

# In search of dragons

Who on earth would attempt to climb all 15 Welsh mountains above 3,000 feet in the same day? The Extreme Vegan Sporting Association, of course. Story: Andrew Knight

Shards of golden light pierced the delicate purple of the evening clouds, as the sun waged a losing battle against the onslaught of the night. Gaps in the silken mist revealed the twinkling lights of towns far below, stretching across the plains of Wales to a distant, half-imagined sea. Directly ahead loomed the lonely summit of Foel Fras, rising like an island from the mist. But it was with sinking dread that I gazed into the depths of the yawning valley that had just revealed itself, separating us from our goal. Our torches remained in the packs we'd hidden on the last summit to save weight, and it now appeared certain night would fall before we could return to them. And so with speed born of fear we ran, staggered and slipped our way into the rocky depths, racing against our doom, oblivious to the beauty being steadily swallowed by the night.

We had begun our adventure some 18 hours earlier with much lighter hearts. At 4 am on 5 June, we'd gathered at Pen-y-Pass in the heart of Snowdonia, ready to begin our challenge. Admittedly my sleep had not been the best. Flashbacks of a teammate's uniquely thrilling driving on the winding mountain roads had somehow combined with the soft trickle of heavy metal issuing faintly from the walkman of another, hidden beneath his dreadlocks in the far corner of our youth hostel dorm.

But our packs were full of gourmet treats from our kindly vegan sponsors, our feet were wallowing luxuriously in our state-of-the-art vegan boots, our bodies were fit and strong from months of training (with the exception of a certain teammate who remains too macho to train), and we had the most wonderful set of mountains to climb.

Perhaps there would be dragons, I mused. There are none in Australia, but Wales is well known for them. I'd love to see a dragon. And if there were any, we had a decent chance of finding them because our route would take us up virtually every mountain in Snowdonia. The official route for our Vegan 15 Peaks Challenge would require us to climb 9,800 feet (3,000 m), while covering 21.5 miles (35 km). Recklessly, perhaps, we aimed to climb all 15 of Wales' 3,000 foot peaks that day.

But we still had to reach the start – the summit of Mt Snowdon, Wales' highest peak at 3,560 feet. And to get there we had to climb Crib Goch, the scariest knife-edged ridge in all of Wales, in semi-darkness.

Lee on Crib Goch.



**A silent, untouched world was revealed, bathed in a golden glow.**

We had a point to prove. The Extreme Vegan Sporting Association exists to showcase vegan health and fitness, and to demonstrate that the vegan lifestyle is fun. Extremely fun, I told myself with teeth gritted against the pre-dawn chill. And besides, we were fundraising for a variety of extremely worthwhile animal charities. We would not give up lightly.

And so our band of eight dedicated vegans and three mountain guides from the vegetarian-friendly Lupine Adventure Cooperative hiked upwards through the pre-dawn mist. The fearsome bulk of Crib Goch soon loomed forth like the prow of some mighty ship, and we cautiously ventured up.

The mountain was kind that day. The vicious winds that threaten to tear smaller hikers from the ridge were reduced to the mildest puffs, and the sleet I recalled from previous exercises in "fun" was absent. As we emerged from the mist a silent, untouched world was revealed, bathed in the golden glow of

dawn. The pinnacle of Mt Snowdon rose from the clouds ahead and our knife-edge pathway appeared warm and inviting. Soon we revelled in unaccustomed solitude on the summit. Within hours it would be visited by thousands, but at dawn the world slumbered quietly somewhere far below.

We were rewarded with magnificent views from the Snowdon Massif, then the Glyderrau Range and finally the Carneddau. Our teammate from Finland – which I understand is somewhere near the North Pole – struggled valiantly against the summer's hottest day so far, succumbing near the Carneddau Mountains.

With the exception of our erstwhile guides, who took it in turns to sleep in their cars when they thought we weren't watching, the rest of us completed the official route in just under 17 hours and 30 minutes. Fear gave us the strength to conquer Foel Fras and race back to our torches just in time, and Iain and I even managed a staggering sprint to the finish, beating our guide's best time by seconds.

We raised hundreds of pounds for charities, gorged ourselves on vegan goodies and proved our point about vegan fitness. But I never found my dragon, so further adventures remain necessary. Check out [ExtremeVeganSports.org](http://ExtremeVeganSports.org), where adventurous vegans are welcome.

**Ex-pat Australian Andrew Knight is founder of the Extreme Vegan Sporting Association.**