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The Pen Y Gwryd Hotel: Tales From The Smoke Room

Edited by Rob Goodfellow, Jonathan Copeland, and Peter O'Neill

The Pen Y Gwryd Hotel: Tales From The Smoke Room. Edited by Rob Goodfellow, Jonathan Copeland, and Peter O'Neill. Gomer Press, Wales (U.K.), 2016. Hardcover, 278 pages, £14.99.

Impossible, you say! That the Beatles, George Mallory, Ed Hillary, Tenzing Norgay, John Hunt, Joe Brown, Don Whillans, Lionel Terray, Bill Tilman, Eric Shipton, Graham Chapman (Monty Python), and Anthony Hopkins (*Silence of the Lambs*) all walked through this very same front door? The answer is a resounding Yes!

The Pen Y Gwryd Hotel in Snowdonia, North Wales, is no ordinary wayfarer's inn. Founded in 1810 and known to climbers as the "PyG," this famed hostelry is justifiably renowned as "the home of British mountaineering." The inn was base camp for 19th-century alpinists—and for the 1953 Everest and 1954 Kanchenjunga expeditions. Both teams trained in Snowdonia and held reunions at the PyG for decades. The signatures of these illustrious mountaineers and others, plus assorted glitterati of the entertainment and sporting worlds (think Roger Bannister, who broke the four-minute mile) grace the ceiling of the hotel's Everest Room.

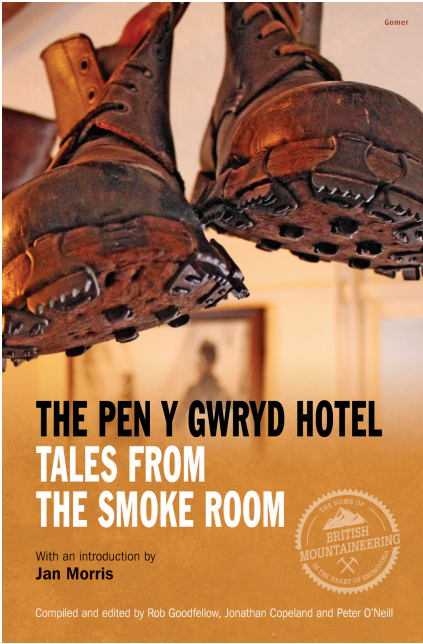
The Pen Y Gwryd also was the setting for the inception of several of Britain's oldest climbing organizations. In the 1850s it hosted English mountain enthusiast Charles Matthews, subsequently a prominent founder of the Alpine Club—the first mountaineering club—in 1857. The PyG also hosted, in 1897, the rock climbers who established the Climbers Club, and, in 1921, women climbers, led by Eleanor Slingsby Winthrop-Young, who started the Pinnacle Club.

Tales From the Smoke Room is an absolutely delightful and thoroughly varied compendium of short reminiscences about the hotel by over 60 individual contributors, among them 1953 Everest correspondent Jan Morris, Joe Brown, Sir Chris Bonington, Doug Scott, various environmentalists, former employees, historians, and even yours truly.

The "Smoke Room" of the title is the intimate sitting room housed directly behind the bar. (There's no smoking there these days, but for an idyllic setting to sip a fortifying pint, you could find no better.) Upon one wall of the Smoke Room is the glass-covered Everest Cabinet, with an assortment of "holy relics," including a piece of the rope that united Tenzing and Hillary on May 29, 1953. To fully experience the history of Himalayan and British mountaineering, and of Welsh rock climbing, a pilgrimage to the PyG in North Wales is required. Prepare yourself in advance by reading *Tales From the Smoke Room*, and then, after arriving, hoist your glass, make a heartfelt toast, and absorb not just the alcohol but also the unforgettable atmosphere of one of the world's greatest mountain inns.

– Ed Webster

Images



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