points and Brynley Williams and Elwy Bob who lost sixteen. Gethin's six year old Jess 290399, is by A L Jones's Bill 240898, out of G B Jones's Gail 274991, and Brynley Williams's Bob 307080, almost four years old, is by his own Bob 257617, out of A H Roberts's Queen 263968. Leaders on the Tyn y Groes course, judged by Martin Evans, were George Bonsall and Tim 273154, and Cyril Roberts and Groesfaen Roy 311145. George's nine year old Tim is by Alastair Gilchrist's Mac 244859, out of

T Williams's Jess 239200, and Cyril's Roy is by Aled Owen's Roy 266416, and out of G Evans's Glencregg Becca 289417.

The Maltese cross in the final created the sort of challenges, mishaps and hijinks that only a Maltese cross can do, but it was smoothly conquered by several of the finalists, and none better than Kevin Dodd and four year old Ben 303119. In fact, theirs was a run that left no room for argument or debate because it was quite definitely out there on its own. Good all around the course and untroubled at cross and pen, they had only eleven and a half points deducted, eight and a half clear of their closest challengers, Gethin Jones and Jess (see above). Kevin's Ben was bred by Aled Owen from his Mac 276484, and Dot 260561.