

Christina D'Alessandro
June 29, 2019
Wales Journal 1

June 6, 2019 - Day 11

This was my favorite day of the trip. We spent the morning inside of a slate mine in Northern Wales. The history and cultural aspect of the mining actually really intrigued me. It was interesting to learn that Wales's purple slate roofed the world while the necessity for slate was at its peak. Learning this reminded me just how underrated Wales is as a country. It's a place known for its beautiful landscape and abundance of resources, but in my opinion is extremely underappreciated.

Although the mine provided a fun experience for the day, my absolute favorite part was climbing up Mount Snowdon. Conquering the highest peak in Wales and the second highest peak in all of the UK was personally an extremely rewarding challenge. Exploring Northern Wales was my favorite part of the three weeks we spent in the country and I thought climbing Snowdon was the perfect finish to our last day in the North. At first I was disappointed that we wouldn't be able to peak the mountain for sunrise. The weather throughout the trip was extremely frustrating and I was upset to think that it would be ruining another adventure. However, in hindsight I think peaking the mountain for sunset and getting to walk down the mountain in the dark was even more special in its own way.

Before peaking Snowdon we had already peaked two other mountains and had walked what felt like a hundred miles throughout Wales's natural world, but I felt that this hike was the first time I really got to appreciate Wales for all it has to offer. No one was in a rush. Every other hike seemed like we were sprinting to get to the top: either because the weather was unbearable or because we were growing with impatience and just wanted to be at the top already. But this time, we had two and a half hours to get to the summit, more than enough time and the terrain on the trail wasn't too difficult. I liked that I could look at my surroundings rather than looking down at my feet to make sure I wouldn't trip. I also got to have conversation with people in our group something that I hadn't done much of before on our hikes, mostly because I was in such a rush, I was too out of breath to speak.

The hike up Snowdon taught me patience, something that I have always struggled with in my every day life. I also finally learned what it means to pace myself and why it is important while hiking. Racing up Pen y Fan and Cadair Idris made the experience far less enjoyable. Mentally I could only focus on how exhausted I was and how I just wanted the hike to be over so that the exhaustion would end. I realized that with pacing myself, yes it takes slightly longer to climb the mountain, but I also got to enjoy the whole experience, not just the summit.

To understand this thought process I largely used Kolb's theory for experiential learning. The four stages are doing, observing, thinking, and continued planning. Hiking up Snowdon taught me a lesson that never would have hit me without the physical experience. I observed what it taught me and in reflection I realized that I might have missed opportunities with the way I was approaching my hikes. In further planning I will continue hiking at a steady pace to make sure that I am able to enjoy act of hiking as a whole rather than just the excitement obtained when peaking a summit.

A little over one month before I left for Wales, I lost one of my best friends to suicide. The loss of Rachel made leaving for this trip extremely hard. As soon as I arrived in Wales I suppressed and buried the thoughts that had been haunted me for weeks. Most of the time I felt like I was going to explode, but did not want to in front of everyone.

I remember how I felt walking up Snowdon. With every step I felt closer and closer to finally letting go. I remember reaching the summit. I remember how it felt to look down on the valleys and see the sun setting. I think it was one of the most beautiful and rewarding experiences of my life. Prior to the trip, Brigid was the only person that I really knew, but walking up the mountain with this group of people made it even more special to me. I could only think about how lucky I was to share this experience with all of them.

The whole walk down the mountain I walked by myself, listening to a playlist that I have dedicated to my friend. I finally was able to cry. Mount Snowdon put a lot of things into perspective for me. I realized how lucky I am to be alive and how even on my worst days beautiful parts of the world are out there waiting for me to explore. When reflecting on John Dewey's theory of experiential learning, I realized that I never would have gotten this experience in a classroom. Climbing the mountain gave me a perspective that only would have

been obtained through the experience itself. From Snowdon I gained perspective, I gained confidence, and I gained an appreciation for my life following the death of my friend.

Journal 2

In the first journal I talked about my favorite day in Wales. For my second journal I will be talking about my least favorite day in Wales and the greater lessons it taught me. Although I have to say, even though it was my least favorite, I still loved it and it has given me some of the best memories of the trip that I will never forget. I think it says a lot that even on the worst day I can still appreciate how amazing this experience was. It goes to show how special this program really is.

We spent this day with our favorite rock guy, Professor Andy Williams, in the Preseli Hills. Honestly, I knew from the second we started in the classroom that I was not going to like this day's adventure. The walk itself began with Andy asking us to identify species of plants and telling us that each species signified a specific amount of years that the paved row existed. This "fun" activity further confirmed that I would not be enjoying this day. We then hiked up our first hill to a huge pile of rock, which yet again confirmed my distaste for the day. I think what originally turned me off from the activity was knowing that Andy actually had no background in these studies, but rather it was just a hobby of his. I for sure can appreciate his passion on the topic, but could not bear the mainsplaining of his theories any longer.

The best, worst part of the day was trudging through the bogs. I thought it was funny that Andy specifically warned us not to walk through them, but being so fed up with him, we stubbornly ignored his advice and did it anyways. The bog was a never-ending pit of mud, water, and tall grass of fucking hell. Kate, Erin, and I fell what seemed like every five seconds. Personally, my worst fear was seeing snakes so I wanted to get through it as quickly as possible. By the end of the bog my legs were all cut up from thorns, my quads were the sorest they have ever been from doing high knees for forty-five minutes, and everything below my waist was soaking wet. Kate had grass caught in every crevice of her body. Of course, making it out of the bog was only the beginning; we still had a solid 30-minute walk up the hill to our favorite, another pile of Andy's precious rocks. This was the absolute most soul crushing part of the trip. To top it off, following the misadventure through the bog, Andy asked us to find a secret

landmark that he discovered. However, it was soon realized that he in fact had no idea where it was and led us in the complete wrong direction, another absolutely frustrating part of the day.

We ended the days adventure with a little surprise from Andy, something that he claimed he had never showed another group before. We all expected to end up at the pub, but instead we ended up OF COURSE at another pile of sacred rocks. This was one of my favorite memories, the look on everyone's face, everyone expecting a good surprise, and to be let down yet again by another rock formation. It was absolutely hilarious.

The day was underwhelming to say the least and it felt like it was just an excuse to walk 20 or so kilometers. It was confusing to me because I actually have a huge interest in archaeology and history, but there was something about the day that I could just not wrap my head around – I honestly think it was just a huge dislike of Andy that turned me off from everything. However, I will admit, that if we had stayed in that classroom all day with Andy lecturing to us, I know I would have never obtained the knowledge that I have today. I found it really cool and exciting that the rocks of Stonehenge came from Preseli Hills. Wondering about why they were the chosen rocks, why they were transported, and even how they were transported is all very remarkable to me.

There was a huge lesson that came out of the adventure of Preseli Hills. Even though the majority of us were absolutely miserable, we found the best of the situation. We made light of every opportunity we could. The bog ended up being one of my most memorable parts of the trip. And although a lot of us disliked Andy for what seemed to be a bit of arrogance, in what he proclaimed as just a hobby, he bonded us in a way that no other activity we did could.

If I had been sat in a classroom all day and was forced to listen to the history of Stonehenge and the Preseli Hills, I know that I would not remember any of it. But, the horribly unplanned day with Andy made for a completely unforgettable experience.

[illegible]