

## Threes of a Kind

*by Gerry Gee*

My first acquaintance with the Welsh Threes walk happened in June 1962. Brian Rhodes, John Allen and I had agreed to go to the Bernina and Bregaglia Alps in the summer and the Threes was considered a suitable training walk. Working in London at that time, I drove up together with my then girlfriend and future wife Christina, taking five hours in incessant pouring rain. We had arranged for Christina to stay at the cottage near Tan y Celyn. She was admitted with reluctance, having arrived 'so late in the evening' – 9.30pm. Feeling somewhat tired after the drive I was relieved to hear from Brian that, with the rain still pounding down, the walk was off, at least for the moment. However, at around 2.30am. I was rudely awakened with a brisk 'Rain's stopped, full moon out, leaving in 10 minutes'. Enthusiasm was not high as I sleepily staggered up Tryfan in company with Brian, John, Ian Bell and Bill Rowntree. But a glorious day unfolded and I



*Welsh Threes 1962. Left to right - Brian Rhodes, Bill Rowntree, Ian Bell and John Allen on the Summit of Elidir Fawr. Photo Gerry Gee*

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began to enjoy myself. After Tryfan and the Glyders we did the Snowdon group before dropping down to Beudy Mawr for breakfast. The rise from Nant Peris to Elidir Fawr summit seemed endless and etched itself on my suffering soul. However, after that Y Garn and the Carneddau went at a fast pace. Yr Elen was done last, so that we could return directly back to Tan y Celyn, arriving there at around 9pm.

Thinking about the chosen route later, I guessed that only Brian, then a fairly ferocious walker, would have planned to have a double ascent of the middle group. However, I was impressed with the superb views, enhanced by the unusual times of the day that one was experiencing them. I knew that this long walk would always be one of my favourites. My first and partial involvement with a Winter Welsh Threes was one that John Allen, Joe Walmsley, the late Taffy Davies and former member Cliff Meredith attempted in true winter conditions in January 1965. Joe and Cliff dropped out after stormy winds on the Carneddau. John and Taffy arrived for a meal at Beudy Mawr having done the middle section and I joined them for the Snowdon group. As we left Beudy the wind was still gusting in the winter darkness and I had uneasy thoughts about the Grib Goch ridge.



*1962 - Brian Rhodes with views to Snowdon from Elidir Fawr. Photo Gerry Gee*

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In the event it was fairly calm on the ridge, with John strolling ahead nonchalantly whilst Taffy and I scabbled along, conscious of the gloomy depths. The horseshoe paths were not so definite then and I remember we started to make the classic darkness and bad weather error of wandering off the track down the Clogwyn y Person promontory before soon correcting ourselves. The wind became gusty again and we were blown a yard or so off our feet, luckily in harmless situations. The temperature had dropped whilst we were out and when running down from Clogwyn Station the frozen turf took me by surprise and I skidded off into a bruised heap. Somewhere along the line we lost Taffy but he arrived back at Beudy an hour or so later. My only full attempt at a Winter Threes took place in January 1967, with former member Peter Hickmott. We did the Snowdon group reasonably fast but we were very slow in highly misty conditions on the Glyders, so that by the time we reached the A5 our support had left in disgust. Around Foel Grach night was coming on, conditions were deteriorating and our vigour was draining away rapidly. We decided to forget about completion and descended off Foel Fras to Aber. Unfortunately, in our tiredness we omitted to go down to the col before Drum and thus



*1962 - Brian Rhodes and Clogwyn Du'r Arddu from Clogwyn Station. Photo Gerry Gee*

found ourselves descending Northerly in darkness onto steep ground with rocky outcrops and streams everywhere – a nightmare ending.

In June 1972 I joined Boece Cardus and his group who were attempting a ‘Threes’ plus rock climbs en route. This ambitious plan required good weather, but what we got was a thorough soaking on the Carneddau after a damp bivouac on Foel Fras and thus a tedious bee line back to Beudy lugging our heavy and wet climbing gear. In contrast, in June 1984, John Llewellyn and I enjoyed a wonderful dawn as we traversed the Carneddau. We were above the cloud line which was at around 2,600 feet and our target peaks peeped out like black diamonds under an orange moon. We managed to drop off our bivvy gear at Glan Dena, but even so, I was always lagging due to stiff legs from insufficient sleep-wear. The result was that we were on the Grib Goch ridge at 8pm, with cloud gathering but our reward was a magnificent Brocken Spectre.

I was lagging even further behind in an unsuccessful attempt in July 1991 with Don Smithies. I had twisted my right ankle badly the week before on a Lakes meet and it was crazy of me to be out again on such a strenuous walk. Don eventually completed it despite numerous waits for me. In June 1993 Peter Walters fancied a go and so with Simon Wilson in support, we left Foel Fras at 4.35am. Simon gave us a reviving breakfast at Glan Dena and led us up an excellent scrambling line on Tryfan, which I have never been able to find since. On Elidyr Fawr a stranger gave me a pitying look and an apple, so I must not have been looking too good. Arriving at Beudy, Peter had had enough (although he did complete the walk, with Simon, in the following Spring). The Snowdon Group, misty and drizzly in the evening greyness, looked uninviting, but I swallowed an enthusiasm pill and set off. Despite the mist I luckily managed to arrive quickly at the foot of the scree slope below the grassy col near the Grib Goch pinnacles. I was soon going back and forth along the ridge and then onto the Snowdon finish in faint rain, mist and imminent darkness. Perhaps not surprisingly, I had the whole ridge and Snowdon to myself, giving an extra touch of elation at the finish.

In May 1995 I continued the solo theme, with the walk as a kind of pilgrimage, since almost every acre of Snowdonia conjures up memories for me. Local weather forecasts were consulted and a day selected. I was somewhat surprised to find six inches of snow all around the summit of Foel Fras, covering all the usual bivvy spots. In fact the only conceivable place to spend the night was in the summit windbreak, the floor of which offers two prone body positions – ‘very uncomfortable’ and ‘extremely uncomfortable’. I squirmed down as best I could, determined to believe the forecasts. Showers all night tested my faith and my bivvy bag and the floor

provided future income for the medics. I arose at 6am, feeling crocky, made a bowl of coffee and promptly knocked it over. The outlook was as misty and soggy as the inside of an immersed tea bag – I slogged off direct to Beudy. Three weeks later, I was back again (always a slow learner). Having hitched from Beudy and walked up from Aber village. Everything had gone far too smoothly. I was on Foel Fras at 7.30pm – somewhat early for starting bivvying. It was a gorgeous early summer evening and the Carneddau were solely mine and too good to waste. I decided to start right away and bivvy later. After a delightful stroll the sun finally set as I approached Pen yr Ole Wen, but out popped a full moon. There's planning for you! Halfway down the East ridge, I bivvied as the sky blackened. The route was completed the next day in reasonable weather. On a clear Snowdon summit tenanted by a group of rather pretty Swedish teenagers, I proudly pointed out where I had been. 'So where's your next peak?', they enquired. Having a bivvy during the walk had been most enjoyable and was compatible with my 'elderly gentleman' status – well 'elderly' anyway. So, in May 1997, I planned it that way from the start. A cache was left near Tryfan and after leaving Aber village at 2.50pm, a superb afternoon and evening were enjoyed in good weather on the Carneddau. I bivvied near the base of Tryfan and completed the walk the next day in very hot conditions – 30°C on the tops and a delightful half hour's sunbathing on Snowdon summit.

Thus encouraged, in June 1998 I tried a repeat performance, but the only entertaining bit was a thumbs-chance lift to Aber village, given me by Les Brown and the BMC's Derek Walker, fresh from excitements on the Anglesey cliffs. Breakfasting below Tryfan after heavy overnight rain whilst bivvying, hordes of midges descended on me – I suspected a net weight loss. The rain continued, but after reaching Beudy I didn't. It was a similar story in June 1999, except wetter and shorter. As I said, I'm a slow learner. In May 2003 I decided to improve my chances of success by making an earlier start on day one. Leaving Aber village at 9.20am, poor early weather improved to give an excellent evening. I had time to pick up my bivvy gear and ascend Tryfan, in company with a young man snatching some golden moments away from work. I carried on alone over splendidly empty Glyders, bivvying on Glyder Fawr summit. I dozed off, content with being about halfway there, and woke to early dawn mist. This soon cleared to give a very pleasant 71st birthday walk to the finish on Snowdon.

In August 2005, I completed the walk again, having made a similar advance bivvy deposit near Tryfan. In the event, however, I was able to make a much earlier start than in 2003, thanks to Mary White giving me an early ride to Aber village. I left there at 6.25am and the day started fine, sunny and windy. Unfortunately, a torrid time was had on the Glyders in

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thick mist, drizzle and bad early evening light. I briefly met a young couple having similar fun and their good company cheered me up. I staggered slowly up Y Garn, about as fast as a man walking to the scaffold, but speeded up a bit on Elidir Fawr. As darkness fell, I was glad to fall into the Vaynol Arms in Nant Peris for a much craved pint. I was then able to stroll up the road for a 'bivvy' in Beudy with a hot shower and snug bed – does it come any tougher?



*1984 - Gerry Gee strips for action on Foel Fras.*

*Photo John Llewellyn*