

**TT No.137: Mike Latham** - Sat 31 Jan 2009: Design2Print Welsh Alliance: **Barmouth & Dyffryn United** 2-0 Conwy United; Admission: £2; Attendance: 60 (h/c); 24pp programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 3\*.

The last day of January dawns fine, bright and dry but the winds are piercingly cold. Most pitches around the country have dried out after the recent deluges and, for once, there is a wide choice of games from which to choose with the threats of postponements relatively few.

After careful consideration I decided on my first ever visit to the Welsh coastal resort of Barmouth. A cursory look at the map makes one think it is a long way away, but closer inspection makes it a far more attractive proposition- just 3 hour's drive and 120 miles from Bolton through some glorious mountainous scenery.

The A-road through Bala and beyond has breath-taking views but can be stressful for drivers not familiar with its twists and turns, particularly if you are being tail-gated by an impatient driver with a personalised number. When a rare straight road allowed it, I decided to pull in and allow the driver to pass- only to find, ten miles beyond Bala, he was the next car in front as we stopped at temporary traffic lights at a set of road-works.

Barmouth & Dyffryn United FC are newcomers to the Welsh Alliance this season- effectively level three of the Welsh pyramid. I have been following their progress with some interest not least because a good friend of mine, Andy Sneddon, a world renowned groundhopper and Welsh football expert, has stumped up much appreciated funds to become the home kit sponsor through his Black Dragon Badges & Promotions Limited company.

Andy has kept me informed of Barmouth's fortunes and they certainly seem a team to boost one's goal averages. They have beaten Amlwch 14-1 yet lost 1-9 at Llanrwst (a game I witnessed) in their debut season at this level. They currently occupy a mid-table position with today's visitors, a former Welsh Premier League side, above them but having played several games more.

Barmouth's home ground is called Wern Mynach, translated as monks' marsh- once a place, just inland from the beach, from as early as the 12th century where the monks from a nearby settlement grazed their animals. Beyond the far end of the ground, reached by following Park Road from the town centre, is an urban country park which has its focal point a distinctive wooden ship.

The football ground was bequeathed to the town by a local landowner and is an impressive complex. Though there are drainage problems on a couple of areas of the pitch the playing surface looks tremendous for this time of year, testimony to the dedication of the club groundsman. There is a small covered terrace on the near side together with the changing blocks and a tea room. The rest of the ground

is open standing though there is plenty of room for expansion should the need arise.

Barmouth merged with neighbouring Dyffryn just after the end of the last war and are currently playing at the highest level in their history. Though the excellently produced programme is critical of a couple of players' attitudes to away games, stating that some still have a 'junior league mentality' the club has adapted well and chairman Will Huntley, vice chairman Mark James and manager Brian Harvey are all respected football people who lead the way in helping the club consolidate at this level.

Parking is easy along Park Road and I notice the car that troubled me earlier is parked up by the entrance. From the personalised registration plate, you don't have to be Inspector Morse to look through the programme and ascertain the owner. Fortunately, by leaving on the final whistle I am way ahead of him on the journey home.

Barmouth's comparative isolation works both ways- with several visiting teams failing to turn up with a full complement of players and subs. Conwy seem to fall into this category- about half-an-hour before the 2pm kick-off they arrive in three cars and field a bare 11 players with no subs with just a manager, a forlorn figure by the dug-out on the far side, and no physio, trainer or backroom staff.

Sure enough, Conwy's lack of pre-match preparation costs them as they concede a fourth minute goal while they are still organising themselves. Barmouth, immaculately attired in neat black and white stripes, look impressive going forward and go on to dominate the rest of the half. But their failure to convert chances almost costs them as Conwy, a different proposition in the second half, almost score from the re-start, a goal-bound effort cleared off the line. But within six minutes of the second half starting the home side win a penalty, duly converted, and go on to record as straight-forward a 2-0 win as it is possible to witness.

It isn't a great game to be truthful, or the best day weather wise to sample the delights of the resort what with the piercing cold wind. But my visit to Barmouth demonstrated that here is a go-ahead club with an enthusiastic committee and some dedicated players that are establishing themselves well at this level of football and are capable of moving further up the Welsh pyramid in the future. A visit here comes highly recommended.

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