



Yr Wyddfa i Foel Fras mewn diwrnod

Challenges can be considered a bit naff, and I'd agree being in the hills isn't just about proving or conquering. But sometimes the thought of doing something just gets in your head and gnaws away.

Shane and I had our first go at the Welsh 3000s last year and after all it is a magnificent line. You simply start at one end and string together all the 3000ft tops until you've got to the top of all 14 (or is it 15), following a meandering but satisfying succession of ridges and whaleback plateaus. Everyone knows the Snowdon horseshoe, the round of the Glyders and the Carneddau, each a straight forward day walk so linking them appeals just as a logical thing to do.

Our first attempt got us to Ogwyn. That was the point when we both realised that perhaps it wasn't that easy. Forty kilometers is fair enough, but actually you need to go up and down 4000m and then also add on a couple of 6k walks at the start and end. What Finlay Wild does in 4 hours translates into considerably more of a challenge for most middle aged punters.



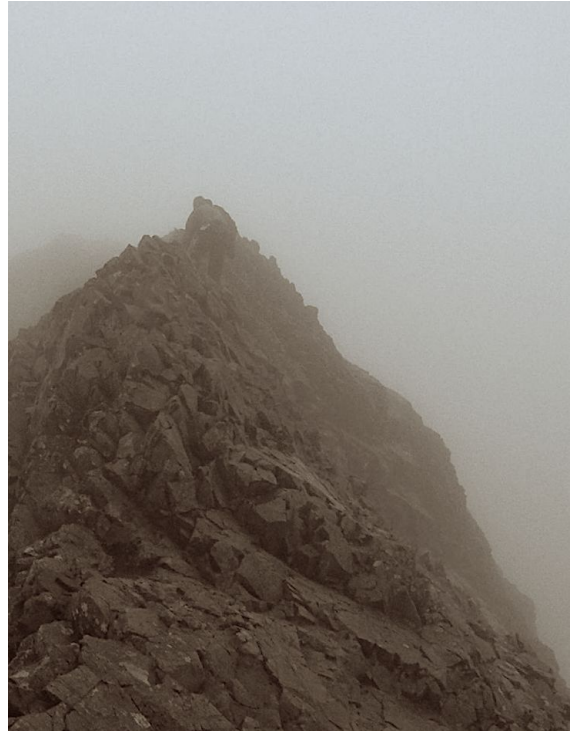
The frustrating thing was that after the first go at we both knew we had got pretty close. Although in terms of distance Ogwyn is only half way, you realise that once at the top of Pen Y Ole Wen the major difficulties are over. And that's why it was gnawing away, we were keen to try again.

The weekend we picked, the second in June 2019 coincided with one of the biggest summer storms of the year. It rained all day Friday and the

forecast said it wouldn't stop raining until mid-afternoon on Saturday. Starting at sunrise from the summit of Snowdon as is customary was no longer an option. Instead we would trust the forecasters and aim for 3pm in the afternoon. Shane estimated we would be finishing sometime after dark. Shane can underestimate a bit, at least when he's guess my pace.

As we began our leisurely preparations sitting in rain soaked tents in Nant Peris, I couldn't find the waterproof trousers I had meant to bring. Somehow I'd managed to leave them at home. The plan to drop a car at Abergwyngregwyn was extended to include a stop at Joe Browns and spend an unnecessary £90. Well perhaps an essential £90 (not unnecessary) as waterproofs were going to be 100% essential on the walk in.

We caught the 13:15 Sherpa, which was almost on time and straight away started up the Pyg track. Still raining but a bit more intermittently we optimistically jostled a way to the summit. With not much to see bar bedraggled hikers we began. I've never not met someone on the Crib Goch ridge before, and I've done it many times. Apart from being a little damp, the wind was reasonable and we soon came down out of the clouds and into the Llyn Glas cwm.



Shane jogged down the road, I fuffed about with the poles I was trying unsuccessfully to carry. At the campsite I decided to ditch them, and promptly forgot to put the cereal bars in my bag. Don't forget the head torches and the car key though, double check the car key. And so we are off again this now this feels real.



Elidir Fawr is the long drag. It's pretty grueling and for sure and it goes on a bit. Shane thought he had read about the vital bridge being washed away. I reassured him that was ages ago and the bridge we crossed last year was the new one. Only the bridge had definitely gone. The thirty six hours of rain was now draining and pouring down to the valley bottom. Not just by the rivers and streams, down every footpath, in places just flowing over the grass. But the streams were the

worst and the one we had to cross was very swollen. We couldn't get any wetter, but our worry was being swept away and into the void. Remarkably Shane found a reasonable rock to step across. So we slogged on upwards, Shane got some way ahead and I did a submarine impression in a peat bog.



From the summit the path is quite easy for a bit and running is okay. Once again you start feeling like it's good to be there and the miles start to go by quickly. The Glyders have some rough bits but as things were going well these tough sections were feeling shorter and easier than I remembered. Along the top of Glyder Fach I think was the best bit. Evening light at its shallow angles began to cast some weird hues and shades. The fields of Bethesda were vibrant emerald green. The rocks were almost white yet slightly moon blue. The sun made a ruby orange glow through a gap in the shower cloud.

Down the scree, up to Tryfan and drop into western gully to make the A5, almost before darkness was complete.

Deep breaths, no second thoughts, do or die time. An easy decision, lets go.

The dark definitely makes it harder. We crossed the bridge and turning right uphill the path immediately became pretty vague, sheep paths through bracken. I thought maybe I should get water but the prevalence of sheep poo said no. Soon it was too late anyway. I'd later just be sipping away terrified I was on the last drop but somehow there was enough. In any case there was now something else to be concerned about. My crappy navigation after the style had taken us too low and we were contouring onto steep thick heather covered rocks. A shallow gully headed up the right way and by using grunts and expletives we topped out back on the ridge proper just above and missing out the scramble bit. I wouldn't recommend our gpx to anyone.

In the dark both Shane and I were uncertain exactly where the summit was. The rounded cairn seemed too inauspicious, so we resorted to GPS. No mistake we were right at the top of Pen Y Ole Wen. Phew.

This really is the last significant difficulty surmounted, but there is still some distance to go. We follow the trodden worn stones that mark the path. Quite difficult because low cloud gets between you and your feet in the torchlight. When the cloud relents we can see much better, the relenting is very occasional. A possible short cut across to Yr Elen is out of the question and we elect to climb Llewelyn twice. Several times we lose the trail and have to resort again to GPS. Navigating by wind direction, it has been a strong westerly all night, is as reliable as any other method.



Back again at Llewelyn, through the rock garden, we are heading north now and it's just the easy bit to go. We pass the bothy for the second time, turns out the first occasion was just a rocky illusion and it's beginning to get light again. We reach the fence, a few hundred meters, a few false trig points, just rocks sticking up and then that's it Foel Fras, we are there. It is 4:30am we have taken thirteen and a half hours. I'm so tired there is no real elation. Just the knowledge that in 6 more kilometers we will be dry, in reach of food and water, and sleep.



At Nant Peris Shane announces he is going straight to bed. I tell him I am going to drink copious amounts of tea first. I put the kettle on, crawl in my sleeping bag and promptly fall asleep. Two hours later I wake and the gas is still roaring away. The water has completely gone. I turn off the gas and sleep for another two hours.

