

Having just returned from 10 days in the Lake District and Snowdonia, perhaps I can provide some up-to-date reports on the conditions.

Please bear in mind that none of these routes are technical in any way i.e. you don't need ropes or technical climbing gear. These mountains have been walked up by thousands and thousands of people so the way to the summit is well-trodden. They are steep in places, but the most important thing to remember is that you watch where you put your feet. Taking a slip or a tumble, or turning an ankle, will be the main risk to stopping you completing the challenge.

Scafell Pike:

I reached the summit in awful weather (horizontal rain and thick fog), but reassuringly, the snow was only on the ground for the last 100 metres or so of elevation gain. It did snow again heavily the night after, but I climbed a more technical peak nearby without any trouble.

The route starts off quite steeply - we'll go from grass and muddy track onto a specifically laid trail of rocks. These are uneven and although easy on the way up, are tricky underfoot on the descent (especially if wet). There is a small river crossing which was very swollen, but still easy to cross (lots of stepping stones) and then the rocky trail resumes. The path then reaches a brief plateau and small boulder field, and then turns into a very wide and easy gravel path. Nearer the top, the path is less obvious, but well marked with cairns all the way to the summit. At this point there were a couple of small snow fields to cross and it was a bit icy between rocks. When the clouds did briefly part on the way down the views were amazing.

Snowdon:

Snowdon had experienced a lot more snow than the Lake District and it was snowing heavily on the summit when I climbed it on Saturday. The route which we intend to use on the event is called the Pyg Track, which rises quickly from Pen Y Pass to the top. It's the shortest, and therefore steepest, walking route. Because of the steepness, it means you reach snow quite quickly. The path is less maintained than Scafell (more boulder strewn), which means that the snow made the going a lot slower than I'd hoped. Near the top the Pyg Track has a zig-zag section where it breaches the summit ridge and meets the other trails. This was pretty snowy - waste deep in places - and it made the going quite slow and arduous. If conditions don't improve before the 18th, then we will probably switch routes to walk up from the Llanberis side. This is a longer walk, but much more gradual ascent. I walked down this way and the route is very simple. Slippery in places, but wide and gentle.

I am monitoring Ben Nevis carefully. A friend has been on the mountain in the last week and climbed up to over 1000 metres. Others were still going on to the summit.

What I would suggest is that some of you give some thought to walking poles (see the links from Catherine below). When we do reach the snow they will give you extra support and on both the ascent and descent they will take some of the weight and impact off your legs.

Please don't let any of this worry you. I'd much rather you all knew what to expect and turned up prepared.

As for fitness, nothing that you do now will boost your fitness before the event, so please don't think "Crap I need to go and run every day until we drive to Scotland". It's tempting to do. You'll want your legs feeling fresh when we start. If you have access to a bike (or gym) then try some light cycling. Your heart doesn't know if you are walking up a hill or riding a bike, so it's a good way to maintain cardio vascular fitness. I would suggest one final short walk this weekend just to check that you are happy with your kit. I'll send round an email about food this week too, so you'll get an idea for how

much your bag will weigh on the mountain.

If you have any other questions please drop me a line.

Thanks,
Ross