

DUNC'S ETERNAL PADDY BUCKLEY -A RIGHT NON-ROYAL
OCCASION! FRIDAY 29TH APRIL 2011

The car park at the back of Joe Browns is a hive of activity as the Bowland machine cranks itself into action. Siabod angles up into a cloudless sky but there is a cool breeze from the east. Insignificant-perhaps? This is attempt number three and I am optimistic. I have not over trained and the weather forecast looks favourable. Will the trepidation of this last week match the triumph of finally linking all these now familiar hills together in one journey?

Nine thirty creeps up and we gather outside the Pinnacle Cafe. Team shots and we are off.



I feel good running down the road to Plas y Brenin with Leigh, Cookie and Dave Swift from Rochdale (met in the clag on a rekkie in the spring) I have run a lot of this on a 14 hour recce 3 weeks ago. I walk and run the flats up through the forest and as we emerge onto the hill a lone cuckoo sounds. I'm optimistic it's a good omen! Leigh is running ahead taking photos and across the valley in the haze Snowdon beckons. That's for later. I point out the farmhouse where Thomas Firbank wrote 'I bought a Mountain' cowering in the rocks below us and we are soon heading over the last stream. We will

need our water today as its warm and breezy, almost a rerun of the conditions on my first attempt three years ago.

Up into the boulder field and I point out the landmark rocks with names that Dave will need to locate if it is claggy on his attempt in July. We are soon climbing the trig. I look at my watch, its 59 minutes and well under time. A good launchpad for this long leg which mentally I have always considered too long to leave to the end.



Off out and round the rocks we stick with the fence where the grass is short and running faster and are soon at the anonymous top of Clogwyn Bwlch-y-maen. Here there is a new barbed wire fence and a very sad person has marked the top with a post that can be touched by leaning over the straining wire. It's too high to climb even for a Bowland trespasser. It needs the Webster's Meadow Wire Special Ops Team for this.

More barbed wire evasion makes us go west of the fence and up to where a double stile crosses it just below the summit of Carnedd y Cribau.

From here it's an easy run across the dried up bogs east of the fence and round the end of the crags and down to the Bwlch.

The next section up the ramparts of Cerrig Cochion always seems to drag but the bogs are dry and we do a lot less wire hopping than usual. At the iron spike in the rocks we cut right up a fairly good new

trod through the heather and the little ribbon lake below the summit is dry.

Then it's back to the fence and onto Moel Meirch. Even the Woodall eating bog (according to Yiannis he went up to his neck!) is relatively subdued and we decide to cut right through the heather with its confetti of sheep bones. Maybe the bogs get peckish when there are no Woodalls to eat?

Up Moel Meirch we scramble up the crags and I cut my knee on the rocks by the summit but it does not even register until later. It's too enjoyable a day in the wilderness of the ridge. Today we see four walkers on the ridge, by normal standards it's crowded but we all have a wedding to miss and maybe it's understandable. I'm not too bothered about my dress and I know Leigh doesn't bother about these sort of things too much (no offence mate!)

We reach Llyn Edno with its tide mark of the drought and head across to Ysgafell Wen. Three weeks ago I had sat down here and thought I was too knackered to do this. Today I am feeling good but in retrospect am probably not drinking enough. We all have our sun hats on but probably don't realise how the stiff easterly wind and hot sun are sucking the moisture out of us.

We reach Three Tops which Dave has never seen on a clear day and then across at Allt Fawr Wayne is waiting for us. After the altitudinal abuse he leads us off and finds a much lower line near to Llyn Conglog and we reach the dam without having to weave our way through the tussocks higher up.



I have a new idea here and we cross the stream and head up on grass. Normally I have descended left and over the stream but find it hard on my ankles on the traverse. Today it's time to try my new descent through the crags. Wayne leads us on but goes too far west as I lead us down to the end of Llyn Clogwyn and a zig zag route down through the crags. It pops us out by the wall and it's an easy run across to the Rhosydd Quarry Barracks. Wayne should take up catering and has a motorway services picnic laid out. Dave Cottam is here and we tuck into what's on offer. I only want the rice pudding and the butties just seem too dry. This is probably the first ominous sign and at this stage. My normal incontinence is just a memory!

But we are soon off and up Foel Ddu with Dave and his politically incorrect jokes to take my mind of the steep short climb. Off to Moel-yr-hydd its a bit cooler as the last vestiges of the front come in from the east but by the time we are traversing across to Moelwyn Bach on the tramway the sun is out again. But it's windy. I run all the way to the col below Bach but at the top an ominous déjà vu feeling surfaces. It was here three years ago that the sun and dehydration got Steve Cliff. Today the wind is with us again and we could easily be on an aircraft wing. What will Snowdon be like in 9 hours time?



It's a lovely scramble up to Craigysgafn and then Moelwyn Mawr where the mountain stalking Wayne is waiting. He leads me off and down across the arid remains of Llyn Croesor and across to the tramway where another feast is laid out. I look at the size of the rucksack he has brought and realise he works for the late Eddie Stobart.

The route across Cwm Croesor unravels and we cross the dam and begin the trudge up Cnicht. I am finding my feet are sore on the traverses now and on the screes convince myself that I have ripped my left big toe. It's steep but we soon pop out at the col and are on the summit. Here I hop over left and contour round right to descend a good grassy gully (yes it does now have a name!) and cut right to the main path. This is much quicker and we bob out at the col.



The grassy route off Cnicht

There are a few walkers about on this lovely royal wedding afternoon but we avoid the crowds cutting down right on grass and an easy descent into an oven. The shirt comes off as we run down and away from the nagging north easterly.

Cookie offers to drench me in water but I refuse and we hit the hard baked track and turn right for Nantmor. A cuckoo sounds across left in the freshly burnt gorse. This has been a cuckoo bookended section.

As we near the forest Ian Roberts, Declan and Mike Gibbison have come out to meet us with a flotilla of dogs.

Once down to the road at Bwlchgernog it's a leisurely saunter and jog to the changeover with Ian offering to let the dog pull me up the climbs. Not wanting to risk disqualification I decline and the poor dog is nearly throttled as it hauls him up the hill.

I run into a round of applause and the Bowland Machine crowds that have swelled (no offence Ian!) during the day.

I have trouble eating any of my bacon buttie and just get some stew down. I should recognise that it's because my mouth is dry and I need to start drinking more. Unfortunately I think the damage is done by now. A wash off and we are away. I know I am up on my schedule and we climb steadily through the woods. On this leg Alan Duncan is leading with Declan and Andy Crook out training for their forthcoming Bob Graham's.

It's a lovely dry evening as we meander through the sedge and past the enigmatic abandoned house at Oerddwr - uchaf .Paddy told me that Clough Williams Ellis, the architect of Portmerion, reckoned it spoilt his view from across the valley. I don't know how, and it's hardly as if the resident, if there is one, comes out much!



Bryn Branog

Bryn Branog is its usual slog but I expect this after a feed and going into the evening. Then coming off we miss the trod left, go too far right and have to hack back left to pick up the good trod that runs along the ridge of rocky knolls that leads across to Moel Hebog. Alan persuades me that the quickest way is straight up on the grass and I adopt a hands and knees approach. It gets me up and we begin the slow plod to the summit. By now Chris Armour has recognised that I am dehydrated and presses water on me constantly but I am not really interested in food and my stomach is beginning to complain. We descend on grass and clamber up to Moel yr Ogof and off through the ragged volcanic rocks. Ahead is the craggy top of Moel Lefn and we are soon up and off. To the west the sun is setting as we run along the ridge of the Eifionydd Hills with the Nantle ridge gesticulating towards the Llyn peninsula.

It's a long and tortuous run down to Princess Quarry and the climb up to Y Gyrn. Alan reckons this is the worst climb of the section and no one disagrees. The wall that I usually follow seems to have fallen down onto what faint trod there was and the climb is painful, as is my speed over this sort of ground with very little energy. Andy Crook says later that he has never known me so quiet. He should have been on the Snowdon section!

Finally we are off and the newcomers can't believe that Mynydd-y-Ddwy-elor is a summit. It is, and we trudge over to it. It's starting to turn to dusk now and I know we have to get to Y Garn before it is dark, so it's head down and don't look up all the way up Trum with Chris talking to keep me going. He has done a really good job to rehydrate me but I have taken ages to put down one new potato and even rice pudding is of no interest (aghast though friends may be by this statement)

My feet are really sore as we descend and climb Mynydd Drws-y-coed and scramble down the rocks. I tell Declan and Andy of Alan Duncan's 'challenging' conditions on here 4 years ago and wonder how he survived the dark and horizontal monsoon. Tonight it's an opalescent sunset and just that nagging breeze from the north east. It's only after dark that it will turn to the wind out of Mordor!



Sunset on Y Garn

We have a good run off Y Garn in the last glimmer of the evening and spot Ian Roberts and his flashing torch by the entrance to the forest. He would have been a wrecker in a past life -some might say he still is if you see what he can do to a pair of shorts!

We cross the stream and head for Ian but there is no trod and my sore feet complain. Below us is the tourist path and gate but Ian reckons this way is quicker. From my language it is clear that we differ on this one!

In the forest we trundle along and jog into the support wagons beside the railway. I think that with knee length Skins, Nurofen and a Diocalm tablet I will recover. But I don't have much of an appetite and we set off very slow. I expect the food to settle my stomach up Craig Wen and we trudge up this pathless hill. Baggins (Bill Williamson) is navigating with Lawrie Jones and Karl Percival in support.

At the top its 51 minutes on my watch so I am optimistic. I just need my quads to start working and stomach to settle down. But now we have another foe. Just like three years ago the wind from the north-east arrives and there will be little shelter from it until we come off Snowdon. In Patagonia it's called 'La Escoba de Dios' - 'The Broom of God ' What that is in Welsh I don't know.

By now we have all our layers on and I try and eat some Shot Bloks but the stomach is unhappy and does not really show much interest. We still get off Yr Aran down the old fence line and as the path goes down to the col I cut left past a cairn I have built and descend easily on grass all the way to the little lake.

As we start the long climb to Cribau Tregalan we are constantly buffeted by the wind. At least it is dry and we can see all the lights across to Caernarvon. But the lads must be weary of waiting for me. You would not choose to linger on a night like this. Eventually we are at Cribau Tregalan and I touch the top and know that the next section is the most exposed. This time I am better equipped than in 2009, I can see the path and am glad when we cut through to the western side and the relative calm. At the café there is the light of the alarm primed but even in the doorway it is a maelstrom. Lawrie and I tentatively clamber up to the summit plinth. My glasses are vibrating with the gale and we use the undulating buttock technique

to get across and down the steps. I was here in January and a lad was having 'Happy Birthday' sung to him. All there is today is the aural concussion from this Midnight Mistral.

We retreat to the lee of the café and warm our hands on the generator outlet, despite the diesel aroma. I sit down here and try and put down some of the chicken broth we have in a flask. It takes a long time and does not have the desired effect. From now on it's literally a 'wrecked' section!

We plod across to Garnedd Ugain and as we descend for Moel Cynghorion the gale follows us. I seem to be descending on lots of scree where I remember grass and I realise that I am no longer able to descend downhill. Baggins has already told me we are not descending the railway again and they all keep well ahead luring me onwards. I develop a forlorn trudge and finally reach the path where a shuffle begins.

Bill says we have to get over Moel Cynghorion as he has two bottles of lucozade sport to collect. So I plod on and at the col Bill discovers that mice have eaten the tops off the bottles. We sit down and eat in the lee of the wall. The views across to the The Arfon transmitting station mast at Nasareth are impressive and the wind has dropped from its biblical proportions but so has my pace as we locate the confusing summit of Foel Goch.

I plod up Moel Elio and finally reach the wind shelter. My last rest and we are off. I know the way off and spot the route off right beyond the ruined wall. Tonight the nav is easy because it's so clear and we are on the track and down to the farm. Normally the lights of the house are on but tonight it's invisible as we turn right and weave our way through the kissing gates and boggy fields. A horse whinnies

behind me in the dark and we pop out on the road. Yiannis is waiting and reckons I can go on. Yiannis says he has seen people in worse states but I can only think he spends too much time in cemeteries! My stomach is still retching and I will run out of energy on the Glyders. Not the easiest place to be brought down from. And there might be a lack of rescue helicopter pilots today! So I bin it and crawl into Pam's camper van. As I spoon in my porridge my support are fed bacon and egg butties whilst I relax in semi coma. It's been a great adventure but yet again I'm beaten.

The Bowland Machine has yet again provided a fantastic day out in the hills with all your mates and all those views to bottle up and savour. And one day I might just get it right!