

ADVENTURE IN NEW BOOTS

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It was June, and the weather had been disgracefully good all the way through the exams. In fact, thoughts of some climbing after the exams had become clouded by thoughts of the break in the weather which by now seemed inevitable. Therefore I convinced myself that it was not essential to sit the last exam; after all what was one exam among so many. So I duly left Birmingham, and by diligent use of the thumb reached the Llanberis Pass late that same day.

The climbing of all the 3,000 foot peaks in North Wales in a single day had interested me for some time, and to do it alone I thought would provide a very interesting day on the mountains. The fact that I was wearing new boots was brought about by the final and complete collapse of my old faithfuls only a few weeks before and did not at the time seem to merit any special precautions. I was going climbing, boots or no boots, and if there was any breaking in to be done I fervently hoped it would be the boots that were affected and not the feet that were mounted therein.

At the foot of the Dinas Mot nose in the Llanberis Pass is a great confusion of tumbled boulders, which apart from providing innumerable boulder problems give at one point an extremely comfortable bivouac shelter. This gave the necessary base camp for the following day's operations and incidentally a wonderful spot in which to spend a lazy evening, the weather now being perfect. After a short reconnaissance of the route to be followed in the morning towards Crib Goch it only remained to put the bivouac in order and to get a good night's rest.

I was forced to wake up several times during the night to prevent the position from being completely overrun by invading mice, their objective being the food in my rucksac and their approach route being over my face and sleeping bag. After one or two painful but unsuccessful attempts to locate the culprits the food was securely put away and fortunately peace ensued for the remainder of the night. These goings on rather upset my internal alarm clock and the sun was well up when consciousness returned; so without wasting any more daylight, food was eaten, equipment arranged and a start made to the day's climbing activities after leaving my rucksac to the tender mercies of the resident horde of mice.

The climb to Crib Goch on such a perfect morning was wonderful and made even more so by the slow Alpine-type pace, specially imported for the occasion, which I hoped would ensure a successful day.

The scramble along the Crib Gochridge had something special to offer this morning; the air was absolutely motionless with that early

morning freshness still in it. A light mist hung in each of the surrounding valleys which with their early morning shadows and lack of any movement gave a strangely mysterious air. It might have been another world. The silence was of a quality which can only be experienced on the summits of mountains and only then on rare and privileged occasions. It was a rare and wonderful mountaineering experience which will always stand out among many others and make sense out of the many climbing days frustrated by impossible weather.

A small group of tents by Llyn Llydaw, showing no sign of life as they lay there still in shadow, made me realise rather selfishly that the presence of other people up here on the ridge would have spoilt the magic. I was glad I had set out alone on this occasion.

My path led over Crib y Ddysgl on to Snowdon and then without stopping down via Clogwyn station to Nant Peris. My boots had behaved very well to Clogwyn station but as soon as I began running downhill my toes became jammed against the front of the boots and long before the valley was reached even standing with feet pointing downhill was painful. It was therefore with some relief that I reached the road, and after passing through the still sleeping village, an even greater relief to remove the offending boots and climb up the slopes of Elidyr Fawr in stockinged feet.

On Glyder Fawr the cloud came down to make the conditions seem more normal, and then I met the first person I had seen that morning, making it even more like a normal day on the hills.

The thought of a painful descent to Bwlch Tryfan made me decide on a slow climb down rather than a fast scree run, but I left the summit plateau too soon owing to the cloud and spent a long time climbing across the face of Glyder Fach, arriving at Bwlch Tryfan extremely depressed by the state of my toes. Here fortunately I met a climber equipped with a first-aid kit containing some sticking plasters and was able to make a few necessary but rather inadequate repairs. This boosted the morale somewhat but still made descending very uncomfortable, the descent from Tryfan to Glan Dena taking well over the hour.

Some sympathetic friends staying at Glan Dena helped to revive the flagging spirits with many cups of china tea; some fresh plasters and a soaking in hot water making my feet feel a little more human.

Thus the last section of the expedition was embarked on with still a reasonable chance of success. On the way up to Pen yr Oleu Wen I passed several anglers descending from Ffynnon Lloer, the little lake which supplies the water and source of electric power for Glan Dena and which could, it appears, also supply food if carefully tapped.

Once the first summit of the Carneddws was gained the going was fairly straightforward with little more ascent to worry about and only the final descent to cause anxiety for my long-suffering toes. The hills were again deserted, as evening was now approaching, but I was rather less receptive now to the peace which was settling over them. My thoughts were taken up with rather more mundane problems such as feet and route finding.

After making the mistake of climbing Carnedd Llewellyn before Yr Elen and then having to traverse across the loose scree-covered north face of Carnedd Llewellyn, I headed over Foel Grach towards the final summit, Foel Fras. I was planning to descend to Bethesda that night, which meant retracing my steps for about a mile from the last summit before descending westwards into the valley which leads down to that town. Therefore with the cloud now covering the hills and darkness approaching, the walk to Foel Fras and back to what I hoped was the head of the correct valley was performed at the double. Then a quick descent to below cloud level and—what a relief—the lights of Bethesda shining in the darkness way down the valley.

Now that every summit had been reached and the nervous strain gone, the psychological effects became disastrous. My legs turned to rubber and my whole body felt exhausted, making the otherwise gentle walk down to Bethesda a major ordeal. This part of the trip seemed endless, and many times I remember resting and dozing off only to be awakened by some sixth sense which forced me to keep moving, but at last the Douglas Arms was reached where I was found a civilised bed for the night; and I didn't even really care that the only refreshment they could offer was a glass of cider. I don't think my feet have been quite the same since and I'm sure the boots haven't.