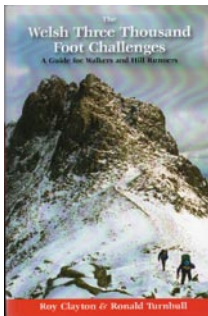
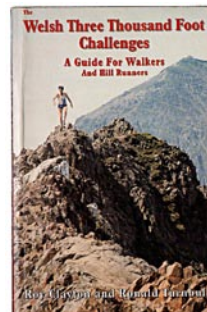


# The Dragon's Back 1992

by Ronald Turnbull



This text is from the first edition (1993, reprinted 1997) of my book **Welsh Three Thousand Foot Challenges**. That edition is now out of print, available second hand at the “well somebody might be desperate for it” price of about £50. ISBN 0-9515996-6-6.



The current edition of the book has a shorter version, given that all this happened so many years ago. The book is primarily a guide to the Welsh 3000s walk or run, with the Paddy Buckley Round and various other matters. You can look at it on Amazon with [this link](#). And you can visit my website at [this link](#).

*Fifty miles a day, day after day, with the Parachute Regiment carrying the tent: this, we must suppose, is a foretaste of what awaits the dedicated hillrunner in the afterlife. Enter Wales at the top end. Sleep all night, eat large military meals, and run all day, following roughly John Gillham's 'Snowdonia to Gower' long-distance route. Emerge five days later somewhere near Swansea. There would be the cream of British fell running, as well as eminent guests from abroad. There would be television cameras. There would be a bus to the station afterwards.*

*There was one thing I didn't ask myself. Does the Dragon's Back Race represent the eventual reward of the well-behaved hillrunner – or of the wicked one?*

## Day 1: The Carneddau, Glyders and Snowdon

In the car park of Conwy Castle, they were interviewing runners for the TV: but not us. We weren't glamorous like the smart and sponsored Americans; nor, so early in the race, quite as ragged and romantic looking as we were soon going to be. The Mayor of Conwy was there in his golden chain. No cannon or whistles for us, for we are after all hillrunners. 'All right, off you go then,' said the Mayor.

Below the castle walls and through the streets we trotted, with a motorcycle escort and camera van at the front, and also (we realised when the back became us) at the back. We discussed things with the solitary Swede and decided that everyone else had started much too fast for 200 miles. Then we dodged off into a gateway. Our personal route preference is for the pretty way not the quick one, the field paths not the road.

Without so much as a faint gulping sound the wide Welsh landscape swallowed up 57 runners. We climbed Drum alone.

At dawn the hilltops had looked all sunny and bright, and I'd let the Parachute Regiment carry the altimeter. But now the ridge was a misty one. Never mind, navigation's more interesting without altimeters. A pair from Chelmsford found our navigation particularly interesting. We stopped to look at our map: they stopped to look at their map. We stopped to put on our waterproof trousers: they stopped to put on their waterproof trousers. The entrants for this race were supposed to have been vetted for basic hill skills, but the Chelmsford pair had trained on abandoned railway lines, where hill skills are hard to acquire.

The ridge off Carnedd Llewelyn is narrow and exciting, but Glyn had to pause to pour away the rainwater pooling in his lenses. The Chelmsford pair paused too, but they wore no spectacles, and the view wasn't the sort you stop to look at, being mostly mist. Anyway there was only one way to go; so they went. A few minutes later we dropped out of the mist. On the track below there were no runners. The Chelmsford pair had gone onward for Pen yr Helgi Du and points beyond, and plunged into oblivion off the extreme end of the Carneddau.

The track past the reservoir is smooth and level after the stony slopes. Here we could stretch out, and try to look a bit impressive for the Telegraph's photographer. But there came an angry shout from behind. On this fast easy ground Glyn had wrenched his leg. He'd expected injury – it'd be unrealistic to set off for two hundred miles without expecting injury – but he hadn't expected injury so soon.

Still, injury doesn't have much effect on strength uphill, and strength uphill is what we now required. Tryfan and the Glyders lay ahead, and beyond the Glyders, Snowdon. The 9:00 am start was convenient for mayors and camera people, but meant that, for us, it was 1:30pm already.

We crossed the A5 onto Tryfan's North Ridge – an irrational route-choice? The camera people lurking in the gully didn't know. They'd lurked on the Heather Terrace only to see all the elite runners head up the North Ridge; then transferred to the North Ridge to see all the midfield runners heading across onto the Terrace. This confirmed what I already had suspected. Glyn and I are elite runners: we're just extremely slow elites. They proceeded to film our elite feet scrabbling up the scree.

The North Ridge has real rock moves. We balanced across the tops of rock climbs, their final pitches rising out of the mist. I, at least, did in distant youth accomplish one or two of those rock climbs, so could be confident that Glyn would be



Tryfan from Pen yr Ole Wen

finding this more scary than I was. This is fine psychology. Deal with anxiety by bringing someone you know is going to find it worse.

At the summit, we were fifth last. This wasn't us overtaking, it was people in front getting lost. We lost time, making sure not to climb Bristly Ridge, and then some more, examining the various tops of Glyder First-one, then casting about for the ridge to Glyder Other-one. Casting about on wet splintered boulderfields is no fun.

Four-twenty at Pen y Pass, and it was going to be dark at eight. The weather was horrible but we were fine – there'd been a couple of runners in Bwlch Tryfan who were totally bewildered and we weren't; we'd found both Glyders; and now we had a nice straightforward Pig Track along which to eat our sandwiches.

Runners in proper lightweight gear can enjoy the wind and rain. Even stranger, so can runners like us in washed-out tee-shirts and waterproofs whose breathability is assured by torn seams and various holes. It's a matter of charging into battle rather than sitting in a shellhole being shot at. It's getting sweaty enough actually to welcome rainwater next to the skin. And when you're already leaping around on a high ridge with hardly any clothes on, vigorous gusts of wind just make it more exciting. Since I was last on it, the Pig Track had become a Pig Road, with boulder-steps and flat gravel. An hour and twenty minutes up Snowdon – we were indeed enjoying ourselves. At the top was an orange tent containing Ian Waddell. This man had devised this inspiring route, gathered sponsors, TV coverage and the Parachute regiment. His reward was to spend eleven hours on Snowdon summit with a boulder under his groundsheet. We had to admit that including all the 3000ft peaks on this first day wouldn't have been a good idea after all. Before the race I'd written to Ian pointing out what a classic first day the full 3000s would have made. He'd awarded me the race number of [1] for attitude, but explained he couldn't be bothered putting an orange tent on Yr Elen.

We headed off down the twisting, exhilarating South-west Ridge. But once among the lovely woods and waterfalls of Cwm Llan, on pleasant green track, Glyn wrenched his leg again. He added to the sufferings of the unfortunate limb by insulting it most viciously.

We arrived at 7:02 pm – eighteenth; so while we were lost on the Glyders we must have been overtaking others even more lost. The leading pair of Martin Stone and Helen Diamantides took just under seven hours: now that's fell running. We ate supper, drank eight cups of coffee and juice and finally got the fluid balance right. We then ate



Y Lliwedd from Snowdon

another supper and inspected the shower. British military ingenuity was the shower, comprising duckboard, bucket and pulley. The person underneath thought it was great, but we were only going to get dirty again tomorrow.

## Day 2: The Moelwyns and Rhinogs

At the start they said, "Anyone want this midfield runner, lost his partner?" Perhaps unwisely, I said yes. In fact Stefan from Frankfurt didn't lose his partner. His partner dumped him after a depressing twelve-hour yesterday. Stefan is 28 and goes in for the Hundred Kilometre, also the Geneva to Basle 'hill' race, which actually takes place on roads and paths. He was very good on the roads and paths, but once up in the grassy rocky valley with the waterfalls and the croaking ravens, he turned out to be wearing unsuitable shoes. Soon enough we were back in the clouds, and the pair behind wanted to know which hill this was. Well, it was Moelwyn Mawr, and since we were going quite slowly anyway with our ill-shod German, we thought we'd show them the way off Moelwyn Bach.

The way we showed them off Moelwyn Bach was a really terrible one, clambering down all the little cliffs. At one point Glyn abseiled a tree root. Our entourage found this even slower than we did. If there was a certain vagueness in their thoughts and movements, there was good reason. This pair had spent half the night crossing Snowdon, having previously gone up something else by mistake for Tryfan. At the railway it was a relief to wave good-bye and dash ahead down the track.

It's funny how this always happens. You wave good-bye and dash away down the track, and it turns out to be the wrong track, so you end up coming back up it and waving hello again. The railway alongside makes the same mistake, turning a complete circle and going underneath itself at Dduallt station. My sister's boyfriend worked as a guard on the Ffestiniog railway, and found himself involved in a hi-jacking episode. In the long run, you're best on your own two feet.

The next bit cheered everybody up. It's a man-made surface, which reminded Stefan of his happy Hundred Kilometre. That surface, however, is tilted sharply upwards, and goes among rough heather and rougher boulderfields, and the men who made it are referred to as 'Romans' though probably 17th-century Welsh.

When the Karrimor Mountain Marathon went over my home hills of Galloway, people said: "It's almost as bad the Rhinogs." So I'd been looking forward to these Rhinogs. They didn't let me down. The Roman pavement entered a dramatic defile. Mist blew over, and though no Welsh bandits were in evidence, they're scarcely needed. The boulder-fields alongside the path will do the same job of breaking your legs for you and leaving your body for the ravens. I urged my party forward with hoarse cries; 2:00pm at the Roman Steps meant darkness on Diffwys.

Quite quickly we were through the pass, and onto the real Rhinog. The real Rhinog is jammed grey gritstone. The boulders show admirable sincerity in their project – to make two two-thousand foot hills into an impenetrable mountain range. Above Rhinog Fawr's small lake, Stefan hoped there wasn't going to be any 'scramblink'. He'd learned this useful Eng-

lish word on Tryfan, and seemed to understand it quite as well as he wanted to. But the jammed boulders tilted up alarmingly, and Stefan became cragbound. "Nein es geht nicht, es ist gefährlich zu Lebens," he said in his fluent German. "Niemand ist hier gesterben," I reassured him in my broken German. Nobody dies hereabouts. "Niemand?" "Ist Wahrheit." He clambered up a boulder, and another, and mist closed round to hide the black waters below.

The bigger Rhinog overcome, we tore over the smaller one. My diary records 35 min up and 15 down. These hills are high on rock and romance, but sadly small in all other ways. Beyond was ground of a sort we'd almost forgotten: green and grassy, laid out as ridge rather than piled as heap. We galloped down the pleasant slopes, and were at Diffwys with just time to get off the hill before dark.

Well, that was the idea. Somehow it didn't work in practice. And since I was at the front, it must have been me that read the map wrong and landed us in several miles of tussocky bog and a forest, though I blamed Stefan for being so slow. Along the bog-trudge poor Stefan got a lot of stick, to which must be added twigs-down-the-neck when it got dark as we were still fighting the Christmas trees. It's just as well he doesn't understand English.

Once on the tarmac Stefan ran away strongly. I tried to keep up for the glory of Scotland, but Glyn really dislikes road running, even when it's not in the dark. At last we got to the big green tents. We certainly got value for money from the event's trifling £10 entry fee. We were on our legs for 13 1/2 hrs today. Stone and Diamantides took just 8 1/4 hours. Martin Stone said that he couldn't cope with the long hours we were doing at the back of the field. This was pure politeness: he has run 26 Munros non-stop.



Martin Stone and Helen Diamantides dining in the big tent -  
photo Ian Waddell

### Day 3: Cadair Idris, the Tarrens and Plynlimon

I told registration that we didn't want Stefan any more. They said OK, but five minutes down the road, there he was running along beside us. As it turned out, though, it was us that would be slow on Day Three. We strode up Cadair Idris's Pony Track. At the top was another windy rocky ridge with views of mist-filled emptiness.

Smooth grass that's fairly steeply downhill can make you feel like a member of the Parachute Regiment yourself, but Stefan didn't appreciate it, and neither on this occasion did Glyn. First Glyn's shoes had gone, and then that ankle again, and a thigh. And now, most

undignified of all, came the collapse of his bumbag. The bumbag, as an out-of-fashion fashion item, had been bought very cheaply. However, unlike Glyn, it had been designed and constructed with city streets in mind.

We took three hours over Cadair Idris and were last but two; but still moving, in which respect we were doing better than many on this unprecedented hill race. They filmed Glyn's collapsed shoes running through a ford.

Painfully we ambled into a place called Abergynolwyn. Trying to be helpful, I asked if the muscular physiotherapist could rendezvous with Glyn's leg damage at the next checkpoint. They seized on the word 'injury' and radioed it back and forth. We hobbled away onto the Tarrens before they could strap us down to any stretchers. The Tarrens are rounded grassy hills with plantations creeping up the sides, overwhelming the very ridge. What was I doing on these Tarrens? I've got better hills at home in the Southern Uplands.

We trotted down through lots of forest to the checkpoint at Machynlleth. It was 3:15, and there were still fifteen miles to the top of Plynlimon; and just as far to the top of Pumlumon, which is the same hill spelt in proper Welsh. We were last through. Over the next section race organiser Ian Waddell would act as escort and guardian angel. In theory the Guardian Angel jogs along 50 yds behind, observing but giving no navigational aid. We contemplated going round a corner and putting on a quick sprint – just a joke. Glyn alternated walk and shamble and made quite strong progress, specially once we got off the road. All the same the Guardian Angel got bored, and caught up for a chat. It was fun trying to tempt the Angel into navigational hints. "Now that must be Plynlimon," I indicated a point in the distant south, lying dim and grey across the horizon. Ian went very quiet. I looked at the map. Dammit, that actually was Plynlimon!

It was only encroaching dusk lending distance to the view. This bit, that I'd expected to be a bore, went quite pleasantly. A grass road ran along the high moor, (sometimes we even managed to run along the grass road), while on either side were deep valleys full of green shadow, waterfalls and spruce. Much of the Southern Uplands has less to offer.

But at 6:15 pm, at the track end under Plynlimon, Ian told Glyn he must retire. Glyn knew that he could get over Plynlimon by nightfall, and even if he couldn't, he's got lots of experience of not getting over things before nightfall. He also knows that the race organiser's right even when he's wrong. Reluctantly, he climbed into the Landrover.

My own feet were blistered from the road running of the previous evening, but though it made me feel slightly jaded, it didn't matter uphill. Stefan and I strode up Plynlimon in the last of the light. The top of Plynlimon at dusk was two piles of stones, grey mist and a little orange tent. We did proper running down the back of Plynlimon, both for the fun of it and also to get away before the grass path crawled into the darkness and pulled the rushes up over its head. We got in at 8:10 without having to use torches. In other words, we didn't get benighted!

Glyn could go on tomorrow if the Medical Sergeant said OK. This was a fairly transparent device by Ian to avoid having to give the bad news himself – fair enough, good even. I could drop out too and take my own blisters back home to Scotland.

Glyn went under the Medical Sergeant, receiving ice, massage and painkillers. Stefan was having a toe lanced. I offered up my blisters. I had trench foot – how glamorous – just like in World War One. And every other war since the Romans, the Sergeant pointed out... We all turned in feeling much better for this display of military expertise in the field of chiropody. Maybe armies march on their stomachs, but us runners run on our feet.

## Day 4: Drygarn Fawr

The blisters came back up again in the night. Another 85 miles of slow jogging on blisters wasn't going to be altogether enjoyable but I decided to start anyway. I joined Glyn in the long queue for the Medical Sergeant. The Medical Sergeant gave Glyn's leg no more than ten miles, but said he could start. So we did.

The well-wrapped blister became uncomfortable after the first mile but then didn't get any worse. A long trek along forest tracks led to seven miles of road. This middle bit of Wales isn't very mountainous.

I ran with fellow back-markers Chris and John from Teesside. They were both moderately damaged, but quite enjoying the road, and were well supported by Chris Senior. Their car boot was full of bananas, which they generously handed around at every lay-by.

We turned off at last for some intricate rights of way through farm and woodland. The farmland is interrupted by small raven-haunted crags: pretty countryside, and pretty navigation too. Away from the road, Chris had got separated from his painkillers. "Don't worry," said Glyn: "that nice Medical Sergeant gave me more than I can use." There followed a technical discussion on the merits of various painkillers from which I, as a mere blister-sufferer, was excluded.

The way rose above the vast seas of industrial Birmingham's drinking water, on a stony path, a grassy path, and a high green lane between grown-out hedges. Lovely running country, except that we were walking. I did some running for a couple of miles so as to enjoy a stationary chat with Chris Senior in a lay-by tucked away in a wooded valley where buzzards buzzed around with bits of twig in their claws doing nest repairs.

Chris Senior, like Ian Waddell, is an ex-Para; they give themselves away by referring to any part of the landscape as a feature. He told of the battle-march: ten miles in under two hours with 50lbs on the back. He admitted he could go into the toilet with a map and not come out for an hour. He was a bit annoyed at his supporting role. He didn't like us having all the fun.

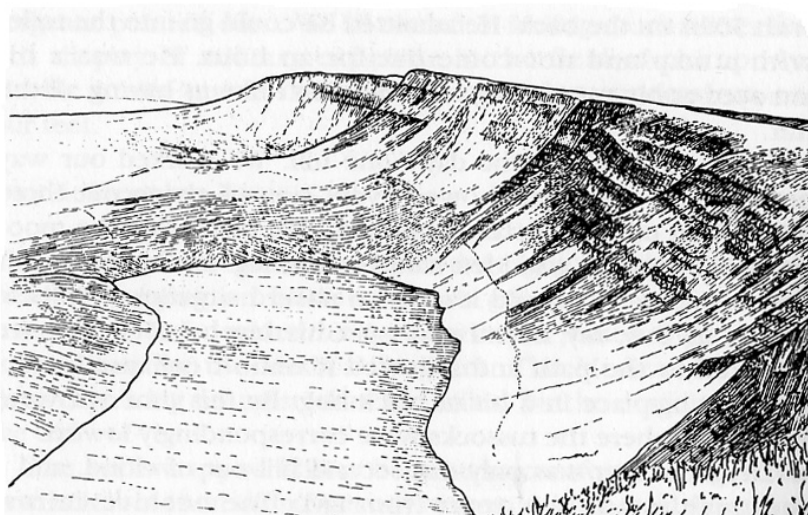
Drygarn Fawr was the day's one hill. We worked our way onto it on a path that showed every sign of giving out three miles short of the crucial orange tent. We cut across the moor and Glyn came to a sudden halt. His bad leg wouldn't lift over the tussocks. This could lead to an absurd situation – "please winch us out, my friend can't get his leg over" – but we returned to the path and followed it until it collapsed to its final resting-place in a bit of black bog. By this time we were higher up where the tussocks were correspondingly lower.

Drygarn Fawr was only our second hill out of cloud, and a thoroughly dull one apart from two fine beehive cairns. There's a nice way off, a little stream valley carved out below the

level of the moor. It's not the quickest way – indeed for Glyn's leg it's a very slow way – but there are pleasures other than the pleasure of sheer speed, such as these little rocky bits, and the sudden steepening of the path as it turns into a new hollow of the valley. Also, there are no tussocks.

On the road through Abergwesyn my blisters started to boil out from under the bandage. Up a long grassy pass it was all getting a bit grim. Glyn lectured me about counting the blessings of my lithe young body and extracting pleasure despite the pain. Certainly his sufferings were greater than mine, but if I had his legs I wouldn't be going anywhere on them. I discovered that by running hard I could divert the pain of my feet to somewhere other than the brain. Doing the final two miles in fifteen minutes let me arrive feeling like a dispirited runner rather than a dispirited hobbler, and also in good condition for the Dragon shower! You fill the dangling black bucket with water from the boiler, haul it up the tent pole and open the sprinkler in its bottom. No wonder we won the War.

Chris was before me in the line for the medical sergeant: "Your Dad made me suffer in his time. Now I get my own back." He goes over all the bits that hurt in Chris' ankle one by one, and prescribes: "rest it." That's a joke. Glyn was thrilled with the job done on his bad thigh – if only he didn't have the two bad ankles. I got 0.5cc of fluid drawn from my blister. Quite a small one by Falklands War standards. "Planning to run on this tomorrow?" I wasn't sure. He injected TINCT BENZ, which made me go ooh aah for a while. After this ordeal, I'd have to run tomorrow – or rather, walk. It wouldn't be fun but I'd try not to groan too much. Bed, though, was deeply enjoyable for the few seconds it took to fall asleep.



The sandstone cliffs of Carmarthan Fan (Black Mountain) – drawing by John Gillham

## Day 5: Black Mountain

The final day to Carreg Cennen Castle started with a long, long road walk: thirteen miles of it, occasionally breaking into a shamble. Five minutes after the start Martin Stone and Helene Diamantides ran past with greetings – such a handsome couple. They had led the race for the first three days, but the flat fourth day had allowed Belton and McDermott to seize the lead by just four minutes.

At the back we formed, along with Chris and Dave, the walking wounded. Dave's friend fancied a go at the Bob Graham Round: would we send our schedule? What do we talk about during events? Other events.



The lanes eventually led to the impressive scarp of Carmarthen Fan: old red sandstone and fresh grass. The grass and sandstone themselves had been denied us because the race might damage the path, but what had to be a red kite was soaring above the place, and the grass and sandstone looked good even from underneath. Below the red-and-green lay a lovely lake with an orange tent. Here we stopped to think.

Chris and Dave (both of course injured in their legs, though neither so badly as Glyn) planned to omit the descent to Glyntawe and two of the heavy limestone hills behind the scarp. We too should take this shortcut if we were to get through the tough ground in daylight. But how do you persuade Glyn, and for that matter Stefan, almost as stubborn and determined? The thinking was made more difficult by the TV camera that loomed close over the debate and my pig-dog German. (Fortunately, though, the programme was not scheduled for transmission to Pig-dog Germany, so that this searing bit of human interest didn't get used.)

"Wir müssen über dieses sheissliches Grund passen bevor es Nacht wird." The Paras catch 'sheissliche' and nod agreement. Glyn is not influenced by decaying shoes, decaying feet: still less by sheisslichkeit of ground, which is a plus. However, he was persuaded by other considerations. Young Stefan now had a twisted ankle of his own; and the descent to Glyntawe is an inelegant dogleg, spoiling the route, whereas Carmarthen Fan, the fine sandstone slice we just walked round the bottom of, could almost be justified as a rational straight line across the dogleg. Stefan seemed puzzled at being consulted over the route. It would only waste more time to enquire whether he understood what he'd agreed to.

Next we were to rise above the little lake on a near-vertical grass slope with a slanting path. Camera off, the man from Channel Four now existed and might be spoken to. He told stirring tales of the front runners, many hours ahead of us. Stone and Diamantides, a full seven minutes astray after yesterday's roads and tracks, took this slope direct, seizing back the lead in a short 750ft ascent. Great TV! "Not by chance," I told him. "All fixed up by Diamantides and Ian Waddell behind the food tent on Wednesday evening." He took a while to see the funny side of this joke.

I took the Diamantides/Stone line up the steep face, and enjoyed some hill-running over a couple of extra tops along the ridge. It's a splendid place with its steep grass sides and wide views: best hill since Cadair Idris. We pointed over the edge, explained to Stefan the joys of running down 2000ft of steep grass. He'll stick to the Hundred Kilometre.

He now realised that we'd cut out five miles of the race. He was upset, but it was the only way we'd finish at all. He even managed a brave joke: we should raise his waterproof as an orange tent on Carmarthen Fan and impose time penalty on everybody else for not visiting it.

The actual orange tent was in a small green swamp two miles away. The Lieutenant offered hot sweet tea and called us "bloody heroes". Wrong: it was just our way of having fun. Fun we must have been having, for here came another joke, for Ian Waddell this time: a man from the Council was after him. His notice, 'Dragon Race: please close the gate' should have been in Welsh.

We hobbled onwards into the limestone. It was nasty in bits: limestone boulder-fields are soapy-slippery but interesting, with sink-holes in the grass where underground caverns have collapsed. At the final orange tent we had a choice. There was the proper route over two small hills or, it now being 6.00pm, there was no shame in dropping round by the lanes. Of course, we were going over the two small hills.

We set off for the first of them. We now discovered that when Glyn had kindly given Chris some of his painkillers, he had actually given not some but all. At this moment along the little road behind us drove Chris Senior, getting into position for his final delivery of bananas. Forgetting the unhappy result of my previous attempt at being helpful, I flagged him down. No problem. Glyn could have one of Chris' painkillers.

It's an impressive large orange bomb, something-gesic. Ten minutes later, up on the hill, Glyn starts waving his arms around and shouting. Then he starts staggering – not that we weren't all doing that anyway. Forward progress becomes slow indeed as the light fades. It's a bit unsettling. Every few steps we take towards Tair Carn Uchaf, the going becomes harder. First it's heather, then it's deep heather, then it's deep heather with rocks underneath. Perhaps, as in the Paradox of the Arrow, we shall forever approach but never arrive.

Down at the castle they were filming runners as they climbed up out of the sunset – a special kink had been put into the route so that we should arrive out of the West. Meanwhile, we defied five separate leg injuries and the Greek philosopher Zeno by reaching the cairn of Tair Carn Uchaf.

"Glyn," I said, "let's get off this hill." "Nonshensh. Not even dark yet. Where's that other one they're sending us over?" "Glyn, your speech is slurred and you're in a bad way." "My shpeesish ish not shlurrrd!"

I tried to persuade Stefan, but Stefan was just as insistent on the last pile of boulders. "I didn't understand any of that," said Glyn cheerily. "You must have been speaking German." So – short of putting Glyn into his sleeping bag and tying the neck up very tight, which I wouldn't be able to do until he actually passed out – the decision was made. In fact there's a useful little path through the final boulders, while the descent afterwards, in full darkness, it is on heather so deep and soft that all it took to get down was leaning forward and flailing about a bit. My torch was weak: writing up my journal in the tent after lights-out had depleted the batteries. Glyn's torch was broken, but good Stefan's had a large and powerful beam. Down



event organiser Ian Waddell at Carreg Cennan in 2002, as he celebrates his 70th birthday by a non-stop two day attempt on the 100-mile Beacons Way

in the valley, Glyn gradually became coherent. Had I been over-reacting? Glyn always walks in a funny way.

We steered the two miles of path by torchlight and compass, searching each field-end for stile or waymark. "Are you sure this is the right track?" Glyn asked suddenly. I shone the torch onto the compass. South-east, and ten seconds ago it was North! Now compasses never break down, so it must be my brain not working any more: in which case we'd be wandering in circles here till our legs folded under us.

But no: it was in fact the compass. I was standing on an iron cattle grid completely covered over with mud. Glyn had his revenge for my disparagement of his mental state. Only Celtic intuition combined with the lingering remnants of the Something-gesic could have let him guess, though, the precise moment when I'd be standing over the buried metal...

The path changed direction nine times but Glyn's intuition, my compass and Stefan's torch got us through. It took a long time but it was fun. And so, at 9:00pm, we reached the castle. We'd finished. We weren't even last!

They offered free beer. But there are no riotous scenes in the food tent. Most people are enjoying simpler pleasures like dry footwear, sleep, and not having to get up at five in the morning and start running. Stone and Diamantides lost their way and their lead in the limestone, but eventually won the race. Their big advantage was being slightly less injured in their legs than the pursuing pair.

After all the time penalties have been worked out, we were 13th out of 17 pairs. But since 27 pairs started the race, we're actually in the first half of the field! We achieved our final climb, to the tall limestone castle set on its tall limestone rock, and got a brass dragon paperweight engraved 'survivor'. The Swede took notes on Glyn for his running magazine: "He has been in the pants for how long you say? Fourteen years?" We sat around appreciating our paperweights and telling one another about our injuries.

Not Glyn, though. He didn't approve of the tall limestone castle, and limped away under his rucksack to finish this thing properly. He was walking the final 30 miles to the Gower Coast.

Martin Stone, Helen Diamantides at Carreg Cennen – photo Nicola Gillham

