



This extract from a Climbers' Club Journal contains only articles/photographs where the copyright now belongs to the Climbers' Club.

It is provided in electronic form for your personal use and cannot be used for commercial profit without seeking permission from the Climbers' Club.

© Copyright 2010

## A CLIMBERS' CAMP IN CWM DYLI.

By F. E. R.

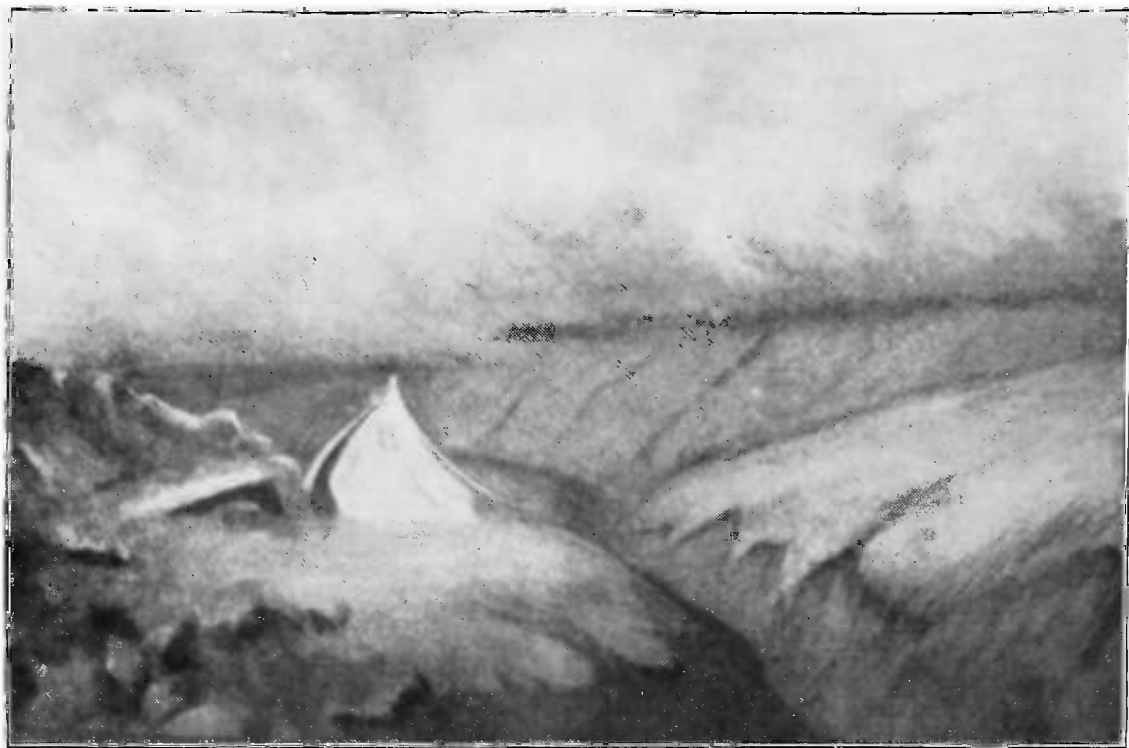
“There’s night and day, brother, both sweet things ; sun, moon, and stars, brother, all sweet things ; there’s likewise the wind on the heath. Life is very sweet, brother, —”

—*Lavengro.*

PERHAPS the following account of an attempt to combine camping and climbing on Snowdon may be useful as showing how *not* to do it ; for it must be confessed that, though very good fun, it was not successful from a climber’s point of view ; and though the failure was primarily due to the weather, several mistakes were made which also contributed to the unfortunate result.

One afternoon late in the Autumn of 1898 three men might have been seen driving furiously up the road from Capel Curig to Llanberis. They anxiously scanned the sky, which, though clear to the eastward, was becoming ominously overcast in the direction of Snowdon. After a week’s climbing in the Cader district in perfect weather, they were on their way to pitch their tent somewhere in the gap through which Afon Glaslyn issues from the splendid amphitheatre formed by the five peaks of Snowdon, and rushes down through Cwm Dyli into lovely Nant Gwynant.

Their object was to get more time for climbing by avoiding the walk from Capel Curig and back ; Pen-y-Gwryd being full and the old inn at Pen-y-pass in process of demolition. The tent and baggage had been sent on from London to the gorphwysfa Inn at Pen-y-Pass *via* Llanberis, and it had been arranged that the party should arrive at Capel Curig on the Saturday afternoon and proceed to the camping ground the next morning—but the threatening appearance of the weather and the discovery that it would be difficult to



THE CAMP.

*From a drawing by F. E. R.*

get a man to help to convey the baggage to the ground on Sunday, induced them to push on at once and get under canvas that night. On arriving at Capel Curig it was still fine, but heavy ragged clouds could be seen blowing up from behind Snowdon—ominous quarter—and “posting like couriers down the sky” at a speed which showed that something like a gale of wind must be behind them. It was evident that if the camp was to be pitched before the rain began there was no time to be lost, and so it came to pass that the party drove in hot haste over the long familiar road which they had so often wearily tramped together, and projected themselves into what remained of the old gorphwysfa Inn in search of their baggage. This was providentially found to have duly arrived, and, the number of packages having been carefully checked and found correct, a cart was chartered to convey them to the ground, or as near to it as was found convenient. It will probably amuse experienced campers to hear of a tent and baggage for three men filling a cart—and it is a fact that we had too much tent and too much baggage. It must be remembered, however, that we were provisioned for a week and intended to be quite independent of supplies. The tent was an excellent 10 feet by 8 feet “Explorer,” of what is called “Ridge Pole” pattern, big enough to hold six men at a pinch, and provided with a “fly sheet,” or double roof—which latter caused us much tribulation. There are those of the party who cannot to this day speak of that unfortunate fly sheet without expletives. Then there were three seamen’s kit-bags, containing sleeping bags, cork mattresses, blankets, etc. ; one case of provisions, one ingenious but highly exasperating agglomeration of enamelled hardware called a “canteen,” a table, and three campstools. There were also (with shame be it spoken) three Gladstone bags ; also one bottle whisky. Altogether, the baggage and tent must have weighed  $3\frac{1}{2}$  cwt.—far more than was necessary. Before leaving the inn an attempt was made by L. to photograph the expedition. But a certain hen having vaingloriously thrust herself and family into the field of view, the gravity of the men on the cart broke down at the critical moment and the picture was

spoiled. One of the offending members, who felt himself unequal to the strain of another attempt, then took the place of L. at the camera and a successful picture was obtained, but not before the operator—dismayed by the cold and severe gaze cast upon him by L.—had spoilt another plate by omitting to close the shutter after exposure. Having wasted two plates and a valuable half-hour of daylight over this business, and jeopardised an uninterrupted friendship of many years duration, the party started off along the Miner's Track followed by the pitying gaze of the assembled staff of the inn. R. discovered that the horse, who viewed the proceedings with strong disfavour as a gratuitous addition to his day's work, bore the same name as himself. He therefore questioned the driver as to the animal's nationality—the name being a Scottish one—and learnt that it is a common name for horses in Wales. The coincidence is rather interesting, for the same word in French stands for a jade or sorry horse, and in German for a horse of ordinary quality. At a point about a mile short of the causeway across Llyn Llydaw the expedition halted, and detachments were sent out over the hillocks on the left of the road to choose a suitable spot for the camp. It was now dusk, and the darkness was increased by the heavy clouds rising fast over the crest of Snowdon, the precursors of a mighty host which was assembling on the windward slopes of the mountain—

Lo, where the ruffian clouds arise,  
Usurp the abdicated skies,  
And seize the ætherial throne.

Fortunately no rain had fallen as yet. A hurried search resulted in the selection of a small level plateau just large enough for the tent, on the farther bank of Afon Glaslyn (here 8 or 9 feet wide), thickly turfed, and situated about a quarter of a mile from the edge of Llyn Llydaw and half a mile from the Miner's Track, from which it was completely hidden by intervening moraine heaps. Its level was about twelve feet above that of the stream. It was thought that protection from the prevailing wind would be afforded by a spur of Lliwedd running

out close in front of the tent and limiting the view in the direction of Snowdon summit. Close at hand on the left were the lower slopes of Lliwedd, and, on the other side of the lake, to the right, stretched the majestic flank of the great Red Ridge. Towards the east, the ground sloped steeply down from the edge of our little plateau to the head of Nant Gwynant, beyond which Nant-y-Gwryd, over-shadowed by Siabod, lay open to view nearly as far as the lake at Capel Curig. The site was an ideal one in some respects, but it turned out to be far too exposed. The spur of Lliwedd, on which we counted for shelter, was not high enough to form an effectual screen, and the converging horns of the "Horse Shoe" had the effect of concentrating the wind on the camp in a most uncomfortable manner. Furthermore we committed the obvious error of pitching the tent with the door facing the wind. After one or two trips to the cart, the party left the man to bring the rest of the baggage while they proceeded to transport the things across the stream. The packages were mostly cylindrical and were easily rolled down the hill to the water's edge, where they were skilfully fielded by B., who, however, was bowled over by an unusually fast service, and came near to finding a watery grave at the foot of the Cwm Dyli fall.

The crossing involved some ticklish balancing on slippery stepping-stones, and the conversion of L. into a temporary bridge for the transport of the precious box of provisions, and was interrupted by his propounding, at a very inopportune moment, an abstruse and exasperating puzzle—something about two white men, fourteen black men, a boat, and a river. Meanwhile the man with the rest of the baggage did not appear. It was thought that he had fallen asleep by the way, and, as nothing more could be done till the other things arrived, L. went back across the stream to seek him. When he reached the top of the hill he gave a wild yell and disappeared from sight. We followed as quickly as possible and saw to our dismay that the horse (which had been in the Artillery and ought to have known better) had bolted, and was trotting serenely down the road towards his stable,

pursued at some distance by his driver, while L. brought up the rear. This was serious, for it was getting late and the tent poles were still in the cart, so with a "Hark, forward!" we instantly joined in the chase—with about as much chance of overtaking the others as if we had been pursuing an express train. However, the horse was stopped by some miners coming up the road, and in a short time all the baggage was across the stream, and we set to work on the task of erecting the tent.

It was now raining, and the wind roared gustily down the splendid Snowdon Cwm and swept through the gap in a manner which made us thankful that we had brought spare fore and aft guys, and we began to wonder, too, how we should get the tent up. However, after one ignominious failure which involved the whole party in a tangled mass of flying ropes and flapping canvas, it was got fairly on to its legs, and very snug it looked. Only just in time, for it was no sooner up than the rain came down in torrents, and the wind swept the tiny plateau on which we were perched as though it would tear up the tent by the roots and hurl it and its inhabitants clean down into Nant Gwynant. The hills were blotted out one by one—Siabod the last to go—to be no more seen for two days. Cheered with the prospect of a hot supper, we roughly put our house in order, and began to unpack the provisions. Packed with these, we had ordered the methylated spirit for the cooking stove to be sent. L.'s face grew more and more gloomy (he had charge of the commissariat arrangements) as he took out package after package from the case, but no spirit appeared. When it became evident that no spirit was there, one pitiful wail went up and then for a few moments L.'s life was in danger. It was suggested that a certain private store of whisky should be appropriated and used as fuel, but this its owner refused to permit (on the ground that it must be kept for emergencies), and so we had to be satisfied with a cold and cheerless meal, during which much abuse was directed at the commissariat officer—who was driven to plead feebly that he had at any rate had the foresight to provide two stoves, in case one should break down. To add to our discomfort, the tinned

beef—our *piece de resistance*—turned out a failure. A less appetising substance it would be hard to imagine. It appeared to consist of chopped sea-anemones bedded in a glutinous substance resembling size. Nobody could tackle it except the commissariat man, who declared that, as in the case of the obsequious curate's egg, "some parts of it were excellent." The usual deadly struggle with a patent tin-opener took place, from which L. came off considerably damaged, and retired to his sack in great bitterness of soul to write up his journal and to draft a severe letter to the Stores. B. and R. turned in "all standing." One could smoke, but not read; talk was difficult and sleep was out of the question. The rain was tremendous—sounding like small shot on the tightly-stretched canvas. The wind howled down the valley and smote the tent sometimes end on, sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other. One moment it was blown out till its dimensions approached those of a commodious villa residence—the next, its cold wet sides were collapsed about our ears. The fly-sheet flapped and slapped and sjambokked against the roof, the lantern rattled and clattered its glass sides as it swung from the swaying ridge pole, a candle held in an ingenious bracket rigged up by B. on one of the uprights gave an exhibition of the persistence of images by describing geometrical figures as it waved from side to side—and three men lay grimly silent, wondering how long their frail shelter would stand, and where they would land when it fell. Presently the lantern crashed down amongst the plates and dishes on the table and left the tent in darkness. The three men sat up with one accord, convinced that the end was come. When the alarm had subsided, R. sallied out to inspect ropes and pegs. It would have been a splendid scene, no doubt, had anything been visible, but the night being as black as pitch, he merely went the rounds and, having gone on his nose over a guy-rope, retired without taking any other observations. So the night passed, and when morning came there seemed to be no prospect of improvement in the weather. The wind blew as strongly as ever, the rain poured, the stream was now a raging torrent, and the hills were buried in clouds which

seemed to be only a few feet above our heads. We were glad to find, however, that not a drop of water had found its way through the canvas. After a very unsatisfactory breakfast, we started for Pen-y-Pass to try to get some fuel for the stove—crossing the stream by a plank bridge which spans it not far off. On enquiry at the inn, a battered and disreputable tin can was produced which, we were told, had come with our baggage, but which we, expecting it to be packed in the case according to orders, had overlooked. The can was empty! Like a certain oriental Queen on a celebrated occasion, there was no more spirit left in her! However, Mr. Cobden came to our assistance and kindly supplied us with much store of fuel, and we went on our way to Pen-y-Gwryd where we made a second breakfast and whiled away the morning over the Book of the Chronicles of the Climbers. We also discussed the question of the can of spirits, and came to the conclusion that the damage could not reasonably be attributed to Jettison, Barratry, Ullage, Leakage, Spiles, Sweating, Corruption, or any other of the diseases to which goods sent by rail or sea seem to be liable. It was therefore decided to proceed against the Railway Company with all the rigour of the law. A vote of censure was then passed on the commissariat officer, and we wended our way wearily and wetly back to the camp, carrying a leg of mutton in a newspaper, a loaf of bread, and a can of spirits. By the time things were put to rights in the tent we were ready for the evening meal, which was a tolerable success though the table (of the American folding persuasion) was so afflicted with the staggers that it was difficult to cut anything solid on it without spilling everything liquid. The weather was still as bad as it could be, and we were evidently in for another rough night.

During the evening there sprang up an exceedingly acrid discussion on the subject of Glacial Action, and for some time there was war without and discord within. There is nothing like a discussion for passing the time, and it would be difficult to find a subject with more possibilities than Glacial Action. The writer remembers an occasion when a walk from Ogwen

Cottage to Capel Curig in the dark after a hard day's work was robbed of its terrors by a discussion (this time on Fatalism in its Relation to Climbing Accidents), in the course of which each man propounded theories which he would never dream of supporting in cold blood, and maintained them with a violence in direct proportion to their absurdity. But even personalities have an end, and, Glacial Action being played out, the party betook themselves to bed—each with the comfortable assurance that the others were good fellows, but quite incapable of argument. Every now and then two or three of the ropes would come off their pegs owing to the alternate tightening and loosening of the canvas, and the uproar was then tremendous. It was like being in a runaway omnibus on a cobblestone pavement, with half a dozen drunken drivers calling the conductor's attention to possible passengers by frantically flogging the sides with whips. To turn out from one's comfortable sack at frequent intervals into such a storm as was raging outside, and grope blindly for the flying ropes, guided only by sharp raps on the knuckles from the wooden buckles, was not pleasant, but it was better than finding that the bottom had dropped out of the 'bus and that the sides and roof were madly careering down the mountain side, leaving the unhappy passengers exposed to the fury of the elements. Next morning we turned out looking rather sour, for we had not slept, and B. had caught a bad cold. Still the tent was watertight. The water was pouring over the ground into the stream and squished and gurgled under the tarpaulin groundsheet in a manner suggestive of a water-mattress. L. issued ostentatiously forth to wash a pile of dishes, and performed an involuntary toboggan down the slippery slope, by which, had our dishes been of less durable material, many must have come to grief. During the morning it was discovered that the system of cleaning knives by digging them into the ground is not always successful when the solid rock is only an inch or two below the turf, and even in more favourable spots it is open to objection on humanitarian grounds—on account of the worms. In the afternoon B.'s cold having become worse he was ordered to the rear, and we accompanied him on his way as far as Pen-y-Gwryd.

The third night was as bad, or, if anything, worse than the others. By this time we had gained some confidence in the stability of the tent, but in spite of this, and the fact that we had not slept for two nights, we could get no rest. Tossing wearily in our sleeping bags; we became increasingly familiar with the physical features of the rock on which the tent stood. L. had a "roche moutonné" in the small of his back, and R. became aware of certain scorings clearly indicative of Glacial Action.

Next morning, as the weather showed no signs of improvement, we decided to give in, and, seizing the opportunity of a slight lull in the storm, we struck the tent. It is perhaps needless to say that this was no sooner done than the rain ceased, the hills became visible again, and by noon it bid fair to be a fine afternoon. L. went for a scramble on Crib Goch with B., who had walked up from Capel Curig, while R. sat disconsolate amidst the ruins of the camp, laboriously constructing a serious parody on "The Three Fishers" adapted to our melancholy circumstances.

That afternoon we saw the first human beings who had come within sight of the camp—a party on Crib Goch—one of whom, clearly defined against the sky, appeared to be running at full speed along the ridge.

Our envious feelings found expression in the following apt but uncomplimentary quotation from an early Lake Poet:—

What is that atom I espy,  
That speck in Nature's plan?  
Great Heaven! is that a man?  
And hath that little wretch its cares,  
Its freaks, its follies, and its airs;  
And do I hear the insect say:  
"My lakes, my mountains, my domain?"

In the evening we returned to Capel Curig sadder and wiser men, bringing with us the leg of mutton (as aforesaid) and the greater part of the case of groceries. The next morning was beautifully fine, and we had good weather till the end of our visit.

R. got no sleep whatever during the three nights in camp, and though L. maintains that he slept for an hour or two, yet it is open to doubt—for had he done so it is certain that the fact would instantly have made itself apparent to his companions, even above the noise of the storm.

There are one or two things which it may be useful to note from this unfortunate expedition :—

(1st) A good tent of ordinary canvas, with double roof is practically impervious to two days and three nights of continuous heavy rain with strong wind.

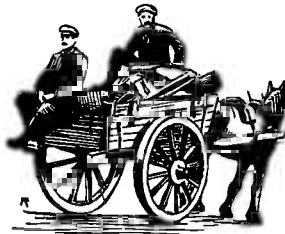
(2nd) A “Fly sheet” is a delusion and a snare where there is any wind (though a convenience in hot weather, as the writer has since found). It is impossible in rough weather to make the guys so tight as to prevent the “fly” from flapping on the roof.

(3rd) Camping can never be very pleasant if the weather is continuously bad. On the other hand, given even tolerable weather (and no fly sheet) this particular expedition would have been a success.

(4th) Much depends upon choice of position. A better spot could probably have been found lower down the cwm and more under the lee of the hills. As it was, we were just on the lip of the Llyn Llydaw basin. But such a spot would of course have been farther from the climbs, and not so easy of access from the road. It had been suggested before we started that a good place would be Bwlch Goch between Crib Goch and Crib-y-Dysgl, and within 300 feet of the summit level of Snowdon. Judging from our experience some 1800 feet lower, such a position would not be without its disadvantages.

Doubts had been raised as to the wholesomeness of the water, on account of the polluted state of Glaslyn, whose bed is covered with what appears from the heights to be a bright green deposit from the copper mines. This deposit had not yet shown itself in the lower lake, though doubtless it will do so in time, and we suffered no ill effects from drinking the water. But our enjoyment was not increased by the knowledge

that some of it at least had reached us through the alimentary canal of a base mechanical turbine. It is sad to think that of all the great climbing hills in North Wales, only one—now that Cader has its ginger-beer factory—remains unprofaned by the misplaced handiwork of that insect, man. That one is fortunately one of the best, from a climber's point of view—namely, Y Tryfan. But we may find any day that some enterprising person has planted a temperance steam laundry on one side of the great North Gully, while a rival establishment flaunts its underlinen in the breeze on the other. It is reserved, however, for the queen of them all to suffer the indignity of a kitchen midden on her summit. Ages hence, the deposit of bottles and bones may have a certain interest, as showing beyond a shadow of doubt that Snowdon was a town and not a mountain (for are not similar deposits found where towns have been ?), but at present it is a grievous offence to many, and a disgrace to those who allow it.





•AWL•CMB•FER•  
•SNOWDON•  
•SEP•MDCCCXCVIII•

