

V3k (Vegan Welsh 3000s) 28 June 2014

34 miles, 4500m of climb over 15 mountains

So off we go on race 8 of the 12 race Runfurther Series. Well not quite. First we all attend registration and kit check on the Friday evening at Rowen memorial hall followed by an hour's race briefing. Wow this is serious. I think this is because the race is being run to Skyrunner rules – the first Skyrunner race in the UK and part of a four race series. The briefing is introduced by Kirsch Bowker, the Race Organiser and her passion for the race and the Vegan ethos is evident. There is a welcome also from the Skyrunner rep Niandi Carmont. Then Joe the Technical Director takes us through the whole route with a series of photos – how thorough, although the pictures proved less helpful during the mists and low cloud during the race. Positions of marshals, aid stations and self-clip tops are all identified. Finally a talk on Vegan sociology / psychology by which time it has gone past most of the racer's bed times.

Some sleep.

Saturday, up for an early breakfast and then on to one of the two coaches at 4am which transports us on the deserted roads round the back of Snowdon to the start at Nant Gwynant. After a few words from the Skyrunner representative XXXX we set off in warm still conditions, nibbled by midges. After a minute a bunch of four or five have already opened up an obvious lead – how fast they are going! It's a fast climbing pace yet a glance behind shows the quality of the field as there are no stragglers. A quick count of those ahead indicates I'm just in the top 30. I settle in to a rhythm as we wind our way gradually up to the Snowdon South ridge, which steepens and disappears into mist. There are a few people directly ahead and behind me but no real changing of positions. A few green marker flags are in evidence. The Snowdon summit marshal checks us in and then some downhill to the col and up to Ugain with about six of us together.

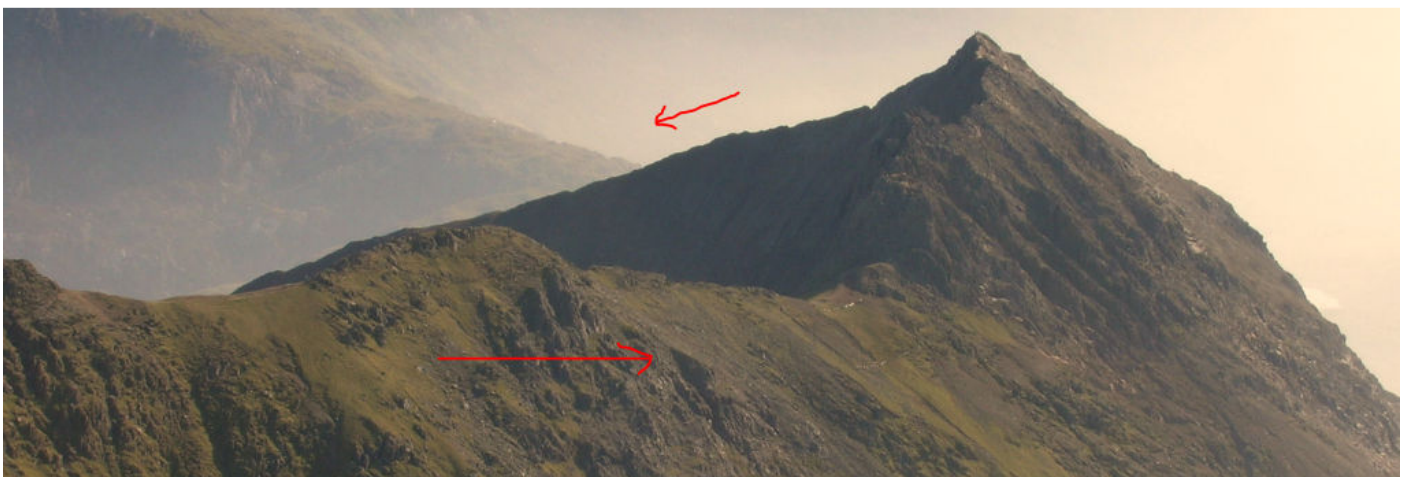


Up on to the Snowdon South ridge and on to the summit

Now, in gentle refreshing whisper like mist we start to tackle the ridge and pinnacles that lead down and then up to Crib Goch. Whoosh. Two chaps shoot ahead and descend rocks like I've not seen before. A little later a third does the same, although a slip followed by a 180 degree pirouette shows that perhaps he isn't in total control. It's busy on the ridge. At 6:30am we must have 'met' 30+ people coming the other way. Even a few people on the North ridge. The first self-clip found and used, now I'm with Liz Barker and we descend Cwm Uchaf and drop out the mist down the stream to the road and into the Nant Peris aid station. Cheering and clapping, water and food. Will Buckingham-Burr is there taking on board the refreshments and looking in no rush – I met him at the race briefing, he seemed to be taking the race quite casually, but was obviously in good shape. I leave the aid station eating cake and jog along with Liz, with Will just in front and off we went up Elidir Fawr.



On a clear day the route from Snowdon round to the Crib Goch ridge is obvious – and you can see the drop!



Along to Crib Goch then down the North ridge

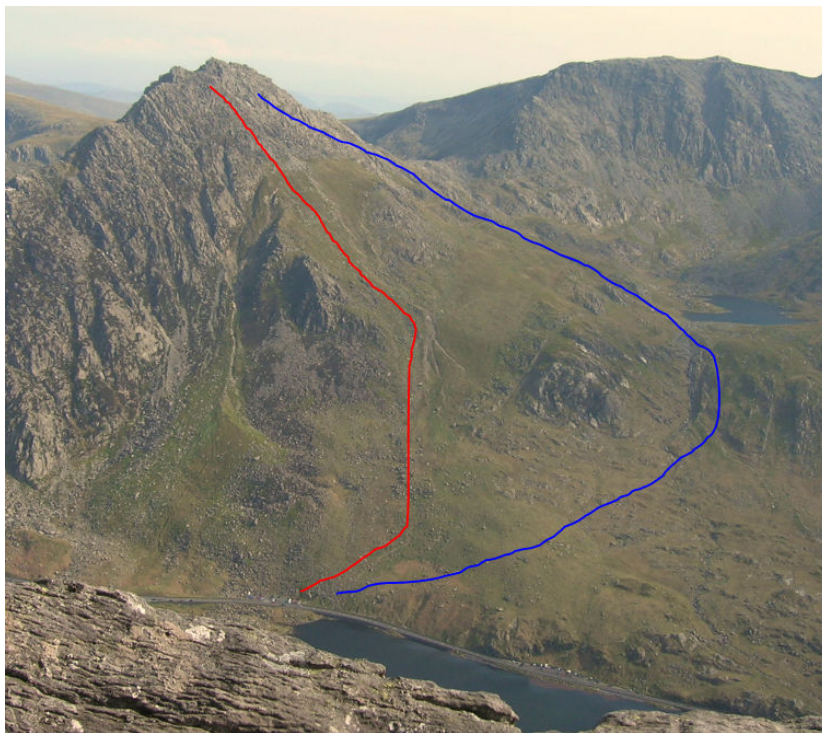
During the relentless climb up Elidir we see one of the 'V3K extreme' guys come down (doing the route both ways, only about 6 of them in the race). It is not until the descent of Y Garn that I see the next competitor in the V3Ke – Charlie Sharp and when I say hello he says "Don't ask" [see end of this report]. Mist is up, Elidir top is clear and the views are to be had. I open a little gap between myself and Will and Liz over Elidir, they close it during the descent and lovely traverse jog around to the Y Garn ascent and then it opens and closes in similar fashion over Glyder Fach – i.e. I'm OK going up and they are very good at the other bits! Elidir and Y Garn had been out the mist but it comes back again for Glyder Fach so by the time we've climbed the tricky lower screes, and tacked a few summit rocks it's good to follow a few green flags and arrive directly at the summit to immediately find the red and white post with the self-clip on it.

Cairns line the route down the gentle slope and rocky surface which are easy to follow with the occasional green flag to boost confidence. A walker shouts something at me as I pass at a distance which I can't hear properly, something like "... 6 and 7 so you'll have to double punch". I've no idea what he means but should have paid more attention. Feeling good I continue to press ahead looking out for green clues going up Glyder Fach to lead me to the self-clip. I spot a chalk arrow but see nothing more so I scramble over the big rocks and go up. No clues in the thick mist so I aim for the pile of rocks summit. No sign of the self-clip still, so getting a bit desperate I leak time by scrambling up to the top and look all around. Nothing except thick mist and damp rocks. I hear some voices – "... no, we're still going up ..." is all I can make out – have they found the self-clip I wonder, but am too far away to see them or ask.



Glyder Fach summit on a clear day – a yucky scramble around when misty with damp rock

Despondent I make my way off Glyder Fach, thankfully easily find the scree, stick to the right and bear left as Joe suggested and am soon down to the wall and begin ascending Tryfan with mist/cloud giving little away. However, my thoughts are now whether I will be disqualified. Should I just stop and abandon? Is this the end of the Runfurther grand slam attempt? My route up Tryfan is awful and takes ages. Finally the top and a self-clip. A lady is having pictures taken as she jumps between Adam and Eve, although the cloud will mean the huge drop behind her is not obvious. I thought my way down was head West. But now I'm confused and decide to take a more South West route, pick up a sort of path and continue down. Oops, I've come out at Llyn Cochlywd, way off route, but at least out of the cloud and can 'see' my way to detour to the second aid point at the road.



Route down from Tryfan: Red – ideal, blue – a mistake!

"Are you OK?" asks the check point lady. "Yes, but I've missed a checkpoint out", I reply. "Don't worry, as long as you are alright that's all the matters", she replies reassuringly. At the aid shelter (gazebo) Joe the technical director is there and explains that it's alright, a number of people did not find the self-clip. Phew, I think to myself, I'm not going to be disqualified. Will is at the aid station, something about a leg hurting. Water topped up, some food from my drop bags and then I'm soon off again with more vegan cake from the aid station [should have had two pieces].

On the climb up the South East side of Pen y I wonder how Will had got ahead of me, although it was probably quite easy given my messing about on the last two hills. I see him begin the climb perhaps 5 minutes behind me. Now there is no one around, just the odd few walkers about and it's soon back into the low cloud which is now much damper. My spirits remain high even though my ground speed has dropped, but once over Pen y I know the climbs are going to be much less.

Trot and fast walk over Dafydd and gentle jog down following a few green flags – comforting. Nothing to see though – until coming *the other way* is a racer – yes he is doing the V3K. It's Scott Sadler. He says that he has been lost for an hour and a half and turns out that he descended North off Dafydd and had climbed back up – wow! Anyway he tagged along and we made our way together for the rest of the hills.

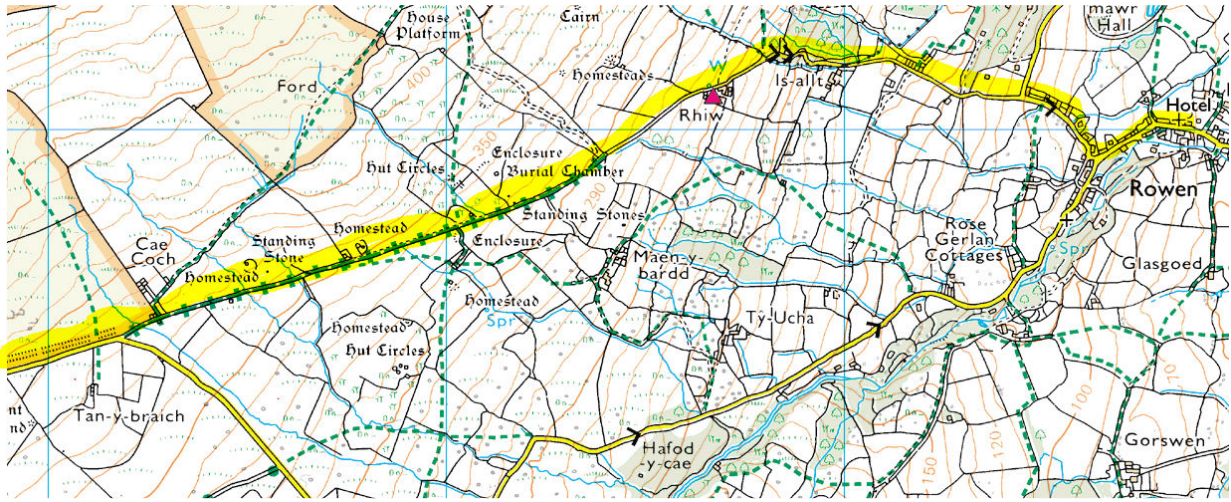


Carnedd Dafydd in distance. Scott had gone horribly off course and I think ascended the ridge from below!

A marshal welcomes us at the foot of Llewelyn and we skirt round, a little high, to the col and on to Yr Elen. We see another marshal at the col – is he for the V3k? I like the route round to Yr Elen as it is jogable in places in both directions but there are no views today to add inspiration and bounce. Some walkers also arrive and then one says “no point in staying let’s move on”. To true. We self-clip. A struggle to put gloves on over wet swelled fingers – but worth it as the temperature drops and might need to add a cag layer too. I continue to pay close attention to the map and compass now to get up to Llewelyn, cheery marshals, then along to Foel Grach over the saddle and self-clip with a smiley face on it (Joe lost the clipper). We remember to divert off the path to Gwenllian and the last self-clip. Here another runner suddenly appears – green fluorescent top yet only visible when stood next to us!. He is doing the shorter Carnedd only race. He insists that he knows the hills really well but wasn’t sure where he was!. He tags along with Scott and myself, propelled by legs and two poles.

Again out of nowhere (visibility about 30m) came Will (last seen at the base of Peny). It’s clear to see he has speed; as soon as he jogs he is much faster than myself. I was content to be moving at a pace that was just above walking now, and Scott, despite being in the top 10 for most of the race, seemed to be content to follow as cramp was making anything difficult for him. A few sort points on my feet slightly inhibit my running but overall I am content with the choice of La Sportiva shoes for this face. Foel Fras summit had a cheerful marshal to check us through and then as Will disappeared again, this time into the distance (finishing 7 minutes ahead), we jogged around way down and eventually to Drum, the track, the wall, the roman road and the last aid station. Now out of the cloud, I was warming up having cooled down considerably with the slower speed, and cold wet damp of the cloud. The marshal pops out of the car, notes my number, asks if I need anything, “No thanks” and continue past without having to stop.

Scott had dropped behind as the route now went road, track (pleasant grass in places) towards the finish on steep tarmac. At least this is all runnable. Rowen, marshal to guide me to the stile, over the stile, round the field and finish. Medal, beer mat memento and loud music from a live band. Due to the damp most people were indoors as were the band so the cheering and applause were slightly muted (for all finishers). I’m pleased with my time of 11:30, yet as is often the case wonder if there was more to give – especially as the Glyder/Tryfan messing around cost me perhaps 30 mins?



The final trek down to the finish in Rowen with a soft grass track punctuating hard surface and the final steep tarmac

I took the opportunity to get changed before settling in to sampling the wide variety of vegan food [shepherd's pie!, pasta, salad, ginger cake, fruit cake and much more]. The live band were entertaining but it did make conversation with fellow competitors and others tricky. Presentations to the top 3 men and women took place (Liz was top woman) – handled by Kirsch and the Skyrunner rep Niandi. I had a quick chat with Clair Maxted, Trail Running magazine editor and look forward to the news item about this race (I dare say she might feature in it as she was second lady). As I left there were still many out on the course, but thankfully I later found out that successful completions had eventually been made, with the last finishers including Dick Scroop in over 17h.

The potential for the event is obvious with great marshalling, much enthusiasm and passion, super backing from various big sponsors and a challenging course offering rewarding superb views (sometimes). Thank you.

Charlie Sharp "Don't ask" as he was coming up Y Garn:

After the race Charlie told me he had damaged his map irreparably when slipping on scree descending Glyder Fawr. So he dropped down to Ogwen aid station to get a replacement and back up Devils kitchen and into the race again – which is when I saw him. Unfortunately the race organisers would not extend the 3pm cut off time so even though he had pressed on pronto and bombed down Snowdon etc. etc. he had just failed to meet the 3pm cut off when he got back to Ogwen and got timed out.

Nigel Aston