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The north face of Lliwedd.

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## FIRST ASCENT OF THE EAST BUTTRESS OF LLIWEDD.

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

IN a revolutionary age, when the words of the wise are on every climber's tongue, and the intention to obey them in few climbers' minds, it is refreshing to record a striking instance of strict adherence to one of the cardinal canons of orthodox mountaineering.

We have been advised that before we try to climb a mountain we should look at it, and in the present case this unquestionable counsel has been conscientiously followed. We had looked at the East Buttress of Lliwedd for twenty years. It had indeed become a habit, if not with all climbers in the Snowdon cirque, certainly with those who knew by heart their West Buttress, to pause in passing, and scanning "with head awry and cunning eye" the gaunt slabs of the sister peak, to discuss the possibility of ascent. In conformity with this custom, O. Eckenstein and I, on our way down from Bwlch Goch on April 23rd, freshened our recollection of the main features of the face. Sundry streaks and dots of snow so far aided our survey as to enable us to trace out to our complete satisfaction an elaborate route which seemed to

promise success, or at least to be by far the most favourable line for an attack upon the formidable fortress.

Early in the afternoon of the day following we were seated on the grassy *boncyns* above Llyn Llydau, reconsidering our plans.

A glistening ribbon of snow and ice filled the sinuous crack, by which we were to have forced a route up the lower slabs. The question whether we should go up or forbear was referred to me for decision. The weather was bright and the rocks were dry, but the wind was blowing fresh from the north-east, and it was a matter of experience that even at this season the north-easter does not "stir our Vikings' blood" to the extent of rendering us immune from frost-bite. The route upon which we had fixed our hopes was definitely abandoned.

We now turned our attention to a small ledge a little above the scree, which may be said to run out horizontally from the east side to the centre of the Buttress. It was impossible from our standpoint to form any opinion whatsoever of the character and potentialities of the slabs above, but the ledge would obviously serve as an initial base of operations. So, without more ado, we reached the rocks and roped.

Our route lay up steep slabs and shallow chimneys of the type that may be loosely described as triangular in horizontal section. At the height of 150 to 200 feet, we reached one of those places which engross the whole attention at the time and afterwards dwell in the memory. Our line of ascent struck a niche in the rock having a sloping floor of the size and shape of a boys' kite, heather-grown and overspread with a thick layer of loose snow. The scarcity of good holds was all the more noticeable as the possibility of the turf sliding bodily away like a toboggan appeared by no means remote. Such spots we are apt to reach with satisfaction and to quit without regret. Dry summer weather would widen the margin of safety. It may however be useful to mention that from a view obtained later, it appeared that a cleft on the right might

prove a good alternative. At a slightly higher level it came as a surprise and a pleasure to discover a tapering rock standing stately as a statue in a recess on our right. So excellent was the anchorage afforded by this colossal belaying-pin that a burnt offering was forthwith decreed to the Spirit of the Mountain—Eckenstein officiated in the sanctum, while I scrambled a little higher and, cowering into a sheltered nook, contributed my quota to the fragrant fumes that came curling in graceful columns along the grey rocks below.

Immediately above me there rose an oblique chimney which was found to give out upon a smooth wall, but nature has favoured the climber here, for from the upper exit the sharp arête of a thin rib can be reached without real difficulty.

The descent on each side of this rib is sheer, but its crest gives an excellent line until, some 50 feet above, it terminates abruptly in a vertical wall, and progress in precisely the same line is effectually barred. The position here is very exposed, but the climber can hitch himself to a spillikin of rock and contemplate at leisure a striking view of the imposing crags that surround him.

Though disinclined to believe that we had arrived at an *impasse*, we anticipated difficulty in effecting an advance from this point. Stepping down from the arête on to a little ledge on the wall, we traversed a few yards to the left and discovered a chimney which had been invisible from above, and this proved to be furnished with holds sufficient for solving the problem.

At a higher level we entered a narrow chimney in yellow rock ; the upper part is in my estimation decidedly puzzling, until the right hand can grasp a small peg of rock so placed as to test somewhat severely the length of one's reach. We emerged upon a heathery shelf, which we reckoned to be 400 feet above the scree. It was the first spot we had struck large enough to afford sitting-room for the two of us. We made therefore a prolonged halt at this welcome *gorphwysfa*, enjoying besides the familiar views, a very interesting outlook upon the West Buttress.

The steep wall above would offer a distinctly formidable obstacle were it not curiously ribbed and furrowed, bearing some slight resemblance to the shell of a pecten, so that, when the groove first chosen ceases to be convenient, we have merely to adopt the simple expedient of stepping round an intervening rib into a parallel trough, for all give out eventually upon a good quartz ledge, which trends from this point westwards in the direction of Central Gully.

After constructing a cairn to mark our route, we followed this horizontal ledge to the foot of a snow slope some 80 feet in height, and kicked steps up it. I was about to attack the rocks above, when Eckenstein called my attention to a narrow strip of snow on our left, indicating the existence of a ledge of some description, and proposed traversing along it. This proved an excellent suggestion. Stamping steps with great care along this narrow ribbon, we gradually worked back to the centre of the face, and reached a conspicuous corner, marked by a massive block of white stone. From this *omphalos* it seemed tolerably safe to prophesy that the chief difficulties of the ascent had been overcome, for we had reached the lower termination of a bold, sharply-defined arête, which appeared to offer a practicable and interesting line of advance. Upon its jagged crest we found climbing of a particularly pleasing and exhilarating kind, and finally came out upon the summit ridge at the foot of the cairn.

The ascent occupied nearly three hours, exclusive of halts. No part of this time was either wasted in following false scents or devoted to exploration. Indeed, opportunities for lateral deviation are very restricted. On the other hand, progress was never rapid, as we took the precaution of moving one at a time practically throughout the whole climb.

While no very close comparison can be established between ascents of our own mountains and those of the Alps, yet *mutatis mutandis* this climb resembles in character that of the difficult part—between the shoulder and the summit—of the Petit Dru. In both, a number of chimneys play an important part in the scaling of a generally smooth face. On

the Swiss peak, one short pitch—that above the fixed stanchion—is of greater technical difficulty than any encountered on the present climb, on the other hand, the opportunities for safe anchorage are relatively abundant. The time taken on both occasions was the same, but we were a party of five on the Chamounix Aiguille.

The trite dictum that “whatever number on the rope is right, two is unquestionably wrong,” may contain as much truth as any other proverb, but cannot, in my view, be regarded as applicable to ascents of every description. On the climb under consideration, as it is nowhere necessary to resort to combined tactics, a third man can add nothing to the strength of a party, while the presence of a fourth man on the rope would be so inconvenient as to materially increase the difficulty, and, in fact, to seriously imperil the safety of all.

That the climbing on the East Buttress would prove severer than upon the West, has always been anticipated, for the face is seen to be both steeper and smoother. It is, indeed, remarkably devoid of ample shelves and grassy ledges, such as occur so frequently and form so important a factor in the ascent of the sister peak. Other noticeable points of difference are the soundness of the rock and its freedom from vegetation, and these are advantages of no little importance in a climb of which the uniform steepness of gradient is perhaps the most characteristic feature.

J. M. ARCHER THOMSON.