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Journal: 1903

Author: Charles Packe

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THE

CLIMBERS' CLUB JOURNAL.

VOL. VI.]

1903.

[No. 22.

A NIGHT ON SCAWFELL.

By the late CHARLES PACKE, A.C.

NOTE by the President :

The following paper, though not finished, has a double interest for us owing to its subject and its author. Deliberate sleeping out on mountain tops is a form of enjoyment which many regard as an invention or a mania of the last few years ; but the late Mr. Packe indulged in it zealously for nearly half-a-century. He was one of the earliest members of the Alpine Club, and in those days comfortable inns had not pushed their way far up the slopes of all the Swiss mountains, so that sleeping out was then indispensable for many an expedition, which is now regarded as an affair of half a day. Accordingly, sleeping bags attracted much attention in mountaineering circles, and among the very earliest forms to be invented were those devised by Mr. Packe and Mr. Tuckett. When I first made the acquaintance of this celebrated bag, it had been in existence and use more than twenty years, and had lost a good deal of its warmth and its weatherproof qualities. It had also shrunk and stiffened with age, till at last the inventor became quite unable to get inside it without assistance of the most vigorous kind.

Many and many a time did he and I bivouac together among the mountains and forests of France and Spain, and the process of preparing him for his slumbers was comical in the extreme. He would sit on the ground while we—a guide, a porter or two, and myself—formed a circle round him. His feet were then cautiously insinuated into the bag—it was like putting a pair of spectacles into their case—we then raised him to a vertical position, and seizing the top edges of the bag, jumped him up and down until his weight gradually forced him down inside. We then lowered him gently to a recumbent altitude, where he remained like a mummy till we shook him out again in the morning. In those days (more than twenty years ago), the wilds of Spain were not thought very safe, and we heard a good deal about the brigands who were supposed to infest them. We might console ourselves with the reflection that no one, however evil disposed, was at all likely to look for us with success in the dead of night, and in such inaccessible places as we generally chose for our sleeping quarters, but if anyone had come, Mr. Packe was perfectly helpless. He could not very well say to the marauder, "I'll knock you down, if only you will help me to get out of this bag." So when we had chosen our positions for the night, this sort of conversation used to ensue.

"Have you got your rifle handy?"

"Yes. Sleeping on it."

"Got a cartridge ready?"

"Yes. Two."

"If you hear anyone coming fire at once. Goodnight."

"All right! Goodnight."

But the expected seldom happens. Queer animals came to visit us now and again, but never a brigand. For his night on Scawfell he had, of course, no sleeping bag, and very few creature comforts of any kind. He was a delicate-looking man, but wonderfully hardy. Sleeping out in high and wild places was quite a hobby of his, and he had done it on Snowdon, Helvellyn, and I think he mentioned several other prominent British peaks. Every expedition was marked

throughout by the same painstaking scientific spirit, which is shewn in this paper. As a mountain botanist he enjoyed, of course, a European reputation, and science of every kind interested him hugely. He had a perfect passion for determining altitude above sea level, by means of the boiling-point thermometer, an apparatus, the handling of which, at his instigation, upon cold mountain tops, has cost me many a miserable half-hour. His attachment to our English mountains lasted all his life. To take Scawfell Pikes alone—he had already ascended them in 1850 and 1852, and after this he went up in 1863, 1871, 1884, 1886, 1888, and 1889. On this last occasion he walked all the way from Low Wood, on Windermere, and over the Pikes by Piers Gill to Wastdale Head, which, for a man of 63, was not a bad day's work. When he died, some seven years ago, we lost a mountaineer of the best and truest type.

Monday, July, 1859. Left Low Wood at 10:30 a.m., carrying with me a plaid-cloak in addition to a light tweed wrapper, reached Ambleside at 11, and thence, passing by Rydal and Grasmere Lakes over Fox Howe, reached Thompson's farmhouse, at Mill Beck, at 1:10. The day was excessively hot, the thermometer 72 degrees in the shade. At Thompson's I indulged in a good meal of ham and eggs, milk, and bread and butter, thinking it prudent to reserve the small stock of bread and meat I had taken with me. Left Mill Beck at 2:15, and by 4 had reached the top of Rossit Gill, the very steep gully which seams the mountain side on the left hand extremity of the valley. This ascent is very steep, much more so than the Stake Pass which is carried up another gully on the right hand corner of the valley, leading into Borradale. The Stake Pass is practicable for ponies, but Rossit Gill is only to be scaled on foot. The ascent of this occupies 50 minutes—keep the gill on the right hand till near the top and then cross over to the other side. On the summit you emerge on a grassy *col*, from which 10 minutes easy descent in a N.W. direction brings you down to Angle Tarn. After passing this

on the left, and bearing W.N.W. under the crags of Bowfell, the summit of another green *col* is reached, Esk Hause, from which on the right you look down to Borradaie, and on the left you look over the savage valley of Eskdale towards Hardknot; continuing along this ridge some 10 minutes, a very plentiful spring of most excellent water is reached, gushing out from the rocks of Great End. This spring is the principal source of the river Esk.

I reached this spring on Esk Hause at 5; from this point to the summit of the Pikes takes about 45 minutes in a W.S.W. direction, the track, which passes over large rugged stones, being more or less marked.

From Styhead horses may be taken as far as this point, where they must be turned out to graze (there is no danger of their straying), till the party return from the summit.

I reached the summit of Scawfell Pike at 5.50, and tried hard to induce the two or three people whom I found there to remain on the top and bivouac with me for the night, but all of them descended at 6.30, and I was left to contemplate the sunset alone. The state of the atmosphere was pretty favourable for the view, but I think the forms of the mountains are more picturesque as seen from Helvellyn. There was a strong wind from the S.E., and it was scarcely possible to stand except under the shelter of the "man." The bearing of the principal points was as follows:—

Due N., Great Gable.

Then came the Scotch coast looking over the Solway, 30 degrees W. of N.

Then the Pillar, W. of N.W.

and beyond this to the left appeared Barrow Head and the Mull of Galloway, with their promontories projected into the sea like two islands.

Floutern Tarn, W.N.W.*

* There must be some error here. The tarn lies in a hole right under Herdus, which would completely hide it even if the mass of Pillar Fell had not already done so. Probably Mr. Packe misapplied the name to some other tarn, possibly Low Tarn, just on the far side of Vewbarrow.

Isle of Man, 10 degrees S. of W.

A bit of Wastwater, 10 degrees N. of W.S.W.

Scawfell on the other side of the chasm of Mickledore, 15 degrees S. of W.S.W.

Black Combe, S.S.W. (10 degrees S. of) and beyond, the Duddon Sands due S.

Hard Knot, 10 degrees E. of South.

Cockley Beck, a little white house in Eskdale S.S.E.—
Coniston Man beyond.

Then come Crinkle Crag, a continuation of Bowfell, E.S.E.

Bowfell due E. and a glimpse of Windermere over the ridge between them.

Harrison Pike, E.N.E. (10 degrees S. of), Hill Bell over it.

Saddleback, E.N.E. (10 degrees E. of).

Skiddaw, N. (10 degrees E. of).

I purposely confine myself to specifying the bearing of the principal peaks, and attempt no description of the extended panorama, for to do so would be only to weary the reader by vague description and monotonous expressions of admiration; the more strongly the beauty of picturesque scenery is felt, the more difficult does it become to convey the various emotions which crowd upon the mind.

Those who have no experience of mountain climbing are unable to appreciate the exquisite pleasure, after toiling up the rocks for several hours, of arriving at the summit, and the agreeable sensation of *seeing all around you*. There is doubtless something solemn and imposing in the aspect of a boundless horizon, whether viewed from the summits of the highest Alps, or the humbler eminences of two or three thousand feet. Infinity of space, as poets in every language say, is reflected within ourselves; it is associated with ideas of a superior order; it elevates the mind which delights in the calm of solitary meditation.

It is fine

To stand upon some lofty mountain top

And feel the spirit stretch into the view. *Bailey's Festus.*

It is true also that every view of unbounded space bears a peculiar character. The prospect surveyed from a solitary peak varies, according as the clouds reposing on the plains extend in layers, are conglomerated in groups, or present to the astonished eye, through broad openings, the habitations of man, the labour of agriculture, or the verdant tints of the tortuous vallies that wind amid the savage crags. It is a mistake to suppose that the highest and most arduous ascents are attended with the greatest amount of pleasure. "Travellers," says Humboldt ("Personal Narrative," I., 80), "have learned by experience that the views from very lofty mountains are neither so beautiful, picturesque, nor so varied as those from heights which do not exceed that of the Rigi (the Puy de Sancy, Scawfell Pikes, and Helvellyn). Colossal mountains, such as Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa, compose so large a mass that the plains covered with vegetation are seen only in the immensity of distance, and a blue and vapoury tint is uniformly spread over the landscape."

There is no vegetation on the top of Scawfell Pikes, neither is there any water, that nearest to the summit is to be found in a spring about 80 yards below the last *col*, on the west side, descending towards Styhead.* Hither I descended to make my frugal meal at 7:30, and then again repaired to the summit to watch the setting sun.

The longitude of Scawfell Pikes is 54°30' N.—the latitude, 3°20' W. On the 11th of July the sun sets at Greenwich (latitude 51°30'), at 8 hrs. 12 min., and rises at 3°57'. Now we must allow 4 minutes for each degree of longitude, which will give 13 min. 20 secs. later to rise and set at Scawfell than at Greenwich.

We must also allow 17 minutes earlier to rise, and later to set, for the 3 degrees of North latitude over Greenwich.

This will give 8 hrs. 12 min. + 13 min. 20 secs. + 17 min. = 8 hrs. 42 min. 20 secs., Greenwich time, as the hour of the sun setting on the sea level at Scawfell Pikes.

* There is generally good water near Mickledoor on the Eskdale side, and an excellent spring under Pikes Crag. Either of these would be much nearer than that by Great End.

And it will give 3 hrs. 57 min. + 13 min. 20 secs. - 17 min. = 3 hrs. 53 min. 20 secs., Greenwich time, as the hour of the sun rising over the sea level of Scawfell Pikes on July 11th.

At 8:45 the sun set, a blood-red orb, but no illumination of the sky succeeded. Small, but compact little black clouds, drifting up from the sea, came scudding past me with astonishing rapidity, and there was every sign of the wind, already strong, increasing in violence. On the summit some of the larger stones have been built up so as to form very rude *cabanes*. These were made by the Ordnance Engineers, who were here for some weeks surveying about two years back; but the roof is now gone, and they afford scarcely any protection against the weather. I took up my position for the night bivouac about fifty yards from the top, on the North side, on a spot where a little patch of moss afforded some substitute for a bed, for the rocks all round were so hard and rugged, that to lie down on them was actually painful. Having built a low wall of stones along the East side, to protect myself from the wind, which blew very strongly from the S.E., at 10:30 I stretched myself along it, and prepared for sleep. The moon which had risen very misty, soon disappeared; and the North was the only quarter of the heavens in which a few stars remained visible. I was astonished to see how long this part of the sky preserved its blue tint. Up to 1 a.m., long after the light had faded, in this quarter I could still admire a patch of pale azure sky distinguishable from the dark profound. At this hour, however, the last cheering speck was overspread by fast gathering clouds, and every now and then one came a little lower, bedewing me with vapour.

I once thought of endeavouring to make my way down before it got worse, but two steps convinced me of the impracticability of scrambling over the stones in the dark, even if I could be certain of the direction. It was not cold, and whenever I felt myself a little numb, I got up and exercised myself in reconstructing and improving my wall, which very soon restored the circulation. I found it, however, impossible to sleep, and I lay patiently expecting daybreak. Sometimes

the wind would lull for a minute or two, and then every thing was perfectly still, there was no sound either of the hum of insects or of falling water, and I could not help thinking how astonished I should be, if any man or animal at that time had presented itself before me. Though no believer in ghosts, I should have been at a loss whether or not to take it for a visitant from another world. The only living things near me were, I believe, some long-legged spiders, of which in the morning I found some dozen curled up in a paper of sandwiches, that I had taken out of my pocket and placed on a rock. Gradually the hours wore on, and at 3 there was sufficient light to enable me to read the thermometer, which marked no lower than 58 degrees. At 3.25 the thermometer had gone down to 52 degrees, and this was the coldest period of the night. At 3.53 the sun ought to have risen in that latitude and longitude; but at 4 a.m., though it was now light, it was impossible to say in which quarter the sun had risen, as far as any aspect of the sky was concerned. All was equally wrapped in grey mist, which allowed me to see the ground from 10 to 20 yards but no farther. It was impossible to say how long this might remain, and as I had not the slightest intention of spending a second night on the top of Scawfell, I thought it best to try how I could get along, so at 4.15 a.m. started. From Scawfell Pikes to Esk Hause there are two distinct masses of rock to be traversed, the Pikes being the third of the series, the track over these is partly marked, but, in a mist like this, it is not easy to keep it, and, fortunately, in ascending I had taken the bearings by compass of all the prominent points, which are as follows:—

To return from Scawfell Pikes to Angle Tarn:—

E.N.E. is the general direction—Great End bears due N.E.

To first col bear 5 degrees E. of N.E.

From this col bear 10 degrees E. of E.N.E., passing over some large stones, descending on a second col, and then mounting up to a mossy plateau. Traversing this mossy plateau E.N.E., you come to rugged stones, and descend by those to the spring on Esk Hause, rising under Great End.

From the spring on Esk Hause, Harrison Pike bears E.S.E., and this is the direction to take to arrive at Angle Tarn, keeping close under the rocks of Bowfell on your right.

From the North corner of Angle Tarn ascend the grassy col S.E., which brings you to the top of Rossit Gill.

Compass in hand, I got on pretty well, the main difficulty I had being in striking the stream on Esk Hause from the last rocks. It was impossible to see Great End, Bowfell, or any other land-mark, even when close upon them, and twice I found myself descending into Eskdale, by not keeping up enough to the N. Owing to this I was a good two hours in reaching the spring, instead of 50 minutes, and in crossing Esk Hause I had again some little difficulty, but at 6.50 found myself safely down at Angle Tarn.

The mist here began to clear, all the difficulty was over, and the wind got round to the North.

I reached Mill Beck, including a siesta on the road, at 9.15, and, having there had breakfast with a very good cup of tea, started again at 10.50. The day was so fine that I was tempted to prolong my ramble over the mountains, and make for Grassmere over the col of Silver Howe. It is a very pleasing diversion from the dirty road, and the following is the route:—

At 11 a.m., 19 minutes after leaving Mill Beck (Thompson's), struck off to the left and made up the hill due E., along some cut fern. On reaching the col (Silver Howe), bend to N.E. Helm Crag is N.N.E. of you as you descend, and a little to the left* of Helm Crag is seen Grisedale.

Top of col at 11.45.

Descend best on right bank of stream, striking into foot-path, and continuing down to upper extremity of Grassmere village. You may keep the crest of the hill, keeping close under the rocks of Red Bank, but it is a slippery and somewhat difficult path, not fit for ladies.

It turned out a beautiful day, which if I could have foreseen, I should have remained three hours longer on the top of

* Right.

Scawfell, but of this I could not be certain, and, to say the truth, I was somewhat sick of my solitary bivouac ; not that I at all regret it, and, under more favourable circumstances, I have no doubt the view would well repay for the inconvenience ; and a party of two or three would not find it at all dull.

