

SNOWDON TO PUMLUMON

- A challenge accomplished solo on 24/25 May 2003.

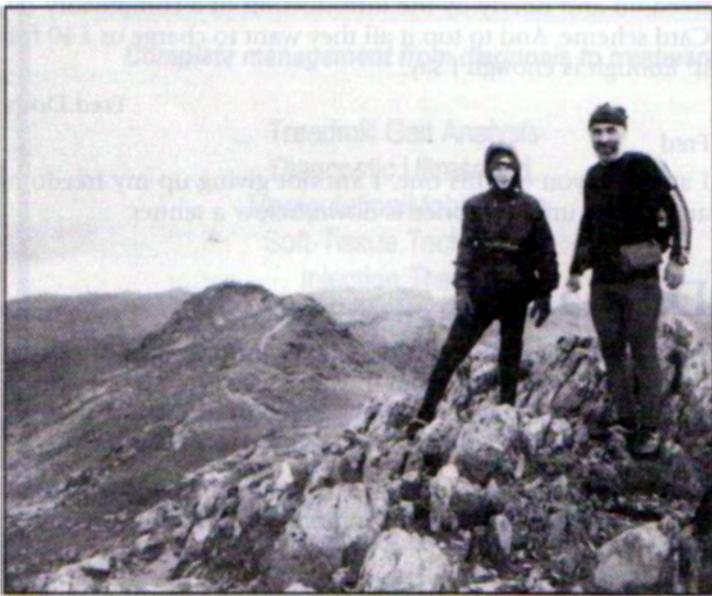
by Yiannis Tridimas

According to legend Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon), Cadair Idris and Pumlumon are the three chief mountains of Wales. They are lined up in more or less a straight line from north to mid-Wales. A couple of years ago I got the idea of a linear run joining all three of them. As those who like to indulge in long distance events know, the best part of such challenges is the reconnaissance stage. I spent many happy hours sorting out the route, and in the process visiting Pumlumon for the first time. I decided to include only the largest hills along the way and avoided roads as much as possible although a few miles of tarmac had to be allowed in.

I made a solo attempt on 21st April 2003, which for a number of reasons ended at Cadair Idris after about 21 hours. I then went back and refined parts of the route and decided on the next attempt date as Saturday the 24th May.

On Friday I stayed at Nant-y-moch overnight and was joined in the morning by Wayne and his fledgling fell runner son Karl. Wayne provided transport to the start. I left food and drinks at four road crossings and arrived at Pen-y-pass just in time for a mid-day start. Wayne was to stay in the area and do spot checks wherever he chose but was under oath not to be at road crossings as this could tempt a weak and battered me into giving up easily. This way I would have to get to Nant-y-moch to my van come what may. As Wynn Cliff put it....."NO offers of lifts unless it's to recover your body or remove it to hospital".

Although I had the benefit of fully supported challenges in the past, I have in recent years developed a liking for solo attempts. Carrying a light sack with some food and drink and essential gear I set off up Snowdon expecting the whole thing to take me well over 24 hours but secretly hoping to be able to do sub-24 hours between the tops of Snowdon and Pumlumon. The weather was fairly mild and overcast and the tops shrouded in cloud. Rain soon came and it became a deluge as I was descending towards Nant Gwynant. At the top of Cnicht I met Wayne and Karl. This and the next two hills were clear but rain showers continued through the day. The ground was heavy with water.



Yiannis and Karl on the summit of Cnicht
(Photo Yiannis Tridimas)

I find runnable stretches hard and the long slog between Manod Mawr and Arenig Fawr seemed endless. Most of the route is on open fell or on rights of way but the temptation for a couple of shortcuts through private land could not be entirely resisted. As I was taking one of those shortcuts on approaching Arenig Fawr, close to a farm, the farmer appeared leading his flock of a few hundred sheep and with all his dogs in attendance. I ducked down and sat there for

about five minutes taking an enforced rest. This was then followed by a sprint to rejoin the path as soon as the farmer was a safe distance away.

Arenig Fawr was clear for a while but as I started ascending the cloud came down. Two figures appeared hurrying along a contour below the cloud line. I found out later it was Wayne and Karl, who were skirting round the mountain below some crags on their way to the top to meet me. I got to the trig point before they did and we never met. At the next road crossing I had a sit down meal of hot soup from my flask deposited there. I put on an extra layer and headed up the path to the Arans, which were under thick cloud. It was quite dark and drizzling. I chose this as the night section since it is fairly straightforward to navigate although it can be quite slow in the dark due to the large amount of rock and a very boggy descend towards Glasgwm.

I had a brief meeting with Wayne at the road before ascending Maen Du - the steepest of all the climbs Daybreak came just before the next hill. My progress up Cadair Idris was quite good and I was in good spirits. The mist on the top was thick and my only concern was finding the gully on the precipitous south side of the big mountain for a swift descent. It all went to plan and soon I was starting the climb up Tarren-y-Gesail thirteen minutes behind my schedule. The long treck through sheltered forest tracks was followed by pretty stormy weather at the top of this little known hill, which on a clear day gives beautiful views of the surrounding valleys. Its smaller neighbour, Tarren Hendre, attracts more attention probably because Tarren-y-Gesail is completely surrounded by pine forests that almost forbid access to its lofty summit. On the way down to Dyfi valley I paused briefly to call home on my mobile. One hill to go but a very long way away! At the road I met Wayne and Karl and after picking up food and drink I ran through the town of Machynlleth. There is no other crossing of Afon Dyfi for miles. At the outskirts of the town I left the tarmac road and headed for the high level hill route, which involves more distance and climb than a country lane running parallel to it. It is a beautiful path through meadows and hills but now, much to my dislike, the sun was out and it felt quite hot at times. I splashed through puddles on the path to cool down and persevered. I looked at my watch as the 24 hours was up - there was still some way to go. On and on I pushed and eventually I crossed Afon Hengwm, thigh deep and pleasantly cool, to start the ascent of Pumlumon Fawr. I expected to find Wayne at the top but when I got there I was the only one on the whole mountain. The descent to Nant-y-Moch was easy underfoot, mostly on soft grass. I got to the dam quicker than I did when I reccied it some time ago.

I found this challenge to be one of the hardest ones I have done, harder than the Ramsey round I did last year. The Ramsey round has lots of hills, many of them quite rough underfoot. This challenge has fewer hills with long runnable distances in between. I must say that I prefer the first. As far as scenic beauty goes though, the Snowdon to Pumlumon route is unrivalled.

Times: Pen-y-pass to Nant-y-moch: 27:09; Snowdon to Pumlumon: 25:28

Distance: 78 miles; climb: 22,500 feet.

Rest: Approximately 20 minutes in total was spent in picking up and consuming food and drink at four road crossings.

Hills: Snowdon, Cnicht, Moelwyn Mawr, Manod Mawr, Arenig Fawr, Aran Fawddwy, Glasgwm, Maen Du, Waun Fawr, Cadair Idris (Pen y Gadair), Tarren y Cesail, Pen Pumlumon Fawr.