

## SOME MISCELLANEOUS CLIMBS, FAILURES AND PLUMMETS IN BORROWDALE

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I knew it meant forfeiting my Stoat's record and hard won reputation for sloth but I was so hungry it just had to be done. I tapped sharply on the window pane a second time. One of the box-quilted mummies moved and a bleary-eyed, bearded Perry head extracted itself from the scaily interior of its pit. "God help his future wife" I shuddered to myself. He rose, administered a hefty kick to the still unconscious Willi T, and opened the door of the hut.

While Perry and Willi T performed ablutions ('got washed' isn't quite the right expression), I cooked some Post Office sausages, beans and toast and prepared myself for the barracking to come.

I'd worked hard in the Stoats to establish a reputation for late rising in mountain areas. Ante Meridian were obscene words in my vocabulary. That very summer in the Alps I'd slept in a full 25 minutes on a very uncomfortable bivouac. All this diligence had earned respect even from some vintage Stoats. A glance at my watch showed 8.30 a.m. Up and about at 8.30 a.m.; this would take some while to live down!

Leaving home the previous afternoon, I'd hoped to reach the hut the same evening. Sixteen hours, half a cheese sandwich and one bivouac on the A65 later I was thoroughly convinced that hitching nowadays wasn't the same as it had been in my boyhood days. However, all this early morning dawn start nonsense has its reward (predominantly aesthetic and self-righteous ones albeit). The walk down Borrowdale from Keswick had been unusually beautiful. The real charm of the valley, slowly unfolding with each twist of the road, had been emphasised by the pale morning light as it strengthened into streaks of watery autumn sunshine. Every detail of the trees, fells and crags stood out sharply in the thin air and even the silence contributed to that strange emotion, exhilaration.

The poetic drift of my thoughts was interrupted by the sound. It was like the mandibles of a million half-starved soldier ants devouring a ton of tripe and onions. Willi T was eating! The noise comes from the speed of eating which is necessitated in turn by the volume of food consumed. After all Willi T is a growing lad and he needs to keep his strength up for the hard routes.

After breakfast we decided to take advantage of the dull but dry climatic conditions to visit Falcon Crag. We piled into the Perry-mobile, a battered frog-eyed Sprite, and too few minutes later arrived, relatively intact, at the parking place beneath the Crag. Only one dry stone wall for aid had been used on the first big corner. The

bracken path up to the Crag amused us less; the dew-laden fronds, far from tickling our fancies, only succeeded in wetting our breeches, so to speak. After a brief drying out spell we were ready to climb, a pity, as until then I'd been enjoying the morning!

We decided to do Illusion (HVS). This was polished off quickly and Willi T and I were able to settle down to watch the first of a series of not unamusing Perry failures on the Niche (XS). Following his tactical retreat, Willi T led Dedication (XS) which we found hard (owing to sharp-end myopia he succeeded in climbing the crux avoiding several large, comforting and highly necessary jugs).

The following afternoon we rose early. After a wet walk up to and down from Black Crag and a visit to Keswick, Perry suggested we finished off the day with a 'look' at Bludgeon (XS) on Shepherd's Crag. Our protestations that we could 'look' at it from the road went unheeded and an hour or so later, Perry was beginning his inspection of the top pitch competently belayed by the author. (With Willi T poised above on a big ledge, camera to hand with fastest shutter-speed setting ready to record any particularly spectacular plummets which might occur). I clearly remember a section on which various wild contorted flailings of the Perry limbs produced minimal upward progress behind a perched flake. Simultaneous output consisted of a whole new range of juxtaposed expletives. The final pull up eluded us and we were forced to traverse off left somewhat subdued.

Next day with a perseverance dangerously akin to masochism Perry decided another attempt on the Niche was called for to save face. Needless to say face was lost. To recover our sagging morale an ascent of Upper Falcon Crag buttress (HVS) was undertaken. Willi (just-call-me-Cartier-Bresson) T decided to solo up easy rock to the left to take action shots of the final pitch, a large open corner climbed with slings for aid on various pegs (at least that's how we did it). We were just starting this top pitch when Willi T yanked off the jugs he was swinging on and with wild cries of "Geronimo" proceeded to leap backwards into space. "Well if that's his thing", we thought, "who are we to criticise"? He certainly seemed to enjoy the subsequent plummet, waving his arms and legs in glee. We knew it was a stunt when the 50 feet of slack rope he'd left pulled taut. He still maintains it wasn't contrived but he always was modest. Most diverting. It must have taken years of practice to perfect. Quite dangerous too. We finished the final pitch in rain, congratulated Willi T on his sky-diving act and greatly enjoyed the scree-run down from the Crag. The following day, Perry having reversed the first pitch of the Niche for the third and final epic, we visited Shepherd's Crag. In fine weather we enjoyed ascents of Little Chamonix, Arduus, Kransic Crack, Devil's Wedge and North Buttress. All fine routes climbed amazingly speedily considering our general level of incompetence. Tomorrow was to be our last half-day. "Something special" said Perry.

We parked the frog-eye in Grange and toiled up to Goat Crag. "A fine autumn Saturday like this should pack the valley with hard men fresh from ferocious alpine ventures," I thought. It did. Several parties were trying routes but unfortunately our objective, Praying Mantis, was clear. As we approached the ledge below the first groove two hard men we'd met earlier in the summer on the Biolay after their ascent of the Bonatti Pillar bombed past. Pipped at the post I hoped. But no such luck, they were there to force a new route (Athamor) up the groove a few feet right of Mantis.

We sorted the gear and Perry started up the groove. I remembered an earlier visit in mid-winter ice with Harwood. I hoped for the same result, a quick fail then back down to Grange. But Perry was soon up and belayed, harassing one of us to tie on. I thought: "if I fail first Willi T will have to climb it to retrieve Perry's runners." Accordingly I set off up the groove. For a few feet all went well, then a sort of move right into the upper groove presented problems. It seemed a convenient place to fail so I started to lay back. Sure enough my plastic arms rebelled and after a short plummet I was lowered off quite pleased that all had gone to plan. Willi T started up the pitch.

I had just removed my P.A.'s when Willi T reversed the preliminary section, unclipped and announced his decision to give up climbing. Impasse!! But who was to retrieve Perry's runners? Unfortunately for me Willi T had one trump card up his sleeve. I was hoping for a lift from Perry out of Borrowdale to civilized hitching territory (i.e. Kendal). I realized that this would not be forthcoming if his gear were not retrieved. Redonning P.A.'s I leapt up the groove; all difficulties were laybacked. I finally arrived on the stance. Numerous, nervous fidgetings of my descendeur produced no response in Perry and we continued the route with less difficulty, a fine climb on steep rock.

Arriving back in Grange we found the frog-eye with a flat. Our Borrowdale luck seemed to be wearing thin so we collected Willi T and headed south to Wales. But that's another tale.