



The American Friends of St Davids Cathedral 2008 Pilgrimage

For many years, the possibility of a pilgrimage to St. Davids Cathedral has been the dream of the AFSDC Board. This dream became a reality in May 2008, when Sister Cintra Pemberton, of the Order of St. Helena's, agreed to come out of "retirement" to join Board president, Harold Hallock, in leading a group of pilgrims to Wales. A pilgrimage has been described as a search for the holy, and 28 pilgrims were not disappointed in their search, which took them to St. Davids and beyond.

Our first afternoon in Wales was spent exploring the ruins of Tintern Abbey at our leisure. Equipped with audio cassette guides, we were able to immerse ourselves into the lives of the 12th and 13th century Cistercians.

The next morning found us on a Pilgrims' walk amongst the blooming hawthorns and sheep with frolicking lambs to one of the many holy wells in Wales. After renewing our baptismal vows at St. Issui's well, we made our way up the hill to the 6th century Patricio Church, where we celebrated the Eucharist. Following our lunch at Wales's oldest inn, we drove to St. Davids, stopping at Carreg Cennen Castle, where some climbed the hill to explore the ruins and others enjoyed a spot of tea. On to St. Davids.

The four days spent at St. Davids were filled with tours of the Cathedral and the adjoining Bishops' Palace, many opportunities for worship, a boat trip around Ramsey Island, a visit to a nearby pre-Christian burial site, a quiet day at a church on the ancient pilgrims' route to St. Davids, a chance to hear one of the famous Welsh male choirs during their weekly practice, an introduction to Welsh poetry, some time to hike the Pembrokeshire Coast, and tea with Deean Wyn Evans and his wife, Diane, at the Deanery. During our stay at St. Davids, we learned first-hand what Welsh hospitality is all about!



Pilgrims in Deanery Garden

Sadly, we bade farewell to St. Davids and traveled north to explore North Wales with its rugged landscape and many holy sites. We toured a slate mine, visited the ruins of Dolwyddelan Castle, and celebrated the Eucharist at historic St. Michael's Church in Betys-y Coed. Following the service, we were treated to a delightful high tea by the members of the church. Treasuring magnificent views of the Snowdonia Mountains, we journeyed on to the country hotel, which was to be our home in North Wales.

The next day we made our way down the Llyn Peninsula, following the traditional route of the ancient pilgrims making their way to Bardsey Island. The day included a pilgrims' walk and a healing service at St. Cybi's Well, a Eucharist celebrated in the Welsh language at an ancient church, a visit to and meditations at St. Hwynn's Church, where the poet, R. S. Thomas, was the vicar for many years. Some hearty souls experienced a cliff-side visit to St. Mary's Well.

The following day we made our way to Caernarfon, where we spent much time at the castle in which Prince Charles was installed as Prince of Wales. We also explored the Segontium Roman Fort and Museum.

A visit to Anglesey Island was on the agenda for the next day. First we visited Bryn Celli Ddu, one of the most important pre-Christian burial sites in the United Kingdom. We then went to Penmon Abbey for a picnic lunch and quiet afternoon, followed by our final Eucharist at St. Seriol's Holy Well.

On our final day we journeyed to the Manchester Airport, stopping at the historic walled town of Conwy, where people visited the Plas Mawr Medieval House and Conwy Castle. Our last afternoon was spent amongst the glorious blooming spring flowers in Bodnant Gardens, called by many "The Showcase of Wales."

We flew home the next day ... 28 contented pilgrims, who, in one way or another, had truly glimpsed the holy. As one pilgrim wrote, *"Everything was great! I loved the variety of places we went and the information given to us about them. I loved the variety of worship experiences. I loved the variety of people who went. I was never bored or uncomfortable or uninterested in anything that we did.... I loved the combination of 'old, holy stuff' with current culture. The accommodations were comfortable, clean and nice—couldn't have asked for better."*

The evaluations were very positive, and the AFSDC Board is considering sponsoring another pilgrimage. If you are interested, we would love to hear from you; please contact <hhallock@comcast.net>.