

TT No.37: Paul Roth - Sat August 28th 2010; **Llanidloes Town FC** vs. Llansantffraid Village; Welsh Cup 2Q Rd; Res:2-1 aet, (1-1 at 90 mins); Att: 302; Programme: 8 glossy, professionally produced pp, £1; Altitude & Location: Victoria Park is 173 m (567.585 ft) above sea level - latitude of 52 degrees, 27 mins north and a longitude of 3 degrees, 32.1 minutes west (position derived from centre circle); Club Shop: Yes (just for hop?); Weather: Rain at times and autumnally cool; Local MP: Glyn Davies (Welsh Cons).

Geoffrey Seers and I have spent these past few nights sleeping together! Not in the same bed I hasten to add, but in separate bunks a Robert Wadlow arm's length apart in a somewhat frowsty and tawdry bedchamber, atop the raucous Red Lion public house in Llanidloes, Powys.

Having withstood the rigours of shared accommodation on umpteen occasions, the two of us are well-accustomed to each other's night-time eccentricities, violent mood swings and bugaboos, incessant teeth grinding, moonlit heebie-jeebies, bete-noires, mournful groanings and witching hour somnambulisms, sleepless tossings and turnings, prolific pre-dawn sweats, screaming ab-dabs.....All endured for the sake of 'The Beautiful Game'!

During our sojourn to the Principality we were joined at varied bar counters on most evenings for postprandial refreshments and erudite intercourse by Steve Hurley, accompanied as ever by his faithful bloodhounds Bella and Whipsnade. Inevitably, these fun-filled get-togethers turned into bibulous affairs.

All this of course means but one thing; It's August bank holiday, that time of the year when a gallimaufry of our brethren come together for the first of the season's planned hops. The new look Spar Mid-Wales League (the competition now comprises two divisions), set as it is amidst glorious vistas of rolling, sometimes snow-capped hills, cow and sheep-filled verdant pastures and fast-flowing watercourses, is our new early-season destination for the next few years. A big 'Thank You' must go to the GroundhopUK organisation, more especially Chris Brazey (SIC), for masterminding the event.

The shenanigans got underway at the Sports Centre, the home of Abermule FC, early on Friday evening. The next day we moseyed north to watch matches at Llanfyllin and Four Crosses, with three further Sabbath-day games undertaken south-eastwards of our Llanidloes command post, at Rhosgoch, Newbridge-on-Wye, the day ending with a just-before-evensong kick-off, this time in the spa town of Llandrindod Wells. The high jinks culminated on the bank holiday Monday with visits to the footballing locales of Carno, Montgomery and Kerry.

But it's the floodlit FAW Welsh Cup 2nd qualifying round clash between Llanidloes Town FC and Llansantffraid Village FC, played at the former's atmospheric Victoria Road stadium on Saturday night that's the focus for this, my initial "Travellers'

Tale" of the new season. Actually, I espied the ground last August when driving past, little imagining that twelve months later I'd be returning to watch a game.

Fully railed and illuminated by eight floodlight pylons with two impressive juxtaposed grandstands - painted in the club's colours of green and yellow - a vibrant photo-festooned clubhouse, a two-manned(!) pay box at its entry point, similarly coloured goal netting to the aforementioned viewing structures, coupled with the overwhelming feeling the arena exudes of being well-loved, leads the visitor to correctly surmise that 'The Daffodils' must once have been a major force in Welsh football.

Founded in 1875, the side are twice-winners of the Welsh Amateur Cup, in 1922 and 1965 respectively; they were also original members of the Konica League of Wales when it was formed back in the 1992/93 season. But that was when the good times abruptly ended and since then it's been a slippery slither down the Welsh football pyramid. That is, until last season, when the club remained unbeaten throughout its Montgomeryshire League campaign, eventually pipping Montgomery Town to the title in a winner-takes-all, last-day showdown between the pair.

Having gained promotion to the Spar Mid-Wales First Division, hopefully this sleeping giant is now on its way up again, back to where it undoubtedly belongs.

Within seconds of the 19.30 kick-off it was patently obvious that this match was of a far superior quality than that which we'd seen previously (mind you, it couldn't have been any worse than the offering witnessed at Four Crosses FC earlier!). And so it proved to be, with a thoroughly entertaining cup tie unfolding as the evening progressed.

The manicured surface, coupled with the fast-flowing action, made for an absorbing encounter which saw the 'Daffs' ahead on points, if not on goals, as the initial forty-five minutes remained goalless.

The restart saw a reversal of fortunes when the 'Villagers' took the lead, and with their defence snuffing out the homesters increasingly sporadic forays, it looked as though they might hold on to what they'd got. But, to the chagrin of my cohort (laughably he imagined we might lose valuable drinking time; impossible in a town that sleeps by day and parties virtually all night long), Llanidloes equalised with a well-worked move with ten minutes remaining, taking the match into extra time. To the delight of the majority present, the home side secured their place in Round One with a rasping shot scored in the first half of the extra period.

To have spent a few hours inside such a charismatic and idyllic old ground, that in my mind is worthy of being Grade 2 listed, was the highlight of my, and probably many other groundhoppers, bank holiday weekend.

The occasion was only slightly soured for myself late on as darkness descended, when I was bitten once on my right leg by an Altdorf Bug, and twice on my left by a particularly malevolent Sharpshooter. The post-match imbibing however acted as a more than pleasant distalgesic!

FGIF Star Rating: 5*.

07/20