

Hill Walking Diaries

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Volume 2 – The Welsh Nuttalls

Being the 189 Welsh Mountains that exceed 2000 feet.

Following John and Anne Nuttall's *The Mountains of England and Wales Volume 1 Wales*, published by Cicerone Press.

Please don't attempt to plan your routes from my text. Please purchase the guidebook.

2001

I clamber into the rear of Adrian's car and show him my latest purchase: Harveys 2000ft Mountain Charts of England, Wales and Scotland. "Oh, Steve. You are born to bag," says Adrian before chuckling and shaking his head.

"Yeah, like Malaria it's in the blood," I reply.

"Steve's got an idea," adds Alison, settling herself into her seat. Adrian, and his partner Alison, had accompanied me, in July, on my final Munro (Scottish Peaks above 3000ft). I'm now visiting them for the weekend, and Alison has just witnessed me purchasing the maps.

"Oh," replies Adrian with a curious look upon his face.

"Well," I reply, "I don't think anybody has ever climbed all the two thousand foot mountains of the British Isles."

"How many are there?" he asks.

"Nearly fifteen hundred I should imagine," adds Alison.

"Fifteen hundred!"

"Yeah, but I've already done the two hundred and eighty four Munros, so not that many to do."

Six days later, Saturday November 24th 2001, my alarm is sounding at 0600. I'm ready in half an hour for the one hundred and twenty mile drive to the Brecon Beacons. Just to have a look. Fiddling with my radio I pick up my cousin's radio show on BBC Wiltshire Sound. Knowing I must come across as a little unusual I wonder what he'd think of my latest madcap scheme. By Bath, on the M4, I've lost him and retune and get 'Rhyl Radio.' This will put me in the mood I think, something Welsh. Where in the heck is Rhyl? A nagging doubt tells me it's North Wales and I'm currently heading for South Wales. Glancing down at the radio I see the station identifier 'Real Radio'. Either I'm going somewhere where they cannot spell or there is something magical about Welsh radio waves.

Knowing very little about Wales this is a new adventure, the Brecon Beacons and Black Mountains have sat on my doorstep for years and I've hardly ventured to them, instead preferring the 500-mile drive to the Scottish Highlands.

Crossing the new Severn crossing, just after the 'Welcome to Wales' signs, I'm hit by the tollbooth. £4.40 to pay. When the new crossing went in there was talk of charging on both bridges but in alternate directions. This went through various negotiations until some bright spark pointed out that if each bridge charges in opposite directions the odd motorist just, just might, travel across one bridge in the toll free direction and return on the other bridge in the toll free direction.

I'm parked up and walking before 0900. I'm soon in the mist, but this is easy. The terrain is not as steep as Munro land and the starting point, just north of the Storey Arms, was so high I'm on the main ridge within an hour. But then I'm flummoxed. It is so flat, where is the cairn? I'm poking round a farmer's field in Mid Glamorgan looking for the summit of a mountain. I stumble on a rise and a small pile of rocks that I settle on being the summit of Craig Cerrig-gleisiad, at 2064 feet. The Munros, virtually without exception, are graced with cairns, leaving the walker in no doubt of their achievement.

I walk on and bump into the farmer and his dog, tending their sheep and quickly discover these mountains are phonetically harder than the Scottish mountains (judging by the amount of spittle I have to duck). Like bumping into somebody on his way to work we chat away. This quickly becomes a talk about Scotland as Wales is not our common ground. Welsh through and through he has worked in Scotland for fifteen years so we reminisce about all the places we know.

A six hour round walk takes in Fan Frynych, Fan Llia, a drop down to the dam on the Ystradfekkre Reservoir and the hall up to the summit of Fan Fawr at 2408 feet.

Eight Days A Week

Seven days later and I'm laid on my couch, the sky is miserable, fifty people from my office have been made redundant in the week and one of my all time heroes, George Harrison, has just lost his fight against cancer. Flicking through Beatles tracks I get to 'Here Comes The Sun'. I look out of the window at the precise moment that the sky clears and we get some blue sky with the lyrics 'it'll be alright.' I resolve that if I lose my job I'll go walking.

Next day, Sunday December 2nd 2001, and the six O'clock alarm has me out of my bed. And I know I'm hooked. An hour to pack and make sandwiches and I'm leaving my Wiltshire home and heading for the M4. The moon is full in my face and things are going well. One Beatles CD after another is fed into my car's CD player until I hit junction 19 of the M4 where a helpful sign says 'Motorway Closed.' There were no advanced warning signs of the road works. Within a couple of roundabouts the provision of any diversion signs has been abandoned and I'm on my own. A half hour later I'm thumping the steering wheel with frustration as I realise that I have travelled back towards home on minor roads and I'm facing the pointless choice of rejoining the M4 at junction 18, safe in the knowledge that junction 19 would soon kick me off. Call me damning and cynical but these people that put diversion signs up need a rocket up the backside. I'd hoped to make it to the Brecon Beacons on the petrol I had but, after losing an hour to the 'diversion' and refuelling, I don't get walking until 1030. This means that my daylight contingency has gone, and I'm going to have to motor to take in Fan Nedd, Fan Fraith and Fan Gyhirych.

Like a bull at a five bar gate I'm charging up the hill. Firstly in anger, secondly to try and make up time to do the round in daylight, and thirdly to get away from the quad-bike-driving farmer whose fence I have just scaled.

Fifteen minutes later my breathing is off tune and the blood is thumping about my head. Slowing my pace, on ground that I estimate exceeds the grip of a quad bike, I pull myself onto the top of Fan Nedd after just forty minutes.

I walk the ridge from the trig point to the cairn, cracking through ice puddles as I go. Descending west I try and spot the cliff edge marked on the map as the approach to Fan Gyhirych. Nothing there, just a bit of steepness and I laugh at the Ordnance Survey guys who made this map. Desperate for some geographical

feature that is up to Scottish standards I could imagine them fighting over who got to draw it on.

"No, bugger off you just do the Churches and Youth Hostels."

"You did the last cliff, it's my turn."

"You got to do the roads, I want this cliff."

I'm convinced this goes on whilst the guys upstairs spend hours agonising over which Scottish features to omit to keep the ink costs down.

I'm soon eating umble pie as I'd misread the map and the cliff is there, just not where I had been looking. The two hills yield quite quickly but I'm starving. I dare not stop to eat, or drink, as I'm against the clock. I descend until I reach the slopes back up Fan Nedd where I permit myself to stop and scoff my lunch and slug back water. I reach my car at 1441, lots of daylight left and cursing myself for not have taken it a bit more easily.

Totals to date: 8 out of 191

Note the total number given here, of 191, is the total at the time of writing. It later decreased to 189 as surveying techniques improved.

2002

Walking with the boss

Early January, sat at my desk at work, my PC pings and I open up my email account. There are two new, one from my colleague Louise, the other my boss Andrew. 'Boss, colleague' dilemmas swilled my mind, soon settled by 'boss first.'

"Steve, Can I take you up on your offer of a warm up walk in Wales prior to my trekking trip in Nepal. Regards Andrew."

Nothing serious so I open Louise's email.

"Steve, Would you be available to go to Scotland next week, Thursday and Friday, to do a 'Due Diligence' assessment on the system the Dumfries and Galloway's Constabulary have developed? Louise."

The obvious strikes me, if I can get Andrew to walk on the weekend after the visit to Scotland I can save a lot of travelling and somebody else would be paying for the bulk of my petrol.

Pulling up in Llangollen after a few tiring days away I find the welcome signs of a hotel with a car park. Early evening, having just driven for four hours, I just want to lie down on a hotel bed.

Wandering into the hotel bar my first sniff of a mistake greets me. A room full of early evening drunks turn and stare at the guy with the £400 suit, £50 shirt and £100 coat. I wish the ground would swallow me up. At first I freeze on the spot before unsticking my feet from the ancient carpet and heading towards the bartender. I wish I was wearing blinkers.

"Got any rooms?" I enquire at the bar.

"Nah," replies the bartender, eyeing me with disdain.

January in the back of beyond and the hotel is full? I try to maintain my pride as I turn my back on the 'Reverse Snob Inn'. Out in the streets I find a B&B, press a bell and await a proprietor.

"Any rooms?" I enquire.

"Yes," a smile and I'm shown to my room. Freezing cold but I take it.

Realising that the warmest place was walking the streets and sitting in my car I walk the streets and sit in my car. The centre was alive, Jack and the Beanstalk is playing at the town hall and the queue was pitiful. That is pitifully long, almost as if the day that 'Jack and the Beanstalk played Llangollen' would be talked about for years to come.

The town was obviously expanded in the Victorian era; still well kept it has, however, the air of being insular. One building marked 'Expanded 1904' makes me wonder, but not as much as stumbling across 'Uncle Peter's Real Fudge Shop.'

Sat in my car, my stomach full after a lonesome meal, I check the maps for the Saturday's walk in the Berwyn Mountains, prior to rendezvousing with Andrew in the Black Mountains on Sunday. My mistake swiftly hits me in the face; I should be in Llandrillo not Llangollen. They sounded the same and after a long drive my brain substituted 'Llan' for 'well earned rest.' And I've already paid the £20 for the B&B. I check the road atlas, the extra drive in the morning was okay, but as I did not have an OS map I realise that my daylight hours were now going to be restricted by having to hang around here until the shops open.

I walk around the town again, cupping my eyes against the glass of many shops to see if I could spy a rack of maps. I could see little, pedestrians viewed me with suspicion. "Was that not the guy in the posh suit at the 'Reverse Snob Inn'," I could hear them say. Okay, I made that bit up but I felt people were eyeing me with suspicion.

Selecting a hit list of shops I settle into the freezing bed for a nights sleep with lucid moments grappling for every inch of covering that could be mustered.

At breakfast on Saturday January 12th I realise that the landlady is so sweet that I can't bring myself to mention that perhaps the room I had would be better suited as a fridge. The first shop has maps and I purchase OS Sheet 125, ideal for the Berwyn Mountains. But I start to feel hesitant. I don't want to push myself too hard and I've booked a plush hotel for the evening in Hay-On-Wye. I had to go up market as it was the only place that served breakfast at 0800 on a Sunday and I was due to meet Andrew at 0900 in Capel-y-ffin.

I scale back my plans and decide to just walk Post Gwyn, a single mountain requiring just 1200ft of ascent. Finding the start of the walk proves difficult with the normal procedure of relying on signposts to only then be duly dumped.

Starting in a glorious crisp morning I walk beside the Afon Disgynfa stream and ascend the mountain where I promptly freeze until I don extra clothing. I enjoy the views and descend with Nuttall's guide, to the 2000ft Mountains of Wales, and I soon remember the pitfalls of following a guidebook and not the map. The author of a guidebook can only ever assume that you have managed to follow their route. Off course and you are on your own. I was trying to find the paths surrounding the old mine workings that the book so eagerly told me were the best route back to the start. But I must have missed it and I now face a very steep escarpment with the advice of 'cunningly finding an easy but exposed way down the cliff' ringing around my head like the advice somebody gives you after

you have made a blindingly obvious mistake. Now with the guidebook lost and my eye off the map I have to use visual terrain to pick up a known point and make my successful drop back to the car and the drive down to Hay-On-Wye.

Playing with the remote control at the Swan Hay Hotel I realise that Wales only has three channels decipherable to the ear of an Englishman. Here Channel Four is in Welsh after a democratic referendum, that voted to keep it in English, was ignored.

At 0810, sat waiting to be served breakfast, I take my problem up with somebody that vaguely looks in charge. They don't respond helpfully, actually she barely responds at all, and if she could get away with shrugging her shoulders I'm left in no doubt she would. "Look," I protest, "I stayed in this hotel because when I booked you said I could have breakfast at eight a.m. and I paid my bill at quarter to eight so I could get going." Something dawns when I add about it being an expensive hotel, they has made me late and I'm disappointed. Breakfast comes, but I feel stressed and hurried to get going.

Walking with ones boss is an interesting experience. At work Andrew always looks for me to take the technical lead and, of course, today was to be no different. Instead that this time I also had to take full responsibility for any decision made, at work the buck stops with him. I've memorised the route by heart and we set off into mist, cloud and light rain.

"What's it like in Wales?" I ask.
Fine," replies Andrew "why do you ask?"
"Well I'm in England!"
"Oh we are on the border then?"
"Yes, this is Offa's Dyke."

Still not able to see anything we make the round of Black Mountain South Top, Black Mountain, Hay Bluff and Twmpa in about six hours. But Twmpa has another name, anglicised it has been converted to 'Lord Hereford's Knob.' Now I don't know who Lord Hereford was but he must have been one hell of a big guy. To have a mountain named after just a single part of his anatomy is quite a feat, and we ain't really talking feet are we?

Descending back to Capel-y-ffin Andrew is hesitant about the final descent. To me it is a fine slope but to Andrew all he can see is a steep drop and I realise how dependent he is on me for his safe trip. It is humbling and reminds me of when I started the Munros and how scared I could be on terrain that now I'd hardly take a second glance at.

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January 27th and the 0530 alarm goes off, I have had hardly any sleep having visited with a neighbour until gone midnight. A three-hour trip to Capel-y-ffin and, having just purchased a three year old Golf, this is to be the last major trip in my 194,000 mile Toyota.

Floods plague my journey and it is with welcome relief that I reach the Black Mountains, meet with Andrew again and set off.

We are hesitant walking through the grounds of 'The Grange' eventually stumbling upon the path beside relics of cars, crumbling back into the ground, nature reclaiming them. It strengthened my resolve to properly lay up the Toyota and not let a most trusted thing rot.

Andrew keeps a good pace and we reach the cairn below Chwarel y Fan with little difficulty before bagging the mountain in the beginnings of a gale. Backtracking we take the long route out to Rhos Dirion where I sense Andrew is struggling: the hard wind and rain sapping his strength. "What now boss?" he asks.

From Rhos Dirion we try for the path directly back to Capel-y-ffin but I am unhappy with the route as it will take us onto high ground again so we take in a re-ascent of Lord Herefords Knob. I make good ground, looking back after a few minutes there is no Andrew. I wait and see his head bob in the distance. Realising the boot was now on the other foot, asthma made my trailing people up the Munros miserable I allow him to catch up, wait until he is ready to set off and keep to his pace.

At the summit, in miserable conditions, I say "Andrew, now you can say Lord Hereford's Knob has blown you off."

"Had to be said Steve, had to be said."

We descend to the Hay-On-Wye to Capel-y-ffin road where Andrew is clearly happier. "Looks as if the Sun is about to shine," he says.

"We might make Hay while the sun shines then," I reply.

"Had to be said Steve, had to be said."

February 9th and another 0515 alarm clock awakening for another walk with Andrew. It's a new car for me and New Radnor I head for. Andrew parks his Volvo behind me, a little out from the kerb.

"It'll be fine," I say as I watch him inspect it.

"I think I should tuck it in a bit more."

"Nah, it'll be okay."

"Steve, would this be anything to do with the fact that it is protecting your rather expensive shiny new purchase?"

"Andrew, you've known me long enough. It's got everything to do with that fact that your seventeen year old Volvo is protecting my rather expensive shiny purchase."

"Okay, pack, map and guidebook," I say as I check I've got everything.

"Do you always follow the guidebook?"

"Well no, it's just a guide you see. And I'm rather put off by the first sentence describing this walk. 'Leave the ancient town of New Radnor by Mutton Dingle'. It's not so much the 'Mutton Dingle' that's the worry but the oxymoron in the first part of the sentence. I'd hate to see the state of Old Radnor."

The path has us climbing almost immediately, passing through a wood then onto clear ground where tracks and paths take us to the summit of Bache Hill. An easy stroll follows to Black Mixen where its huge transmitter dominates the surroundings. Andrew pulls his phone from his pocket. "No mobile phone signal," he announces with a dash of wry humour.

The weather is clear and blustery, but the best we've had so far walking together. We walk north west to avoid a sharp drop into the valley, then south west over Great Rhos before south then steeply south east while passing the firing testing ranges for Ely bullets. This takes me back to my days of firing handguns with my Dad. It was for years his main hobby, having been raised on a farm guns were the norm for him and he'd taken that into adult life as a police marksman and member of a number of gun clubs. I'd always wonder where he went off to one evening a week with a small case and earmuffs. Until one day, out of the blue, he decided to take me along. I remember the Ely bullets in their pale blue boxes, the

smell of the discharged bullets and the kick of the gun as he let me have a go. Earlier on the same day I'd found a box of matches and lit one. So I struck my first match and fired my first gun on the same day.

We make it to the bridge over the stream, which runs down the valley that is surrounded by the hills of the day. We pause awhile and Andrew removes his hat. "Does my hair look okay?" he asks. "Yes, does mine?" I reply. "Yes fine, you've got less to stick up than me. Well what I mean is..." "Do you want to stop there?" I ask. "Okay."

At the cars we decide to find a pub, the five-hour round has left Andrew with time before he needs to get back. We sit and discuss work opportunities. I'm freelance with the company whereas Andrew, who I report to, is a manager of a number of projects. There's just a matter of weeks left on my contract and I sense after five years I've had enough of the place and, coincidentally, so many permanent people are being made redundant, there's not much prospect of an extension.

"What are the prospects of winning new business?" I ask. "Poor, Steve. Poor."

We drink up and get set to depart. "Would you do a weekday for the next walk?" he asks, knowing how somebody on contract rates hates taking a day off. "Do you have any free dates?" "March looks good," I quip, "I think I might just have a diary full of free dates."

*

The prophecy comes true and I struggle for contract work over the summer eventually picking up a commission to produce a report, for Unisys, on business opportunities that might come out of the forthcoming freedom of information act.

September 11th is a glorious day, clear skies and warmth in the air and I'm stuck in an office in Colwyn Bay discussing workflow and document management with North Wales Police. I have driven up, setting out at 0400, and am relieved to reach Llanberis Youth Hostel after the day in Colwyn Bay. I had booked, by phone, and when I arrive I can understand the reluctance of the warden to record my phone booking. I am the only guest. This scuppers my plans of seeking out some company. Now working from home I figure that an impersonal hotel would have been a bit lonely whereas a Youth Hostel may be a little more fun.

"Do you want an evening meal?" the warden asks as I sign in. "I think I won't," I reply and he looks a little disappointed – I guess he needed the business. "I'd feel a bit strange eating on my own," I add. "Okay."

So I walk back into Llanberis, enjoy hearing Welsh being openly spoken on the streets, find an impersonal hotel and eat on my own.

As ever I wake early and set off in the dark for the short drive to Pen-y-Pass where there is a car park which I remember was once being free. Now the charge is £4. I dig around in my car for enough coins to feed the meter and set off, at just after 0600, in the half-light of the breaking dawn.

The initial pull is gentle and guides me, in the brightening light, to roughening terrain. As I approach some disused mine buildings I notice a quantity of orange sacks which soon give up the secret of their contents. For every one contained a human being. About thirty in all, obviously a party camped out on the lower slopes immediately before the path becomes vague, scree ridden and hard on the legs. A notice saying 'Footpath erosion control, please keep to the paths' must cause much amusement to many walkers - there is no obvious path through the scree.

About three hours into the walk I'm on the main ridge with the Snowdon Mountain Railway drifting off down to Llanberis. I follow it for a few yards before the climb to Crib y Ddysgl and a back track to reach the summit of Snowdon, for the fourth time since the age of eleven. Unlike the previous times I now do not descend to the start but instead take the oft-narrow ridge around to Y Lliwedd, Y Lliwedd East Peak (one assumes that some Anglican tacked the last bit of the name on) and Lliwedd Bach. I am a little lower which makes the weather a little clearer, in contrast to the thick mist so far and the glorious day of sun cooped up in an office yesterday. I walk out on the ridge spur to Gallt y Wenallt then back before dropping back to the Miners Track.

Totals to date: 23 out of 191

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2003

The winter passes and I start to play five-a-side football again, in my beloved position as a goalkeeper. I enjoy being back on the pitch but various knocks, and a foot-on-foot collision with an opposing attacker, has me delaying a planned trip, to finish off The Black Mountains, by a day.

So Thursday 13th March, while nursing a bruised and swollen foot, starts with a 0500 alarm which, after two beeps, promptly gives up with a failed battery. However, it's just enough to rouse me to breakfast, make sandwiches and set off on the three-hour smooth drive to South Wales and The Black Mountains.

The swelling and bruising of my right foot makes squeezing it into the boot a bit tricky. But once in it protects the joint and I only get a minor nagging from it. I set off, at a bit before 0900, in thermals, shirt and fleece, which proves okay until I meet the first main ridge where it becomes very cold with the ground frozen under foot. I don my Gore-Tex jacket, three layers of gloves and things start to feel warmer.

I take a few tumbles; the soles of my boots are now worn. I decide to accurately record my timings today and, having started at 0856, rest at the first summit, Pen Cerrig-calch at 1016: my only companion the orange peel of previous walkers. In the distance I can see what I think is the furthest mountain of the day, but after closer inspection I realise it is only halfway - Pen Twyn Glas. I look at my watch, consider dusk and calculate I have to reach the furthest point, Waun Fach, by 1330.

In all it takes seven and a half hours to get around with the further peaks of Pen Allt-mawr (1106), Pen Twyn Glas (1136), Mynydd Llysiau (1215), Waun Fach (1330) bang on me calculation, Pen y Gadair Fawr (1405) and Pen Twyn Mawr (1445), making seven 2000ft tops in this elongated horseshoe.

High cloud made navigation easy and I distributed my sandwiches amongst the peaks. The eastern side was warmer, the ground squelched underfoot, not frozen like its westerly counterpart. In the afternoon the sun started to break through and I could see my mornings work now offset by its rays, dusting the folds of the hills with shade. Towards the end the skies cleared further but I had dropped most of my height to appreciate the full effects of the light bouncing off the hills.

Back on a minor road a car pulls up, two old ladies offer me a lift. I decline graciously yet appreciatively. From trips and tumbles I am filthy, their car is immaculate and somehow I figure we'd both end up looking dishevelled. I make it to my car at 1620.

A Missed Summer

After so long away from the hills it feels the time is right to venture back to the Brecon Beacons. A summer of failing to secure proper work is playing on my mind as wasted time. I could have been in the hills after all.

On September 24th, with my alarm clock set for 0500, I wake at 0348 to a distant alarm alerting me that my water softener needs more salt. Laid in bed I contemplate for a few moments before leaping into action. Perhaps I could get even more walking done.

Loading the car I notice how the clear sky has caused frost to settle. It takes awhile to locate the windscreen scraper, but I am on the road by 0500, paying the Severn Bridge toll after 0600 and walking at 0730.

The air is chill, the sky blue – perfect for me. As I ascend I drink in the purity of the day, the smell of the hills. Reminding me of my true love, hill walking.

The ridge around to Bwlch y Ddwyallt gives me views towards the highest points of the Brecons. Sheep graze, birds soar and streams gently trickle. The sun rising over the ridges warms me and I shed clothing and make an even better pace. I am motoring and Bwlch y Ddwyallt falls at 0854, Waun Rydd, 0918 and the soft descent and ascent takes me to Allt Lwyd at 1004.

Without another soul in sight I have the hills to myself. I get back to the car at 1134, pleased with my progress. A summer with no hills had made me suspect my fitness but my body is still there and I contemplate an early journey home. But the day is too good to miss so I drive down the road a bit and take in Cefn yr Ystrad. Starting at 1205, and ascending towards this featureless plateau, ideal for a day of great visibility with a gentle stroll to the summit. A few cairns on the way fool me, in mist it would have been a difficult walk. Yet at each cairn I can see a higher one ahead, to tempt me on; beckoning in the Brecons. I reach the top at 1340 I sit awhile and enjoy. A bird of prey is circling, gracefully swooping, to catch and to kill? Or just having fun like me?

I choose a different descent and soon come across an ugliness of disturbed nature; disused quarry workings, unattended, abandoned in mid slice. An ugly scar - why can't the granters of the license insist on an environmentally pleasing end result? Instead millions of years of weathering will be required to give this a natural look. Some old cars, burnt out, have been driven up on the old quarry roads: joy riders, who rob others of their joy. Some workers are towing the cars away, removing the eyesore from the eyesore.

Past this my spirits lift and I return to my car at 1515 for the drive home.

Totals to date: 34 out of 191

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2004

It's March and my sleep has become sporadic but on the evening of the 26th, with a walk planned for tomorrow with Alison Ashton, I force myself to stay awake while watching the classic film, *Random Harvest*. Afterwards, and feeling half asleep, I drag myself to the kitchen and painfully bash my knee before making cheese and pickle sandwiches and packing an apple along with my days walking kit.

I drag myself to bed, the alarm sounds at 0400 and I'm on the road at 0500. I avoid the toll bridge on the M4, into Wales, and take a cross-country route to meet Alison Ashton at the Talybont Reservoir. Her partner, Adrian could not make it due to work pressures.

I arrive at 0730, Alison arrives, as arranged, at 0830. We then drive down to a small parking area in the Ta Fechan Forest (which requires caution when pronounced). We get walking at 0930 and ascend to the Graig Fan Ddu ridge where the mist descends. We speak with a bald headed out of shape walker on his route to Pen Y Fan. Being the pompous experienced walkers that we are we advise him to put his hat on.

We then go along to the crossroads in paths, past the obelisk in memory to wee Tommy Jones who in 1900, at the age of five, perished on this spot after becoming separated from his father. Then onto Y Gyrn and, at five hours into the walk, back track across Corn Du, descend, where we meet a man and his incredible three-year-old son doing the hills, followed by the ascent to Pen Y Fan, Cribyn and Fan Y Big.

From some of the summits we had views, though misty. Some of the ascents were hard going; Alison and I are both out of shape. Some of the edges were sheer drops: I kept away which was fortunate as I did take one very heavy tumble on wet ground. At the final summit the mist came down again and, having previously seen car lights in the valley below, I asked Alison if we could descend quickly. She was fine about it, a very compatible walker is Alison. We were soon safely on the final track, navigable in the fading light. We got to the cars at the last light of 1900

Birthday Cake

On June 28th, I stir at a little after 0500 and, with my stomach still full from yesterday's birthday meal, I skip breakfast, pack my rucksack with a big bag of left over food courtesy of my mum, back my car off the drive at 0600, and am walking by 0900.

My first intention is to follow the Nuttall guide book and start from Glyntawe but I soon spy a minor road that gains me about five hundred feet. I set off at a cracking pace for Fan Hir, the left hand of two peaks on the horizon. After doing the TGO cross Scotland walk in May my body is on fine form and I reach the Bwlch Giedd in an hour and am soon standing on Fan Hir. I can't believe how light my daypack feels after the thirty three pounds on the TGO. I cut round via Fan Brycheininiog, PicwsDu and Waun Lefrith, admiring (and avoiding) the sharp cliff down to the waters of Llyn y Fan Fach. A whisper of wind is in the air, cool yet

warming but I keep my fleece on. I then strike out for the fifth 2000ft top of Garreg Lwyd which I reach in just over three hours into the day. Now clad in my Gor-Tex jacket, I admire the twin tops of two fine ancient cairns.

I now have a dilemma. By adding the best part of three hours to this walk I can take in Garreg Lwyd and complete all of the 2000ft mountains in the Brecon Beacons. However, I have it in mind to get back to Bristol before 2000 to buy a garden shredder. It's one or the other until I realise the alternative option of using my car to get closer to Garreg Lwyd. So I back track (avoiding a man laying on the ground in a most disturbing pose only to be waved at by his female companion in an attempt to say this is normal) and get back to my car at a little after 1500.

I drive around to the summit of the A4069 where I reckon it's an easy walk up. I break all the rules and take no map, no pack and no waterproofs. Instead I just set a compass bearing and go. I'm soon standing on the summit, just an amazing twenty minutes from the car and only 400ft of climbing. I'm pleased with myself and promptly set off down the wrong side and have to back track and then head back the way I came. It takes me fifty minutes from the car and back before setting off for Bristol – where a navigational error gets me horribly lost.

A North Wales Holiday Cottage

I set off at 0620 on September 11th and make excellent progress, walking on the hills at 1100. Starting from Cwm Penmachno I ascend past the woods and break onto the ridge and am met by good gusts of wind. I make a blustery crossing to Moel Penamnen, jutting up above the surroundings, reaching it at about 1300.

One the way back the wind and the rain conspire and look for a victim. Finding me I'm placed in a wind tunnel with a hosepipe. I rue my luck; the last two weeks have been busy at work and spent in glorious sunshine. I return to the ridge area and make my way past quarry workings. I'm a bit too close to a steep drop, and I worry about a deep shaft to the edge of the path. This is no place for a slip. Fortunately I pass safely but wonder at the lack of warning sign. Workings take you by surprise; they belie the lie of the land and you are upon them before you realise. Like any redundant industry the relics should be correctly decommissioned.

I set off for the blustery ascent of Manod Mawr. My body aches, the cloud is down and I only make the north top. It's sensible to turn back, though not without incident. I put a foot in a boggy area and my leg disappeared to the knee, quickly followed by the other. It took two seconds for the icy cold water to penetrate my boots. I hauled myself out, wet, exhausted and wondering how much I am destined to enjoy this.

I arrive at my rented cottage, Squirrel Cottage, Penmachno. The cottage is one up, one down and nicely done out. I spend a little while making it my temporary home for two weeks.

On Sunday the 12th I keenly set out for the hills again. The weather looks grim but my determination lasts only to the first peak, Allt-fawr. Looking towards Moel Druman, standing at about 2000 foot, I reflect on my ageing. When I was doing the Munros today's weather would not have deterred me. Yet the wind and the hail are lashing in to me and, knowing there will be little view to be had, I turn back with just one mountain climbed of the five planned summits. Two days of uncompleted walks is the equivalent of not setting out at all. It's just too wild and wet to go on. I don't need these mountains like I needed the Munros. I only want

them, not need them. That difference aids caution, reminds one of waiting for another day. Reminds one that the risk is just not worth it. I return to the car, as many ancient trucks pass on a fun day out.

The book 'The Mountains of England and Wales - Volume 1 Wales' is split into sections. The mountains attempted so far are The Moelwyns, which are in turn split into four walks. Fortunately I had completed Moel Siabod back in 1999 that meant, despite two incomplete walks, I have still made some headway into this area.

Moel Siabod is probably well remembered by the party I was in at the time. I was in a group of chaps and when you get a group of chaps together on a hillside it's only a matter of time before the sheep jokes start coming out. In fact I'd be decidedly worried if a group of chaps failed to discuss such matters; it's a rite of passage, a badge of honour. During a rest stop, the subject matter duly turned to the topic of sheep buggery. My friend Greg put in an initial bid, "Why do you do it with a sheep on the edge of a cliff?" His joy of explaining that it was because they push back harder was not denied by anybody claiming that the lack of response was because we had heard it before: most likely on the last walk with Greg. Anyhow in true style the stakes were upped until I announced, "Oh yeah, you need a bull dog clip on a piece of string tied around your neck." "Why?" somebody enquired. "To hold their tales up."

The previous few minutes of joyous hilarity were curtailed. The silence was awful. Greg, with comic timing, asked, "You've done this haven't you Steve?" I was just about to chip in with, "Surely we all have lads?" when I realised that immediate denial was the best from now.

It's Monday 13th and I'm in Blaenau Ffestiniog looking for the path to Saturday's abandonment, Manod Mawr. It proves elusive and the car and foot are used to inspect a multitude of possibilities. At 0820 I'm walking having found the route, tucked up a side street. I soon get a soaking yet make good pace, doing the round trip in just two hours. Saturday's route would have taken me through a steep quarry so I'm now grateful that the weather steered me back.

Many hours later I'm sat at the foot of the Snowdon area having just failed in my three-hour attempt of Crib Goch. Arriving at the pay car park at 1120, and realising it is £4 before noon or £2 after, I make the excuse that I'm waiting to see if the weather will hold and go in search of food in Llanberis.

At 1220 I'm back, paying the £2 parking charge and setting off in the dry. The weather soon turns to passing rain. The summit of Crib Goch stands at 923m and it looks, from a distance, very steep. This is often the way and I have an imaginary conversation with a friend - she was walking this with me and questioning how steep it looks and I give reassurance that it looks worse from a distance than it actually is. Well today is an exception: up close it is just as bad. I try many different angles, go on many fruitless scrambles, following paths that peter out. I realise that my boots, veterans of many a Munro and having walked well in excess of 2000 miles, do not have the grip. I turn back, the shakes have kicked in and when confidence goes it's time to give up.

So I'm back in my car further realising these hills don't need to be conquered like the Munros. I'm ambitious but self-preservation is now in charge.

The 14th was a complete wash out but the 15th brings a better day. The forecast is good and I set off early, walking by 0740. The ascent to Pen yr Ole Wen is soon into mist and I rue my trust in the forecast. I have to pick my way up the east

face, bits of scrambling then many places with no obvious path. But I make it to the top and then set forth, still in the mist, to Carnedd Dafydd, which I reach with ease.

The thorny issue of Foel Merich now arises. In 1997 Myrddyn Phillips poured over maps and determined that an 800ft descent, followed by a very short rise constituted another 2000ft mountain. As I start to descend to it I fail to share the excitement he may well have had. I soon abandon - no way would I find the small rise in the mist. So I set off back up and walk around to Carnedd Llewelyn where I meet a nice chap, Roger. We end up spending the rest of the walk together. As the mist lifts, to reveal wonderful views, we take in Yr Elen and Pen y Helgi Du: the latter having a narrow ascent to it. In all I am out for just over nine hours. It feels good to have got a good dry high walk in, with some views.

It's Thursday morning, the 16th, and I check the TV forecast - wind and cloud this morning, rain this afternoon. I set off to attempt the four that I abandoned on Sunday. Starting at a little before 0800 it's a long, three hour, pull around Moel Dyrnogydd and up onto the high ground. The wind is now giving me quite a hammering as I survey the long ridge walk before me. The first top, Ysgafell Wen Far North Top, is soon captured, as is its near neighbour, Ysgafell Wen North Top. But by now the mist is thick and the wind very blustery. It is further to Ysgafell Wen itself, following a fence I keep on the safe side such that the wind that blows me will throw me against the fence. I'm pleased for its company and protection. To reach the summit means climbing over the fence and crawling across rocks to touch the summit cairn followed by a quick descent to line up Moel Druman. It is now a shade after midday when the forecast rain begins. Moel Druman is in thick mist and I try and get a compass bearing onto it. Occasionally it emerges for a second or so, teasing me yet not enough time to line the compass up. I give up and set the bearing by the map and lay one of my trekking poles on the bearing and, like a drunk waiting for the room to stop spinning, I wait for it to emerge for confirmation. It does, I'm right and I set off but get drenched and blown all over the place. I make the summit then descend quickly to the north side for some protection. There is little. A fence is still with me and I cling to its loose top wire. When it becomes detached from the posts I cling to the next one down. On a steep downwards section I cling to the wire and use it like an abseil by running as fast as I can go.

Skirting Allt-fawr (bagged on Sunday) I make the ridge again to its east. As I approach I can see the wind thrust up from both sides and battle it out at the top. On the final descent the wind subsides and I meet a group having a break: it looks like a leader and paying novices. I wander across and mention how windy it is. I get the cold shoulder from the guide.

Friday the 17th and I discover, on my trip over to Croesor, that Wales still has gated roads. It reminds me of our 1982 family holiday. Dad would hop out and open the gates and I, as a learner driver, would lurch the family car forward whilst he shut them. It felt daring, a learner always needs a tutor by his side: fortunately my mother and sister, in the back seats, were not slow in offering me the benefit of their expertise.

I set off at 0730 and it is a log pull up Cnicht then its north top. Navigation becomes tricky over to Moel-yr-hydd. On route I bump into the party I had spoken to yesterday.

"Was it windy?" I ask.

"Just a little breeze," replies their guide.

There are some pulled faces and harrumphs from his group.

The route I am now on is a little tricky and I triangulate off two tops to confirm my position. This is something I rarely do but a useful technique to have in ones toolbox.

The route up is via old quarry workings, disused buildings and mounds of spoil. I make the top then set my compass bearing for what I think to be Moelwyn-Mawr North Ridge Top. But it does not line up, instead it lines up with some insignificant bump. I dig around for my guidebook and am alarmed to find that Myrddyn Phillips has been up to his tricks again: a Welsh 2000ft mountain is defined as having to have at least 50ft rise all round, and I imagine Mr Phillips pouring over maps looking for new humps which serve only to add to the challenge of walkers like myself. When he's laid to rest I'm convinced it'll be in some hitherto undiscovered part of his local graveyard.

After this I ascend Moelwyn-Mawr proper then take the wrong direction but am rewarded by a Broken-spectre and its glory. This is where I look down my own shadow and see my silhouette surrounded by a rainbow. After correcting myself I take in Craigysgafn and Moelwyn Bach. I return to the car in a round that has taken eight hours and seven mountaintops.



Moelwyn Bach and Moelwyn Mawr

On Saturday the 18th, wishing to right the missed summit on Wednesday, Foel Meirch, I drive to Bethesda and, having waited for the rain to pass, start walking at 1120. It's an easy walk yet, due to previous walks and a restless night from eating cheese last evening, I feel oh so tired.

It takes me two hours to the summit and about an hour and twenty back down. I remind myself of a childhood story - when visiting Wales at young age I rather fancied buying a small witch that I had seen in a shop window. Being a shy type I mustered the courage and went in and asked for, "A witch". The shop assistant glared at me, middle age and fearsome.

"That, my boy, is not a witch. It's a Welsh lady dressed in our national costume." I wonder if over the years she has seen it as funny as I have. Needless to say her words failed to secure a purchase and, with her eyes penetrating into me, I rapidly left the shop. I probably begged my parents to drive me out of town.

Starting at 0830 on Tuesday 21st I'm pleased to be walking again. The weather has been so bad that it was impossible walk Sunday or yesterday. Last night I tried to offset the boredom by venturing out for a beer only to find the sole pub in the village was closed on a Monday.

I make good progress and, after climbing a ladder stile and finding a handy spare compass, am soon atop of Tal Y Fan. I then descend and have a 1000ft pull up Carnedd Y Ddelw. Here the wind is cold and fierce. Not as bad as last week but it is draughty and a couple of times I feel insecure for my safety. I then walk over to Drum: these middle two mountains have ancient cairns on them which have been broken down to form welcome shelters. I then continue to Pen Y Castell and along the ridge before descending to the road and have a long, hard on the feet, walk on tarmac. A few minutes from the car I rue my luck as it starts to rain leaving me a little damp for the return drive.

Wednesday brings rain and I contemplate a walk but plump to keep my kit dry for the better forecast for Thursday. So at 0900, on Thursday 23rd, I'm sitting right up the end of a single-track road, three miles south west of Tal-y-bont, waiting for the rain to ease. It pours and pours then at 1030 things ease and I set off. I decide to split the one long walk into two: with five peaks in all I reckon that, even with the late start, I could pick one peak off then return to car and re-position for the last four.

All is going to plan, Craig Eigiau climbed, until I take a wrong turn in the car and get lost. By the time I spot the error my entire contingency has gone and it is pointless setting off. The forecast for tomorrow is better and I'm hoping for some good weather to leave Wales on a high note with. Though I have suspicions that next week is going to be nice and I'll be back at work.

Friday 24th indeed brings much better weather and promises to be the best day so far. I start from Abergwybgregyn at 0840. I pass over some waterfalls and am a bit concerned about the sharp scree. I go slowly, picking my way. I find the pull up onto Llwytmor tough going but once made I find the rest of the walking okay. It's usual for me to find morning ascents tough, it always takes me awhile to become broken in.

I then cross to Foel-fras where I spy a man with a tripod. I wonder if it is Myrddyn Phillips and his trusty theodolite looking for extra summits. Here follows Garnedd Uchaf and a pull up the distant Forl Grach. Some of these hills I'd observed from other walks and it is good to connect them together. Then across Yr Aryg to the rocky summit of Bera Mawr where the last few steps involve climbing. Good views are had, inland to mountains and out over the sea. From here I do Bera Bach, Drogsgl and Gyrn Wigau. I take an odd route back, extending the walk for safety sake, as I do not fancy the waterfalls again. However I find the walk along the side of Moel Wnion steep, freaky and requiring care.

It's so good to finish the holiday on a high after an eight and a half hour round.

Totals to date: 79 out of 191

Note the total number given here, of 191, is the total at the time of writing. It later decreased to 189 as surveying techniques improved.

2005

It's June 10th, just before noon and a glorious day. I've driven up to mid Wales on the spur of the moment, and I am now sat atop Gorllwyn. It's been an easy pull up. Tracks, streams and tadpoles have graced my way. The weather is gorgeous. A light breeze is teasing my neck. A bird is accompanying the weather in a delightful tune. Gentle hills are all around me, I can see for miles. Distant farms and tree plantations lead the eye to the Brecon Beacons standing proud on the horizon. An ancient trig point supports my back.

Later and I'm sat atop Drygarn Fawr. It's been a good walk across, boggy in places. The gentle breeze is still with me and I think about looking for a B&B and to do another walk tomorrow. A group of Guerka soldiers have arrived, the view is amazing in any language. It feels like the world is laid out, horizons enlarged from day to day living. The Guerka soldiers come to say hello, so polite, so sweet and so young. I wish I were twenty years younger, and possibly female.

The walk back from Drygarn Fawr is a little complex, navigating a number of deeply cut streambeds. I come across a disused mine and am grateful for its track; still good enough to follow leading me most the way back to the car. At the car I feel very dehydrated and, to make things worse, I find I've not packed enough water. I think through my options. In this area are three walks containing 2000ft peaks. It would be nice to get them all in this weekend. I plot my route via Rhayader, reckoning on getting a drink there then driving onto Devil's Bridge. Very soon after setting off I come across a sign "Mountain Road" to Aberyswyth. A quick look at the map and I am sold. The re-hydration will have to wait. It is glorious, sun and mountains and I play a Woodstock CD - it fees oh so good.

Arriving at Devil's Bridge I rouse the hotel owner with the help of an elderly couple who are also seeking accommodation. I let them check in first and then do the same. Though when I ask for a single room she asks, "Just for yourself?" Was she trying to out fox me or had she heard about Greg's theory of me and the sheep? We all ask about food, the elderly couple are directed to the dinning room but when it comes to my turn the bar menu is mentioned. Target market or just a lucky guess? I ask for an early meal and they oblige. I wonder if I can get one of the walks in this evening - it looks short; three hours. But tiredness descends and I plan to walk tomorrow morning.

The hotel is glorious; Victorian opulence of an imposing building. With high ceilings the view from my window is straight up a wooded gorge with twists and turns hundreds of feet high. It's amazing.

June 11th and, having woken at 0430 with a dehydration related headache, I breakfasted at 0830 and set off at 0925. I make good going and at 1035 I'm sat on top Y Garn. It's cooler today and the exercise is doing me good. Below me are a dam and a reservoir. In the distance is mist; a cool breeze forces me to put my fleece on. On the ascent I passed foxgloves - I always loved them as a child, collecting their seeds for the next year and littering our garden flower borders with them.

Crossing east then north I find the pull up Pen Pumlumon Fawr a gentle affair. I meet an older lady and we share company to the cairn and trig point covered summit. A shelter is to my right, not required today. Some mist has just blown

through. It's all very peaceful and gentle up here. The Welsh hills are easier on my lungs than the Scottish.

It's now 1250 and I'm sat on Pen Pumlumon Arwystil having passed over Pen Pumlumon Llygad-bychan. A light breeze accompanies my thoughts that I'm glad I brought more water today: two and a half litres versus the one litre yesterday. I'm used to being spoilt in Scotland where there is lots of water in the hills. My night time dehydration fuelled headache has now gone.

At 1425 I'm sat in the warm grass having passed over the final bumps of the walk.

I make a positional move by car, gaining a puncture that I have to wheel change in blazing heat on a steep mountain road, and start walking again at 1700 to claim Pen y Garn. The walk up is through very hot forest tracks. I make the summit at 1815. I elected to do it this evening instead of first thing tomorrow. The weather is so glorious I wished to make the most of it.

The summit has a horseshoe shelter, a break from the sun. A wind farm is behind me. There is much protest against them on hill top sites. I can hear a constant drum of noise. In one way they are graceful. I'm unsure what I feel but would not want to see many more. They do spoil the tops.

Forty and still going

My first return to the hills, as a 40 year old, comes on July 25th. For the last year I've returned to playing five-a-side football, as a goalkeeper, in a last bid to assuage that childhood dream of being a great keeper. The opportunity came with new employment, providing systems support for Wiltshire Constabulary, and after work games. Playing every week my skill levels soon came up until I was again rueing not having had an opportunity as a youngster. Some games my form dipped but by and large I played well with whatever team I played for usually winning.

On one occasion I made a string of saves from an aggressive attack, with me flying around, scooping the ball away with each shot. Finally a blast came, a hammer of a shot and I upturned myself and, from near ground level, cupped my fingers and flicked the ball over the bar. There was a pause, "Gordon Banks" was mentioned and one of my teammates dropped to his knees and worshiped before me. My ego loved it. Another game stays with me as a favourite. The opposition had two sharp shooters who, at one stage, were two to one onto me. The first one struck, I saved it but into the path of the other and promptly saved his strike. Later in the same game the younger of the two launched a rocket from outside the penalty area. I flew backwards and tipped it over the bar. The strike was with such force I had no idea how I travelled backwards faster than the ball. Nor did my teammates or the striker, who congratulated me at the end of the match. I dwelt on it for days then the reason came to me. As the ball was struck I could see I'd not be able to get to it as it past me, but my brain worked out, before the ball was even struck, that if I immediately dived backwards my hand would be ready for it, on its flightpath, a couple of yards behind me. And there at the age of 39 I discovered the art of goalkeeping. No instruction manual teaches this: the art of goalkeeping is that you start the save before the ball is struck. And if you watch the old footage of Gordon Banks' save against Pele, in the 1970 World Cup, this is exactly what he did.

The crunch came in March, again we were under pressure, and the ball was flying in as quickly as I could push it away until a power shot smashed me in my nose

and eye socket. I don't remember the ball being struck, I don't remember it striking me but I do remember coming too, on the ground, with one of my team mates standing over me and the sweet taste of trickling blood from my nose. I reassured everybody I was okay but as I staggered to my feet I felt anything but. I played on but was wobbly, groggy and glad when the match finished.

I woke the next morning very stiff necked and achy. I had displaced two neck vertebrae, which had to be reset along with the bones forming my nose and eye socket. It took me a few weeks to play again, my confidence had dropped and it became very easy to pull muscles in my neck; there was likely long-term tissue damage. This made stretch saves very difficult and I was beginning to make judgements based on the risk of injury rather than as the true role of a goalie. From then on I could play about one game in three, a painful neck ruling me out for the other two. I made the last game the one after my 40th birthday. I just wanted to have played one competitive game in my forties. There was no hero ending, we lost. But one of the opposition team, in the changing rooms, asked if I'd be interested in training with his eleven aside team with a view to playing in goal. I was flattered but explained that, despite not quite looking it, I was forty. I did not explain to him, or anybody, that this had been my last ever game. I did that by an email, to the organiser, a few days later.

The reason for this, less than humble, tale, amongst my diary of mountain ascents, is tucked away in the first pages of my Munro diaries. For I found hill walking as a sport that I could do, having failed miserably as a sportsman at school, while knowing secretly that I had a talent for goalkeeping. It goes a way to make up for what I lacked at school and later missed out on.

The ending of goalkeeping coincided with leaving my career in police IT. Though I'd enjoyed working for an end user the politics were rife and I concluded the force was structured to build careers rather than provide a public service. Also it was not developing software, my true love and for which the pay is better. Therefore I found a new job, as a software developer, and between leaving one and starting another I had a break, still carrying football injury, in Wales.

I'd set off from home at a little after 0600 and got walking around 1030. Starting from the west side of the lake Llyn Ogwen I thwarted the £2 parking charge by parking in a lay by. Soon ascending I follow the path then a faint one beyond Llyn Ldwal (Llyn means water) up the steep ascent around Devil's Kitchen. I notice a number of places in the hills called the Devil's something or other. His elbow, punchbowl, staircase and penis are scattered throughout the land. It must make his daily routine a logistical nightmare.

The ascent requires a bit of scrambling and the use of polished handholds. Then I reach a plateau before a final ascent where the handholds are jagged and come away. Fortunately it is just steep; there is no risk of falling. I pull myself onto the ridge at about 1400 and strike west for Glyder Fawr. After following cairns and a well trodden path I soon find the twin peaked summit. Many people are around and echoes and clanks come from the mist until it clears enough to enjoy a view. I then head east for Glyder Fach, climbing amongst the boulders to reach its summit. I visit the famous cantilever stone before the steep descent via Llyn Bochlwyd where my companion is drizzle.

July 26th dawns a glorious day, views all the way but I am slow. I drive up to Nant Peris (just a mile or so) then set off for the hard slog up Elidir Fawr; first passing some cottages then onto the open hillside. Initially I strike to the east of the stream but change my mind and, having passed a bridge, descend the gully before picking my way across. Then it is the long slog: from 0810 to about 1120 I

haul my way up this steep gradient. My trekking poles, left behind yesterday to ease a painful shoulder, assist the 3000ft to the summit.

From the top I have views of Snowdon and its mountain railway, emitting clouds of smoke as the engine ascends. I peer over to the modern and functional reservoir before descending and ascending Mynydd Perfedd.



I then walk out to Carnedd Y Filiast and back before the pull up Foel Goch. Here I can see down the other valley, where I ascended from yesterday. The final peak, Y Garn, the highest of the day, is the next. At its summit I can see all of my walking of the past two days. I descend to Llyn y Cwn and take a poorly defined path back to the road and a mile walk back to my car, arriving at 1650.

I'm staying in the Heights Hotel, Llanberis – staffed by very sweet, polite, smiley and helpful eastern European girls. This is the sign of the times with the expansion of Europe. I eat then go for a stroll and pass a group of Welsh youngsters. I was heartened to hear them speaking their mother tongue but gather there is no Welsh equivalent for that well known Anglo Saxon phrase F*** O**!! It was the only part of the conversation that my passing ear could understand.

Today, July 27th, I start walking at 0750. Following the Llanberis path I make a good pace. Passing the railway line, seeing the diesel locos then later a steam one. Pausing at the cafe of Halfway House it is time to branch off, leaving the path I walked when I was eleven. I soon reach the rocky outcrop of Llechog. Fitting the criteria of a 2000ft mountain (requiring a 50ft drop on all sides) it looks humble within the shadow of the towering Snowdon. Behind is my walk of the previous day, easy to make out. I chat to an older guy and we agree that the rules making the mountains are, at times, elevating minor bumps above their status.

I descend to the lake of Llyn Du Arddu, in a basin with towering cliffs above me. The train hugs the ridge, almost balanced, precariously. I slip twice amongst the boulders yet am glad to catch my balance and move on. I break into my second water bottle of the day – yesterday I took just one bottle and it was not enough. Today I remembered the lack of water in the Welsh hills.

I then take the undulating walk across Moel Cynghorion, Foel Gron and Moel Eilio making it back to the hotel at 1530. There were descents then long hauls back up, my legs feel heavy the boots like weights hanging off each. I wonder if trail shoes would be better. On these final three peaks I have good views west and back east across the ground I covered today. The older chap catches me up and we rue the guidebook appearing to have measured map distance, not catering for extra distance caused by ascent and descent.

As I descend the final mountain I see two people arriving at the top – no gear and just jeans and trainers. Further down I chat to a lovely, ascending, Welsh girl. It was nice for a couple of minutes. Her Welsh accent music to my ears.

Further South

Setting off from home at 0730 on August 27th I get to Oswestry for about 1030. There is one signpost for the B4580 road but there are three roads it could refer to. Three tours of the town, and a few wild guesses later, I'm out on narrow Welsh single-track roads. With signposts only to places not on any map I frequently pull up to try and make out where I am. I miss the relative ease of Scotland that has long glen roads with no web of alternative routes. I sense a conspiracy but, after having at one stage stopped and spread the map out and used my compass to navigate, park up, feeling rather agitated at the start of my walk.

I'm walking at 1230 but ruefully back along the road I'd just driven along. I bump into a young man and woman; people are a rare sight today. I ascend up a track and then follow the gentle pull up to Godor. Then onto its North Top followed by Moel yr Ewig: a minor bump above the 2000ft line where a drop of 50ft all round gives it an undeserved status.



I then make a sharp pull onto a glorious ridge - North Wales is saying hello beyond with summits and valleys beckoning. I turn left and take in Moel Sych before a reverse turn has me passing the ridge entry point. Here there is a cross, carved in marble, to Fiona McWilliam. "Remember me." says the inscription. I do not know of her but pause and take in here years - 1965 to 1999. The same year I was born. I wonder why she was robbed of her life. What was her history? It would be unfair to pick mountain flowers so I pick some grass and make the small gesture of laying it on her memorial. I then bump into the same couple I'd met earlier, they've done a different walk, covered more ground with their lighter sacks. Though I am doing well, breathing good - coping with the 13Kg sack, including 3.5Kg of water and camping gear. There is no water on the walk, so all has to be carried.



I continue and take in Cadair Berwyn North Top and Cadair Berwyn for real. Ploughing on, soaking the views and gentle breeze I bag Cadair Bronwen and Cadair Bronwen NE top before a descent and re-ascent to meet Pen Bwlch Llandrillo Top. With the time at 1730 I view the next part of the walk, a six mile round trip to Moel Fferna. It feels too late, I'm tiring and wish to look out at the sunset. I pitch my tent below the summit cairn and eat my cold food. No stove packed, zero luxuries on this walk. I had a large veggie breakfast at the M54 services - my hot meal of the day.



I call Alison Ashton on my phone, just to say hi - she loves the hills. I text Gisella's partner, Andrew for the soccer results. He obliges. I'm asleep before sundown, eventually zipping myself into the tent.

I wake to howling wind and remain snug until I get the urge to move on and get the tent down. I set off at 0810: it's a ninety-minute trip out to Moel Ferna, and the smashed remains of its summit cairn forming two horseshoe shaped summit shelters, and eighty-minutes back. I pass back near my campsite and then the difficult re-ascent, with accompanying strong wind, of Cadair Bronwen NE. I'm now tired, aching and very slow. People I first spy as being miles behind me catch and overtake. I use extra medicine but am still plodding. I settle in for a slog and eventually hit Cadair Bronwen and cut across to Tomle, using a short cut across the escarpment. At the top the wind is howling and I have to put everything under stones as I take my pack off to sup water. It's then Foel Wen and Foel Wen S top - I am blown against a wire fence the wind is so strong. There is long grass and the wind rushes at it sending it brushing like the waves crashing on a shore. I plod my way up Mynydd Tarw, noting how the fence divides grazing styles giving one side grass and the other heather. I then start my drop to the car, getting there at 1530 and the three-hour drive home.

Totals to date: 111 out of 191

Note the total number given here, of 191, is the total at the time of writing. It later decreased to 189 as surveying techniques improved.

2007

July 14th and I'm trying to find Bristol Airport. For an international airport it's proving remarkably shy. Tucked away on some minor road with signs for the oncoming traffic but none for me. Many about turns, to collect the signs, and a process of elimination home me in. I arrive a few minutes before the arrival of

Steve Hampton's flight from Rome. It's good to see him but I notice that like me he's recently lost a lot of hair. Alas mine to ageing, his to a barber. After negotiating the way out, signs pointing to dead ends, we set off for the Gower to camp.

Both starving we try various service stations. The first one is closed, the second has run out of everything vegetarian, and the third is a rare combination of being open and serving vegetarian. However, it's a slow service Burger King, it'll do yet there is some confusion between Steve's antipodean accent and Welsh.

"Do you have water?" asks Steve (a rare request in a Burger King).

"You want a whooper," she replies.

It takes some explaining.

We find a campsite and enter the office and explain we wish to camp for one night. The proprietor, a middle aged man, looks us up and down.

"That'll be," there's a pause while he thinks about what he can get away with, "sixteen pounds for the night and a ten pound deposit for the car." Neither Steve nor I are awake enough to enquire why property belonging to ourselves merits a deposit.

"You've got your own toilet paper?" he asks. Steve and I give one another an incredulous look: this guy's taking the mick but making it sound as if he's doing us a favour.

"And it's twenty pence for the shower. You get ten minutes."

Next morning, after a rain soaked night, I discover that indeed you do get ten minutes, four of which are waiting for the warm water to come through. What with the recent rains and flooding making the UK a less desirable holiday destination we could only wish this chap a rapid business failure.

We go in search of breakfast, first trying an open café in Port Eino. We pop our heads around the door.

"We're not open to eight thirty," says a woman dismissively. It's 0820 and this woman is trying her charm. "And the oven's still heating up," she adds. "Might not be ready until nine." She's busied herself with tasks, not aided by an apparent hatred of customers. No offer to take a seat and wait. Why oh why do the UK tourist boards wonder why they suffer so?

In the end we find a Post Office store open and eat hot pasties in my car whilst watching the rain stream down the windows. Welcome to Wales. We do a short walk, after avoiding a £3.30 charge to park the car, on some wasteland for an hour or so.

After a late afternoon drive, we camp at a site just above the beautiful Beddgelert. The campsite office is closed so we find a pitch. In the morning we discover it does not open until 0900. We decide to leave the tent and pay later; I'm itching to bag Yr Aran. At the car park I discover I've left my jacket in the tent so we return to collect it and pay the £14.70 per night. At least there are free showers and toilet paper. But it does feel a little steep when you supply your own tent.

We get walking at 1048, following the easy mine paths, watching out for the literal pitfalls. The water glimmers and the mountains look down. Steve has to wait often for me because I'm having a slow day with my breathing. Some mist

and cloud greets us on the high ground but the final pull brings in some glorious views, arriving around 1400.

After another night of heavy rain we pack the car up, park in Beddgelert, lunch and get ready for a night out in the hills. I'm wishing to string two walks together by doing a wild camp.

After the rains subside we set off for Moel Hebog, a fine hill that overlooks Beddgelert. Though getting out of the village proves one of the hardest parts of the day. The map and the ground barely tie together and we find ourselves crossing the new Welsh Highland Railway and struggling through dense woodland. Ferns, brambles, ruts and trees all have to be negotiated. A stone brick wall blocks our path, the length of barbed wire atop serving little to alleviate our frustrations. I attempt it first and, by managing to sit myself just the other side of the wire, I throw my titanium trekking poles to the ground and jump the five feet to the forest floor below. As I leave the wall I hear my over trouser rip and as I'm about to land I exclaim 'Oh God' as I land on one of the poles. It snaps in two bringing the total cost of negotiating the wall to £140.

"Are you okay?" I hear Steve asking.

"Broke my pole and ripped my trousers," I reply.

"Oh, thank God. All I heard was a nasty crack and you saying 'Oh God'. I thought you'd broken your leg."

"It's worse than that," I reply, "I've just trashed £140 of kit. If I'd broken my leg the NHS would have fixed it for free."

We pass some empty cottages, apprentice ruins, before making for the open hillside. I find the walk tough going yet Steve is happy to rest often. He magnanimously says that my frequent needs for rest allow him to take in the views in a way that he would not have done if he were alone.

It's a long pull to the summit to Moel hedgehog (as we've christened it), arriving around three hours after leaving the woods. Steve, in true fellow Kiwi Edmund Hillary style, says, "We knocked the bastard off."

From here we ascend Moel Yr Ogof and Moelf Lefn. Really bumps in the ridge before the descent to find a pitch. This proves difficult as there is real steepness and we have to take it step by step with our heavy packs.

We camp around 1930 on a shelf in the hills with running water. The weather has joined the idyllic scenery to set a peaceful evening of relaxing after a days walk. Only when we finish eating do the rains come in - ideal timing.

In the morning, breakfasted and tent taken down, Steve asks me to point out the route up the Nantlle Ridge. I detect some hesitation. As we get to the point where we could ascend it or cut back to the car, via Beddgelert Forest, Steve admits he'd like to give it a miss. I'm glad he could speak up as a long day lay ahead. Instead we walk out, navigating forestry tracks not always matching the map, and drive up to Caernarfon to look around.



Heading south we get a free night of camping at the Beddgelert site. We were in no mood to turn up so early to get there before the site office shut, nor were we keen to wait until it opened in the morning.

The following day, July 19th, Steve surprises me by saying that he fancies the Nantlle Ridge: I'm in no mood to disagree - a fine day of weather, despite the week of much rain, is forecast.



It's a steady pull up Y Garn where the beauty of the ridge, and its six 2000ft peaks, lay before us. Twists and turns, boulders and grass, slopes and sheer drops snake into the distance with views into the valleys below. There are views over to Yr Aran and the Moel Hebog ridge of the days before. Days like this are to be savoured.

The walk up Mynydd Drws-y-coed involves a rocky ascent, with some entertaining drops if one chose to wander off course. I find the rocky ascents helpful with my breathing as they force a pace better suited to my windpipe. Trum y Ddysgl is the next peak with a splendid walk between the two, sheer drops to one side, a col and steep pull to its summit. From here we take the twisting ridge, with one small scramble and sharp drop to negotiate before reaching the wall leading to the summit of Mynydd Tal-y-mignedd where the obelisk, in celebration of the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria, towers over the valleys making it an easily identifiable landmark.

It's a good descent and steep, and boulder ridden, climb up Craig Cwm Silyn. Some mist blows in but, on the easy walk on to Garnedd-goch, it nicely picks out some of the hills for us. We are spared rain and get good views over to Caernarfon and its castle, the Menai Straights and Porthmadog.

Now at the furthest point we descend into the southeast valley, steeply with much backtracking to find a route down. Eventually bum sliding to save a fall, the closeness to the ground causes my hay fever to come on. Steve crosses the fence onto the road as I do further down. An itinerant busy body, on his EU financed quad bike, tells him off for not using the gate. Steve points out that the gate was covered in stinging nettles – presumably there's no EU grant to clear them.

From here I have to apologise to Steve for having promised him no further ascents. For we have to pick our way through the abandoned mine workings. It looks a grim place to have worked, far from home with poor conditions. Steve

and I agree this would be the place to bring the one or two angry feminists we have encountered in our lifetimes.

Some map or navigational error means we lose ourselves near the Beddgelert Forest. The GPS confirms where I think we are but we've lost the path. We force our way through the commercial forest on a bearing, pick up the track again and walk out. My estimate of finishing around 1700 is woefully inadequate as we finish at 2020, having started at 0840.

We re-hydrate in the pub at Rhyd Ddu. The landlord, having got wind of our long walk back, takes glee in pointing out a leaflet advertising a bus service back from the end of the ridge. We try, on a few occasions, to point out we've not heard of it, we've just completed the walk, but he's having none of it. The pleasure in pointing it out is all his. Even our comment that, if back earlier, we'd not be about to camp on his campsite cuts no mustard with him. After leaving him to his pleasure we put up our tent and are treated to an incredible sky at sundown.



The Friday dawns wet, no chance for the hills. I've arranged to meet with my friend Sandra in Llandudno and mention to Steve we have five hours to kill. Steve picks up on the emphasis as he sees it as an opportunity to explore the historic Conwy. I sit in the library reading a book on electronics.

Moor Hills

It's 0550 on August 11th and I'm setting off. I make the M54 in two hours then hit Wales where the A roads are B roads and the B roads are C roads, yet get parked and walking at 0950. In the twenty minutes of readying myself not one car passes, this is peak season in Wales.

It's a high start, around 500m; the weather is blue sky and cloud. The air is clear, the views are good. Behind me are the three tops for later in the day, or

tomorrow – a ridge guarded at either end by Foel y Geifr and Foel Goch. But for now my ambitions are set on Pen y Boncyn Trefeilw - just off the landrover track of ascent. This Nuttall could almost be done in a car.

I make the summit in half an hour, crossing a fence from heather to grass field. The summit is a minor rise in the high ground, a few to pick from so I stand on them all to be sure. A panoramic vista greets me, Cadar Idris guarding the view of the coast as the hills unfold into a more mountainous terrain. For today I'd describe what's beneath my feet as hill not mountain. The slopes are gentle and suit me well. I set off and battle the heather, a trade for a steep slope. Heather, grass and commercial forest break the view of the terrain; cloud builds from the horizon greeting blue sky.

I make Stac Rhos in around half an hour and again have a game of guess the summit. Minor rises and bumps deter an outright contender yet the guidebook and visit to each convinces me of my achievement. I follow the fence east, passing a rare hillside ploughed field, then tough going in the heather before finding a path slowly opening up, after forty minutes, to the summit of Cefn Gwyntog - my 125th Welsh 2000ft mountain.

It takes me an hour and a quarter to the next, Cynriau Nod, the highest of the day at 2188ft - bagged by returning to the landrover track, heading north east then heading into the heather land once more where fence posts guide me to the summit. There is the odd conifer tree, an offspring of the nearby plantation, delivered by bird no doubt; a phenomenon not known to Scotland where the deer stunt any growth. The only deer I've seen today is a young one that ran in front of my car just outside of Swindon. A fellow car driver, the deer and myself all swerved and managed to avoid one another.

The guidebook describes this area as looking and feeling a long way from anywhere. The expanse of moorland surrounds me, my hills past and future mere minor bumps in the immediate surround. I miss the 'mountains' yet am glad for an easy day on my breathing. A modest cairn, with a protruding post marks the summit.

I head back to the track then carry straight on as it turns sharply left. Alone on the hill I quickly make Y Groes Fagl, a tall post marking its summit. In front of me is Foel Cwm-Sian LLwyd, an hour and a quarter walk - the longest stretch of the day. A recommended bag from a different starting place I decide to battle its heather slopes and include it today. I wonder at my pursuit, these mountains are rises in the ground on a high moor. I ponder whether they are rightly individuals or whether just part of a massif. Yet they draw me to Wales, the classification of these mountains and I tick them off and greet them as individuals.

A classic trig point, built from stone, adorns the final summit of the day. As I approach I spy a shape and wonder if there is company but, on further examination, I conclude it's a raven sat against the cairn. It flies off - there is no company today. The hills stretch out in all directions and I'm at my furthest point after six hours.

I start to make my way through the heather clad slopes, back towards the landrover track, but am soon stopped by the curious spectacle of an infiltrator in the heather. It's a balloon with a card attached. As a boy I always hoped to be the finder of one of those balloons that are set off at fetes. At the age of 42 my wish is granted. I read the card and determine it was launched a few days earlier (on the 8th) from Aberystwyth. It's a chance find and I use my GPS to record its location to within a few meters. I hope it's the winner.

After just over an hour, from the furthest summit, I'm back on the landrover track. I'm out of water and thirsty. A landrover passes, the only people I see on the hills today. I trudge back, rueing each incline but satisfying myself that they are not too steep.

I make it back to the car at 1835, and set my stove to boil water for a pot noodle. Lack of gas pressure and gusty wind conspire to make it a slow boil. A man is hunting for a mobile signal to call the AA to rescue his broken down car. I wonder about driving him to the phone box in the valley below. Yet I need to eat and direct him up the track to get a signal promising myself that I'll be more altruistic if he should return with no signal. Alas he gets one, my water boils and I eat pot noodle.

I plan to camp but wish to not show my car as having been left too long. I decide to turn it around then quickly realise I've parked it facing the same way again (a 360 turn is exactly that). I turn it properly again. I gather things for the night and set off into the moorland to camp. My dry feet sink into a bog, coming up smelling and dirty. I pitch and get into the tent moments before the rains set in. Visible from the road I feel a little nervous. I wake often in the night, uncomfortable on the uneven ground.

I wake properly at just after 0600, eat peanut butter and jam sandwiches for breakfast, get the tent down and head back to my car. A change of pack contents has me setting forth for the trig point of Foel y Geifr. I'm soon in cloud and mist. I had vowed not to go up in such weather. The Munros required ascents in all weather, less ambition and an aging body have conspired to cause me to take it easy. Yet I'm already cold and wet and not getting out of a nice warm car makes for an easier transition. In two hours I make the round trip of Foel y Geifr, Trum y Gwragedd and Foel Goch. My only companions being two birds perched on the fence that follows the ridge. They look at me, and I at them. We conclude I am the maddest.

The Aran Ridge

It's August 25th and, feeling cheated by a summer of constant rain, I've been checking the weather forecast all week and, by the weekend, the prediction has now improved enough to make a break to Wales, for the bank holiday, plausible.

I set off at 0545 and am making good time until I get to navigating the shores of Lake Vyrnwy. In perfect sunshine I turn up what I think to be the minor road to Bwlch y Groes. As I ascend the grass in the middle of the road spreads and the tarmac narrows until I'm driving on lawn. Finding a place to turn proves fun and by the time I hit the right road I'm driving through cloud. I park and start walking at around 1045. I can see the Aran Ridge, for today or tomorrow but first I have a single mountain to be bagged with a day pack.

I have brassy ideas of doing the fourteen peaks of the Aran Mountains in two days with perhaps making a start on the Arenigs on Monday. A fence shows the way, from a very high starting point, for the half hour brisk walk, in the warm sun, to Moel y Cerrig Duon. I survey the fine view down to the shimmering Lake Vyrnwy. On my way down I'm a little unsure about a junction in the fence that I cannot remember from my ascent. Fortunately a boot print, which lines up perfectly with the pattern of my own, puts me back on track.

Back at the car, after an hour round trip, I switch day pack for camping pack, have a brief chat with some holiday makers then make a noon departure for

Llechwedd Du. I keep peaking at the folded map to judge my progress against my plans. Although my pace is good I soon realise that this will take two nights of camping, not one and I'm glad I've packed two days of food.

I make my way across the modest peat hags – terrain where one can easily get bogged down. Fortunately my footing remains firm and my pace good. I have the presence of mind to rest awhile, from the weight of the pack, and survey the glory. I make Llechwedd Du at 1300.

Skipping the proliferation of peat hags I follow the fence north, crossing it, briefly meeting a fading streambed before the pull onto the slopes of Foel Rhudd (Red Bare Hill). I make the modest summit on a compass bearing yet the rising ground was the greater clue. From here I can see the Bala Valley and the Arenig hills.

A helpful fence takes me west then south to the unmarked peak of Esgeirau Gwynion, or 'White Ridges' to the anglicised. Views are again superb, even my car glistens two miles away.

A steep descent and re-ascent catches my breathing out. A heavy pack, with 3Kg of water to be sparingly used, sun and asthma has me at a snails pace on the 400ft of ascent from Bwlch Sirddyn. I make the summit of Foel Hafod-fynydd at 1555, and look back to see the west face of Esgeirau Gwynion sporting its white quartz from which it gets its name. Foel Hafod-fynydd has a couple of peaks to its summit, reminding me of the Python sketch with the double sighted expedition leader wishing to build a bridge between the two summits. The valley to its left has farm, spots of commercial forest and cultivated fields.

I drop to the lake Creigtyn Dyfi where the rising wind makes waves and keeps the most tenacious midge grounded. I'm dehydrated, having rationed and not peed all day, so finish the water I'm carrying, refill from the lake, use purification tablets to be safe and hesitate putting the tent up. I'm tired, it feels like a boring job and I procrastinate until I pitch alone, not having seen another soul since I left the car. Good rocks form a shelter for my stove; an east face guarantees the morning sun.

I wake around 0500 but cannot get enthusiastic about leaving the warmth of my sleeping bag. Around 0615 I poke my head out and see blue sky, mist wisps around the peaks. Some red sky reminds me of "red sky in the morning shepherds warning". I slowly get prepared, heating breakfast in the shelter of the rocks, placed for this very purpose by another long-gone camper.



I set off at 0710 taking the sharp incline towards Erw y Ddafad-ddu. It's a little easier than it appears and soon opens up as a broad ridge spur. Mist wisps over the col, exposing and covering the lake. Aran Fawddy stands guard with its sheer, beautiful south face towering above the lake.



I reach Erw y Ddafad-ddu in around an hour then at 0835 I'm at the far end of the Aran Ridge on Aran Benlllyn. I take in the views of Lake Bala, Lake Vyrnwy and even my distant car.

I back track over Erw Ddafad-ddu then the rocky ascent to the highest point, at 0945 and a shade under 3000ft of Aran Fawddwy. Here I see the first person since I started - a fell runner with his two Jack Russell dogs. With the sea to the west, and a stone built trig point marking the summit, the scene is a real treat.

I drop away and make a rough crossing to Gwaun y Llwyni, at 2250ft with its good views to the east. I then follow the fence to the 2038ft lump of Waun Camddwr, so much of the surroundings feel higher yet this point has a 50ft rise in all directions and consequently gets a name, and a place in the tables, of its own.

I realise I'm struggling and my brassy expectations of finishing the fourteen today feel curtailed. I reckon on twelve instead, a high camp and the last two tomorrow.

It's a hard pull up the 2557ft high Glasgwm. Its cone shaped cairn makes an interesting sight as I arrive at 1305. From here I survey the route out to Pen y Brynnfforchog, following the fence then the forest edge. I did not quite appreciate the drops between the two, more height to regain and the undulations add to the ascents. I reach it at 1410 and, being the furthest point from the car today, I feel out of my comfort zone. Beyond is the sea and the mountains of Cadair Idris and the Rhinogs. I make it back towards Glasgwm. As I rest for chocolate a dog appears, followed by its owners. I descend steeply, passing Waun Camddwr and wondering if the peak is the one I stood on earlier, I stand on the other just in case.

After a ten-hour day I camp by a water source, 350ft below the peak of Drysgol.

Pen yr Allt Uchaf and Gwaun Gydan will have to wait for tomorrow. I face the tent entrance to the setting sun: with flap open I snooze in the cool breeze, stir and watch the sun sink ever further.

I wake around 0500 having managed over eight hours sleep, stirring from time to time as my hips felt sore from the pressure on the ground. I consider the bank holiday traffic and the M6 to be tackled later in the day. It's enough to get me motivated so I winch myself out of my sleeping bag at 0540

I get going at 0645, slightly lighter because I've used most of the water, just having enough for the day ahead. I ascend a lovely shoulder leading first to Drws Bach, and then the pull up Drysgol is manageable. A few sharp drops into Hengwm have to be avoided. I look across to the connecting ridge to Pen yr Allt Uchaf and am reminded of the Faninchs in Scotland - a group of mountains carved with interconnecting ridges giving choice of route.

At Drws Bach I stop by the memorial to Mike Robert Aspin who was killed by lightening near this spot. I'm reminded of the walking press recently deriding mountain memorials. My conclusion is simple - memorials are appropriate near the spot of a mountain tragedy. If you die elsewhere your memorial belongs elsewhere.

This peak looks, to the eye, to be an individual mountain. Yet it does not have a 50ft rise in all directions whereas the 2038ft bump of yesterday, simply a rise in moorland, does. Sometimes I think you can't define a mountain on paper, it's how the eye perceives it and the vista from the summit that makes a mountain. To the northwest I see the lake where I camped the night before last - slowly I'm coming full circle.

From the summit of Drysgol I descend the faint path before the pull up Pen yr Allt Uchaf, crossing a fence to meet its summit. I then cut the best line to Gwaun Gydan, catching the ridge to its west then ascending. An indistinct summit yet offering a good panoramic view of much of what I have walked.

From here I walk east hoping to drop height at the end of the ridge. I soon spy a route off to the north, although steep I take it to stop having to chance an even steeper path off. I sit awhile and admire the chasm cut by the stream in Ceunant y Bridell. Steep sides constantly being eroded have opened a deep wide course.

Crossing the Llaethnant I pick up the path. Ideally I'd now ascended back over the second peak of yesterday, Llechwedd Du. It looks steep so instead I follow the path, losing height all of the time. I look to my right and see the way off the end of the ridge would have been very steep - waterfalls on the map are a hint to keep away. I make the road and realise my error. I've descended so far, to avoid the re-ascent of Llechwedd Du that I now have 1000ft of steep, hot road walking back to my car. It is long and tough, taking about an hour and a quarter. I arrive back at the car around noon. A five-hour day and completing the fourteen peaks of the three day walk into the wilds.

Totals to date: 145 out of 191

2008

It's Good Friday and I'm boarding the 0631 train from Bedwyn with gusty ambitions to add the nine Rhinog mountains to my list of bagged peaks. My route involves changing trains at Reading and Birmingham then, via the Cambrian coast line, I'm due to alight at Tygwyn. Over the weekend I plan to walk across the

mountains and, on Easter Monday at Talybont, submit myself again to the mercy of the railway system. The worst Easter weather forecast I've ever seen is initially of small concern - surviving the British railway system is my first challenge.

True to form the train is sixteen minutes late into Birmingham for a fifteen-minute connection. It's times like this that the hope gets you. The despair is easier - a two hour wait for the next train and the short evening mean I'll not be able to walk as far as I want today. That I can deal with. Yet it's the small hope that the Pwllheli train is also delayed that has me, politely as possible in the circumstances, hurrying my way to the main station concourse to find the departure board.

My heart sinks when I find it has left so I make my way to the information counter and join the queue of other would be travellers that have equally just had their journey ruined. A young lady pushes to the front of the queue, suddenly all around me are comrades in arms as we look at one another and frown. Mr Indignant kicks in and I go forward and explain, "There's a queue you know." Fortunately the counter lady has seen it all before and sends the girl packing to the back of the queue.

"My train was late for the ten thirty three," I announce as it's my turn at the desk, "can you endorse my tickets for the 1234?"

"No, it'll be okay."

"Can I have a seat reservation?"

"You are too late for a seat reservation."

I can feel Mr Indignant, who has already been aroused, starting to elbow out Mr Nice and Pleasant.

"I'm not late! It's the train that was late."

"I'm sorry, a reservation is not possible. There's bound to be seats available."

"Are you sure my tickets don't need endorsing?"

"Yes," the strain is showing on both of us, "there are lots of other people in the same situation as yourself going for that train. The guard will know."

"So if there's lots of other people in my situation how come there will be seats available?"

I get an ill tempered look and depart to pace around the concourse, covering as much ground as I'd have covered in the lost two hours on the hills. I'd planned to bag Moel Ysgyfarnogod and Foel Penolau then camp high. Now I'll only get as far as a thousand feet before the light defeats me. Not even a free cup of coffee is offered for my pains.

I find a corner to sit and read. At the last minute I'd packed a slim volume, Agatha Christie's "Dead Man's Folly." I realise my mistake, it's dated and reminds me of the last time I'd read it in the mid nineteen eighties. As an engineering student I had to do a year out in industry and, leaving behind the lights of Brighton, wound up in North London digs. My landlady, a Mrs Joy Rose, had clearly spent a lifetime bringing very little joy to anybody. Indeed Mr Rose had bailed out to the cemetery some seventeen years previously leaving Mrs Rose as a merciless, and embittered, landlady. I'd discovered the best defence was tucking myself away. Agatha Christie and Dick Francis became easy reading.

Rueing my choice I take consolation as the pages feel absorbing and may come in useful later on the trail. I had considered bringing Jon Krakauer's into "Into the Wild" for its slim, lightweight qualities. Yet, with snow forecast, reading a book about a guy freezing to death was not the best of choices. I pace around some more and visit W H Smiths. No book takes my eye, not even the well-thumbed copy of the "Aston Villa 1980/81 Season". Trust me, I'm not joking.

The time comes and I board the train, do find a seat and, given that Tygwyn was not listed on the board, check with the guard that I am on the right train.

"This is the Cambrian coast train? I'm aiming for Tygwyn."

"I've never heard of Tygwyn," he says, "there's a stop called Tywyn, they've probably printed a G by mistake."

"This is the Pwllheli train?" I ask in case mention of the Cambrian coast has flummoxed him.

"Yes, but it divides in two."

"Okay am I in the right section of the train for Pwllheli?" You really have to spell it out to these guys and I'm wondering if he is pre-Cambrian himself.

"Yes." With that I take comfort and after the train divides, and the guard is replaced I ask again.

"Yes, Tygwyn, that's right. Glad you told me as that's a request stop I'll tell the driver."

I wish I were dead.

It's around four thirty when we get to Tygwyn. I'm pleased to at last be walking and my annoyances and aggravations are left at the station. Alan Sloman, who I met for a day when he was doing his Lands End to John O'Groats walk, described me as the kind of person that lightens up any meeting. His words shocked me at the time; although welcome I felt them a little on the generous side. Then I realised Alan only ever meets me in the hills, the place where I truly relax and am the person I hope to always be.

To my right I see Harlech Castle basking in the low sun, to my left mountains gleaming with their snow. As the light starts to fade, and the wind picks up I camp by the small lake of Llyn Eiddew-mawr. I have to stand on the pieces of my tent as I erect it - until the pegs are in I can't risk it to the wind.

I sleep on and off, grabbing a couple of hours to be woken by the wind again. I wake fully around 0630, feeling cold. I unzip the inner tent to find the wind had unzipped the outer which must have been flapping for hours.

I set off at 0725, needing three pairs of gloves to keep warm. The ground is slippery, icicles claim every place they can, a dusting of snow marks my track. I reach Moel Ysgyfarnogod at 0850 and then battle my way across to the well-fortified Foel Penolau. Rock battlements defend its twin summits. I have to scramble to ascend both, taking care on the ice-coated rocks. Two mountains quickly bagged which I literally started from sea level, a rare thing amongst the peaks. My celebrations are brief as the wind picks up and carries me to a four-foot drop. I'm just deft enough to sidestep it into being just a two-foot drop.



I descend via gorse, rock and heather clad slopes towards the edge of the forest to the east of Rhinog Fawr and Rhinog Fach. It's a long pull over and many a time I question my location. Eventually, on the horizon, I see a couple of self seeded trees - a sign of an impending forest. I make its boundaries and struggle with the rough ground, dry stone walls, undulations, pitfalls and scrambling. I'd planned to climb Rhinog Fawr by its north face but the approach looked impenetrable. Rueing my lack of planning I contemplate the long walk, via Llyn Du, to attempt its west flank. Two people pass me, having exited the forest, causing me to glance further at my map. I spy a network of forest tracks and paths that could bring me out between the two Rhinogs with a route up either from Bwlech Drws Ardudwy. It requires close forest navigation but works and I begin the ascent of Rhinog Fawr. After no more than 70 meters up my self-preservation alerts me to the risks. The wind is likely strong on higher ground, I am very tired and it is getting late in the day. Needing a water supply I descend west looking for the stream marked on my map. Water gurgling under the ground teases me and I have to keep descending until it breaks through and I can fill my bottle and camp.

It's another rough night in the tent, listening to the radio and eating my daily luxury of a Cadbury Cream Egg followed by the frustrations of continually losing things. By now I've planned to skip Rhinog Fawr and Y Garn and instead walk out via the five remaining peaks. I get a text from Alison Ashton warning me of snow during the night. When I wake it is raining but a calling card of snow has blown under the flysheet. The end of the tent is damp where snow has laid heavy and melted into a pool formed in the outer. I peer out and see the tops in swirling cloud with snow well below. I realise that the game is up. My Easter weekend relegated from nine summits to just two. Fitness, weather and some lack of planning have conspired against me.

I set off for the hamlet of Llanbedr, spying a youth hostel marked on the map. The weather cheers up. The peaks are now possible. Yet the early decision to bail out can't be revoked and I make the long road walk out.

I pass a field with tents in it. I wonder about pitching up alongside then seeking out the farmer. It reminds me of the Famous Five with Julian and Dick always going off to find the farmer who was always only too grateful to allow some terribly nice middleclass children make use of his land.

The youth hostel is boarded up, a sad state of affairs. They are closing at an alarming rate.

I visit the station and finding that there are no trains today, walk back to the village and find a room in The Victoria Inn. It's luxurious yet noisy, next to the boiler room and above the bar. I sleep on and off.

On Easter Monday I arrive at the deserted station, an hour early for my train. I get talking to two women, around my age up for the walking. They're heading north for a day's circuit, myself south and home.

On the train trip I forget the challenges of the weekend and realise that I should have been more ambitious. In my twenties I'd have thought nothing of ascending higher in those conditions. What happened to that young lad? Somewhere along the line I've lost some confidence. Or is it the enthusiasm of youth? I remember my mum coming home from work and finding me dismantling large parts of my Austin Mini.

"What are you doing?" she asked with alarm.

"The clutch suddenly failed."

"Have you changed one before?" she asked.

"No," and lifting the Haynes manual I added, "but it describes all about in here."

The Final Forty Two

For the first time in five years I'd failed to get on the annual cross Scotland walk (the TGO). Having booked the time off work, in the hope that my name would advance up the waiting list, I sat resolutely in a position requiring an almighty set of coincidences, and possibly a murder enquiry, for sufficient numbers to vacate their places. It felt time to be proactive and time for a crack at finishing the Welsh 2000ft peaks: therefore I withdrew from the TGO reserve list and started to make plans for Wales.

With forty-two mountains remaining (two of which have just been added after some pesky resurveying) I reckon I can do them in sixteen walks. I book a holiday cottage for two weeks, with a few days either side, to give me a good chance.

The advantage of Wales is that, with careful planning, the travelling day can also be a walking day. The nearest remaining mountain to my house, Foel Goch, has a start point that I reach in less than five hours, courtesy of my new in car toy, a 'Sat Nag'. Gone are the days where one is obliged to follow the main roads around. The minor roads are championed as it threads me the most direct route, providing entertainment as it takes me through the village of 'Knockin'. It's the kind of village where I could imagine opening a shop. "Steve's Store", perhaps you are thinking. I'm more inclined to call it "The Knockin Shop". It could be one of a chain of businesses. I have my eye on the town of Muff, on the north coast of Ireland, for a diving school.

It does not take me long to get my kit on, the beating sun only requiring a T shirt and cap above the waistline. Newborn lambs skip in the fields: like me they are enjoying their first day of summer.

Less endearing animals await my arrival at the Pendre farm. Five collies and a drop kick sized terrier circle and yap at my feet. Like all farms the dogs bark but nobody appears but the sense of eyes upon you is unnerving. I climb two gates and make for the hills to the fading sound of their barking. Following a hollow grassy lane, then a stream until a left turn is required to ascend the easterly flanks of Foel Goch. A cuckoo calls my progress. Some faint paths indicate not too many people have beaten me to it on this route. A warm wind, cairn, trig point, ancient marker stone and distant wind farm, await me at the summit. I get clear views out to the mountains of the north and northwest. A single cloud in the sky emphasises my luck with the weather. With a clear forecast for the weekend I'm determined to make use of every clear day. I'll rest when it rains.

Returning to my car I set off for Bala and the search for two night's accommodation. First a filling station catches my eye to refuel. However, a newspaper board, proclaiming Bala has the most expensive diesel in the country, flattens my enthusiasm.

I park then wander up and down in search of a place to stay. Pricey looking places without a price list. Rundown places with detracting signs saying live music and drinking until 0200. I eventually select The Ship with its Bed & Breakfast sign. I enter.

"How much for one night bed and breakfast?"

"We don't do bed and breakfast," replies the bar lady. I'm in no mood to take this further and retract to the road and find the Plas Coch Hotel has room and not too much of a surcharge for being single. The owners and staff are Welsh and I love hearing the language. Even the sink taps are in Welsh – perhaps in England we should have them in Polish to help the workers.

May 9th and I wake early and pass the time until breakfast. Always the downside for me is the wait for the hotel breakfast: it's why I've booked a holiday cottage for the next two weeks.

I have a big breakfast and plan a day to match in the hills - twelve miles, six peaks and 3300 feet of ascent to include the king of the area, Arenig Fawr.

I find my way round to the minor road from Bala, passing the Llyn Celyn, park under the buzzing electric pylons and set off shortly before 0900. The cloud is low yet one I sense will clear. I pass an old railway line, a quarry then pick up the run of an old fence onto the high ground. I'm very slow on the steep sections, of which this mountain has many.

It's misty so only when the wind picks up do I know I'm approaching the exposed summit ridge. The final pull to the windless summit is a gentler incline, where, after just under two and a half hours, I reach a trig point and memorial stone to the eight American crew members of a Flying Fortress that crashed on the mountain in 1943.

I take a short descent and re-ascent to take in Arenig Fawr South Top, my 150th Welsh two thousand foot mountain, and then a longer descent and short re-ascent to take in the cloud free Arenig Fawr South Ridge Top. I then lose around 200m of height as I drop down and prepare for the ascent of Moel Llyfnant. The summit is a series of rocky knolls and I rest at the highest and take in the views with Arenig Fawr still shy behind the clouds.

It's a drop of 1000ft to the low point before the final ascent of the day to Foel Boeth and Gallt Y Daren. These prove to be a hard going and tiring tussock-

ridden climb and I'm continually circumnavigating knolls and debating whether to follow the stream or head straight towards the summit. In the end my poor navigation has me hitting Gallt Y Daren first which should have been on my return leg. I waste no time in striking out for Foel Boeth.

It's a long walk back to the car, taking two hours of steady descent. My right knee causes me to yelp and I stop to readjust my knee strapping. The outer one is a Velcro sports support, the inner a surgical knee sock. Peeling this back I'm surprised to find a mass of congealed blood. The desk in my hotel room had a sharp edge and I'd earlier knocked my leg against it. I'd forgotten the incident until now. I make repairs and enjoy the evening sun, following fence, stream then disused boggy railway line back to my car.

May 10th and as ever I wake early and await the hotel breakfast before my departure. Breakfast eaten, bill paid and I'm off to do Y Garn before taking possession of my holiday cottage for two weeks.

Walking at 0925 I follow the track through the woods as described in the Nuttalls guide book, adjusting for changes in the years since it was written. Once on open ground I elect my own route.

I pass former gold mine workings, fortunately these are fenced. I sit and rest and experience the exploding water bottle phenomena. Filled some 1000ft lower, where the air pressure was higher, water explodes out when opened on the hills.

As I ascend cloud hangs in the valley to my left. It's rough terrain, navigating walls, bogs and tussocks. On the pull to the summit of Y Garn I have to cross a final wall topped with a fence. As I put my weight on the top it crumbles and I'm left using the fence to stop myself going with it. I hum the song "Like a dry stone cowboy." At the summit quite a crowd of people have formed. From eavesdropping it looks like some kind of singles event. A hopeful woman has come minus bra and her hot sweaty top does not leave too much to the imagination.

I descend with more walls to cross and bog to contend with. Finally I'm on a staircase arrangement of massive rocks as I pick my way down to the forest track. My right leg slips between a rock and the ground, dangling in air no harm is done. Once in the forest I make good progress. Crossing a stile I put my left leg onto the leaves carpeting the floor. Unfortunately there's nothing below them other than a boggy sinkhole. My leg descends into a wet mass and jars against firm ground. I wait the crack and the searing pain as my bent knee has taken the full weight of my body. I'm lucky, just mild aching as my lower leg slurps its way to the surface. I get back to the car at 1415, rather relieved.

Holiday Cottage

I wake to birds serenading the sunlight pouring through the bedroom window of my holiday cottage in Llan Ffestiniog. I decide to make this the biggest walk I have left – the six remaining Rhinog Mountains. It's a surprisingly long drive around to the start and in the car I recognise the road walking that I did at Easter.

At 0725 I'm parked at the very end of minor road leading from Llanbedr to Nantcol. A cloudless sky and warm sun welcome my first steps, heading for the skyline then the right turn onto the flanks of Rhinog Fawr. I ascend in the beautiful sun, disturbing mountain goats sleeping on the path. Climbing a wall to find the best attack point for the summit I play mathematical games over how

long this walk will take. The final leg, of the two and a half hour climb, requires the ascent of a scree chute, then the flatter rocky summit with welcome trig point marker. The views are outstanding, just a distant haze hiding some the mountains of Snowdonia.

I set off south for the steep descent into the pass between Rhinog Fawr and Rhinog Fach. It's tough going across scree, heather and rocky terrain. From my high vantage I can see where I camped at Easter and wonder if the sweltering sun of today will curtail my efforts as the snow and wind did then. My left knee is very sore after the jarring I gave it yesterday and I gingerly finish my descent.

The guidebook describes a very steep ascent of Rhinog Fach. I elect for a longer route, ascending to its west and taking a final sweep to its summit. I have a love-hate relationship with guidebooks – I wouldn't be here without them but on the other hand I grumble if they take on a route that is not the best for me.

As I cross the ladder style (this is an area of many walls) I spy another party heading towards the steeper route but, undeterred, I press on with my plan and find this steep enough. It feels like I walk for thirty seconds then rest for a minute. Continually I park myself down, timid to refresh myself with water as I've only brought two litres for the entire day. More would have been extra weight. Like at Easter I'm teased by the sounds of water passing underground, too shy to emerge and be drunk.

The wind picks up and I reach a level plateau that was likely once a tarn. Its northerly bank long breached, draining it forever. Looking back to Rhinog Fawr I see the long layers of rock at forty-five degrees, ancient activity having pushed up this mountain from the horizontal.

I push on up the final steep section before the easier walk to the summit. My right knee starts to jab and I remove all strapping, apply deep heat, swallow ibuprofen and re-strap my knees. At the summit I meet with the guys that I saw taking the steeper route. They beat me by just ten minutes. The wind is now stronger, the air cooler. At first I welcome this until I hear the sinister sound of thunder rumbling around. I prepare for abandonment – being tall on tall mountains is not the best of combinations.

I consider leaving the last four but elect to press on: if I did pull out it would cost a day to return and a lot more ascent to regain the ridge.

I make Y Llethr at 1445, and move my waterproofs to the top of my pack for the imminent need. Welsh farmers are obsessed with building walls and I hug the ones following the ridge as the thunder and lightning crack overhead. The going is now much easier and I can retain a pace. I take in Crib-Y-Rhiw then Diffwys. Translated this means precipice and very aptly it is named too. Its eastern flank just falls away, fantastic views all round and a lovely stone built trig point. About eight guys join me and proceed to add to the wind with their own variety, each attempting to out trump the other. One takes off his pack and places it on the ground, it off it starts to slip towards the precipice. He catches it in time.

I climb back over the wall and make for the final summit, Diffwys West Top. A late afternoon breeze keeps me company. From a distance it looks lower than some neighbours but the optical trick is soon revealed. I descend to the water of Llyn Bodlyn and follow the track awhile before cutting up over the beallach and down to the road and the mile walk back to my car to complete a twelve-hour day.

I'm glad I still have my tenacity. I could easily have pulled out earlier in the day; I feel that I was a bit of a wimp at Easter.

A Day Off

[May 12th and, after my twelve-hour epic of yesterday, I decide to have a rest day. Always one to support a local business I optimistically visited the Llan Ffestiniog store. Picking up a strategically placed basket, outside the shop, I enter. Any local would know not to use a basket. The shop was narrow and short. The shelves sparse and it takes me fifteen minutes to find things to save the embarrassment of having walked around with a basket – two cans of soup and a mars bar.

Having eaten lunch I decided to see if I can find the cottage we had for our last two family holidays in. This was in 1981 then 1982, the cottage inherited by a work colleague of my mother's. I'd asked my parents of the location before setting out on this trip. They were a little unsure.

"Was it near Llandrillo?" I asked.

"Yes, I think you are right," replied mum, "it did start with a double ell."

Dad and I gave one another a look that only a father and son could.

We plumped on Pennant on a minor road out of Llandrillo and this is where I aim for. Turning on to the minor road potholes, ruts and loose stone hinder my progress. It's not been resurfaced since I was last here. Half way down and I find that the local authority is of the same opinion as the road is closed, a sign saying just last week. How unlucky am I? My first visit back for twenty-six years and this is the time they've chosen to resurface it. The road reminds me of the holidays. The place was an eccentric time warp, two wooden army huts joined to form a T and a rather large single storey house. It had been furnished in the 1940s and had remained untouched. We found a tin of plum pudding in a cupboard dated 1948. But what has remained with me was a sadness. My mother's colleague's brother had been killed in 1940, at the age of 16, in the merchant navy – his ship sunk by Germany. His aura still touched the place - photos, possessions and citations. As I was 16, at an age where death felt more terrifying than taxes, I dwelt on it a lot. On the good side the place had an old record player and a pile of 1960s singles. I even stripped the player down and cleaned every component to get a better sound. My family must have got fed up with my repeated playing of the 1962 hit, "Let's Dance" by Chris Montez and the Dusty Springfield hit "You don't have to say you love me...". , The love of the music of this era has remained with me to this day and it always makes me think of that cottage.

On turning around, from my thwarted visit, I set north for an evening in Llandudno with Sandra, Alan and daughter Megan. Megan, just five years old, promptly draws my portrait. Every limb is out of proportion with head too big for the body. Yet the receding hairline she draws to perfection. It is a good evening and Sandra and Alan get maps and guidebooks out. I've been looking for a guide for Tryfan and Grib Goch. With maps spread out on the lounge floor Sandra and I discuss routes while Alan searched the Internet for guides.

May 13th and another beautiful day dawns and with it comes an urge to get up on the mountains. It had been a tough call to take yesterday off but, even though the weather was beautiful, my body demanded rest. I elect Tyrrau Mawr and Craig-y-llyn, in the Cadair Idris range. I soon discover it is to be an easy day. A track rises from 30m to 500m giving me an ascent rate of 250m an hour. I barely stop for rests, a warm wind keeps me cool and the gradient is fine for my breathing. The Rhinogs had not been helped by not noticing that my inhaler had run out so, armed with a new one, today's ascent is aided.

At the top of the track I virtually sidestep onto the ridge for the final 160m to the summit. Fantastic views of Cadair Idris, the town of Barmouth and my next peak, Craig-y-llyn are waiting for me. The sky a rich blue, the wind warm yet moderate add to the surroundings.



The drop down and re-ascent feels easy compared with the Rhinogs of Sunday. I walk to the end of the main ridge then drop to a track that, heading northeast, takes me to the track I ascended on. My left knee starts to give trouble so I add deep heat and tighten the bindings. Arriving back at 1350, having started at 0840, I am pleased with the quick round.

May 14th dawns and, having booked a guide for tomorrow, I decide to hang back on the temptation to do the big round of Cadair Idris and its neighbours. Instead I cast my gaze further south and plump on the Tarren hills. Worried about my left knee I'm gingerly taking my first steps, on a sharp road incline, at 0750. It feels okay, I think just descending is the issue. When I had it un-strapped in the cottage it gave me pain but now it feels good enough. I turn into the forestry paths and tracks. The sky is a perfect shade of blue, streams gurgle, light dances through the trees, birds chirp and the gentle smell of pine reminds me of my Canadian summers. I ascend and zigzag, passing the old slate railway, until I reach a felled section of forest. I make a beeline for the ridge, it proves tough going with, what to the eye at the base looks like a good route, soon becomes a stumbling ground of stumps and unwanted branches. I make it to the ridge where the wind is stronger. Pulling on my fleece I make a more comfortable ascent of Tarrenhendre with the final sections across steep grassland then following a fence to reach the stunning views at 1030. Mountains all around, the sea to the west, a faultless sky and a good view of the walk I did yesterday. I deserve this!

I follow the fence and the line of the forest to head for Tarren Y Gesail. It's a fair old descent and I feel it in my left knee. I need to cross the forest to get to the

open hill of the second peak. Following a path, marked on the OS map, I become concerned as the path dwindles as the density of commercial trees increases. It gets to the point of no return, no path and no sight of where I am. I plough through the trees, their sharp needles and branches attacking my face and neck. The only way of protecting my face is to but my back to it and I have some ten minutes of reversing downhill out of a densely planted forest. I emerge, like a cork out of a bottle, into the daylight feeling very angry. I'm scratched and uncomfortable and annoyed with the forestry people for planting over a marked path. If I had a box of swan vestas with me I'd have risked the ensuing enquiry. I strip to my waist and spend time picking pine needles from my clothing.

It's then a looped ascent, first following the line of the forest then an old fence for the long old slog to the summit. Many of the posts are rotten so my handrail is intermittent. As I approach the summit a jet fighter passes, so close I can see the cockpit. I turn left onto the final ridge and across to the trig point. At 666m it's not the actual summit but I'm amused by the number of the beast. I make a short detour to pick up the true summit and return to the trig point for a rest and to drink in the fine views and to survey the route I took today.

Crib Goch

Both Crib Goch and Tryfan have filled me with fear. Guidebooks warn of exposure and scary sections and, having previously turned back from Crib Goch, I conclude that this was the time to pay for a guide. Finding a guide was the first challenge. After a few emails, texts and leaving answer phone messages Libby of Llanberis Guides called me. Suddenly it was easy, she arranged that today I'd do Grib Goch, with her showing me the way, and tomorrow I'd do Tryfan and the other three peaks that I need to get done.

It's May 15th and we meet at just after 0900 in the lay by on the Pass of Llanberis. A very fit woman, not an ounce of fat I hope she'll slow to my pace. We are soon off and walking, taking the seldom used route to Llyn Glas.

"Few walkers come this way as there are no paths marked, but as you can see it's easy going to start with," she says. "Start with" sticks with me as I gaze up to the jagged ridge of Crib Goch, silhouetting the skyline.

Libby and I chat away, finding the common ground. Spending around eight hours in somebody's company, where one is entrusting his life in the other, makes for an interesting dynamic. My mobile phone beeps, an incoming text.

"Was that you?" asks Libby.

"No it was my mobile," I reply.

She gets the humour and laughs. I turn my mobile off, I don't want it bleeping when I'm about to make a move with a vertical drop.

"You have got the rope in that pack haven't you?" I ask.

"Yes, Steve I have."

I feel bad for asking but it feels sort of important to me.

We reach Llyn Glas. A beautiful tarn, with an island, covered in vegetation that the sheep can't reach. The mountains tower on three sides and Libby points out the proposed route up the right flank to join the ridge at Bwlch Coch. This is a beautiful place with mountains hogging the pure blue skyline. We ascend well, Libby's pace just perfect for me to follow.

At Bwlch Coch it's a left turn on to the ridge and the reason I'm paying. Not just to be shown the way but to also be talked through the handholds. Polished rocks show the good places to put hands and feet as we twist and turn across the rock. No place to have a slip, long drop offs and deep gullies. People head towards us, the more classic way of tackling the ridge but Libby has listened to my need to

bag Crib Goch itself and feels this is the easiest way to the summit. It will then be my decision as to whether we complete the ridge or turn back once the mountain is claimed. A couple with a free roaming dog pass us. The dog 'Sam' needs a lot of encouragement to make his progress. I do well, just nervous at one point where a large step is required with a simultaneous twist of the body to take in the handholds. Libby has to talk me through it, my nerves taking a beating as I make the move. I'm over but have caught my right hand on the sharp rock. A minor thing but like a paper cut it bleeds well. No place to worry about first aid kits I just rub the blood into my hand and allow a few drips to worry other walkers.



We pass the 914m peak then easily get onto Crib Goch itself. "You did well," says Libby "you undersold yourself. You moved well on the rocks." "Thanks," I reply handing her my camera, "I really just brought you along to take some photos." She smiles and I add, "Really it was so you could show me the route to the top. It'd have been too easy for me to have taken a wrong turn and this is no place for a wrong turn."



She asks if I am up for the rest of the ridge. I am and we make good progress, I deal well with the exposure and we make the 921m endpoint in good time. I peer down and look at the way I attempted to ascent years ago. It's not surprising I turned back, too many options with only one good way, the preserve of those in the know, that I was paying for. I peer into the valley below, "I can see the cars," I say.

"If you look to the left you can see our route up and Llyn Glas."

"Oh yeah," I reply.

We take the north ridge off and Libby points out a face about a kilometre ahead, the opposite side of the road.

"See those climbers?"

I peer at the face and make out three people ascending the vertical pitches.

"Yes," I reply.

"I was working on that yesterday. See the climber on the right he's doing a route called Cemetery Gates and the guy, or girl, on the left is doing a pitch called Cenotaph Corner."

My left knee plays up; I can feel something moving around in it. I stop to adjust the strapping and we both bask in the sun and soak up the surroundings.

"How many days like this do you get a year?"

"Few. Very few. It's often cloudy and raining."

We hit the road. I'm able to repay Libby's tolerance and good company by inflating her flat rear tyre on her van and buying her a coffee in Llanberis.

Tryfan

Having read scare stories about Tryfan I wish to take no risks and Libby has arranged a chap, Gary to guide me today. We meet at Capel Curig, a tall Geordie chap with a gentle manner. Gary, like Libby, has never previously met somebody

doing the Welsh 2000ft mountains. We head down the pass, in both vehicles, dropping mine off and continuing in his for the short drive to the start of the walk, taking Tryfan from a northerly approach. Like with Libby we get on well, joking and ruing our political system. Grey blanket cloud gives a cool day. We climb beyond Tryfan so we can approach the final stretch from its upper southerly flank. Although exposed you'd have to be rather foolish to fall off, just one small section to navigate with a nasty drop. Then the summit plateau with strewn boulders and the famous 'Adam and Eve'; two vertical rocks, each about six feet high that form the summit. I watch a chap climb on to the highest one. I walk over to take a peek and see the drop off behind them. When he's off Gary gives me a leg up and I'm sat on the rocks I'd read about and feared.



Gary tells me of the record for running from the top of Tryfan to the tarmac of the road below. It's an unimaginable nine minutes and six seconds. One would simply be flying over the rough ground.

We eat, drink and descend. Gary, doing his paid guiding job, stays on the danger side of the one exposed section. I then proceed to take a tumble on an innocuous section and rather embarrassingly slide on scree tripping over my trekking pole and bending it into the bargain.

We ascend the steep scree slopes of Glyder Fach. A repeat mountain for me but I need to reach the newly promoted top of Castell y Gwynt – Castle of the Wind. It is a rocky outcrop that requires a scramble to ascend. I sit atop and munch some more lunch while an ever hopeful seagull joins us; giving up it swoops off in hope of sustenance elsewhere. Gary points out the interesting lichens, some bright as a yellow highlighter. Near the road they've virtually died out as car fumes have poisoned them.

We press on for Y Foel Goch, the wind now giving icy blasts in complete contrast to the week just gone. We chat away and I ask him about his guiding. He gets all

sorts of requests, always turning down ones involving children because of the overbearing child protection laws. We are of the same age; both did degrees at the same time. He tells me of the city university 'freshmen' he has to take out – a social engineering attempt to bridge the gap between home and university life by getting the youngsters to bond. "So many of them faint in injury at the first sign of tough ground."

"What's the most stupid?" I ask.

"One guy collapsed ahead of me in absolute agony, holding his groin," replies Gary. "I got to him and asked what had happened and he replied that he'd just touched his knob against an electric fence. I asked him why he'd done it and he replied because the guy next to him had told him to."

We both rue the quality of university intake and then I collapse laughing. Through my near tears I manage to say, "It's not his stupidity in doing it that's funny it's the fact he told you."

We talk further and discover we have both been on a walk before. Though it's not surprising we could not remember one another as it was the two million strong anti-war march before Blair and his bunch of crooks invaded Iraq. We pass over Gallt yr Ogof and the easy northerly drop, observing the goats grazing on the high ground. We continue to my car, which we then use to return to Gary's van.

May 17th, being the day of the FA Cup Final, I elect the straightforward round of Dduallt and Rhobell Fawr. I set out early and wind my car around to a suitable starting place. The cloud is low, the windscreen wipers on, I'm pleased for the early start. In the middle of nowhere I happen upon a traffic jam; a series of low-loader trucks containing rally cars - some event in the hills. There are marshals way ahead checking people, taking ages over each entrant as some paperwork is obviously being done. Tens of minutes drag by and I reach the head of the queue, window down I ask, "Is the road blocked, I'm going hill walking."

"Oh sugar," replies the female half of the pair of marshals.

"If the road is closed it'd have been decent to have signposted it from the main road," I say.

"The road isn't closed," replies the male half.

I compose myself, "well it does look fairly closed to me."

"Where are you going?" she asks as the man wanders off as clearly their unofficial closing of the road has been called into check. I point to the map and she tells me I can get through.

I drive on and park at the end of road below Cwm-hasgen. I don full waterproof kit, the fun of the last few days is over even though the forecast said it'd be clear today. My short sleeve shirt now sits below fleece and Gortex jacket. My cap, that protected me from the sun, replaced by one that protects me from the rain. I set off, initially up a track, passing old farmhouses that are being allowed to fall down, just some minor repairs to the roofs would save them but they are destined to be ruins. Knowing the wet would make it unwise to refer to the guidebook I closely follow my annotated map. A bridge takes me over the Afon Mawddach to keep to the track; I re-cross it via stepping stones to break for the slopes of Ddauallt and a long pull to the top. Through heather and wet ground, an old fence acts as a guide. It's a miserable sightless summit where I eat and drink water. Then on a compass bearing I head for the forest, skirt round until I find an entrance. A row of trees has gone over simultaneously in the wind, the roots and the earth all still connecting the toppled row. I pick my way through, going off track into the forest's clutches to avoid fallen trees. When I emerge it's on to a track which I follow until a decaying wall leads the way to the summit of Rhobell Fawr. A higher mountain and I struggle to find a consistent pace across the rough terrain, sometimes having to scramble through rocky sections. Four hours into the walk I tag the summit trig point and feel miserable in the rain as the icy wind

clips the back of my neck. A wall runs near to the summit and the group of sheep, huddled in its shelter, stare across to me. I descend quickly to the track on the south side of the Afon Mawddach and to the car.

Cadair Idris

May 18th and I wake early, before 0500. I feel so tired. I manage to snooze until my desire to do these mountains, coupled with good weather forecast, gets me out of bed, fed, packed and driving to the start of the Cadair Idris circuit of five 2000ft mountains. I pull up in the car park and see the signs saying no camping and no starting fires, symbolised by the activity with a red line through it. The symbol indicating smashing a car window and nipping off with the contents does not have a red line through it. Presumably a local by-law allows such activity.

At 0750, with compass aligned I swing round in the car park and point it directly at the sign for Cadair Idris. Perhaps I'm being too fastidious for this popular tourist route. I set off, climbing the well made steps yet I feel tired. Dog tired. I ache through and through and rue not taking the wet yesterday as a rest day. I rest often, press on often, sit down often, sip water often. I can't shake it off so am pleased for the marked path. That is until I reach a fork, Cwm Cau to the left and Mynydd Moel to the right. It's just like driving through a British town. You are following the signs for a place then it dumps you at a junction with different signs you've no clue of. I revert to compass and follow the cwm signs and rest before the path branches to the high ground around to Craig Cwm Amarch. Cwm is Welsh for a valley and when Everest was being mapped they borrowed this Gaelic word, hence the Western Cwm on Everest. Here, on mediocre terrain, I get chatting to an older chap, he's doing the Cambrian Way which stretches from Cardiff in the south to Conwy in the north. It's good to connect with a likeminded sort and I hope when I'm his age I'm still able to venture into the hills. I press on up the long pull and experience the beauty of the Llyn Cau. Nestled in the horseshoe of the Cadair Idris Mountains it sparkles blue in the sun. I stand and admire, with the mountains like a group of men admiring a debutant.



My knees ache. I stop and rub in deep heat, tighten the strapping and take Ibuprofen. I reach Craig Cwm Amarch, rest and catch up with the Cambrian Way man. Then a drop down and ascent up much of Cadair Idris before branching northwest and out to do Cyfwry. The views are stunning, out to sea in the west, Llyn y Cadair in a drop to the north and Cadair Idris itself to the northeast. To my south are Tyrrau and Craig-y-llyn that I climbed just five days ago. I make Cyfwry at around 1120, good going given I feel so tired. Many people are now around, a change from the lonely hills I've been experiencing. The nice weather lifts me and I start to feel less tired. I find the pull up Cadair Idris easier. I meet the Cambrian Way man for the last time before resting at the white trig point of the summit. A shelter is perched a few feet below. I peer in, a large group of people, having taken residence, peer back. An icy wind chills my neck as I make good pace, keeping to the right of the sheer cliff, towards Mynydd Moel. The route pans out ahead and I take the summit in, followed by the lesser peak of Gau Graig which I reach at 1330. I keep looking back to the sweep and splendour of the mountains just completed then it's down to the road – a long way down. I pick a careful route which eventually has me out on the A road. I keep to the right edge; most cars give me a wide birth. I raise a hand in acknowledgement to any car that breaks the centre line for me. I flick a V sign at a car that comes way too close. Here I am, pushing forty-three and still flicking the V sign, I regret my behaviour. I'm glad when I reach the branch off onto the old road, if the driver comes back he will not be able to find me. I make the car at 1535.

May 19th and although waking early I find it hard to get out of bed. A deep fatigue keeps me under the quilt until it's countered by the urge to complete the Welsh two thousand foot mountains. By now I sense they are within reach to complete.

I drive south and play the game of 'hunt the start point' from the village of Aberllefenni. Things don't tie with the guidebook. I start by following the track, next to a field studies centre. This soon fades to the edge of a wood with no obvious path on. I cut down to a track to find it's the road I've parked on. I drive

on a little further and pick a track marked on the OS map. I make good progress, climbing steadily into the warming morning sun until a doubt causes me to check GPS. It places me on a trackless hillside to the east of where I want to be, yet I'm stood firmly on the track. With the guidebook, map and GPS disagreeing I'm left with the casting vote. I trust the GPS and take a bearing and head uphill through a field of bemused sheep. Making the skyline I stare ahead into the doom of an impassable forest and to my left a steep drop to the track where I should be. It's a hard pill to swallow to lose hard won height but I have no choice. I head down the steep slope, protecting my knees as I go, to the corner of the forest where it meets the track. I then follow the track via old slate workings, admiring the decaying buildings made of right-angled slate blocks. From here I could return to the suggestions of the guidebook, but this takes in forestry tracks that could have changed.

Climbing steeply along a southwest spur I zigzag to ease the gradient. Taking a few deep breaths, to alleviate my mind's worry over the drop, I look to the forest across the valley to my left. Above it are the final two peaks of the day and I keep an eye on the tracks through the trees, working backwards plotting my route out as it unfolds parallel to my current ascent. It's an age to make the ridge but when I do the gradient eases and I follow a fence across a couple of minor tops until I reach the steep drop off known as Craig Portas. A little nerve is required to follow the narrow access way to flanks of Maesglase and its fairly featureless top. I return to Craig Portas and follow the northwest connecting ground for the long pull up to Cribin Fawr. I'm glad to be free of the steeper drops and arrive at its tussock riddled summit with no obvious conclusion as to which is the true highest point. I circle, visiting each bump until I'm certain the mountain has been claimed. I feel a spot of rain in the air as I survey the route already taken.

It's a quick decent then a sharp incline, following a fence, to make the attractive trig point of Waun-oer – six hours into my day. I see clearly my route of yesterday with the final ridge drop off and return to the road. I sit awhile and look around. A chill has me reaching for my fleece as sadness descends. I realise that in any gain there comes a loss. I doubt I'll ever sit here again, doubt I'll ever experience this mountain or precise view again. In doing these mountains one gains so much yet part of life passes by in the conquering of each. This sadness stays with me as I drop back to the low point, between Cribin Fawr and Waun-oer, and descend a slate streambed, picking up the forestry track for the two hour walk out. New trees give a wide view then mature pine hides all but the blue sky and the sadness stays with me, I sense a goodbye happening. I've enjoyed Wales but my two thousand foot mountains are fast running out, as is my reason for coming. It feels like the departure at the end of a wedding reception where people who seldom see one another, or have just become acquainted, make never to be upheld promises to call by "if they are ever passing." Everyone knows the words are hollow yet necessary to soften the sadness of the goodbye.

May 20th and, having cricked my neck while rolling over in bed, I plan this as a semi rest day with just the interruption of the newly promoted peak of Carnedd y Filiast North Top. Having previously done the circuit including Carnedd y Filiast itself I spy a route from a high parking place from the minor roads to the north of Llanberis. It's so easy, following a long track and a path with a kind gradient, that I'm up and down in two hours. It feels a little like taking the low hurdle yet this newly promoted peak, after a resurveying of its ascent and re-ascent, could have been taken in on a previous walk if the initial its status had been known about.

I'm due to meet with Sandra again in Llandudno. I'm early off the hills so retire to Llanberis to buy a postcard and a coffee. Queuing behind an old lady, of at least

eighty, she turns to me and starts to speak. After a second or so she says, "Oh, I'm sorry I thought you were my husband."

I can not resist, "Madam," I reply, "either you have a very young husband or you have just insulted me."

I drive over to Sandra's and we go out for lunch. I'm introduced to a new concept of collecting a child from school. For Megan, Sandra and Alan's five-year-old daughter, Mummy's friend coming along to collect her is an adventure. For me I'm trying to blend in and not cause any "questions to be asked". "Don't worry, Steve," says Sandra, "I feel odd too, I'm older than some of these children's grandmothers."

We have a nice evening, the company is good. Living on my own, working on my own, holidaying on my own and walking in the mountains on my own has its freedoms but also its costs.

May 21st and I wake very early, make sandwiches and head north beyond Betws y Coed to take the minor road to the Llyn Colwyd reservoir. This is a steep minor road, where my fuel gauge alarmingly drops back as the diesel tilts in the tank, the road disappearing as the angle of my bonnet hides the immediate tarmac, and the pong of the clutch has me wondering what permanent damage is being done. The narrow road twists and turns, sharp bends on unbelievable cambers and gradients rarely gets me out of first gear.

I park at the very end of the road; I can see the dam of the reservoir to my left with a distinctly unattractive riveted steel pipe heading from it to feed unknown taps in faraway anonymous households.

I'm walking at 0725, my earliest start of this trip. A short track takes me to the dam and then a long pull up Creigau Gleision North Top. I hope to meet the fence that plots the way to the summit but, after squelching through marshy ground, do not pick it up until I'm only 100m from the summit. The backs of my leg have pulled tight between the ankle and the calf muscles. I use deep heat to free them. I make the first summit at 0850 and admire the spreading surroundings. The horseshoe walk around the reservoir is before me, further Tryfan, with its rigid back, introduces The Glyders with Snowdon behind. I press on over the broad heather ridge to Creigau Gleision and, with some minor scrambling, Craiglwyn beyond. It's then a sharp drop to the west end of the reservoir before the slog up Pen Llithrig-y-wrachon. My altimeter, counting me down to an 1130 arrival, keeps me company before a cold wind greets me at the top.



I take the long, parallel to the reservoir, northeast ridge until I spy the road I drove in on. I turn right crossing rough ground, until I hit the track back to the car where, after my five and a half hours in the hills, the smell of the brakes replaces the smell of the clutch.

I wake on the 22nd, the forecast of rain has not yet hit but I don't sense the need to get going for my penultimate day in the hills. The main road is quite close to the cottage so, even with a late start, I'm walking at 0815. An initial short stretch on the road then a pull up through trees and I follow a useful track to reach the flanks of Carnedd y Filiast. This is to be the second of the day as it's easier to initially bypass, walk out to Waun Garnedd-y-Filiast then follow the fence line to the first summit. As I pass the flanks I see a rare thing – another walker. Initially I think there are two but realise the slab of slate marking the summit looks as if he has company. He is descending my way so I wait for a chat. Not only is he another walker in the hills, all but extinct save for the popular routes, he's also here finishing off his Welsh 2000ft peaks. Just fifteen for him to do he's bagging Waun Garnedd-y-Filiast, which he'd previously missed, having been promoted between the first and second editions of the Nuttall's guidebook. The third edition is not yet out but will surely include the two extra that I've had to do. It's a great chat, Kevin Guest is an interesting chap and very pleased to know I'm on my penultimate day.

I set off alone, unlikely to see another soul all day. I take in Waun Garnedd-y-Filiast, Carnedd y Filiast then Carnedd Llechwedd-llyfn. I branch out a little as another peak looks higher. By my altimeter it's two meters lower but to the eye appears higher. I head back towards the fence then survey Arenig Fach in the distance. It looks a long way off and massive. At only a few meters higher than where I'm standing it's hard to accept that some visual deception is taking place.

I drop down, following the fence, crossing the stream then taking the hard heather clad slog of the flanks of this mountain. I curse the guidebook for

suggesting this route. It's not the best, the heather is draining on my energy and I don't know where I'm placing each foot as it drops out of sight. A rock is an island to aim for, a place of sanctuary for a moments rest. As the gradient increases my annoyance and discomfort grow. I find a fence that I use as a much needed handrail. It soon gives up and I'm again alone working my way to the summit where I'm rewarded by cairn, shelter and rain. It's taken over three hours from the last peak, a long slog but I'm blessed that it was not through wet heather. I descend more heather clad slopes to the road and a long walk to the car to complete the seven and a half hour round. I think the guidebook author's were keen to make this a circular route; Arenig Fach needed to be approached by any angle but this.

The Last One

I wake early on May 23rd and it feels like I'm going on a date. My last Welsh 2000ft mountain deserves this treatment. Shower, shaved, best and clean walking kit and, after the drive over, I'm walking at 0715. Few dates start this early, good ones end this early.

Climbing the forestry track, from Rhyd-Ddu, it fades to a path, then a sharp incline to a ladder style. Open ground includes a sharp incline up the nose to the east of Craig y Bera. Steep enough for the path to be a series of earth carved steps as hill walker after hill walker has placed boot on the very same points. Though this is my first foray into the hills without boots - I'm trying out some new Meindl hill shoes. They are like trainers but with a stiff sole and waterproof upper. Not wishing to risk tried and tested technology until my last hill, I'm wondering whether I'm going to fully get to grips with the lightweight revolution.



I continue on the steep ground until the curve to the summit, Mynydd Mawr opens out in front of me. It's a large curve swinging out to the left, rising all the time to the summit. The wind rises too and it's a chill walk around to the top. A

hundred feet short of the summit I stop and look around. Snowdon standing proudly, shafts of sun rays pouring through the cloud lighting up the undulations of the distant ridges. The Nantlle Ridge, bagged last year, to the south. I get my camera out, capture the scene then switch to video. I speak into it as I record my last few steps. I'm alone, I decided it to be this way. I'd thought about a summit party, as I did for the Munros, but recently a friend pointed out to me that I tend to focus too much on outcomes and that I don't enjoy the passage - one of those passing comments that got me thinking of my own life path and passage. If I'd organised a party I'd have been focussing too much on the outcome and, likely, trying the impossible of keeping everybody happy. Alone feels best or perhaps to celebrate with a sheep! I remember all those day trips to South Wales and weekend trips to North Wales. Lonely times on the motorway, nights in tents. It's been worth it.

I'm also making a double celebration as not only is this my 190th and final Welsh 2000ft mountain I reckon it's also my 500th British mountain. I chatter this into the microphone as I reach the summit and celebrate at 0908.

I sit awhile, admire the surrounds and send a text to family and friends: "Hi All, I'm sat on top of Mynydd Mawr my 190th and final 2000ft Welsh mountain. It is also, by chance, my 500th British mountain. It is a bit cold and windy but a good view of everything and even Snowdon has its head out of the clouds. Cheers Steve."

Jerry Webb calls and we have a good chat as he congratulates me.

Jane Brown: Well done. Enjoy the moment. Have a glass of sparkling mineral water on us! Jane X and Yv.

Liz Barker: Must b magical! What a gr8 feelg it must b.

Gisella Storm: Hi Steve. That is fantastic. CONGRATULATIONS. ☺ I'm very proud of you. I wish that I was there to meet you at the 'base camp' to celebrate. Love and hugs, G XOX

MA Harper. Well done!

Mum. Well done glad ok and on top of world.

Amanda Seymour. Very jealous - well done!

Sue Oxley: Well done Steve! What next?

Ali Ogden: Well done. u r barking mad of course! It would b terribly boring to be sane though

Andy Glover: Steve, Congratulations on your achievement! Cheers Andy

Alan Sloman: Well done sir!

Kate Wilson: Congrats. What will you do next?

Kate Mackenzie: Well done you! I'm full of admiration.

Nick Green: Wo that's where you have been then!

Gary (the Tryfan guide): Nice one Steve.

Rona Waldon: Steve, that's fantastic. Love Rona.

Glynn Seymour: Yeah, well I got donuts, :-P

Epilogue

It's September 19th 2008 and I'm sat at home watching Hitchcock's 'The Wrong Man'. A text from Ali Ogden arrives: "Oh no another Welsh 2000fter". I press pause and amble to my computer. She is right, today Mynydd Graig Goch, previously 1988ft after more than 7,000 readings, has been resurveyed at 2,000ft and six inches. If only they could have done it when the tide was in. I read the news report online:

At 1,988ft, Mynydd Graig Goch in Snowdonia was always classed as a hill because it fell just two feet short of the requisite height for a mountain.

Three Welsh volunteers decided to challenge the status quo and, using state-of-the-art satellite equipment to carry out more than 7,000 readings, concluded that its actual height was 2,000ft and six inches.

And of course my old adversary Myrddyn Phillips was part of the resurveying party.

On November 13th I travel up to the Lake District 'Over The Hill Club' AGM and break my journey with a night in Caernarfon and an evening having a meal with Sandra, Alan and Megan

The following day I set off from the hotel, park near the transmitter and am walking at a shade before 0850. I've slept badly; a chap in an adjoining room, separated by a paper-thin wall, had his TV on loud and made mobile calls until the early hours.

The walk is straightforward with the only obstacle being a wall to climb on the final summit approach. At 0955 I've finished them again and my black fleece turns grey with the light mist as I check the GPS. It confirms a shade over 2000ft. I send just a couple of texts to share this formality with family and friends. I descend and reach my car at 1100 for the trip to the Lake District.

Totals to date: 191 out of 191

2018

It's March 2018 and, after just returning from a walking trip to New Zealand, I start to plan my summer trip to continue to bag the Scottish 2000ft to 3000ft mountains – my new project since completing the Nuttalls.

A chance look at the Nuttalls website informs me that, since completing, Craig Gwaun Taf has been promoted and Cadair Bronwen North-east Top, Moelwyn Mawr North Ridge and Carnedd y Ddelw demoted.

This leaves me with a quandary. The promotion of Craig Gwaun Taf (confirmed by Myrddyn Phillips) is on a walk I've done numerous times. Indeed the Nuttalls website states, "And the good news is that anyone who has done walk 13.1 in Volume 1 of The Mountains of England and Wales has already climbed it - the path goes right over the summit!"

However, another website describes the summit as, "knoll by edge of crag". I recall the path is a few feet from the edge of the crag. And, although I refer to Myrddyn Phillips as my adversary, I'm just a stickler for accuracy as I imagine him to be.

On the 13th of June I make the three hour trip to the Brecon Beacons and get walking, from the high ground of the carpark on the A470 at around 1130. Within an hour I'm on the summit of Craig Gwaun Taf taking in the fine views sitting below a clouded sky.

The grid reference for the summit is SO 00553 20725. I wander about, with GPS in hand, and find the small knoll is within a meter of what my GPS is stating. And technically the summit is just off the path. I'm glad I came back to properly stand on it.

Totals to date: 189 out of 189

Appendix 1: The Walks & Mountains

Number	Mountain	Height	Date
1	Moel Siabod	2861	08/05/1999
2	Fan Frynych	2064	24/11/2001
3	Craig Cerrig-gleisiad	2064	24/11/2001
4	Fan Fawr	2408	24/11/2001
5	Fan Llia	2073	24/11/2001
6	Fan Nedd	2175	02/12/2001
7	Fan Fraith	2192	02/12/2001
8	Fan Gyhirych	2379	02/12/2001
9	Post Gwyn	2182	12/01/2002
10	Black Mountain South Top	2090	13/01/2002
11	Black Mountain	2306	13/01/2002
12	Twmpa	2231	13/01/2002
13	Rhos Dirion	2339	27/01/2002
14	Chwarel y Fan	2228	27/01/2002
15	Bache Hill	2001	09/02/2002
16	Black Mixen	2133	09/02/2002
17	Great Rhos	2165	09/02/2002
18	Crib y Ddysgl	3494	12/09/2002
19	Snowdon (Also climbed in 1976, 1988, 1989 and 2017)	3560	12/09/2002
20	Y Lliwedd	2946	12/09/2002
21	Y Lliwedd East Peak	2930	12/09/2002
22	Lliwedd Bach	2684	12/09/2002
23	Gallt y Wenallt	2031	12/09/2002
24	Pen Cerrig-calch	2300	13/03/2003
25	Pen Allt-mawr	2359	13/03/2003
26	Pen Twyn Glas	2119	13/03/2003
27	Mynydd Llysiau	2175	13/03/2003
28	Waun Fach	2661	13/03/2003
29	Pen y Gadair Fawr	2625	13/03/2003
30	Pen Twyn Mawr	2159	13/03/2003
31	Allt Lwyd	2146	24/09/2003
32	Waun Rydd	2523	24/09/2003
33	Bwlch y Ddwyallt	2474	24/09/2003
34	Cefn Yr Ystrad	2024	24/09/2003
35	Corn Du	2864	27/03/2004
36	Pen y Fan	2907	27/03/2004
37	Cribyn	2608	27/03/2004
38	Fan y Big	2359	27/03/2004
39	Y Gyrrn	2031	27/03/2004
40	Fan Hir	2497	28/06/2004
41	Fan Brycheiniog	2631	28/06/2004
42	Picws Du	2457	28/06/2004
43	Waun Lefrith	2221	28/06/2004
44	Garreg Las	2083	28/06/2004
45	Garreg Lwyd	2021	28/06/2004
46	Moel Penamnen	2034	11/09/2004
47	Manod Mawr North Top	2159	11/09/2004

Number	Mountain	Height	Date
48	Allt-fawr	2290	12/09/2004
49	Manod Mawr	2169	13/09/2004
50	Pen yr ole Wen	3209	15/09/2004
51	Carnedd Dafydd	3425	15/09/2004
52	Yr Elen	3156	15/09/2004
53	Carnedd Llewelyn	3491	15/09/2004
54	Pen yr Helgi Du	2733	15/09/2004
55	Moel Druman	2218	16/09/2004
56	Ysgafell Wen	2205	16/09/2004
57	Ysgafell Wen North Top	2195	16/09/2004
58	Ysgafell Wen Far North Top	2133	16/09/2004
59	Cnicht	2260	17/09/2004
60	Cnicht North Top	2251	17/09/2004
61	Moel-yr-hydd	2126	17/09/2004
62	Moelwyn Mawr North Ridge Top (ii)	2119	17/09/2004
63	Moelwyn Mawr	2526	17/09/2004
64	Craigysgafn	2260	17/09/2004
65	Moelwyn Bach	2329	17/09/2004
66	Foel Meirch	2625	18/09/2004
67	Tal y Fan	2001	21/09/2004
68	Carnedd y Ddelw (iii)	2257	21/09/2004
69	Drum	2526	21/09/2004
70	Pen y Castell	2044	21/09/2004
71	Craig Eigiau	2411	23/09/2004
72	Llwytmor	2785	25/09/2004
73	Foel-fras	3091	25/09/2004
74	Garnedd Uchaf	3038	25/09/2004
75	Foel Grach	3202	25/09/2004
76	Bera Mawr	2605	25/09/2004
77	Bera Bach	2648	25/09/2004
78	Drosgl	2487	25/09/2004
79	Gyrn Wigau	2110	25/09/2004
80	Moel Fferna	2067	28/05/2005
81	Gorllwyn	2011	10/06/2005
82	Drygarn Fawr	2103	10/06/2005
83	Y Garn	2244	11/06/2005
84	Pumlumon Fawr	2467	11/06/2005
85	Pumlumon Fach	2178	11/06/2005
86	Pen Pumlumon Llygad-bychan	2385	11/06/2005
87	Pumlumon Arwystli	2431	11/06/2005
88	Pen y Garn	2001	11/06/2005
89	Glyder Fach	3261	25/07/2005
90	Glyder Fawr	3278	25/07/2005
91	Elidir Fawr	3031	26/07/2005
92	Mynydd Perfedd	2664	26/07/2005
93	Carnedd Y Filiast	2694	26/07/2005
94	Foel-goch	2726	26/07/2005
95	Y Garn	3107	26/07/2005
96	Llechog	2356	27/07/2005
97	Moel Cynghorion	2211	27/07/2005
98	Foel Gron	2064	27/07/2005
99	Moel Eilio	2382	27/07/2005

Number	Mountain	Height	Date
100	Pen Bwlch Llandrillo Top	2037	27/08/2005
101	Cadair Bronwen North-east Top (i)	2297	27/08/2005
102	Cadair Bronwen	2575	27/08/2005
103	Cadair Berwyn	2713	27/08/2005
104	Cadair Berwyn New Top	2723	27/08/2005
105	Moel Sych	2713	27/08/2005
106	Moel yr Ewig	2280	27/08/2005
107	Godor North Top	2215	27/08/2005
108	Godor	2228	27/08/2005
109	Mynydd Tarw	2234	28/08/2005
110	Foel Wen South Top	2254	28/08/2005
111	Foel Wen	2267	28/08/2005
112	Tomle	2434	28/08/2005
113	Yr Aran	2451	16/07/2007
114	Moel Hebog	2569	17/07/2007
115	Moel yr Ogof	2149	17/07/2007
116	Moel Lefn	2093	17/07/2007
117	Y Garn	2077	19/07/2007
118	Mynydd Drws-y-coed	2280	19/07/2007
119	Trum y Ddysgl	2326	19/07/2007
120	Mynydd Tal-y-mignedd	2142	19/07/2007
121	Craig Cwm Silyn	2408	19/07/2007
122	Garnedd-goch	2297	19/07/2007
123	Foel Cwm Sian Llwyd	2126	11/08/2007
124	Pen y Boncyn Trefeilw	2119	11/08/2007
125	Stac Rhos	2067	11/08/2007
126	Cefn Gwyntog	2018	11/08/2007
127	Cyrniau Nod	2188	11/08/2007
128	Y Groes Fagl	2162	11/08/2007
129	Foel Goch	2011	12/08/2007
130	Trum y Gwragedd	2008	12/08/2007
131	Foel y Geifr	2054	12/08/2007
132	Llechwedd Du	2014	25/08/2007
133	Foel Rhudd	2162	25/08/2007
134	Esgeiriau Gwynion	2201	25/08/2007
135	Foel Hafod-fynydd	2260	25/08/2007
136	Moel y Cerrig Duon	2051	25/08/2007
137	Aran Fawddwy	2969	26/08/2007
138	Erw y Ddafad-ddu	2861	26/08/2007
139	Aran Benllyn	2904	26/08/2007
140	Gwaun y Llwyni	2247	26/08/2007
141	Waun Camddwr	2037	26/08/2007
142	Glasgwm	2599	26/08/2007
143	Pen y Bryn-fforchof	2247	26/08/2007
144	Pen y Allt Uchaf	2034	27/08/2007
145	Gwaun Lydan	2073	27/08/2007
146	Moel Ysgyfarnogod	2044	22/03/2008
147	Foel Penolau	2014	22/03/2008
148	Foel Goch	2005	08/05/2008
149	Arenig Fawr	2802	09/05/2008
150	Arenig Fawr South Top	2743	09/05/2008
151	Arenig Fawr South Ridge Top	2336	09/05/2008

Number	Mountain	Height	Date
152	Moel Llyfnant	2464	09/05/2008
153	Foel Boeth	2021	09/05/2008
154	Gallt Y Daren	2031	09/05/2008
155	Y Garn	2064	10/05/2008
156	Rhinog Fawr	2362	11/05/2008
157	Rhinog Fach	2336	11/05/2008
158	Y Llethr	2480	11/05/2008
159	Crib-y-rhiw	2198	11/05/2008
160	Diffwys West Top	2461	11/05/2008
161	Diffwys	2106	11/05/2008
162	Tyrrau Mawr	2169	13/05/2008
163	Craig-y-llyn	2041	13/05/2008
164	Tarrenhendre	2080	14/05/2008
165	Tarren y Gesail	2188	14/05/2008
166	Crib Goch	3028	15/05/2008
167	Tryfan	3002	16/05/2008
168	Castell y Gwynt	3189	16/05/2008
169	Y Foel Gogch	2641	16/05/2008
170	Gallt yr Ogof	2503	16/05/2008
171	Dduallt	2172	17/05/2008
172	Rhobell Fawr	2408	17/05/2008
173	Craig Cwm Amarch	2595	18/05/2008
174	Cyfrwy	2661	18/05/2008
175	Cadair Idris	2930	18/05/2008
176	Mynydd Moel	2831	18/05/2008
177	Gau Graig	2241	18/05/2008
178	Waun-oer	2198	19/05/2008
179	Cribn Fawr	2162	19/05/2008
180	Maesglase	2218	19/05/2008
181	Carnedd Y Filiast North Top	2365	20/05/2008
182	Pen Llithrig-y-wrach	2621	21/05/2008
183	Craiglwyn	2044	21/05/2008
184	Creigiau Gleision	2224	21/05/2008
185	Creigiau Gleision North Top	2080	21/05/2008
186	Waun Garnedd-y-filiast	2133	22/05/2008
187	Carnedd y Filiast	2195	22/05/2008
188	Carnedd Llechwedd-llyfn	2110	22/05/2008
189	Arenig Fach	2260	22/05/2008
190	Mynydd Mawr	2290	23/05/2008
191	Mynydd Graig Goch	2000	14/11/2008
192	Craig Gwaun Taf (iv)	2711	13/06/2018

Post Completion Changes:

- (i) Cadair Bronwen North-east Top was later demoted as having an insufficient drop all round.
- (ii) Moelwyn Mawr North Ridge was demoted on 05/08/2015 as having an insufficient drop all round.
- (iii) Carnedd y Ddelw was demoted on 31/05/2017 as having an insufficient drop all round.
- (iv) Craig Gwaun Taf was added on 12/11/2016.