

TRAVEL



■ The Ffestiniog Railway



NEED TO KNOW

■ **ADRIAN CAFFERY** was a guest of Attractions Of Snowdonia. A return ticket from Porthmadog to Rhyd Du on the Welsh Highland Railway costs £23.60 per adult. A day ticket on the Ffestiniog Railway costs £21.50 for adults. One child (3-15) travels free with each paying adult. Additional children travel approximately half price.
 ■ Victorian Santa trains run in December. Call 01766 516024 or visit festrail.co.uk
 ■ For more details about Gwynfryn Farm visit gwynfrynfarm.co.uk.
 ■ For more about what to see and do in Snowdonia go to attractionsofsnowdonia.com

Little wonders of Wales

A Snowdonia break was just the ticket for **ADRIAN CAFFERY**

IT was full steam ahead on a journey back in time during our long weekend in Snowdonia.

The Caffery clan spent both the Saturday and the Sunday enjoying the Welsh national park's magnificent scenery from the gleaming carriages of two great little railways. First up was the The Welsh Highland Railway, a 25-mile track between Caernarfon station (a stone's throw from the historic castle) on the north coast and Porthmadog on the west coast.

Jayne, Cerys (four), baby Owen and I travelled in modern comfort, although passengers can ride in a lovingly restored 1894 carriage for an authentic taste of travel on the original Welsh Highland.

To cope with some of the UK's steepest and longest gradients, the railway uses Beyer-Garratts – the most powerful narrow gauge steam engines that you'll see anywhere in the world.

Our train chugged through the remote Aberglaslyn Pass and slowed to a walking pace so we could appreciate the landscape, voted the most beautiful in Britain.

The pleasant village of Beddgelert is a popular stop along the route. On an earlier visit to Snowdonia we had enjoyed its cafes, pubs, shops and riverside walks. We also visited the (so-called) final resting place of Gelert (Beddgelert means 'Gelert's grave'), a faithful hound slain by his master Prince Llywelyn.

After finding blood on an empty cot, the story goes, the prince



■ Cerys bottle feeds lambs at Gwynfryn Farm

assumed Gelert had killed his baby son and thrust his sword through him in a furious rage.

In fact, the blood had been spilled in a fight to the death between Gelert and a savage wolf. The infant was safe and well... but Llywelyn never smiled again.

With time against us, we disembarked at the halfway point, Rhyd Ddu station, at the start of one of the popular paths up Mount Snowdon, and jumped straight on a returning train.

The following day it was all aboard the Ffestiniog Railway, originally laid in the 1830s to carry quarried slate from the mountains at Blaenau Ffestiniog to the sea at Porthmadog.

With a 700ft descent, long trains of slate-filled wagons used the power of gravity to travel the 13 miles to the harbour, which was once packed with three-masted schooners.

After the slate was unloaded, horses dragged the empty wagons back up to the quarries at Ffestiniog,

which was known as "the town that roofed the world".

When the sturdy Welsh ponies could no longer keep up with the demand for the slate, the world's first narrow gauge steam engines were introduced in 1863.

Two years later, the railway became the first in the world to start passenger operations for intrepid travellers and has this year been celebrating its 150th anniversary.

Two of the original steam locomotives are still in use. It is also the only railway to employ Double Fairlie locos – push me, pull you engines – which have a chimney at each end.

Our train stopped at a handful of picture perfect stations, some with no road access, all of which seemed a million miles from the 21st century, giving us a glimpse of a less hurried age.

At Tan-y-Bwlch stop, nestled in a small wooded valley, there's a play area next to the outdoor terrace of the licensed cafe. A nature trail leads off from here.

Together, the Welsh Highland and the Ffestiniog railways form a 40-mile route across the Snowdonia

National Park, and since 2014 they have been sharing a new-look terminus at Porthmadog.

With up to two dozen trains coming and going each day, Harbour Station is now the busiest narrow gauge station in the world (the railway holds more records than Usain Bolt!).

Nestled between the two lines, the old goods shed is now a pub and restaurant, with a terrace / beer garden and is a great place to admire the views across the bay to Harlech Castle.

Our home for the weekend was Gwynfryn Farm, an organic farm on the beautiful Llyn Peninsula, only one-and-a-half miles from the town of Pwllheli, 14 miles west of Porthmadog.

Despite only having just 13 cottages, our four-year-old daughter found more to keep her entertained than if we'd been staying at a Haven or Pontins resort. For starters, there was the indoor pool, the trampoline, the toy tractors, the playground, the soft play area, the air hockey table and the tennis court. There's also a Playstation, giant chess, a pool table

and a well-equipped gym. But what really made Cerys's stay (and ours) was a morning tour of the organic dairy farm.

After watching the cows being milked, she helped feed the rabbits, goats, pigs, ducks and the horse. She also bottle-fed the lambs and even collected eggs from the hens. It was real education for her.

The delightful cottages, sleeping between four and eight, are all furnished to a high standard and the farming family provided us with a very warm welcome.

Our final day in Snowdonia was sunny so it would have been a crime not to take the kids to one of the Llyn Peninsula's fine beaches. We chose Abersoch, a short drive from Pwllheli.

We unfurled our beach rug beneath an extraordinary house that's burrowed into the headland, with a living grass roof, floor to ceiling glazing and wrap-around terraces.

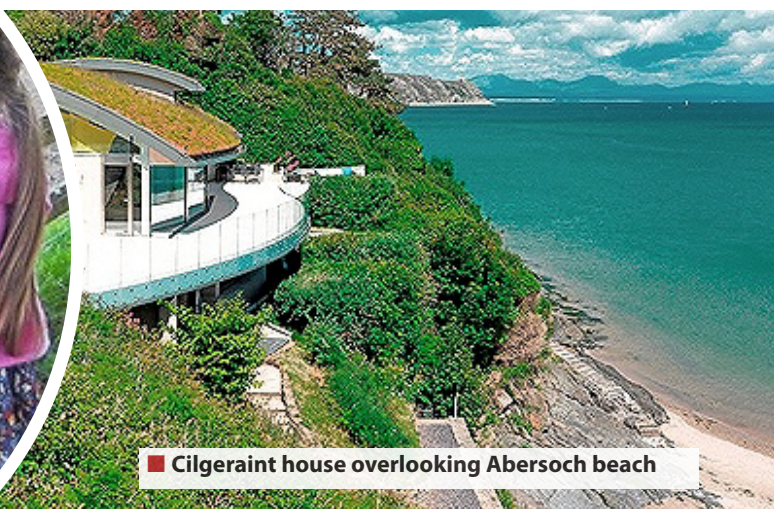
Previously dubbed "the James Bond house", the property was likened by TV comedian Jason Manford to the house of comic book hero Iron Man when he saw it advertised for sale.

He tweeted: "I found Iron Man's house in Abersoch! It's out of my price range but I figured if we clubbed together, we could all have it for a couple of hours each!"

The award-winning house, called Cilgeraint, was on the market for £3.5m but price was reduced to £2,950,000 after Manford's jibe, which had attracted attracted 14,000 'likes'.

But with views from every room across Cardigan Bay to the mountains of Snowdonia, and the area's countless attractions on your doorstep, £3m sounds like a snip to me

Now, let's check those lottery numbers.



■ Cilgeraint house overlooking Abersoch beach