

THE MEIRIONNYDD ROUND

A long distance challenge in mid -Wales designed and run in 23hrs 32min by Yiannis Tridimas

It was around 1993 when I got the idea of visiting the hill groups of Aran, Cadair Idris, Rhinog and Arenig in a single outing within 24 hours. This was long before I had done the Bob Graham and Paddy Buckley rounds. I had been on those Welsh hills on many occasions, walking with friends, before I took up fell running, and felt a special attachment to the wild beauty of the area. From 1993 I spent many happy days in complete solitude, recceing hills to visit and sorting out the best routes between them. I planned a few different routes but the one selected for the attempt was one of the longest and toughest. Since the hills form a circle within the old county of Meirionnydd, I happily adopted Paddy Buckley's suggestion of naming the challenge the "Meirionnydd round".

An injury prevented me from attempting the challenge in 1997 and although not completely fit in 1998, I decided to have a go. Assembling a team of helpers was not a problem, Wynn's team are always ready for such challenges and they are the best. As very few of my friends knew the area, navigation was totally my responsibility. A schedule of 23:30 hours was drawn up and starting time was set at 10:30pm with Cadair Idris as the first section. This meant that there would be daybreak by the time the rough Rhinogs were reached.

On Friday evening 8th May we assembled at the Cross Foxes near Dolgellau, where final arrangements were made. The night was ideal; the nearly full moon was visible through the thin cloud. In the first section I was accompanied by Nick Harris, who was keen to maintain a fast pace. Progress was swift and as the outline of the hills was visible, route finding was precise. We soon arrived at our first changeover in very good spirits.

After a quick rest Ronnie Jackson and Alan Duncan accompanied me on the long footbridge over Afon Mawddach and up the first hill, whose top proved elusive for a brief moment in the dark. Progress over this, the longest section was good. Daylight came as we started our descent from Rhinog Fach. Gordon and Eileen were waiting for us at the top of the Roman steps with hot soup and other goodies and Richard Lamb took over from Alan. We swiftly traversed the wild Northern Rhinogs and soon reached our second road crossing by Trawsfynydd power station. It was now time to put shorts on and indulge in some expertly delivered leg massage by Eileen Bond.

We set off on the third section with Rob Woodall and Nick. This is a wet, boggy and heathery in parts section. Pwll Hwyaidd, the Duck Pool, was quite full and menacing, and Arenig Fach as awkward as ever, both, on the way up and most of the way down. Still making good progress and having by now gone past the middle of the round, we arrived at the third road stop.

The day was now warming up but the cloud was not giving way, something I was grateful for as I do not enjoy running in the heat. There is some real wilderness between Moel Llyfnant and the end of the section. I could have done with an anti-inflammatory tablet but we had none with us. I knew I was not eating enough and my

quads were feeling sore. Kath told me later that I was wobbling coming down the path to the next road crossing.

Not able to take much food and after some intensive massage and a painkiller we set off up the Arans with Steve Cliff, Kevin Davison and Richard Lamb for the longest climb of the round. I made slow progress up one of my favourite mountains, which is usually under cloud cover but was quite clear this time. On the way up Glasgwm we met Rob, whom wedespached to inform the road support of a change of plan. Maesglase, which was to be included in the Dyfi Forest section was to be dropped as time was getting tight. When we descended to the last road changeover point we were greeted by the whole support team.

After the usual five minute stop, it was again time to start climbing. Paddy was already at the top. Gordon Johnson and John Linley were to be my helpers in this last section and they did their best to make me take some food but I had very little appetite. Steve, Richard, Nick, Ronnie, Kevin and Rob were all there to cheer me on. At last we started our last descent as darkness was falling. My spirits were now lifting and the discomfort slowly retreating. Eileen and Graham Bond were shining their torches just above the finish to show us the way down. We soon descended to the road and a champagne celebration at the finish. It had taken me 23 hours and 32 minutes to get there. After a change of clothes and a cup of coffee I felt surprising euphoric and quite free of aches. My support team, which included my wife Kath, had done a sterling job. Thank you team, well done!

Yiannis Tridimas
16th May 1998