

# Walkers reach halfway point

A GROUP of sufferers from the rare muscle disorder McArdle disease this weekend reached the 100-mile point on their 30-day, 210-mile, 'Walk Over Wales' from Llandudno to Cardiff Bay. In the process they have conquered both Snowdon and Cader Idris, but taking three or four times as long as an average walker, writes Anna Lewis.

McArdle is a rare metabolic disorder that means heavy exercise is painful and can cause muscles to seize up and break down – even leading to kidney failure. Many sufferers think long-distance hiking is impossible for them. The walkers want to raise awareness of the condition, which often goes undiagnosed, and raise money for the research charity, the Association for Glycogen Storage Disease.

The 'WoW' walkers have learned lessons about the condition on the way, especially when Stacey Reason, 40, from Canada had to be taken into Ysbyty Gwynedd in Bangor. They were able to discuss the problem with world-leading McArdle's expert Dr Ros

Quinlivan of Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt hospital in Oswestry, who joined them for a day walking in Snowdonia. They realised that Stacey's fear of height on the Glyders ridge had caused muscle-tensing and led her to push herself too hard, leading to a muscle breakdown known as rhabdomyolysis. Dr Quinlivan said: "It's been really informative to see what McArdle's sufferers are capable of despite their condition, and also what causes them problems."

The initial three walkers, Andrew Wakelin, 61, Stacey Reason from Toronto, and Dan Chambers, 18, from San Diego, were joined at Dolgellau by Andy Williams, 48, from Singapore, in a multi-national walk, aimed at raising awareness of the disease. More walkers are joining them as they cross the Mid Wales hills and the Brecon Beacons to head down the Taff Valley to Cardiff, where they plan to arrive at the waterfront Welsh Assembly chamber, the Senedd, on August, 2. Sufferers of the disease from other parts of the world are taking part in simultaneous

walks if unable to travel to Wales.

Their progress has been followed with interest worldwide on the Walk Over Wales blog, [www.agsd.org.uk](http://www.agsd.org.uk).

People are able to sponsor the walkers through the website, and they are now half way to their target of raising £25,000.

The torrential rain and deep mud have been as much of a challenge as the gruelling route, but the WoW walkers have managed to keep going by keeping to a steady pace and following careful rules.

Andrew Wakelin said: "Kids and young people with undiagnosed McArdle disease are often at risk of bullying by peers and PE teachers when they say they can't do things. If we help more kids to get diagnosed by drawing attention, and show them what they can achieve, we will be really happy."

The Walk Over Wales is the brainchild of Andrew Wakelin, who lives near Builth Wells. He loves walking and planned the route for the whole hike, which started on July 2 at Llandudno, North Wales.



**WALK OVER WALES:** Andrew Wakelin, Stacey Reason and Andy Williams in Machynlleth