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Paralysed 65 year-old ex-mountaineer Howard Brunton conquers Snowdon on a Tramper electric buggy

Palaeontologist Dr Howard Brunton

was an experienced mountaineer who had climbed in many countries, including Switzerland, Turkey and Greenland, but a tragic fall whilst climbing in the Lake District consigned him to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. A past member of the Alpine Club and president of his University Climbing Club, becoming a paraplegic still did not destroy his enthusiasm for the great out doors - or his desire to climb.

After his spinal injury, a T12 fracture, he experimented with a variety of scooters to give him mobility. However none of these enabled him to venture off the beaten track - certainly not up mountains! Then he read about a designer in Wiltshire, Chris Goddard, who was developing a scooter for the disabled specifically to be used off road. Howard contacted him immediately, and after one visit de-



SAFETY

This type of challenge has to be taken very seriously. Operating in this sort of terrain *far exceeds* the normal operational limits of the Tramper buggy. There were months of planning, obtaining the necessary permissions etc, and forming contingency plans in case anything went wrong, especially bad weather. The team were fully rehearsed and safety ropes were used whenever there was any risk.

ecided to invest in a Tramper buggy; the ride and agility it offered convinced him he could return to the countryside he adored.

The Tramper is a Class 3 scooter which has been designed to cope with the challenges of the off-road environment. It has large diameter rear wheels and motorcycle tyres to give optimum traction. It also has supple and progressive suspension to give a soft ride that keeps its wheels in contact with the ground at all times, allowing it to



cross uneven ground safely and securely. It has excellent ground clearance to cross obstructions.

The Trampler has become Howard's ideal companion, enabling him to explore steep climbs and rocky surfaces in Somerset, where he lives.

But could it help him achieve his ultimate goal: to get back up a mountain, particularly Snowdon, as it was one of the first mountains he climbed?

It took around 9 months of planning to assess the challenge and to get permission of the relevant authorities to make an attempt on the 3,560ft of Snowdon via the 5 mile footpath from Llanberis. One major barrier about quarter way up is a stile over four-foot high dry stone wall which keeps in the farmer's sheep. Even a Trampler can't manage this, but happily the farmer agreed to lend the key to an adjoining locked gate.

The team would consist of Howard strapped into his Trampler, four professional climbers for their knowledge of Snowdon and ability with safety ropes, the designer of the Trampler

with his intimate knowledge of the machine, two experienced hill walkers, two photographers and several companions to fetch and carry.

The Trampler was standard, though two mounting points were added to attach safety ropes. The Trampler also towed a trailer, which carried the two pairs of lightweight Portaramps needed to climb over the rocks and steps with which Snowdon is littered. A second pair of batteries were left halfway,

courtesy of the Snowdon Mountain Railway.

The attempt started at 10:34 at 377ft above sea level. The weather was fine but fairly windy, so much so that the Snowdon Mountain Railway was only going up half way. Fortunately the wind later dropped enough to allow the train to go to the top. For the first hour the path was steep but relatively straightforward, but beyond the locked gate it gets much harder. The surface is broken by lots of rocks, many with sharp edges. There are also stretches of loose scree.

Howard started off cautiously, but quickly gained confidence, enjoying the precise steering and power of the electric-powered Trampler.

The Trampler made the climb look easy, overtaking many other walkers to an array of astonished comments. But if the climb was steep, the greatest challenge was the many flights of rough steps, up to six at a time, sometimes up to 2ft high.





The ramps were essential, though the greatest care had to be taken as the steps were uneven and the gradient was 1 in 4 or steeper. One slip could have meant disaster, especially with Howard strapped into the Tramper. Safety ropes were attached to the front and one side but were never really necessary..

The Snowdon Mountain Railway had kindly delivered a pair of batteries up to the halfway station where it had been planned to change them, but it was decided to find out how far the first set would go. The extra batteries, another 108*lbs*, were added to the ramps on the trailer! On and on went the team, several struggling to keep up Howard's idea of a slow pace. Three quarters of the way up, at 2,389ft the batteries were at last changed.

Howard and Tramper drove on upward over the shale and rock, getting nearer and nearer to the top. By the time the upper railway station was reached, the team were determined to go right to the very top. This last part is a real climb for the able bodied, even with two feet and hands to help them.



STATISTICS

Climb	3,183ft over 5miles	
Weights		
Tramper	321 <i>lbs</i>	146 <i>kgs</i>
Carrying		
Howard Brunton	168 <i>lbs</i>	76 <i>kgs</i>
Trailer	22 <i>lbs</i>	10 <i>kgs</i>
Ramps	36 <i>lbs</i>	16 <i>kgs</i>
Extra Batteries	108<i>lbs</i>	49<i>kgs</i>

So for Howard and his Tramper this was the most difficult part, especially with winds gusting up to 59mph. Temporarily leaving the trailer, and with the help of Chris, the designer, and the experienced rock climbers with their safety ropes, Howard powered on. The ropes were at last needed - as the Tramper 'wheelied' up the 1 in 2 slope!

At 14:26 Howard reached the Summit where he received a spontaneous round of applause from all the



THE EQUIPMENT

The Tramper is an electric buggy for people with mobility limitations specifically designed for all-terrain use. Fitted with 73amp/hr MK gel batteries, it is within the Class 3 weight limit at 146kgs. It has suspension on all four wheels, Class 3 speed (4/8mph) and regenerative braking backed up by an electric fail-safe brake plus manual rear drum brakes. The Tramper is fitted with a very accurate Mastervolt battery meter and used precisely 97 amp/hrs to get to the summit. The regenerative braking then recovered 13 amp/hrs on the descent.

The Tramper is made by Beamer Ltd of Whiteparish in Wiltshire. Tel: 01794 884766.

Website: www.tramper.co.uk.

The ramps were made of lightweight aluminium with a honeycomb centre; one pair fixed ramps, 5ft long, weighed 12lbs, the other pair, 8ft long and folding, weighed

bystanders.

Howard had achieved his dream. After 28 years he could sit back on the top of a mountain again. Even the weather was in Howard's favour: the summit was backed by clear blue sky and you could see for miles.

After reaching the top Howard had the option of returning by train but there was no stopping him - he was going to drive down as well. So with his ramps and trailer the descent was on. It was 5 miles down but Howard didn't notice - he had a smile from ear to ear.

The descent was just as potentially hazardous. Safety ropes were used, though the Tramper was often able to get down the steps without the ramps. The team returned to base at 18:15pm, tired but having achieved all they had set out to do. Howard & Tramper had scaled Snowdon!

