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Author: J. M. A. Thomson

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## FIRST ASCENT OF THE GREAT GULLY OF CRAIG YR YSFA IN CWM EIGIAU.

By J. M. A. THOMSON, A.C.

THE fulfilment of a promise rashly given to the Editor of this *Journal* has been long delayed, both by the difficulty of obtaining illustrations of the climb and by a wish to supplement or correct the nomenclature of the Ordnance Maps with regard to the ridges on this side of Carnedd Llewelyn.

Other climbers in this district have doubtless found it hard to discover the exact position of Braich Du, have been puzzled by the fact that Craig yr Ysfa, hitherto assigned to the Nant Ffrancon, has not been heard of by the natives of that valley, and have been perplexed by the profoundly mysterious name Elicydu—a word that has never failed to floor the most erudite and ingenious Welsh philologists of my acquaintance.

The grassy ridge of Carnedd Dafydd which descends towards Bethesda, called Pen yr Oleu Wen, "Hill of the White Light," has a steep and rocky slope extending from the scene of the recent stone-fall to Llyn Ogwen, this slope is known as Braich Du, the "Black Arm," and the seeming contradiction involved in the names is quite intelligible to all who have watched the strong play of sun and shadow on the face under certain conditions of weather.

On the east side of Llyn Ogwen, the hogsback, called Y Braich, which helps to form the cradle of the infant Llugwy, rises gradually to a summit marked Pen Helyg on the Ordnance Maps. The true name is Pen Helyg Ddu, "Hill of the Black Willow," and the restoration of the lost adjective elucidates the difficulty of Elicydu; for this word is obviously nothing more than a corruption of the correct name of the mountain.



*From a Sketch by A. E. ELIAS.*

**The Great Cave Pitch in the Gully of Craig yr Ysfa.**

[The triangular hole on the right is the exit.]

The ridge trending north-west from this summit, and finally connecting with Carnedd Llewelyn, has two distinct cols unnamed on the Ordnance Maps: the first, which is far from level, is fittingly called Y Crib, and the second is Bwlch Hên, the "Old Gap," or, possibly, the "Fairies' Gap." Between these depressions the ridge rises to a well-defined summit, the height of which, not given in the Ordnance Maps, must approximate to that of Cader Idris; descending in a grassy slope to Llyn Llugwy, it throws down on the east side a sheer rock face into the deep hollow of Cwm Eigiau. This is the true Craig yr Ysfa. The word, in the sense of sheep-walk, a description appropriate to the western slope, has become obsolete, and the alternative meaning, "Crag of Craving," is held by the natives to be correct, and to derive its significance from the burning desire felt by all who should venture to look over the verge of the cliff to plunge headlong into Cwm Eigiau. However this may be, the mountaineer will prefer to reverse the route, and a particularly attractive line of ascent is afforded by a deeply cut gully which strikes the face from base to summit; it was the goal of an expedition made on April 22nd, 1900, with R. I. Simey and W. G. Clay.

In conformity with the *habitudes* which prevail at Capel Curig, we made a leisurely start before mid-day, and reached Y Crib by way of Tal y Braich Uchaf, Braich, and Pen Helyg Ddu. It may be worthy of note that the temptation to cut the corner from the road should be resisted, as this route will entail the traverse of a bog, and that a *marche de flanc* from Y Braich to the little col will involve a loss of time upon exasperating slopes of shifting shale.

From Y Crib it is an easy scramble down to Cwm Eigiau, but as the other clefts on the face had not then been explored, it seemed preferable to descend from Bwlch Hên, and thus avoid all risk of mistaking the entrance to the gully.

After a prolonged halt for lunch, we roped at four o'clock, and began the ascent. A grass-grown staircase is passed with ease, but is sufficiently steep to enable the climber to *dérrouiller les jambes*, then follow two pitches of the familiar

Tryfân type, which are climbed without difficulty, on the left. Between them the gully narrows to the width of two or three feet, but broadens again in front of the next obstacle; this pitch is of the doorway order, but as one of the jambs overhangs and the other is destitute of holds, the place seems only climbable by means of a human ladder, or some such exceptional method.

We therefore tried a chimney on the right, but mindful of the scriptural warning—"He that removeth stones shall be hurt by them"—finally resorted to strategy, and traversed to a small pinnacle, from the top of which the slabs of the face were reached.

After gaining much valuable experience in step-cutting with a pen-knife, we reached an ample grass ledge about 70 feet above the pinnacle, and followed it to its abrupt termination at a point where a partly detached slab facilitates descent to a small platform in the gully. A line of advance is here afforded by a black chimney, and into its damp recesses the leader must squeeze in order to allow room for the third man of the party to alight upon the platform.

The chimney was liberally supplied with tempting holds, most of which, being undercut and treacherous, have now gone to their own place upon the scree. On leaving the chimney, we have merely to walk up a rushy slope to the next pitch, where a cave, surmounted by four wedged blocks, presents a very imposing obstacle. The vertical side-walls are set at a convenient distance for backing up, and a weathered crack on the right offers some foothold, but at the top a difficulty is experienced, for, while it is necessary to transfer the weight in order to land upon the right wall, the hand-hold much needed for the process does not come within the reach of a climber of average stature. The leader spent much time here, "*gratis anhelans, multa agendo nihil agens,*" before effecting a lodgment upon the landing place. His companions showed how skilfully a height of 6 ft. 2 in. could be turned to account in places of the kind. There remains an upper storey to the pitch; of the two parallel chimneys we chose the alternative

... Line of Exit.



... End of String-cour

.....  
Cwm Eigiau.

**The Outer Bridge from the Inner Bridge.**

on the right, and backed up it with the utmost comfort and satisfaction. After a short interval of easy going, we were confronted by another high obstacle, to which the converging lines of two chimneys give the appearance of an inverted V, we climbed that on the left, as it appeared the more interesting of the two. A pleasing variation was then afforded by a slope of hard snow, sufficiently steep indeed to have seriously delayed a party unprovided with axes; it had, however, so far shrunk from the south wall as to allow us room to ascend sideways by leaning back against the rocks and kicking notches in the angle. Our progress was next arrested by a smooth wedged boulder, over which we climbed directly, but a short chimney on the right seemed to offer an easier alternative. Two obstacles of a similar character lie immediately above, and may be regarded as the threshold of a great cave— unquestionably the finest in any gully of the district. Rocks, fallen from above and jammed between the vertical side-walls of the gully, form both the roof and two bridges, the inner bridge, being the more accessible owing to the slope of the bed, becomes the most vulnerable point for attack.

The removal of débris from these virgin pitches necessitated single climbing, with the result that strange gymnastics were indulged in here, before the top of the rock was reached, for the right wall was streaming at the time with cold water from the snow melting above, and daylight, moreover, had ceased to penetrate the recesses of the cave. The next move was across the bridge to a slippery ledge on the south wall; sidling along this string-course by the light of faith, we reached the outer bridge, where a hole afforded a convenient exit. A faint glimmer on the western horizon sufficed for the ascent of the little pitch above, and we reached the summit ridge soon after eight o'clock. Of the four hours spent in the gully, probably the major part was occupied in pioneering, for while the bed rock was found to be very sound and satisfactory, the obstacles were decorated with so exceptional a quantity of loose turf and moss, that we might almost claim to have found them of grass and left them of granite.

These operations had delayed us beyond expectation, and though nothing could have terminated the day's expedition in more touching harmony with early experiences than a descent without a lantern in the dark and a return to camp between ten and eleven o'clock, yet we could not but regret having been the innocent cause of some uneasiness to the worthy congregation of tourists and fishermen assembled at the Royal Hotel, Capel Curig.

Some further explorations have been made since with Harold Hughes and Roderick Williams. A chimney, seventy feet in height, falling into the gully above the V pitch, affords an alternative exit, the more important as the ledge of the cave is apt to be iced in time of frost.

The loose rocks in the little chimney first mentioned above have now been levered out with an axe; by climbing it we have the double satisfaction of keeping in the gully and of regaining the main channel at the foot of a colossal pitch, 35 feet in height, with a difficult finish.

It is agreeable to general experience that the first impressions of a climb should be materially modified by subsequent visits, yet I have no hesitation in recording my opinion that this is the most entertaining gully climb in Snowdonia.