

Scrambles in Snowdonia

80 of the best routes – Snowdon, Glyders,
Carneddau, Eifionydd and outlying areas



Steve Ashton

updated by Carl McKeating and Rachel Crolla

Scrambles in Snowdonia



Warning! Scrambling can be dangerous

Scrambling can be a dangerous activity carrying a risk of personal injury or death. It should be undertaken only by those with a full understanding of the risks involved and with the training and experience to evaluate them. Scramblers should be appropriately equipped for the routes undertaken. Whilst every care and effort has been taken in the preparation of this book, the user should be aware that conditions are highly variable and can change quickly. Holds may become loose or fall off, rockfall can affect the character of a route, and in winter, snow and avalanche conditions must be carefully considered. These can materially affect the seriousness of a scramble, tour or expedition.

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Acknowledgements

The updaters would like to thank the inspirational group of people who accompanied us on scrambles, let us photograph them or helped out in other ways. Special thanks go to Stephanie Crolla, who supported us on numerous trips to Wales with the children and without whom this update would have been considerably more difficult. Also thanks to: Casey McKeating and James Wilby; Mark Barrett, Sam and Luke; Katie Cole; Charlotte Wilson and Ali Fontbin; Sarah, Mike, Becca and Amy Watton; Neil Butterton; Spencer Cullis and Chris Corcoran; Ali Lee; Dan 'rabbit' Williams and Darren Beever; Marc Yeoman; Jo Rochester and Sophie Nunn; Ben Wood, Lee Wales and Rachel Varney from RAF Valley Mountain Rescue; Luke Jackson, Dave Noble, Ged Heaton and Dominic McKenzie; Monika Kucerova and the late Keith Archman; Robert Bromley (as Adam) and Laura Long (as Eve); Helena and Christian Bird; Huw Gilbert; Ed Sutton and Theia the dog; Chris Aynsworth and Tim Harrop; the Dinsell family; Ella Williams; Steve Smith and Phil Timms; Heather and Rosa Crolla. Finally, a massive thank you to Anna Fleming for literally being a lifesaver with her Heimlich manoeuvre on Glyder Fach!

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CICERONE

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unless otherwise stated.

Front cover: Superb positions on Glyder
Fach's East Gully Ridge with Tryfan
beyond (Route 34)

Half title page: Traversing the second
pinnacle of Braich Ty Du Face (Route 2)

Updates to this guide

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authors to ensure the accuracy of
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Contents

Map key	8
Preface to the second edition	11
Updaters' note	13
INTRODUCTION	15
Area covered by the guide	15
Selection of routes	15
Using this guide (including explanation of grades)	15
Equipment	19
Basic rope technique	22
Maps	22
Access	22
Bases	22
Public transport	23
Accidents and emergencies	23
A final cautionary note	26
THE CARNEDDAU	27
Route 1 Southern Ridge Circuit	1-☆☆☆ ... 31
Pen yr Ole Wen	33
Route 2 Braich Ty Du Face (including Pinnacle Ridge and Porcupine Ridge)	2+☆☆ ... 33
Route 3 Broad Gully Ridge	2+☆ ... 37
Route 4 Craig Lloer Spur	3-☆☆ ... 41
Carnedd Dafydd	43
Route 5 Crib Lem (Llech Ddu Spur)	1☆☆☆ ... 43
Route 6 Eastern Ridge of Black Ladders	2☆ ... 47
Carnedd Llewelyn	49
Route 7 Craig yr Ysfa Amphitheatre	2+☆ ... 50
THE GLYDERS	53
Route 8 Cwm Bochlwyd Horseshoe	1☆☆☆CBU ... 56
Tryfan	59
<i>Tryfan East Face</i>	61
Route 9 Tryfan Bach Approach	3☆☆☆ ... 61
Approach and orientation for the Heather Terrace, East face of Tryfan	64

Route 10	Bastow Buttress Variant	2+ ★★ ★	68
Route 11	Nor' Nor' Buttress Variant	3 ★★ or 3S ★★	70
Route 12	Nor' Nor' Gully	2+ ★	73
Route 13	Nor' Nor' Groove	1+ ★	75
Route 14	North Buttress Variant	2 ★★	77
Route 15	Little and North Gullies	1 ★★	79
Route 16	Pinnacle Rib Variant	3 ★★	81
Route 17	South Gully	3- ★	83
Route 18	South Buttress	3 ★★	85
Tryfan West Face			87
Route 19	North Ridge	1 ★★ ★ CB	87
Route 20	Milestone Buttress Approach	3 ★★	93
Route 21	Milestone Gully Approach	1+ ★★	95
Route 22	Milestone Continuation	3 ★★	97
Route 23	Wrinkled Tower (aka Wrinkled Slabs and Castle Chimney)	3S ★★ ★	99
Route 24	West Face Route	3 ★	101
Route 25	V Buttress	3 ★★	105
Route 26	V Arête	3 ★	106
Route 27	Notch Arête	2 ★★ ★	108
Route 28	Y Gully	2 ★	111
Route 29	South Ridge Direct	1 ★ CB	112
Glyder Fach			114
Route 30	Bristly Ridge	1 ★★ ★ CB	115
Route 31	The Chasm Face	3 ★★ ★	118
Route 32	Main Gully	1+ ★★	122
Route 33	Main Gully Ridge	3 ★★ ★ or 2 ★★ ★	124
Route 34	East Gully Ridge	3 ★★ ★	125
Route 35	East Gully	1+ ★	127
Route 36	Shark Buttress	3S ★★ ★	129
Route 37	Dolmen Ridge	3 ★★ ★	132
Glyder Fawr			134
Route 38	Gribin Ridge	1 ★ CB	135
Route 39	False Gribin	1 ★	138
Route 40	Cneifion Arête	3 ★★ ★	142
Route 41	Maybe Tower Rib	3 ★	144
Route 42	Seniors' Ridge	1 ★	146
Route 43	Seniors' Gully	1- ★	148
Route 44	Direct Approach to Seniors' Ridge	2 ★	149
Route 45	Idwal Staircase and Continuation	2+ ★★ ★	152
Route 46	North West Face Route (aka Idwal Buttress)	2 ★★	154






Route 47	Bryant's Gully	2+ ★★ ★ ★	157
Route 48	Esgair Felen Direct	2+ ★ ★	161
Y Garn			164
Route 49	Devil's Kitchen and the Sheep Walk	3S ★★ ★ or 1- ★	165
Route 50	East Ridge	2 ★★	168
Foel Goch			170
Route 51	South Arête	1+ ★	170
Route 52	Needle's Eye Arête	3 ★	173
Route 53	Yr Esgair	3S ★	175
Carnedd y Filiast			177
Route 54	The Ridge (aka Atlantic Ridge)	2+ ★★	177
SNOWDON GROUP			181
Route 55	The Snowdon Horseshoe	1 ★★ ★ S	185
Crib Goch			188
Route 56	East Ridge	1 ★ S	189
Route 57	North Ridge	1 ★	191
Route 58	Jammed Boulder Gully	3S ★★	193
Route 59	Traverse of Crib Goch	1 ★★ ★ S	196
Crib y Ddysgl (Garnedd Ugain)			198
Route 60	Crib y Ddysgl	1 ★★ S	198
Route 61	Cwm Glas Mawr Approach	1+ ★ or 3S ★	200
Route 62	Clogwyn y Person Arête (including Parson's Nose options)	3 ★★ ★ or 3S ★★ ★	203
Route 63	Cwm Glas Ridge	1- ★	206
Route 64	Llechog Buttress	2 ★★	208
Route 65	Llechog Ridge	2- ★	211
Route 66	Eastern Terrace of Clogwyn Du'r Arddu	1+ ★★	213
Route 67	Western Terrace of Clogwyn Du'r Arddu	3 ★	217
Snowdon			219
Route 68	Tregalan Couloir	2 ★	219
Route 69	Y Gribin and the East Ridge	1 ★★	222
Lliwedd			225
Route 70	Traverse of Lliwedd	1 ★★ S	225
Route 71	West Peak via Bilberry Terrace	3S ★★ ★	227
EIFIONYDD			231
Route 72	Nantlle Ridge	1- ★★ ★	234
Craig Cwm Silyn			236
Route 73	Craig Fawr Rib (aka LMH)	3 ★	236

Mynydd Mawr	240
Route 74 Sentries' Ridge and Continuation	3- ★★ ★ .. 240
Route 75 Bear Buttress	3S ★ .. 245
OUTLYING AREAS	247
The Moelwyns	248
Route 76 Moel Siabod Ridge Circuit (including Daear Ddu Ridge) ..	1- ★★ ★ .. 248
The Rhinogs	251
Route 77 South Face of Rhinog Fawr	2- ★ .. 251
Route 78 South Ridge Variant, Rhinog Fach (aka Hywel Ridge)	3- ★★ .. 258
Cadair Idris	262
Route 79 Cyfrwy Arête (including Table Direct option) 3 ★★ ★ or 3S ★★ ★ ..	262
Conwy	267
Route 80 Penmaenbach Arête	1+ ★★ .. 267
Appendix A Summary of routes in grade order	271
Appendix B Longer combination ideas	274
Appendix C Useful contacts	274








Routes marked **CB**  and **S**  form part of the Cwm Bochlywd and Snowdon Horseshoes.  Route is accessed from the Pass of Llanberis, not from the Ogwen Valley.

Route symbols

(for OS legend see printed OS maps)

-  route
-  alternative route
-  scrambles on longer routes
-  start/finish point
-  start point
-  finish point
-  route direction

Route symbols on photo topos

-  the route of the scramble
-  line of the scramble where it is not visible (through routes etc)
-  approaches and descents (walking)
-  scrambling approaches and descents that are not part of the route
-  alternative routes
-  route numbers
-  notable features

Looking out to sea from the Llech Ddu Spur (Route 5)





About the Author

Steve Ashton began climbing in 1969 in the Lancashire quarries, wearing hiking boots and 'protected' by a tow rope retrieved from a council tip. Within two years, he was grappling with grade VI routes in the Dolomites and narrowly surviving storm-bound bivouacs.

While living in Snowdonia, he wrote regularly for the outdoor press and later produced numerous guidebooks and instructional manuals on climbing and hill walking. The first of these – *Scrambles in Snowdonia* – helped revive this neglected facet of mountaineering and introduced the now ubiquitous grading system.

After retiring from mountain writing, he spent several years as an actor and playwright before turning to fiction.

Other Cicerone guides by Steve

Ridges of Snowdonia



A summer's evening on Tryfan's South Ridge (Route 29)

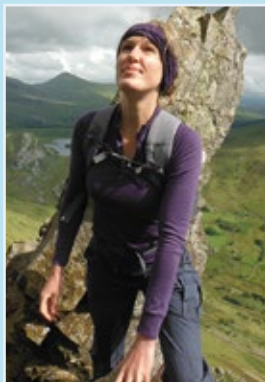
Preface

What criteria should be used to define a scramble? General agreement could be reached on the lower limit – that we must also expect to use our hands on the rock – but fixing the upper limit is always going to be controversial. My own interpretation, reflected in the cut-off point for this guide, is that the technical interest of the climbing (which in any case ought not to exceed Moderate or short passages of Difficult standard in the rock climbing classification) must be superseded by the wider interests of scenery, position and atmosphere. In other words, seeking out difficulty for its own sake, without regard to line or position on the mountain, is not scrambling but rock climbing.

Since its first publication in 1980, *Scrambles in Snowdonia* has served

thousands of existing scrambling enthusiasts, and no doubt helped to convert many more from the ranks of hill walkers and rock climbers. This is not an entirely comforting thought. Unroped scrambling, however exhilarating it may be, is potentially the most dangerous form of mountaineering. There have been times when – alone, unroped and in trouble halfway up some remote and uncharted face – I have vowed never to go into the mountains again. I break the vow regularly, but grow ever more cautious. There is no way of entirely eliminating the risk, only of reducing it. No mountain is worth a life, yet without mountains perhaps no worthwhile life remains to be lived.

Steve Ashton, 1992



About the Updaters

Carl McKeating and Rachel Crolla live at the edge of the Yorkshire Dales. Having grown up scrambling on local gritstone they first ventured to the Welsh mountains as teenagers, where they sampled the delights of Tryfan and the Glyders, along with witnessing a dramatic helicopter rescue from Crib Goch. They have since hiked, scrambled and climbed all over Europe, exploring the major mountain ranges. In 2007, Rachel became the first woman to climb to the highest point of every country in Europe. The couple's resulting guidebook, *Europe's High Points*, was published by Cicerone in 2009. In 2010, Carl and Rachel completed a long-standing ambition to climb all the routes in Ken Wilson's *Classic Rock*. This was followed by a three-month climbing tour of America and Carl has since worked on a Yorkshire gritstone guide. In 2013, *Walking in the Auvergne* – the couple's guide to the hills of the Massif Central in France – was published by Cicerone. In among roaming the steeper parts of Snowdonia, Carl completed a doctorate about Mont Blanc and the couple are both teachers.

Other Cicerone guides by Carl and Rachel

Cycling the Reivers Route

Europe's High Points

Hadrian's Cycleway

Outdoor Adventures with Children – Lake District


Walking in the Auvergne

Updaters' note

It has been a privilege to work on this inspirational book, and one that we have not taken lightly. In preparation for this extensively updated third edition, we have climbed and checked all the original routes, some of them many times. Grades have been reappraised and descriptions revised as necessary. After much thought, five of the routes from the previous edition have been relocated to the book's supporting webpage on the Cicerone website, www.cicerone.co.uk/1136/updates. In contrast, 16 additional routes have been included in the book. All are in keeping with the original premise of the book and allow scramblers to venture onto the best lines in a wider area of the national park, as well as to explore a greater number of excellent lines on the northern mountains.

We share Steve's sobering sentiment regarding the use of this guide. Although grade 3 scrambles are now more commonly climbed with a rope, we have tried to clarify where there is a higher element of risk by introducing the 3S grade – the 'S' being severe, serious or, when tackling their hardest parts, an expletive of your choice! Taking into account scramblers' feedback about the last edition, we have tried to provide extra information about finding and following the routes that are less frequented. Ultimately though, the difference between a superb mountain day and an unmitigated disaster is the experience and common sense of the party. The freedom of scrambling is life-affirming, yet it must be taken seriously.

Carl McKeating and Rachel Crolla



A fine crest on the Cyfrwy
Arête with Llyn y Gadair
beyond (Route 79)

Introduction

Area covered by the guide

Nearly all the described routes lie within the northern half of the Snowdonia National Park, where the most rugged mountains are found. Good scrambling in the southern half is scarce, the rock here being typically loose or vegetated, but a handful of good routes have been included.

Northern Snowdonia naturally divides into four regions. From north to south these are: the Carneddau, the Glyders, the Snowdon group and Eifionydd. The best scrambles will be found in the Glyders, with the large majority concentrated on Tryfan, Glyder Fach and Glyder Fawr. The Snowdon group also boasts many excellent routes, whereas the Carneddau and the Eifionydd regions provide only a handful. In this book, each region is introduced by a general description of the terrain and an indication of the scrambling potential. The best routes in the outlying areas of the Rhinogs, Moelwyns and Cadair Idris have been added to the updated edition of this guide to give wider coverage of the Snowdonia National Park.

Selection of routes

The choice of routes is, by necessity and design, a selective one. All the best scrambles, along with the most worthwhile routes in the outlying

areas, have been included. The range of difficulty extends from scrambly walks to short sections of proper rock climbing. Average fitness and a head for heights will suffice at one end of the scale, whereas nothing short of mountaineer's skill and daring will do at the other. Some routes fit neither category: scrambling over loose rock and up dripping, vegetated gullies seems to require a special cunning, for which neither hill walking nor rock climbing provides adequate preparation. The proficient all-round scrambler is a unique beast with some cautionary tales to tell.

Using this guide (including explanation of grades)

Route information boxes

Basic information has been included in a box at the start of each route in order to help readers decide whether the scramble is suitable for them. The headings are fairly self-explanatory: 'Location' refers to the mountain or mountain group where the scramble can be found and the grid references given here refer to the location of the actual scramble. (Parking details and corresponding grid references can be found in the longer 'Approach' section at the start of the main route description.) 'Approach time' is provided from the point at which most people would begin walking, up until the start of the scrambling. 'Altitude' is the height at which the scrambling, rather than the approach, begins. 'Aspect' simply refers to the approximate direction

A final cautionary note

A guidebook of this sort reflects the author's and updaters' reactions and responses to the routes. Not everyone will agree on the exact lines to follow, the levels of difficulty encountered, or the best techniques to apply. The author climbed all the routes personally, specifically with the guide in mind, and at least once in every case without rope protection. All routes have been re-climbed by the updaters for this edition, often several times and in various conditions and ways. Nevertheless, when faced by an unexpected route-finding problem you must be prepared to trust your own mountain sense or judgement.

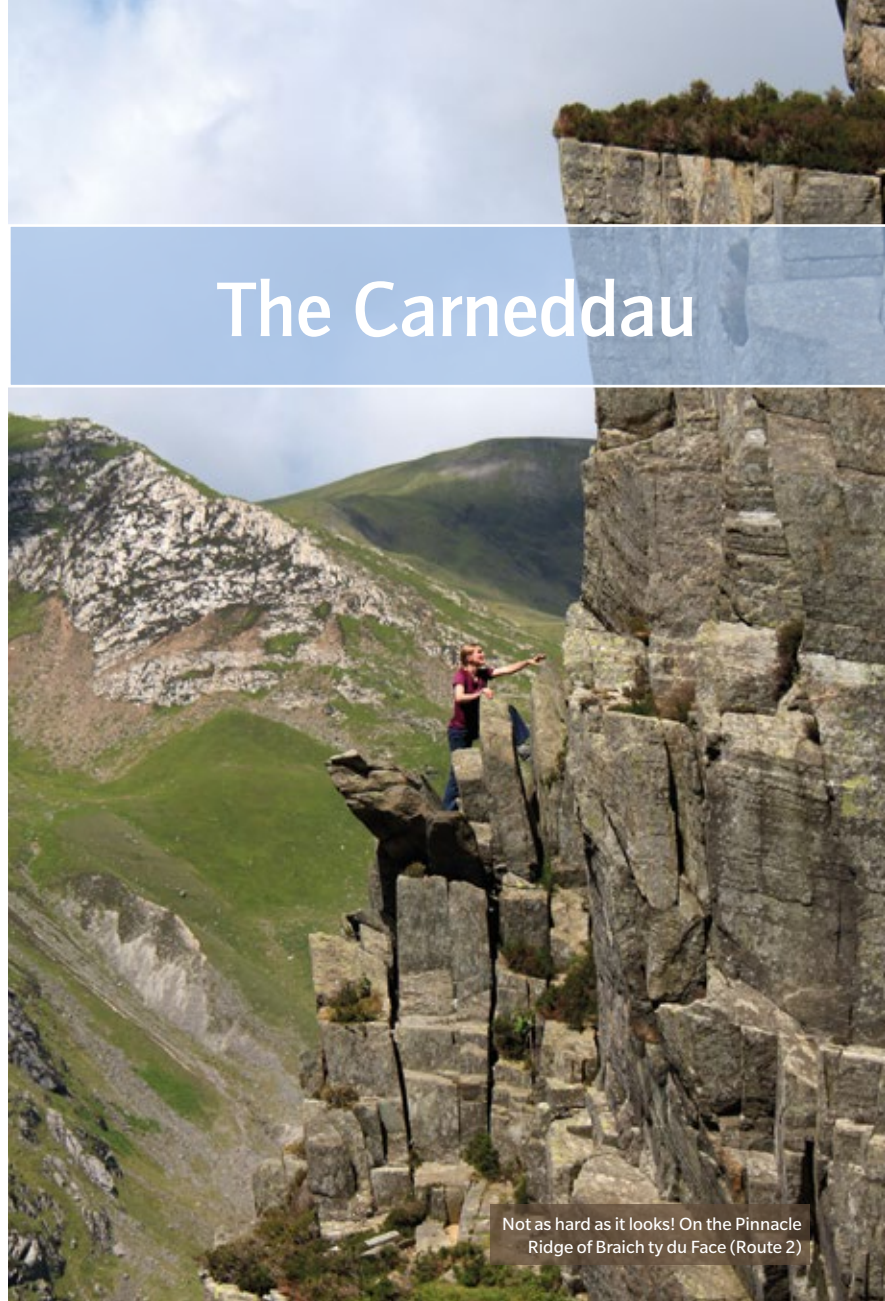
The same goes for loose rock encountered on the routes. Coping with unstable blocks, shattered rock and treacherous vegetation is all part of the game. Even the easiest scrambles can never be made completely safe, and some are potentially more dangerous than most rock climbs.

All the described scrambles are 'summer' routes. Even the simplest of them would be a totally different proposition in winter conditions, when ice-axe, crampons and winter-climbing skills are required. Remember that even when snow is absent the rocks may be coated in verglas – the thin veneer of ice rendering an ascent extremely difficult and dangerous.

A further consideration: the proliferation of indoor climbing and localised bouldering in the years since the last edition of this guide has led to a generation of technically gifted climbers who have not necessarily served a traditional mountain apprenticeship. Although such gymnastic practice is useful, it does not develop the skills required on an exposed mountainside at 900m in strong winds, a thunder-shower imminent and nightfall looming. Neither does it teach you to tap holds, to distrust certain blocks, spot the best line and avoid false trails. No grade of scramble should be taken lightly. Experience should be developed gradually: **consider your limitations and the limitations of others in your party before setting out.**

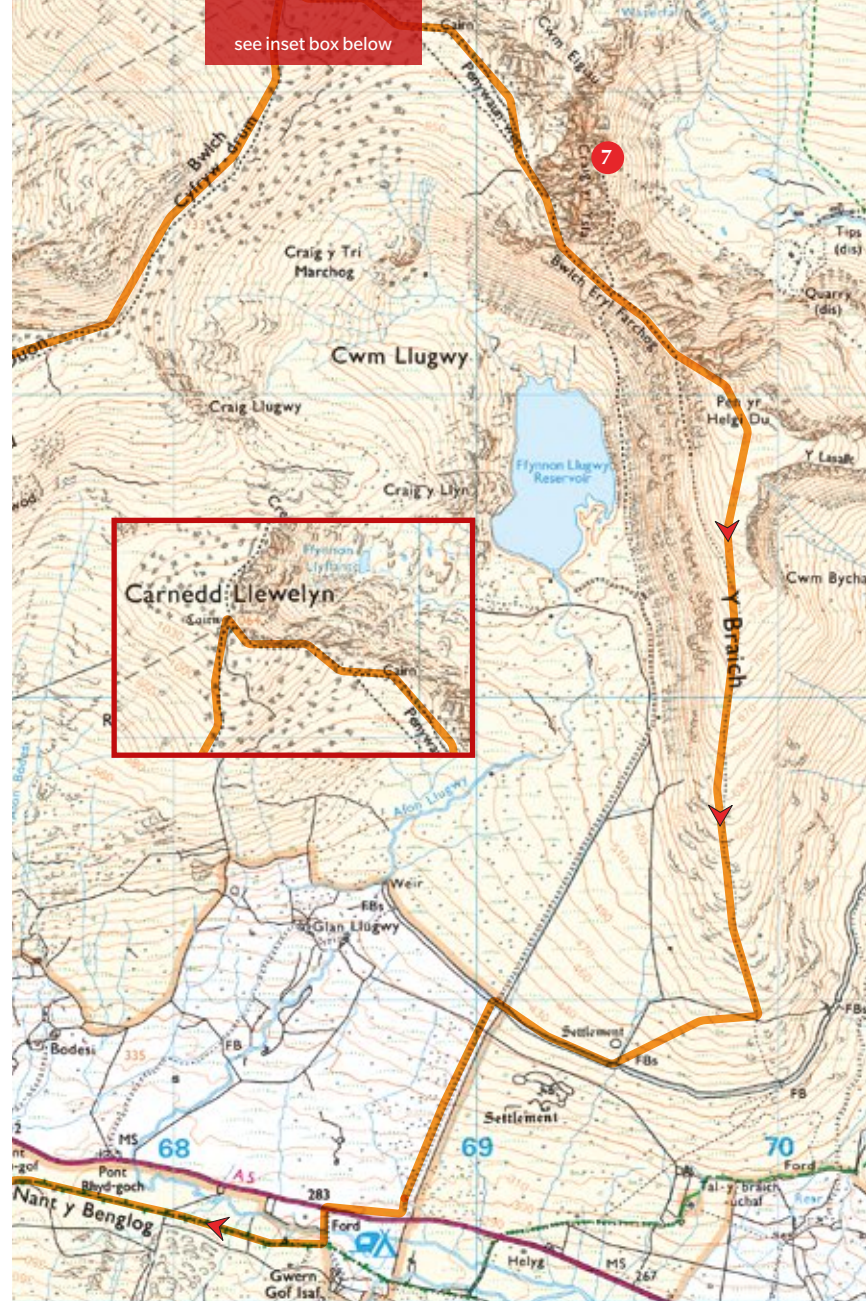
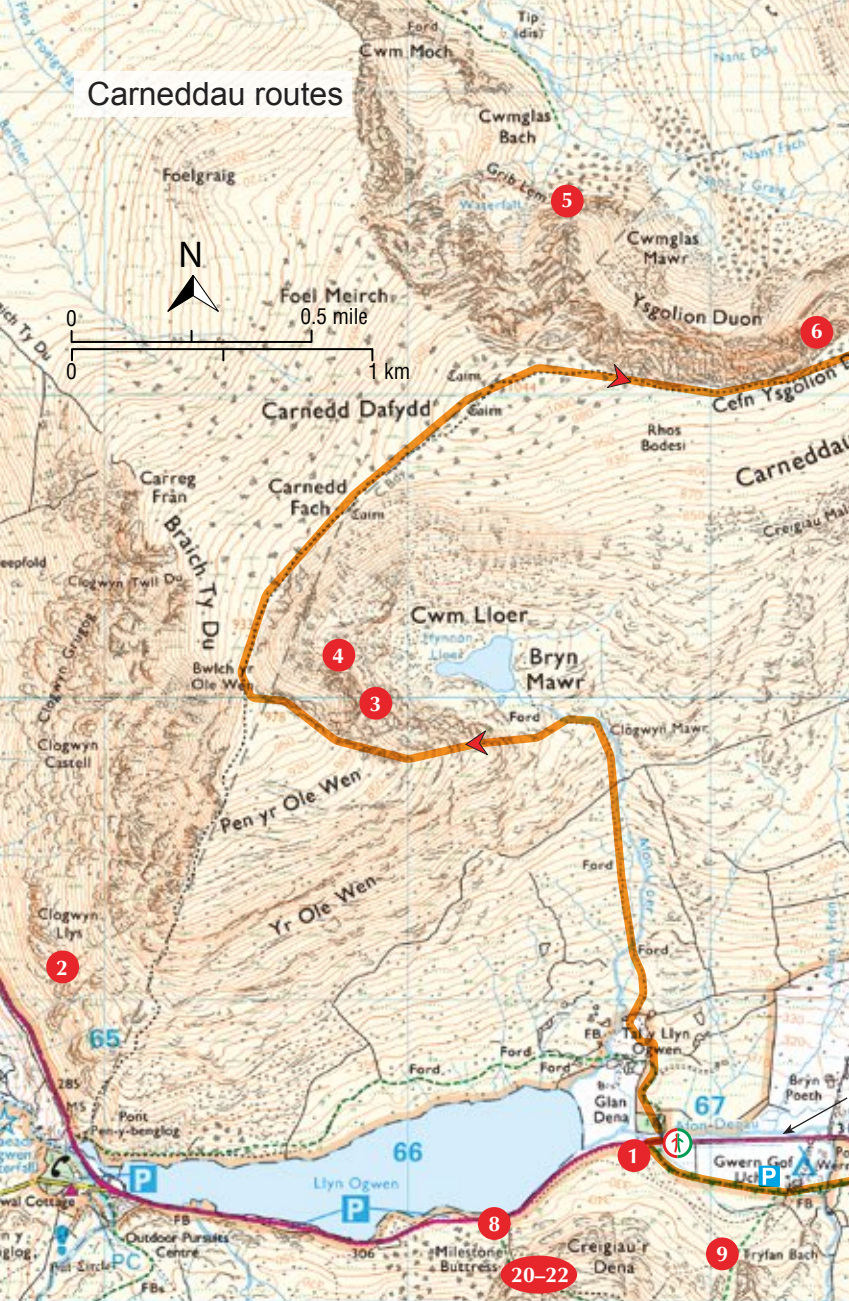
Above all, scrambling demands good judgement of terrain and an ability to assess the potential risk at every stage. These skills are learned gradually, beginning with the grade 1 ridge scrambles. This book can suggest only where the routes go and give advice on how to overcome some of the obstacles you will meet. Knowing when and how to turn back or when to carry on are skills in themselves; no-one can decide for you whether or not it is safe to continue. Ultimately the choices and the adventures are yours.

The Carneddau



Not as hard as it looks! On the Pinnacle
Ridge of Braich ty du Face (Route 2)

Carneddau routes





The Carneddau

The Carneddau form the most northerly hill group in Snowdonia. There are few hints here of the rocky intricacy of the Glyders, or the rugged splendour of Snowdon; impressions instead are of barren summits and remote valleys.

A fortunate arrangement of ridges means that, having once made the initial height gain, several summits can be strung together in a high-level horseshoe traverse. Unfortunately most of the scrambling potential lies dormant under a blanket of heather, and much of what escapes is either too difficult or too loose. Nevertheless, the few lines worth following are enriched by their remote setting.

In broad terms the group lies within a triangle defined by the coastline between Bangor and Conwy, and the valleys that extend inland from those towns towards Betws-y-Coed. More specifically, the area of particular interest lies to the north of the A5 between Llyn Ogwen and Capel Curig.

The main ridges are aligned roughly in the shape of a T, with Carnedd Llewelyn – the highest peak of the group – appropriately occupying the junction. These ridges and their major intervening cwms – Llugwy, Eigiau and Llafar – provide the usual means of access to the scrambles.

Route 1

Southern Ridge Circuit

1- ★★★

A superb ridge walk over four major Carneddau summits, punctuated by short, easy scrambles.

Location	Carneddau, Ogwen
Grade	1- ★★★
Circuit time	5–6hrs
Route length	16km
Conditions	Much of the route is exposed to strong crosswinds, although nowhere is the ridge particularly narrow or precarious. Take care with route-finding on Carnedd Dafydd and Carnedd Llewelyn in mist. Wet rock does not significantly increase the difficulties.

This is the classic high-level ridge traverse of the Carneddau, and the best introductory outing in the group. Not only does it ascend four major peaks, but it also previews most of the routes described later in this section. Scrambling interest is spaced, short-lived and of minimal difficulty, although anyone insisting on including something tougher in their mountain day could substitute one of Routes 2 to 4 for their ascent of Pen yr Ole Wen, while Routes 5 to 7 could also be incorporated into the day with a bit of imagination. The route is on mostly good paths across stony ground or grass.

Approach

Via the A5 from Capel Curig or Bethesda. Park on the roadside near the bridge at Glan Dena (SH 668 605).

Ascent/Descent

Follow the track past **Glan Dena** almost to **Tal y Llyn** Farm. Turn right on a path by a stone wall, later crossing the wall by a ladder stile. Several little streams are crossed until the main stream is followed, mostly on its left side (various often-boggy paths), to **Cwm Lloer**. Just as the lake in Cwm Lloer comes into view, take the path left which ascends a broad runnel towards a quartz-veined slab visible above. This gains the left-bounding ridge of the cwm – the East Ridge. The scrambling starts above the quartz and ascends the ridge, in its initial stages via a simple 10m scramble up a rock gully. Follow the ridge to the summit of **Pen yr Ole Wen**, 1hr 15min from the start.

Circle the rim of Cwm Lloer northwards for 700m and ascend a broad ridge for 500m to the summit of **Carnedd Dafydd**. Descend east for 1.5km on a rocky path, then curve north for a further 1km around the rim of Cwm Llafar where a few small steps of scrambling interest can be sought by going over the rocky knobbls on the way to the summit of **Carnedd Llewelyn**. Here there are retrospective views of the Black Ladders and Llech Ddu.

Take the ridge east then south east for 1km, passing around the head of the Craig yr Ysfa Amphitheatre, and descend by a 20m scramble over a gently angled rock nose to **Bwlch Eryl Farchog** (there is a short-cut descent south from here to Ogwen). Walk or scramble very easily up the rocky ridge ahead to the summit of **Pen yr Helgi Du**.

Descend the grass ridge of **Y Braich** southwards for about 2km. On passing through a gap in the transverse stone wall at SH 699 609, contour right on a small path then descend diagonally to cross the leat (manmade watercourse) at a foot-bridge just left of a stone wall. Turn right and follow the leat to the surfaced Ffynnon Llugwy access road, which leads down to the **A5**. Follow the main road rightwards for 50m or so, but then turn off left up the track towards the Gwern Gof Isaf campsite. After 100m a bridleway on the right is followed to **Gwern Gof Uchaf campsite**, where a choice of two paths leads back to the parking near **Glan Dena**.

Pen yr Ole Wen (978M)

The inelegant bulk of Pen yr Ole Wen protrudes south from the main mass of the Carneddau, introducing a kink into the Ogwen Valley where the outflow from Llyn Ogwen gushes down into the broad U-shaped valley of the Nant Ffranc. For those based in the Ogwen Valley this is the most accessible of the Carneddau peaks, offering unrivalled views of the northern crags and cwms of the Glyders.

Unaccountably, the most popular walking route zig-zags up the unpleasant and exhausting south spur from Ogwen Cottage; connoisseurs choose the scenic and comparatively gentle East Ridge. An ascent of Pen yr Ole Wen by either route is generally regarded as a mere preliminary to a traverse of the higher Carneddau peaks.

The featureless south east slope above Llyn Ogwen holds no interest for the scrambler, whereas the pseudo-alpine west (or Braich Ty Du) face, ribbed with ridges and riven with gullies, promises all sorts of adventure. Otherwise the best scrambling will be found at the head of Cwm Lloer, tucked out of sight behind the East Ridge.

Route 2

Braich Ty Du Face

(including Pinnacle Ridge and Porcupine Ridge)

2+ ⚡⚡

Exposed scrambling on an introductory ridge followed by a big hike to reach the rock arêtes of the upper face that lead, with increasing difficulty and excitement, to the summit slopes.

Location	Pen yr Ole Wen, Ogwen (SH 648 611)
Grade	2+ ⚡⚡
Approach time	15min
Altitude and aspect	360m, west
Route length	Despite the short approach, a lengthy outing with over 500m of height gain – allow plenty of time. Pinnacle Ridge on its own offers a quick burst of scrambling when time is limited.
Conditions	West-facing and quick-drying, this is a good choice when the north faces are likely to be cold or damp. Nevertheless, it is worth waiting for dry rock, especially for the airy pinnacles. The less-frequented Porcupine Ridge requires an astute judgement of holds, although the rock is generally sound. Good visibility is vital for the approach to Porcupine Ridge.

Scrambles in Snowdonia

80 of the best scrambles in the Snowdonia National Park
graded from adventurous walking to mountaineering

This is a completely updated and expanded edition of Steve Ashton's much-loved definitive guidebook. Included are all the popular classics such as the Snowdon Horseshoe, North Ridge of Tryfan, Bristly Ridge, Cneifion Arête and the Cyfrwy Arête on Cadair Idris, as well as a range of outstanding lesser-known scrambles and 16 new routes.

Explore the Carneddau, Glyders and Snowdon Group, along with the finest scrambling in Eifionydd, the Moelwyns, the Rhinogs and Cadair Idris. From classic high mountain ridges to remote steep crags, there are routes for both adventurous walkers and those seeking serious mountaineering outings.

- clear colour photo topos and OS mapping
- advice on how to progress and stay safe on steep ground and rock
- all routes require previous experience in exposed mountain environments



**The Carneddau • Tryfan
and the Glyders • Snowdon
Group • Eifionydd • Cadair
Idris • The Rhinogs**



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