



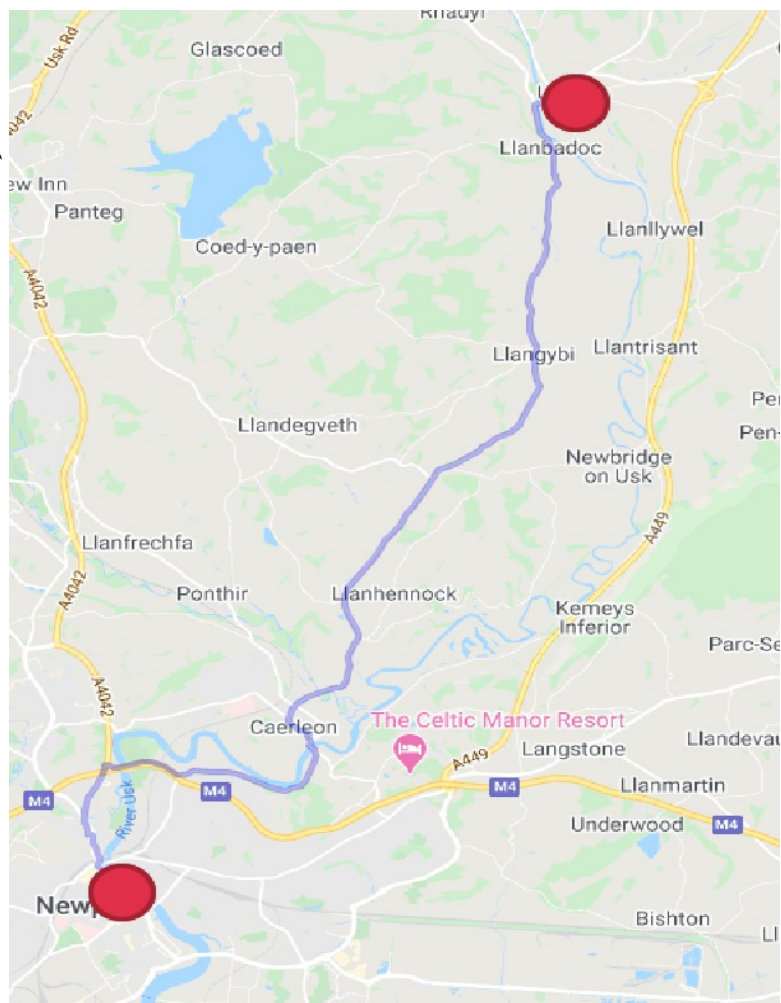
Our bus is not only different but a little smaller than usual, but still big enough, just, for all of us - plus a few locals that we graciously allow to board 'our' bus.

"Are you sure this is the bus for Usk driver? I need 34 places for my group. It seems different to the bus when I did the 'dummy run' a week ago".

"Yes sir, it is, we have had a bit of trouble with the regular bus and this one has been pressed into service. Never been to Usk before, all I have to do is remember not to pull into Sainsburys on the way, unless of course any off you want to do some shopping? How many did you say were getting on as this bus only takes 38, ah yes 34 you did say".

Along with a couple of local people who we graciously allow to share 'our' bus, we climb board which however causes a slight problem for Judy. Her normal seating arrangement is being disrupted. She has to be content with using just the one, not both, seats as she does like to sit at the aisle end of double seats, keeping the window seat beside her, empty.

But not this time, and she smiles gamely at a rather ancient gentleman who settles beside her all the way to Usk.



The bus follows the same route as last months' trip into Caerleon. It goes around its one way system, passing places we visited last month; the Ffrwym, Mynde House, Priory Hotel and the Roman baths.

"Mario" confides Carol Jones as we went past the museum, sorry that I haven't been on a trip for some time, but did I tell you that in the past I was a Cardiff Bus Tour Guide"?

"No Carol, you didn't, but please tell me more". I had the feeling she was going to tell me more anyway.

"Well, one of the things I used to mention on my tours is that Cardiff or Caerdydd in God's own language was given its name by the Romans. And did you know that if you split Caerdydd into Caer and Dydd you get Fort and Day?

"News to me Carol" I replied whilst thinking, there's more to come, I get the fort bit but what about the Day"?

Carol continued, "Well, it took a whole day for the Roman soldiers to march from the fort at Caerleon to their fort which is now part of the foundations of Cardiff Castle" hence Caerdydd!

"They didn't have to march through the Bryn Glas tunnel then or it might have taken them a bit longer" I swiftly rejoin.

I get a despairing look from Carol. Unknown to me the conversation was overheard by one of the ladies, Ruth and I saw her face light up, and I think that I know why.



During the conversation with Carol, the bus arrives at the roundabout on the other side of Caerleon town and beyond it we can see the road to Usk conveniently named the Usk Road. Idly I wonder why it wasn't called the Caerleon Road, after all it joins Usk to Caerleon. I make a mental note to ask someone at lunch if they can enlighten me.



Shaking the dust of Caerleon off its wheels, the bus was now well and truly committed to the rest of the trip to Usk. The journey is mainly through rolling countryside and quiet roads



But the bus driver still needs to be careful as to what might be around the corner in the middle of the road!



Safely past the tractor the bus continues its journey and we pass, on our left that well known resort



Cwrt Bleddyn, which is about three miles out from Caerlon. Now I have been in there a few times

and raising my voice over the rumble of the bus, and of course the animated conversations, I tell Kathleen a story about the place.



"It's very popular nowadays for weddings, and I remember being here for one some years ago, but I remember it for one rather `wrong` reason in particular. The wedding breakfast was being served and we had reached the main course, a roast. All was smooth progress until the extra gravy was doing the rounds. The waiter started of course at the top table and offered some to the bride. She had a rather full wedding dress and the seats were quite close together so the waiter reached around the bride for her plate rather than bend over her. Quite sensible as he was making sure he didn't spill gravy. Only this manoeuvre failed. His left hand, which was holding the gravy boat tilted. Very badly. Gravy was spilt down the back of the bride's rather expensive looking dress".

"Oh poor girl said Sylvia, I hope she wasn't scalded"?

"No, she recovered remarkably well from the deluge. She simply asked the waiter not to make a fuss and perhaps he could see to patting her dry. Luckily it was spilt down her back".

"I hope everyone is enjoying the scenery"? Some murmurs of assent are heard, perhaps some of you who overheard the conversation are thinking about how you might have reacted to the situation. We are just about half way to Usk now and passing through a village. Strange but we didn't see a sign giving its name. What's the name of this village we are approaching, I ask Marilyn who is sitting across the aisle from me?

"I am pretty sure that its called Llangybi, and if we pass a pub called the White Hart then that confirms it. She whips out her camera at that point, I might get a photo if I'm quick". Sadly Marilyn misses her photo as she is on the nearside of the bus and the pub which I know is a Grade II listed, 16th century building passes us by on the offside.

"Perhaps on the way back Marilyn"?

"Yea"!

Just three miles to Usk and soon we are passing Usk rugby club which on is on the outskirts of the town itself. Not far to go now.



Just past a garage we can now see THAT bridge over the river Usk. Now this bridge sometimes causes problems when two large vehicles try to get around one another on the bend. Luckily for us there would appear to be nothing likely

to cause us a problem.

I have lost count of how many Range Rovers we have seen on this road, must be an affluent area.



"Hello,
what's
happened
here.

I hope no
one was
hurt if a
lorry
caused that
damage to
the wall of
the bridge.
No sign of
a vehicle so
perhaps it
happened a
while ago.
Maybe it
was a lorry
driver who
only saw

the sign as he came to the bridge and decided that the sign really meant what it said, and as he

realised that the police station is
the other side of the bridge,
panicked and 'took-out' the
wall"?

Probably didn't have a delivery
but was looking for a short cut
having trusted his SatNav
perhaps?

"Perhaps, perhaps" is the sum
total of commitment to my
hypothesis!



Still, we have some nice views of the river to both sides.



And here's the police station. "It looks rather splendid, don't you think Louise, not your average Dixon of Dock Green station!

"Is it a new series on television Mario, not sure if I know that programme". I forget that Louis has



not yet reached the age required for a concessionary bus pass.

Once past the
police station
we stay on
Usk's main
road,





and past the Three Salmons Hotel where we will be lunching



until we turn right into Twyn Square. Rather pretty isn't it?



Here is where we get off the bus, arriving on time at 11.00am. Just in case the bus didn't know where the bus stop actually is, the transport people have helpfully painted 'BUS STOP' on the road or for Welsh speaking buses, 'SAFLE BWS'. Now if you look carefully at the order of the writing, as the bus approaches the bus stop, the first word (in Welsh) is 'bus' the second is 'stop' the third word (in a language that everyone around here speaks) is 'stop' and the fourth is 'bus'. And so we have BUS STOP STOP BUS. So are the English words a command to a Welsh Sainsburys bus (in English which of course it understands) to STOP? "Bet you never thought about that did you Marilyn,



"No Mario and for the moment I can't think of the reason why" she sighed. Marilyn takes a photo of the bus stop with its road markings in case it is unique. We alight from our bus.

Just across the road from `our` bus stop is the



Nags Head pub. That too looks pretty don't you think?

"Didn't we eat there on our last visit to Usk" enquires Pat Hayes. Did you consider going there again, it seemed a nice place."

"Ah yes, of course you were on that trip Pat. But whilst the food was nice and at a reasonable price, several of our ladies were visibly upset by some very rude and totally unnecessary comments made about them by one of the waiting staff. Plus they wouldn't take card payments for anything less than £10 . This caused a few problems for several people, including me, when they wanted to buy a drink and pay for it before eating their meal, so you had to pay cash or not have a drink as you couldn't add it to your bill". So it's going to be the Three Salmons which I don't think anyone will

turn their nose up at.

"Listen please everyone, we are now going to have our coffee, it's turn left and back along the main road, and about a hundred metres further on. In case you get lost will you please take one of these town guides before we set out. I know that I usually give leaflets to you on the bus but I didn't this time as I didn't want you to miss the scenery as we travelled".

"Bet he forgot all about them" I hear, but can't quite identify the source, but I have my suspicions!

Could you just check the map and spot where we are, as you may have some free time later on and I



don't want you to get lost too soon! I look pointedly at two people. Lets go please, follow me and be careful for the pavements are rather narrow in places and large farm machinery sometimes pass by very closely".

We set off and at the bank turn left and start walking back along the main road.



I notice that everyone behind is being very careful about the pavements, but as I can not see the



back of our crocodile I hope that they are all being very, very careful. Alison will make sure! We pass several very interesting shops, and it is obvious that lots of the ladies (didn't notice the same of the men) seemed to be memorising some of them for visiting later perhaps?

No screech of brakes to be heard so perhaps everyone has paid attention to my warning; or Alison! I arrive first outside the cafe which is at 49 Bridge Street. The cafe is called, perhaps unsurprisingly, No 49. We wait for everyone, to assemble.
"All here" confirms Alison,



"Here we are. As we are a large group, it will take a little time for all of us to be served, but there are also many interesting things to be seen inside, and a very nice garden at the back.

Please remember that We will be leaving here at 12.10 PROMPT and we have a busy schedule so please be ready and waiting at the front door. In we go please"where a warm welcome awaits us.



No49's staff are delighted to see us once more, as we called in here for our coffee about two years ago. I did tell them we were coming, just in case they needed to have extra staff to cope.

"If I take your orders, staff will bring them to you. Please sit either in the garden or at one of the tables we have indoors. If you want look around the cafe which is well worth doing, just pop back and see how your order is going".

One or seem to thinking, can we fit in an afternoon tea later?



You don't need much prompting as by now caffeine deprivation is beginning to hurt. Or is it the cakes? They are not disappointing!





One or two of us notice that it looks as if Pat is about to be hypnotised. But what is Val whispering into her ear, ... Resist... Resist Resist perhaps? Is it too late? Has she ordered a second cake!



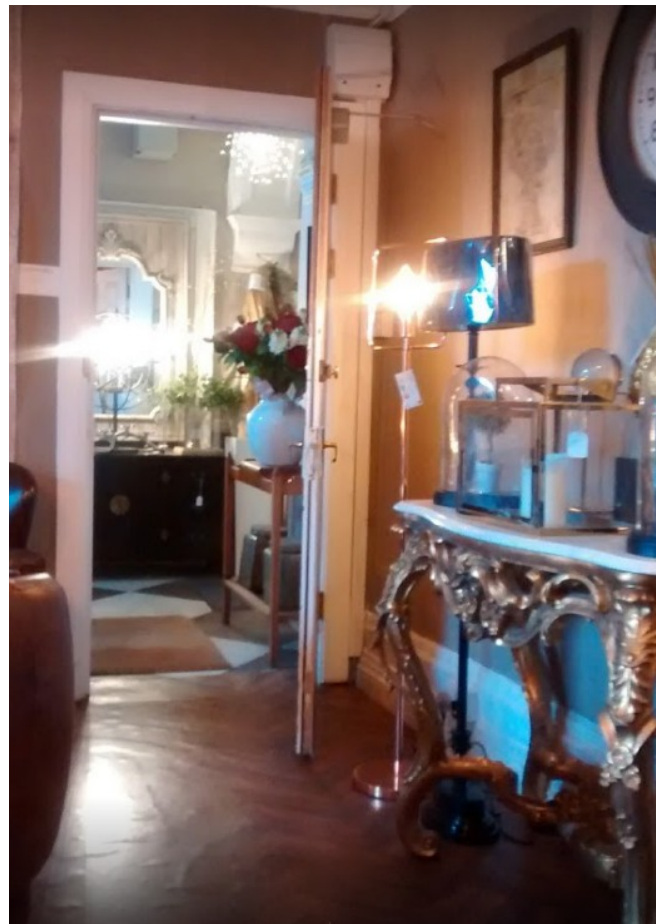


If you browse the upper floor take care as the stairs can be steep in places. There is a very nice display of furniture, lighting, soft furnishings, accessories and cards not to mention wallpapers, specialist paints and other decorating materials on both ground and upper floors.





Most of the people looking around the place are quite impressed and several are overheard mentioning they will visit here again.



And not just for afternoon tea.



Time to meet everyone at the front entrance. Hope they hurry up.

