

COMING ROUND THE MOUNTAIN

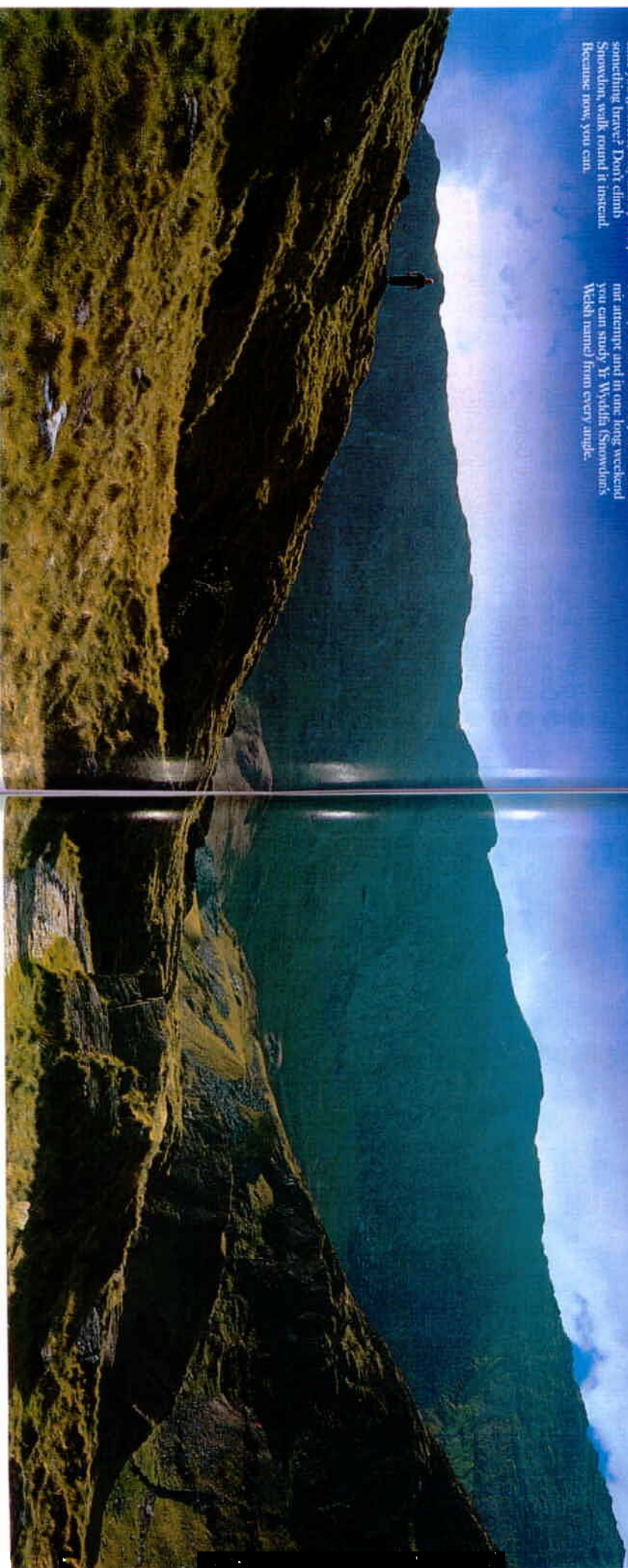
Snowdon's brand new route provides us with the most exciting walking opportunity in years. Danny Hopkins covers all the angles, and walks round Britain's favourite mountain.

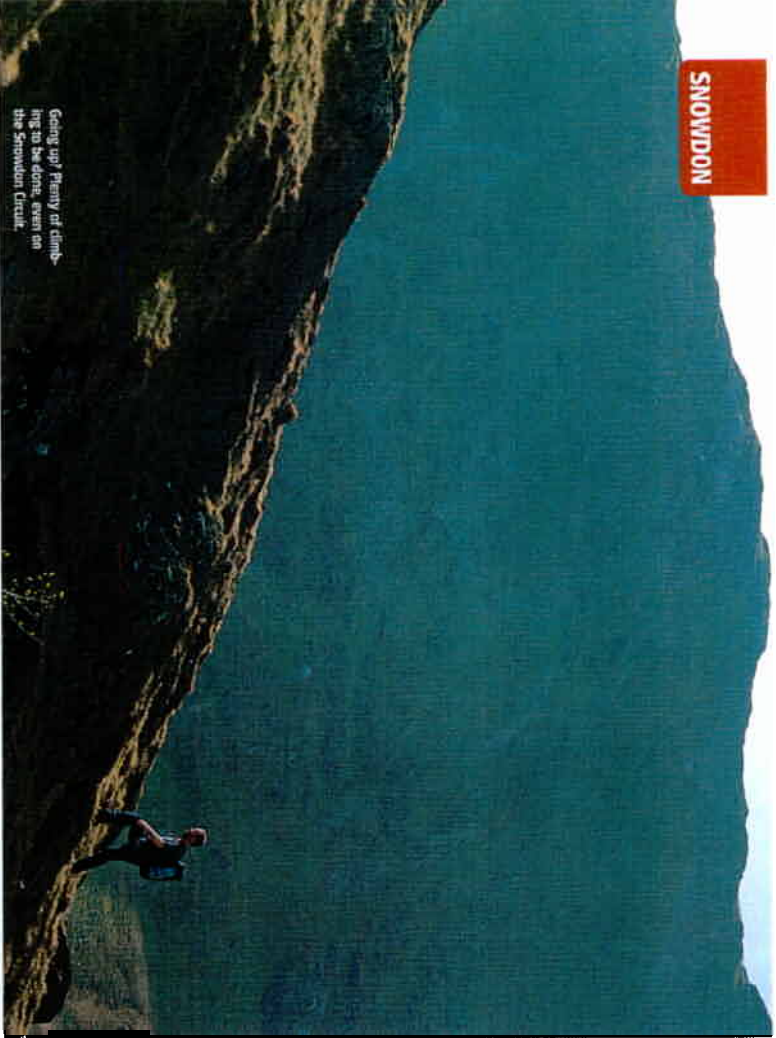
Snowdon is a wonderful lump. Pointy, like a proper mountain should be; accessible by several equally gorgeous routes; and surrounded by fascinating history. The views from the top are astounding, but the views from the foothills can be even more extraordinary. So next time you go there, why don't you try something brave? Don't climb Snowdon, walk round it instead. Because now, you can.

The titular arrival of Open Access in Snowdonia at the end of May, has provided us with a brand new walking route through the Llanberis Pass. The stiles are in place, as are the bridges, all it needs is you. The new 29.7 mile route means it is now possible to circumnavigate Snowdon in two days. Take a third day for a simpler attempt and in one long weekend you can study St Wyddfa (Snowdon's Welsh name) from every angle.

SNOWDON FACT FILE

Height – 1085m (3559ft)
 Rainfall – on 500 days per year
 (36cm or 14in annually)
 Annual visitors (to the summit) – up to a million (most by mountain steam train)
 Facilities – visitor centre/mountain refreshment cafe and shelter
 Number of paths to the summit – 8
 Number of routes round Snowdon – 1





Going up? Plenty of climbing to be done, even on the Snowdon Circuit.

DAY 1

LAMBERIS TO BRYN GWYNNAN

It does feel a bit odd heading for Snowdon, car full of kit, and belly full of breakfast. In the full knowledge that I am not going to climb the mountain, I've walked to the top before and it has to rank as one of the most satisfying ascents I've ever made. The routes are superb and the views on the way up, immense. There are plenty of options as well, each path having its own distinct character.

What am I doing then, parking up in Llanberis, and not seeing my sights on the top tip of Wales? Well, I've got something just as interesting to walk. My pioneering spirit will actually be keeping me low over the next two days, not pushing me up into the clouds. I am going to walk round Snowdon – without the soles of my boots touching tarmac. It doesn't sound as exciting as a solo trek across Antarctica, I know, but in British walking terms it is a groundbreaking expedition... unexplored territory awaits.

So why now? Simple: open access has come to Snowdonia. This means that large areas of previously restricted, private land are now open to walkers. In terms of a circuit round Snowdon it means that the last great barrier to a full circle is gone. That barrier is the Llanberis Pass, and as I leave Peter's Lais



Brynberis Cottage, Rhylis Brook, but what a view of Snowdon!

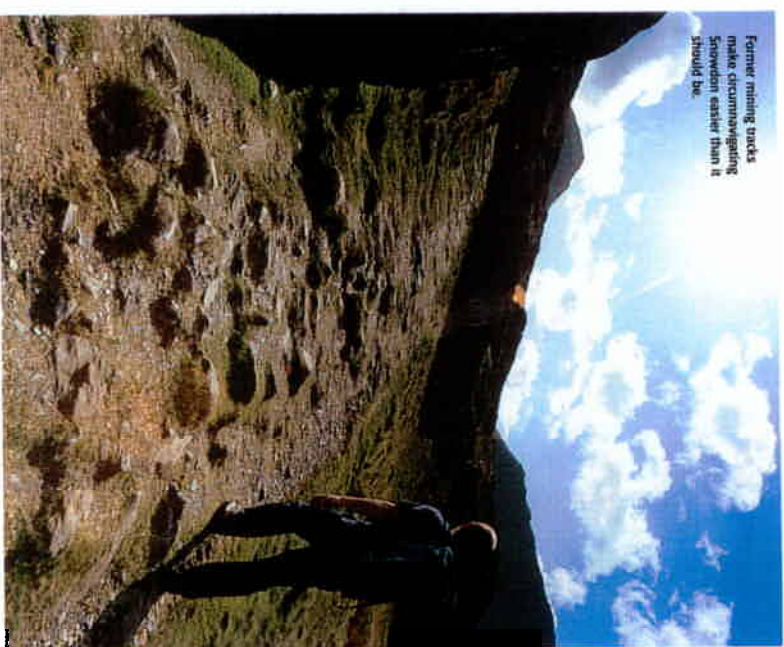
Café in Llanberis I look along the High Street, knowing that tomorrow I will be returning to Snowdonia's most famous café from that direction, from the pass. Today, though, I am heading up from the town, past the youth hostel, along the path towards Rhyd-Ddu. It is a fabulous day and I am alone to enjoy it. Days as clear as this are rare, so as I reach the ruined cottages at Brynberis and come face to face with a fantastic view of the summit, I get a huge urge to nip up there. Instead, I sit down with a sandwich and have a good think about it.

By the time I've finished munching I've come to a conclusion. Yes, standing on Snowdon's summit on a clear day will afford me a rare glimpse of a spectacular vista, but walking a lower level circuit around the peak will do just the same. The one thing you don't get on Snowdon's summit is a good view of Snowdon, and if the weather stays like this, over the next 36 hours I will gain the ultimate 360 degree Snowdon-eye-fest. Unique, enthralling, memorable. I lose the urge to climb. I head up Maesgwyn to the pass below

feet! Coeh. One of the most perfectly sculpted Snowdonia valleys, on a day like today Maesgwyn could rival any high Alpine pass. The diagonal path I follow gently ascends the valley side, each step prizes open the view until, as I crest the pass, I am trapped between two worlds. In one direction the valley I have just walked makes me feel lucky to have been there, in the other a promised land is sucking me in with a view to live for. It hits me in the face and gives me eyes a kiss. I love it when passes do this – simply wonderful.

Taking the path across the slope heading south west, I leave the route to Rhyd Ddu and after a couple of hundred yards, cross the Snowdon Ranger path to the summit. I'm on my own now, slowly heading downhill with the Welsh Highland Railway away to my right and a fantastic view of Myrdd Mawr beyond it. After crossing the River Trewenwydd the path dog-legs left onto a track and then right through old quar-

Former mining tracks make circumnavigating Snowdon easier than it should be.



"WITH SNOWDON TO MY LEFT AND YR ARAN TO MY RIGHT, I FEEL LIKE A HIKING CHILD IN A WALKING SWEETSHOP"



WALES TOP TEN

The Countryside Council for Wales has launched a new web map to create a national picture of where people go to enjoy nature's peace and quiet. At My Special Place you can log on and vote for your favourite spot in Wales. The first top ten results are here, but the list will be updated monthly.

1. Snowdon
2. Tynhy
3. Aberschwyn
4. Cerediff
5. Betws-y-Coed
6. St Davids
7. Aberfoeny
8. Aberrosch
9. Barmouth
10. Cadair Idris



St Davids – at number six. Scorecaste joy.

To vote for this special place where you go to get a natural buzz or fix of fresh air, visit the CW website at www.cw.gov.uk/mySpecialPlace. Our favourite comment on the site so far concerns Snowdon. An anonymous contributor loves Wales' tallest mountain because, 'It's April at the bottom and November at the top'.

You can get more help on how to get involved in CW's National Buzz Campaign by contacting the Countryside Council for Wales' enquiry line 0845 1304 229

