

## MIND AND THE MOUNTAIN

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The popular concept of the mountaineer is one of health, with an efficient heart of gold beating beneath a bluff exterior. People admire these men and women who appear at complete peace with their particular environment. It is common for the non-initiated to believe that were these craggy stalwarts forcibly removed from the mountains the harmony exhibited in day to day life would be disrupted and a neurosis present itself. The latter is quite true for many of us and perhaps we should ask ourselves why it is so.

Some would liken the week-end trip to the mountains to a tranquiliser, drawing attention to the relaxation obtained by clambering over rocky points and pinnacles. They go further and say that removal of the mountain results in a withdrawal syndrome, which in turn precipitates mental anguish. If such drugs are viewed with trepidation, should we not partake of the mountains in more accurately defined doses ?

Two other points are often raised in favour of mountaineering. The escape from the humdrum of modern life is one; the other is that it is a form of sublimation. As for the former, escapism is often associated with an insipid sort of outlook on life; and for the latter, sublimation may be defined as the direction of undesirable or forbidden tendencies into more socially acceptable channels. Two more morbid reasons for the pursuit of a healthy outdoor sport would be difficult to find.

It seems that should the erstwhile climber fall into the hands of a psychiatrist, the "Rock of Ages" concept will be shattered for ever; they might even suggest that only people with a peculiar mental bend would take up mountaineering in the first place. But, then, nobody in their right mind listens to a psychiatrist—although his terminology lends itself quite readily to mountaineering. Disturbance of grasp, for instance, could equally as well be applied to Soap-Gut on a slimy day, or any other day, or a memory defect associated with alcoholism.

Torpor, a constant readiness to fall into a deep dreamless sleep, is another example. This is the only essential characteristic a good second requires. On the other hand, when the leader describes pin-holes in the rock as jug-handles, is it an hysterical outburst, or just his usual manic way of looking at things ?

On looking a little closer at this relation between psychiatry and climbing we see with horror how neatly mountaineers may be

allotted their individual psychiatric pigeon-holes. Delusions that the stones showered from above by a party of novices, are all aimed directly at yourself, could give rise to feelings of persecution, so intense as to border on frank paranoia. How often the black cloud of depression has hung over the heads of various M.A.M. members, as they look through Glan Dena's windows at a particularly nasty week-end outside. The "falsification of memories" which takes place in P.Y.G., and the bars in and around Capel develops to a decidedly pathological degree as the evening wears on.

So are we to wonder that mountaineers are all that the layman makes them out to be, or have I drunk insufficiently from the psychiatric spring ? After all, a little psychiatry is a dangerous thing.

