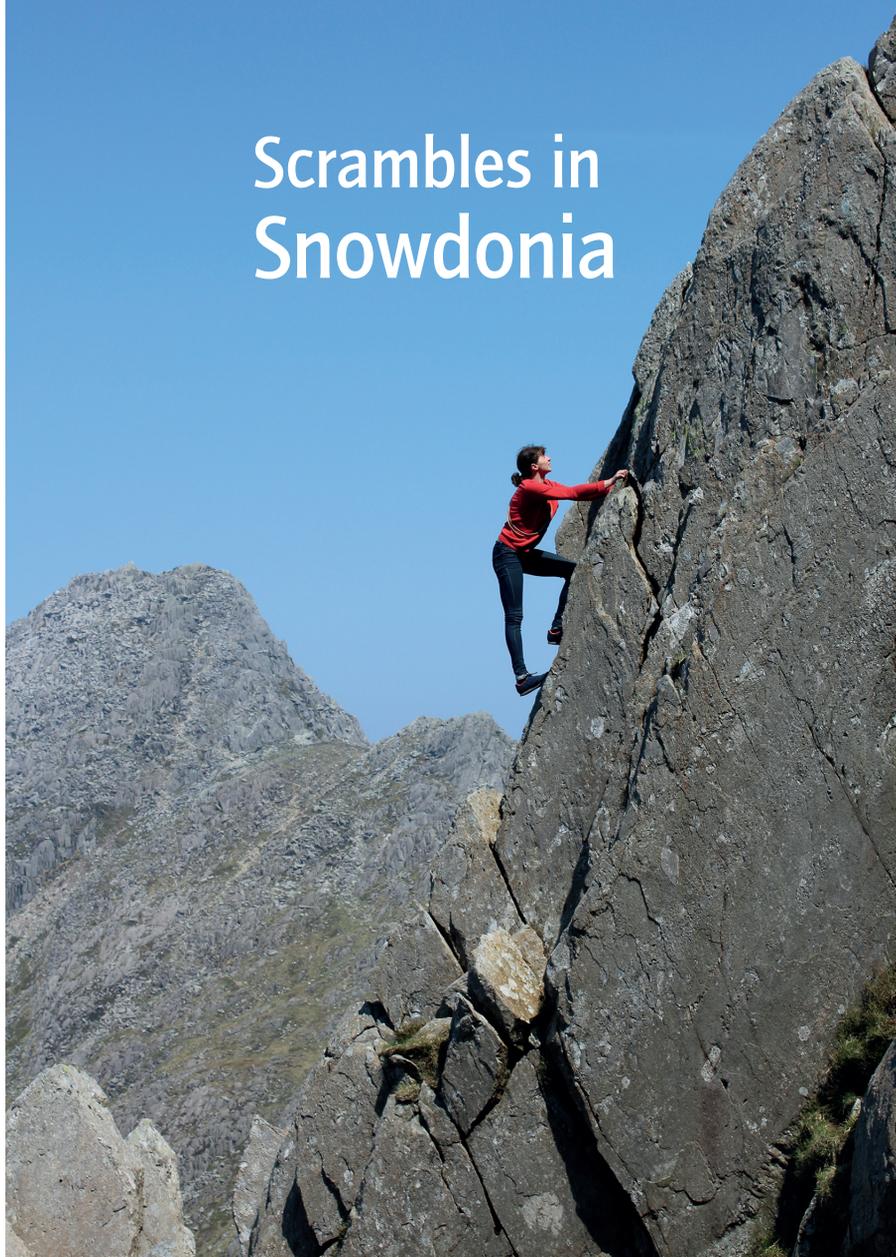


Scrambles in Snowdonia



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.

Therefore, except for any liability which cannot be excluded by law, neither Cicerone nor the author and updaters accept liability for damage of any nature including damage to property, personal injury or death arising directly or indirectly from the information in this book.

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 Butterson; Spencer Cullis and Chris Corcoran; Ali Lee; Dan 'rabbit' Williams and Darren Beaver; 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!

Scrambles in Snowdonia

by Steve Ashton
updated by Carl McKeating and Rachel Crolla

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unless otherwise stated.

Front cover: Traversing the second
pinnacle of Braich Ty Du Face (Route 2)

Half title page: Superb positions on
Glyder Fach's East Gully Ridge with
Tryfan beyond (Route 34)

Updates to this guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/890/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, 2 Police Square, Milnthorpe LA7 7PY, United Kingdom.

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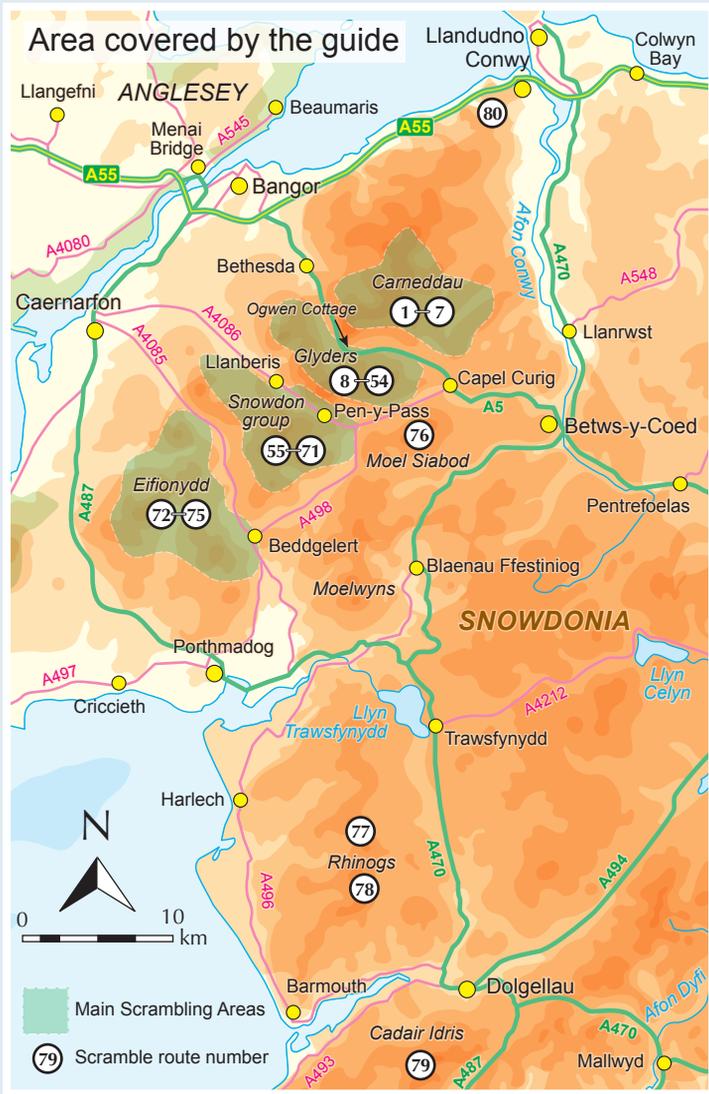
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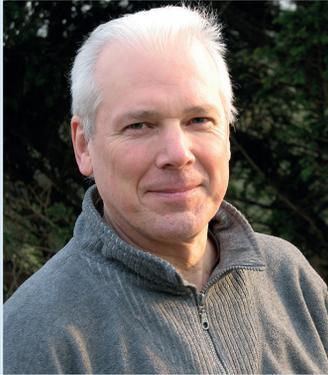
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Route symbols	Route symbols on photo topos
(for OS legend see printed OS maps)	
 route	 the route of the scramble
 alternative route	 line of the scramble where it is not visible (through routes etc)
 scrambles on longer routes	 approaches and descents (walking)
 start/finish point	 scrambling approaches and descents that are not part of the route
 start point	 alternative routes
 finish point	 route numbers
 route direction	 notable features





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 to the second edition

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. When they are not roaming the steeper parts of Snowdonia, Carl is working on his doctorate about Mont Blanc and Rachel teaches.

Other Cicerone guides by Carl and Rachel

Europe's High Points

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/890/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, 2017

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 scrambling 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

Scrambles in Snowdonia

the route faces. The 'Route length' information is a rather subjective estimate of how much scrambling you can expect to find and whether the route is a long or short outing. This should be treated with caution because people move at vastly different speeds on steep ground, especially if ropework is sometimes involved. Approximate scrambling vertical height gains are often included, but again it is worth bearing in mind that scrambles are rarely vertical. The 'Conditions' heading is essential reading; it takes account of aspects such as rock quality and weather.

For the longer ridge circuits that include more than one scramble, such as the Snowdon Horseshoe, a rough circuit



Early on the Cwm Glas Ridge with Esgair Felen behind (Route 63)

time based on an average unroped party has also been included.

Route descriptions

After an introduction and approach description, the routes are described generally or in detail according to the intricacy of the terrain. **Remember that the described line is often only one of several ways of ascending the face.** Use it as a guide, but be prepared to find easier or harder variations as the situation demands. A 'Descent by this route' section gives advice on using the route as a descent; if this section is not present, a descent is impractical or unduly difficult.

Descents and combinations have been given for all the routes to suggest interesting combinations for those seeking a longer mountaineering day. (See also Appendix B.)

Within route descriptions, alternative options are given as bullet points.

Route classification

The routes have been classified 1, 2, 3 or 3S, according to difficulty and level of risk. The progression from the very easiest grade 1 routes, such as the Southern Ridge Circuit or Seniors' Gully, through to the hardest grade 2 routes, such as Bastow Buttress or Bryant's Gully, is considerable; this increase in standard should not be underestimated. To give as much detail as possible we have sub-divided the grades for this edition. Borderline cases formally indicated by a grade of 1/2 or 2/3 are now indicated by the use of + or - symbols. However, it is impossible to apply any grading system

Above the Great Pinnacle Gap
on Bristly Ridge (Routes 8 and 30)



Scrambles in Snowdonia



rigorously, and at best it can serve only as a rough guide.

Grade 1: This grade denotes routes that require no special mountaineering skills (eg Snowdon Horseshoe, Tryfan North Ridge, Bristly Ridge), and which should be within the capability of any adventurous and experienced hill walker with a head for heights. These routes are unlikely to require rope protection, and may be considered for descent or during doubtful weather.

Grade 1-: A particularly simple grade 1 route that limits exposure and is ideal as an introduction to scrambling (eg Moel Siabod, Seniors' Gully, Cwm Glas Ridge).

Grade 1+: A grade 1 route likely to have increased steepness, technicality and exposure (eg East Gully, Milestone Gully, Nor' Nor' Groove).

Grade 2: Things are getting much more serious now. These include the difficult gullies and ridges, and the easier face routes (eg Y Gully, Eastern Ridge of Black Ladders, North Buttress Variant). You may have to wait for optimum weather conditions, and even then difficulties that require rope protection may be encountered. Grade 2 routes often involve short passages of Moderate grade rock climbing. A wide experience of scrambling, or a background in mountaineering, is essential. Such routes are rarely suitable for descent. Note also that a grade 2 climbed unroped may be potentially far more dangerous than a grade 3 climbed with rope protection.

Grade 2-: Routes that provide an introduction to the grade (eg Llechog Ridge, South Face of Rhinog Fawr).

Grade 2+: The hardest routes in the grade (eg Bastow Buttress, Bryant's Gully).

Grade 3: These routes have the attributes of grade 2 scrambles but with the additional complication of one or more short 'pitches' of simple rock climbing, often up to Difficult standard, on which rope protection is usual (eg Chasm Face, Dolmen Ridge). Someone whose background is limited to hill walking and scrambling will need to acquire a knowledge of basic rope technique before attempting these routes – in particular an ability to select belay anchors, fix running belays, and, in the event of a forced retreat, to abseil.

Grade 3-: Routes that offer an introduction to the grade (eg Craig Lloer Spur, South Gully, South Ridge Variant Rhinog Fach).

Grade 3S: Particularly challenging grade 3 terrain (eg Yr Esgair, Devil's Kitchen, Jammed Boulder Gully). The scrambles given grade 3S have more sustained or exposed passages of Difficult grade rock climbing or crux sections on wet or suspect rock. They present mountaineering experiences where good judgement and knowledge of rope work are essential. **Experienced climbers who solo grade 3 scrambles should be wary of 3S routes.**

Star ratings

Routes have been allocated a quality rating from zero to three stars. Obviously this is a subjective assessment, although few will argue over the merits or otherwise of routes at either end of the scale:

- ☆☆☆ acknowledged classics or routes of exceptional quality and interest
- ☆☆ routes of high quality
- ☆ routes of merit but which lack continuous interest
- no star** routes described for completeness or because they are the best available in that particular region.

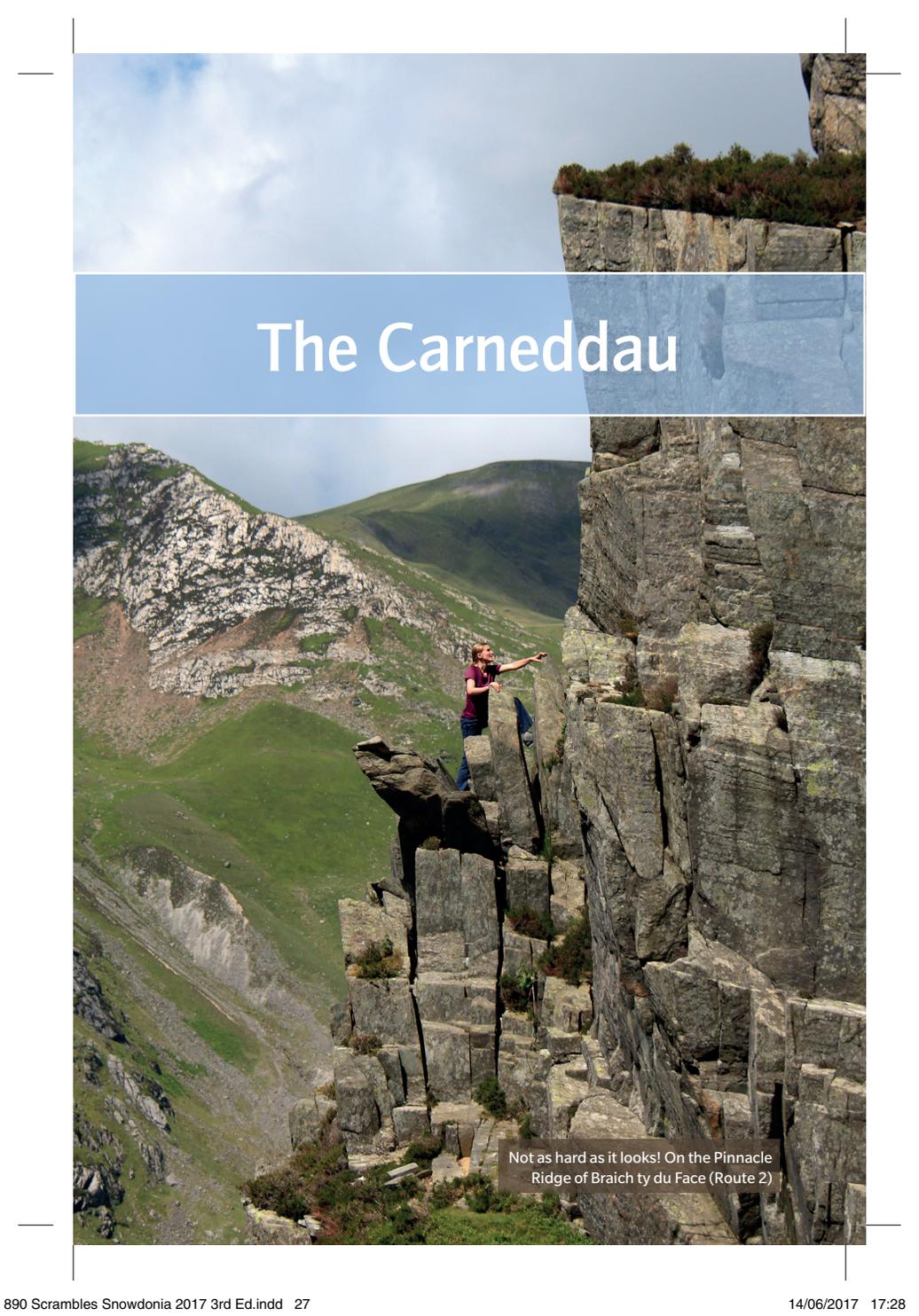
Equipment

Small first aid kit: Essential and should include: bandages, plasters, antiseptic cream/wipes, sun cream and surgical swabs. A tiny roll of duct tape can be surprisingly advantageous for holding swabs and plasters in place.

Whistle, compass and head torch.

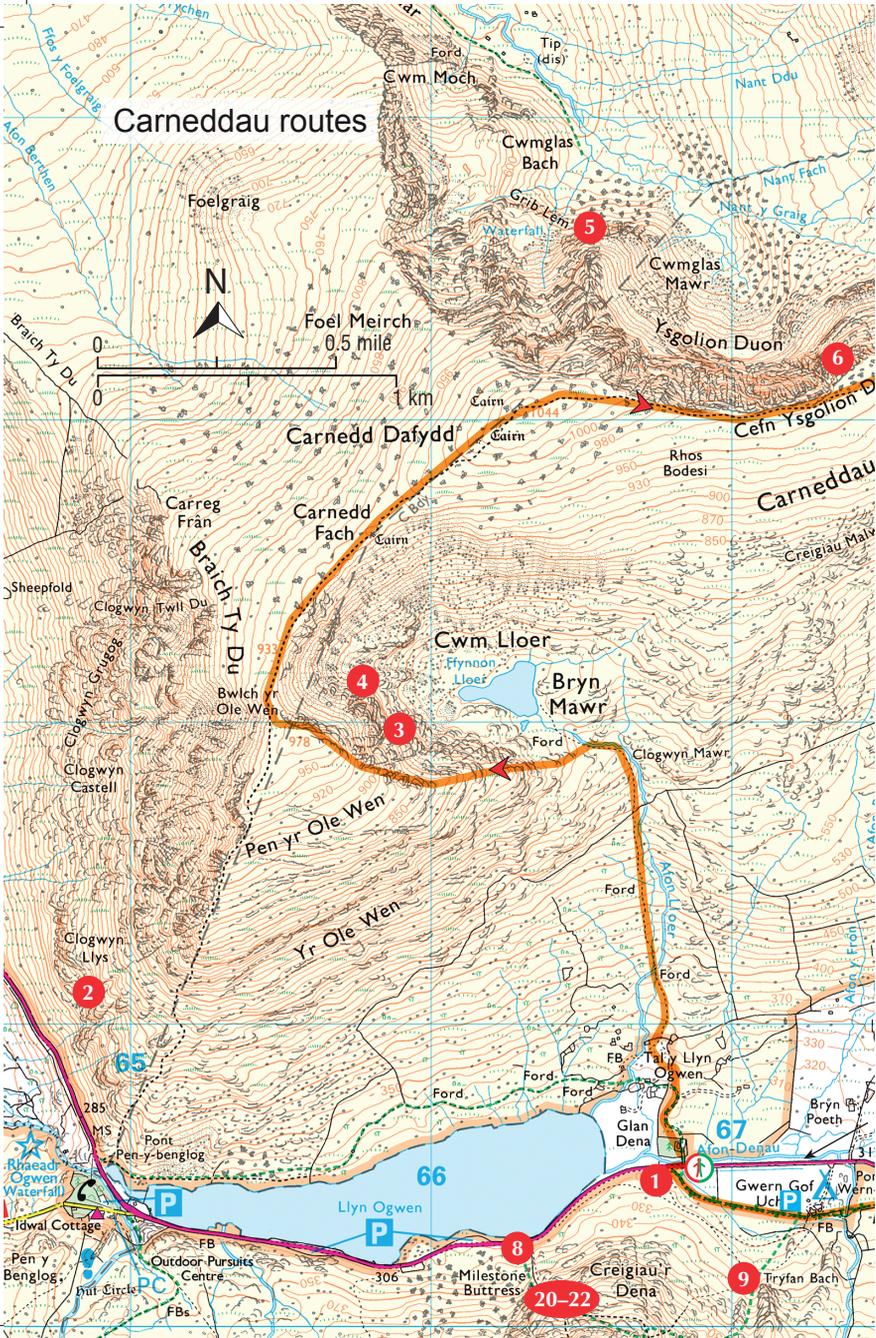
Clothing: Your normal hill-walking clothing will generally be suitable for scrambling, but ensure that it gives adequate free movement for high leg and arm reaches. Mountain weather is changeable; it is wise to always pack a lightweight waterproof. Fingerless gloves or liner gloves that offer sensitivity and grip can be useful for scrambling up cold or wet rock but are no substitute for the sensitivity offered by gloveless hands.

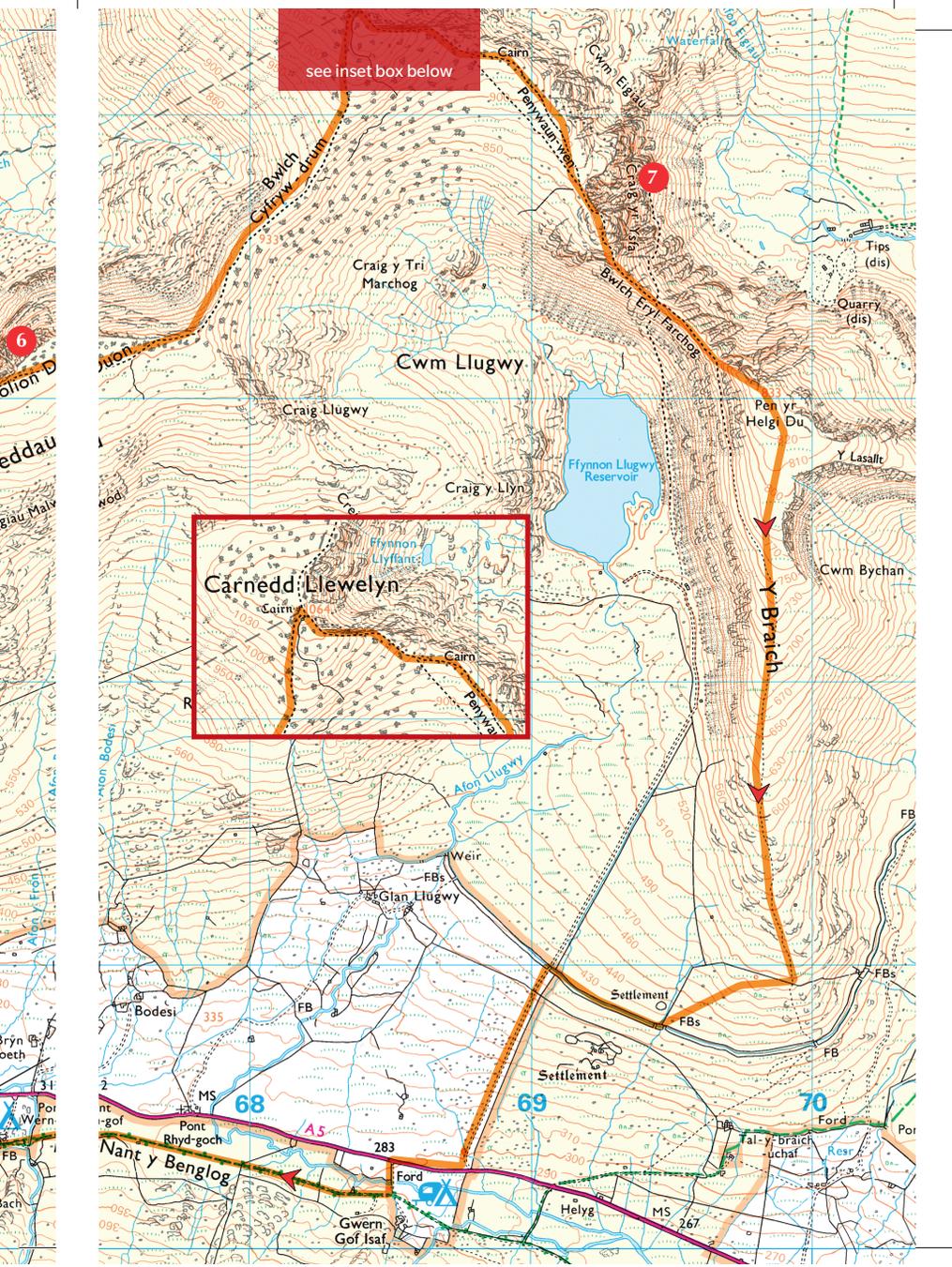
Footwear: Specialist climbing approach shoes designed for scrambling and easy climbs are produced by all the major climbing brands and are recommended for scramblers venturing onto the grade 2 and 3 routes. However, be aware that approach shoes have their downsides: their soft

A photograph of a person in a maroon shirt and blue jeans standing on a narrow, rocky ridge. The person is pointing towards a vast valley with green hills and a rocky mountain range in the background. The sky is blue with some clouds. The foreground shows the layered, grey rock of the ridge.

The Carneddau

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





Descending the short step to Bwlch Eyrll Farchog





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.

Scrambles in Snowdonia

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 rannel 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 knobbles 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**.