



**Andrew Taylor** got an idea in his head that he was going to jump from 'Eve' to 'Adam' on **Tryfan's** very narrow summit. Daunting!





# Why vegans should eat cake!

**In the chilly pre-dawn mountain air of Snowdonia, Wales, on Saturday June 5th, our ragged, sleep-deprived band of two girls and six guys gathered for some serious self-punishment. For reasons that seemed less sound with every passing minute, we'd all signed onto the Vegan 15 Peaks Challenge.**

*Text and photos: Andrew Knight*

**T**his attempt to climb all fifteen of Wales' 3,000 foot peaks in the same day was not for the faint-hearted. The official route covers 21.5 miles (35 km) and requires 9,800 feet (3,000 m) of ascent. However, this does not include the Crib Goch climb – Wales' most feared knife-edged ridge – which we would attempt first, in semi-darkness, en-route to the official start point on Mt Snowdon – Wales' highest peak. Additionally, Chloe had recently run the London Marathon, and I had broken my arm, which was

not quite healed.

Fortunately, however, we did have certain aces up our sleeves. For starters, it has to be admitted that we're not entirely rational – an essential criterion. Additionally we're all committed vegans, and hence possessed of lower average body weights, higher fitness levels and bodily antioxidant stores than average. Additionally, we'd all been training for months (except John, who was too macho to train). Finally, we'd been conscientiously stuffing ourselves with as many carbohydrates as possible (cake being my preferred form), and we had a sizeable stash of vegan sausage rolls, flapjacks, poloni, cheese and vitamin supplements – including stimulants – supplied by our kindly sponsors. (Unfortunately it's suspected that certain of the team attend these events solely for the food). Most of us also had the added motivation of fund-raising for one of several very worthy animal charities.

**Proceedingly gingerly along Crib Goch's knife-edged ridge.**





**Andrew Taylor was thrilled to have survived the ridge.**

Nevertheless, some of us had been weakened by team-mates' snoring or heavy metal drifting softly from their walkmans in the Pen y Pass youth hostel, and others by John's driving and trance music. At least the latter made Crib Goch seem a bit less scary.

After meeting with our fearless mountain guides from the veg-friendly Lupine Adventure Cooperative (who had wisely arranged their own

transport and slept elsewhere), we headed off into the pre-dawn gloom.

Far too soon the edge of Crib Goch loomed sinisterly in the mist. Fortunately, however, the improving daylight and fear of humiliation in front of other team-mates gave everyone the courage to climb higher and higher. In time our efforts were rewarded by the rising sun lifting through the sea of mist below us, bathing the ridge in beautiful dawn light. Crib Goch was clearly saving its notoriously vicious winds for the majority of climbers later in the day, so for once we didn't even have to cling precariously to the ridge, but could relax a little and enjoy the views. And these were truly stunning.



**Right: Andrew Knight just had to go higher than everyone else. Mt Snowdon is in the background.**

**Below: Lee on Crib Goch's summit.**





**Approaching the Castle of the Winds, on the Glyderrau mountain range.**

Glittering far below in the Horseshoe formed by Mt Snowdon and its neighbours was the legendary Lake Llydaw, home to the feared Afanc – a kind of demigod of the rains. Somewhere in its depths apparently also lies Excalibur, where the dying King Arthur threw it before his body was carried away by the ladies of this haunted lake. In one of the surrounding caves his knights still lie sleeping, awaiting the call to rise once more to the defence of the realm. On the other side of the ridge could be seen towns in the far distance, stretching to all the way to the coast.

After reaching Crib Goch's narrow summit, we continued along the ridge, where we had the odd experience of encountering a traffic jam at about 05:15 with another team. They had slept the night

**Andrew climbing the infamous Crib Goch.**



on Mt Snowdon, and were proceeding in the opposite direction. A little tricky negotiation was required, given that the ridge narrows to a boot-width in certain spots.

After reaching, and navigating, Crib Goch's pinnacles – with an exciting cliff beneath our path – we reached the summit of Carnedd Ugain. From there the summit of Mt Snowdon was easily reached, and shortly we stood on the top of Wales, at 3,560 feet. It was wonderful to find it virtually deserted. A few hours later it would become a teeming anthill of humanity. But by then we would be long gone...

We descended towards the valley hamlet of Nant Peris, passing a cyclist pushing his mountain bike all the way up Mt Snowdon. It was refreshing to briefly feel quite sane.

### **The Glyderrau range**

After a long descent Nant Peris was reached, followed rapidly by a brutal ascent of around 3,100 feet onto the Glyderrau mountain range, which took nearly nine hours to cross. En route



**Andrew Knight still has to be highest.**



**Standing on Cantilever.**

we admired the awesome Castle of the Winds – a spiny mass of rock rising some 200 feet into the sky, and posed for photos upon the Cantilever – a carefully balanced slab of rock that appears precarious, but has in fact withstood the elements for thousands of years.

The onset of global warming appears to be leading us to one of the hottest years on record, and we were experiencing one of the hottest days of the year. The sun beat down on us mercilessly as we climbed the rocky, dusty slopes of the Glyderrau. Soon we were all running low on water, and discussions ensued about the relative risks of resupplying from the mountain streams. I dispensed some of the water purification pills brought for just this eventuality. Unfortunately, however, one of our team had flown in from a country close to the North Pole, and after bravely battling nausea for a prolonged period he nobly decided to withdraw, to avoid slowing the team. However he completed nearly two-thirds of the route, and remains keen to try again another –hopefully cooler – day.

For the rest of us the notorious sheer summit of Tryfan loomed ahead. After scrambling high up its jagged, rocky slopes, we finally reached the summit, where we encountered Adam and Eve – two rocky pillars standing tall on the narrow summit. Two of us climbed Eve, and Andrew Taylor jumped the gap to Adam. Fortunately he's as agile as a gazelle, and completely fearless. Any fall could last for a very long time.

After descending what seemed a mile to those of us with aching knees and legs (that is, all of us), we finally reached the carpark at Lake Ogwen, where our supply car waited with wonderful supplies of water and food. Night was starting to approach so we didn't linger, but for those with the time it was an opportunity for some foot care. But most of us dared not examine our feet by that stage.

#### **The Carneddau range**

At 6 pm we crossed the valley and started our ascent of the Carneddau range. Our guides – who we suspect had been sleeping before rotating onto this shift – were fresh and keen, but we heavily outnumbered them and were able to force them to slow down. The first ascent of nearly 2,300 feet was brutal, but we clung to the knowledge it was our last major ascent. Once on top the going would be nearly flat. Or so we thought...

After summiting Pen yr Ole Wen we proceeded smoothly across the Carneddau until the summit of Carnedd Llewelyn loomed before us. Recalling the guide book, I advised that we should contour around to first climb the side summit Yr Elen. However I was outvoted, and so we proceeded to the top of Carnedd Llewelyn and dumped our packs, before heading to the side summit. To our horror we discovered it was much further than it had looked, and was separated by a steep valley. And so, lacking torches or warm gear, we raced the setting sun to the side summit, and all the way



**John on the Glyderrau.**

back – thereby managing to summit 16 times during our 15 peak course. No-one other than our grinning guides appeared to enjoy this exercise, or the fear of being caught in darkness on the mountainside. However, I do believe this places us in a superior class to normal 15 peaks teams. I'm quite sure none of them would do this voluntarily.

The final peak – Foel Fras – was now visible in the far distance, and we moved quickly to get as close as possible before complete darkness fell. We got within an hour before being forced to don our head torches. Calculations revealed that we were close to completing the official course in 17 hrs 30 mins – the time achieved previously by Pete – one of our super-fit guides. And so Iain and I ran the final few minutes, to ensure we beat Pete's time. We achieved this, by 50 seconds, which we've been trying (and are still trying) to communicate to Pete by all available means. Unfortunately he had gone home to bed (and as far as we know, is still there).

On the 1 hr 30 min slog back to the car (over yet another summit – although not a 3,000 footer) we were joined by another team. We chatted pleasantly for ages, admiring the twinkling lights of the stars above and towns below, but in my delirium the only things I can recall are that they'd slept the previous night on Mt Snowdon, and that some of them were Irish.

At the end of a roman road the cars awaited. In

total we'd covered around 43 km and ascended some 4,000 m, in 20 hours 15 mins. I kissed the car I crawled into. Unfortunately, however, the affection was not mutual, because the lengthy drive to the far end of the mountain ranges, along winding mountain roads, made me violently car-sick when we finally arrived back at Pen y Pass in our weakened states. Regrettably the night walkman-player was nowhere near at the time.

After rotating through the showers we crawled into our bunks around 2 am, where most of us slept like corpses. As I staggered out black-eyed to breakfast at 9 am, however, I encountered Kirsch, who had apparently been up for hours and had already hiked half way up Snowdon and skipped(!) back down. The only one of to live locally, her mountain training had apparently resulted in a supernaturally-fast recovery. After our first disordered breakfast we headed down to Betws y Coed for another. It's very important to carbohydrate re-load!

**Days later, the team has largely recovered, and wild plans are being hatched for future vegan adventures. You may see some of them appear on Extreme Vegan Sports website. Although I don't know what will happen next, I believe in always being prepared, and so I've already started eating as much vegan cake as I can...**

*For information or to read about vegan adventures, visit: [www.extremevegansports.org](http://www.extremevegansports.org)*