

Challenging times ahead!

In the last edition, Ymlaen inadvertently failed to mention 'The President's Challenge', one of the recipients of a 1995 Youth Work in Wales Excellence Award. The Challenge was organised by young

members of the Welsh Federation of Boys and Girls Clubs, who had been challenged by their president Stanley Thomas, to "get their walking boots on" and organise a walk along the Cambrian Way. The 274 mile route, which ran almost the length of Wales from Conwy in the North to Cardiff in the South, took three weeks to complete, traversing some of Wales' highest and wildest peaks on one of the most beautiful and difficult long distance routes in Britain.

In all, 35 young people aged 14 - 18 took part in organising and walking the challenge, with backup support and assistance from 14 adult volunteers and 9 expert volunteers from the Army Youth Team. The logistics of organising the challenge and the difficulty of the route proved to be truly a challenge. As Dave Evans, Development Officer of the Federation commented, "I don't think any of them had tackled any thing quite as challenging before".

Having only met once before at a residential weekend in Abercrave, the group gathered on 22 July 1995 in Conwy for a launch hosted by the Mayor of Conwy and attended by the Wales and Everton goalkeeper, Neville Southall. Their route would finally end with a civic reception in Cardiff at the

Ymlaen talks to Dave Evans about past, present and future WFB&GC Challenges

National Rugby Stadium on August 13th.

Ymlaen asked Dave what he saw as the main achievements and benefits of the challenge.

"From a set of individuals at the start of the challenge there had evolved a strong group with such strong camaraderie that they would do anything for each other". From the first night of pandemonium, which saw frayed tempers, frustration and chaos, came order.

"The group very quickly realised that this was no three week stroll, and that they were all going to have to pull together if they were all going to finish

"The group quickly realised that they would all have to pull together if they were going to finish the challenge ... everybody had a vital role to play"

the challenge. Their strength was as a group and everybody had a vital role to play in ensuring the challenge's success. Even if they were not actually walking from day to day, they were actively involved in providing support from base camp. However, although this was in the truest sense a challenge, it was still enormous fun for all those involved".

The camaraderie and team work built during the challenge was too good to waste and so fifteen of the original group took up a second challenge to form a national youth council for the Federation. They formed "The Next Generation" which now meets monthly on a formal basis in various Federation clubs and more frequently

informally. The committee has already adopted a constitution, based on the constitution of a similar Youth Council in Northern Ireland. The committee has also hosted a number of weekend events and residential training events. Dave sees the Committee as "the future of the Federation" who will surpass the Federation's existing structures by empowering the young people to take on the role of shaping its activities, management and structure. The Next Generation Committee was responsible for deciding and planning this year's challenge, "The Three Way Challenge - Walking, Water and Working". They selected the route and decided to introduce a number of work projects into the event. The only part of the challenge that they were not responsible for was securing camping sites. This again was left to Dave who described the difficulty of finding suitable sites. "Many owners will not permit groups of young people to camp, and those that do charge very high prices. Even one local authority site was unwilling to allow the group to use their facilities."

This year the challenge and route were quite different. It followed a north to south route along Offa's Dyke from Prestatyn to Cardiff. At Hay-on-Wye, the walkers left Offa's Dyke and headed west to Brecon where they carried out environmental projects on the banks of the river Usk and the Brecon to Monmouth canal. They also assisted in another project to build survival shelters at the Crickhowell Army >•



Continued on p12

^Continued from p7 Youth Team Barracks. From Brecon a number of the group took to the canal and canoed to Pontypool, from where they continued by foot to Cardiff. Fifteen of last year's challenge participants took part in this event and importantly, five new participants from this year's challenge have decided to become involved in the Next Generation Committee.

Ymlaen asked Dave about the future of the Challenge, and whether it would become an annual event. He explained that a shorter event is planned for next year, possibly only taking a weekend. In 1998, they hope to hold another large event similar to the last two challenges. There will not be a challenge in 1999 but the time will not be wasted for they will be busy preparing for a major event to mark the millennium in 2000. They would like to organise a six week 900 mile walk around Wales, hopefully involving up to 100 participants, and possibly funded with Lottery money either through the Millennium Fund or the National Lotteries Charity Board.

Because of the scale of such an event, Dave believes that there is a opportunity for greater co-operation and called on other groups to get in touch to discuss the possibility of a joint event. "It would be great if other youth organisations in Wales work together on this major event to mark the millennium." Now that sounds like another challenge.

- The Welsh Federation of Boy's & Girl's Clubs can be contacted on 01222 575705.