

WITH PITON AND BOTTLE-OPENER IN DARKEST CWM SILIN

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The road was under water as we splashed round the shores of Bala Lake in the rain-filled darkness. Wise counsels from the back seat put forward cogent reasons for going no further than Ffestiniog, but John Davies and I, who shared an ambition to camp in Cwm Silin, were not to be swayed. We could hardly deny that the fury of the tempest that beat down upon us as we crossed the Arenig moorlands gave us cause for *misgiving*, but bowing our heads to the blast we deposited the wise counsellor in Ffestiniog, wished her a good night's rest, and continued to steer resolutely West.

The weather had, perhaps, deteriorated as we passed through the last gate on the narrow road to Cwm Silin and drove on to the open fell. Clearly the car would go no further, and equally clearly we would not either. We passed a cramped and uneasy night inside the car, lying amidst rucksacks and with our feet in the boot*.

Saturday afternoon found us still in the same position, except that we had rearranged the car seating to make things more comfortable. During the day we had prepared desultory meals and brews in the boot of the car and conversed on many subjects, surprisingly without argument. It was debatable whether the odour of cooking within the car was less repulsive than the mist and rain outside, but at four o'clock the debate was settled when the rain moderated to a light drizzle and gaps appeared in the mist.

After nearly twenty-four hours in a Morris Minor we needed little encouragement to activity. Speedily we shouldered tent and rucksack and staggered weightily up the track to the twin lakes. As we progressed the weather improved, and by the time we reached the little hut a few hundred yards short of our proposed camp-site the rain had ceased and the sun was actually shining. Here we held another debate. Outside this hut there is a smooth level piece of ground which provides just the right amount of space for two tents. The advantages were very obvious—we need not carry our loads any further, the place was flat, the hut would act as a wind-break, and if we were washed out we could always retire there; moreover, it was nearer to the car and therefore to the pub. However, it held one disadvantage. It could by no stretch of the imagination be called an inspiring and beautiful camp-site, and by comparison with the little patch of hummocky ground between the twin lakes was quite aesthetically deplorable. After a moment's thought we plodded on, feeling that another step in pursuit of the Good Life had been taken.

(*—Anyone who wonders how this is done will be supplied with a diagram on receipt of a stamped addressed envelope).

Once we reached our aesthetically superior camp-site we lost no time in establishing our camp, and by 6.30 p.m. we had had a meal and were walking briskly back along the track in a carwards and pubwards direction.

An air of raffish excitement reigned in Penygroes when we arrived there. Inside the pub the air was thick with darts and other missiles, the cause of which was soon explained to us first in Welsh by a gentleman with a cleft palate and then in English by a more articulate gentleman. Penygroes had, it seemed, won the North Wales Amateur Cup by beating Criccieth 4-1 in highly exceptional conditions. Waves, we were solemnly assured, had been crashing over the pitch every second.

The beer was weak but the atmosphere was convivial, and when the leading luminary of Penygroes announced the raffling of a fowl we naturally took part in what we assumed to be in aid of some local charity. When all the tickets had been sold we were approached by the raffler as being the only foreigners present and were requested to draw the winning ticket. John, with the admirable perspicacity of a born mountaineer, promptly drew his own and was ceremoniously presented with as handsome a bird as ever laid an egg, though looking rather the worse for wear on account of being dead. We were at once interviewed by two of the local inhabitants who promptly began to bid.

"I'll give you five bob for it," said one.

The other eyed him suspiciously. "Seven an' six," he volunteered.

"Don't take no notice of those two," bawled the barman. "My Missis'll cook it for you and stuff it too, see."

Not to take advantage of his offer would certainly have put us in a bit of a dilemma, as the chances of roasting a fowl given nothing more than a primus and a Gilwell set seemed rather remote. Eventually we decided to do the Big Thing. The raffle was no doubt in aid of some deserving local charity—very well, then; raffle it again and thus double the proceeds to a worthy cause. We had rosy visions of the foundations of the Davies Home for Distressed Gentlewomen or at the very least yet another statue to the memory of the late David Lloyd George. It was a pity we didn't enquire the original purpose of the raffle, for it was actually (and very illegally) intended to raise beer money for its instigator and therefore the money came to us. Some short time later two figures were to be observed moving by the light of an exceedingly dim torch up the track to Cwm Silin, weighed down by a gallon of Warrington tenpenny and seven-and-fivepence-halfpenny all in copper. It was becoming quite a good weekend after all.

Next day we climbed Great Slab in copious rain and a howling gale.