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Central ↓ Climb.

Upper Chasm »»→

Lower Chasm »»→



CYRN LÂS. Great Buttress.

T H E

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FIRST ASCENTS OF THE BUTTRESSES OF CYRN LÂS, And Climbs on Clogwyn Garnedd.

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THE first mention of a mountain in climbing literature is usually accompanied by a description of its position. It will suffice to say that Cynr Lâs, the Grey Horn, forms part of the Snowdon *massif*, and pens in Cwm Glas on the west side. A long shoulder falls from it into the Llanberis Pass, and affords a fine approach to Y Wyddfa, second only to the popular ridges of the Horseshoe. It is, however, seldom traversed.

The upper section of the face that fronts the valley is of no great interest to climbers, but the lower portion drops into the Cwm in two striking buttresses, separated by the bed of an intermittent stream. These cliffs are so obtrusively conspicuous that it is hard to account for their having remained so long unexplored.

On September 13th of last year, I had the good fortune to fall in with a party of friends, who were meditating an ascent of Crib Goch. The appetite for novelty is easily whetted, and fair promises were scarcely needed to induce them to change

their plan in favour of an expedition to the Eastern, or Great Buttress, of Cynr Lâs.

From the scree, beside the permanent stream, we ascended the glaciis to a broad terrace, and after
Great Buttress— lunching divided our forces. Backwell,
Central Route. Tetley and Turner agreed to execute a turning movement near the east corner of the face, while the brothers Williams and I delivered a frontal attack, It was not, however, to swift and certain victory that we set forth.

A gully suggested a line of advance, but a precipitous slope of heather had to be carefully reckoned with, before we reached its channel. It was found abnormally steep in this its lower section, and so wet and slippery that I required the full run out of a seventy rope before gaining good anchorage on a grassy ledge. Here we were confronted by a black and nearly vertical wall, some fifteen feet in height. Above this the gradient appeared at first to moderate, but the view was shown to be deceptive by the set of the rocks on our left. In fact, the pitch continued for about sixty feet, where a second grass ledge enabled us to re-assemble.

Another steep stretch of rock brought us to a projecting corner, and from here it was necessary to reconnoitre before attempting to advance. A rib on the right, reached by swinging on the arms off a ledge, proved impossible, while the *mauvais pas*, taken in the reverse direction, is obviously referred to by the poet, who, "stooping into the vast unexplored abyss" to reach the finger hold, was able a few moments later to boast to his comrades :—

"I know the right place by foot's feel,
 I took it and tread firm there."

As this traverse led to nothing, it is perhaps needless to add that it has serious defects. However, the divergence led to the discovery that the true route lay up a slab, possibly twenty feet in height, and certainly unpromising in appearance. Below it was a serviceable knob for hitching the rope, and the removal of earth with a penknife disclosed a succession of



CYRN LÂS. Lower Chasm.

excellent niches ; with the aid of these the ascent was accomplished with unexpected ease. We had now a choice of route ; by traversing into the bed of the gully, which bends away to the west and divides, we knew we should have a final pitch as compensation for ascending a long slope of grass ; the alternative was to continue directly up the face in our own line. The latter course was considered the more satisfactory, and a chimney pitch gave an interesting and definite finish to the climb. The Central Route up the Great Buttress of the Grey Horn must be classed among the distinctly difficult climbs of Snowdonia.

Strange sounds caught at intervals, and previously accredited to sheep, were now recognised as human voices. Our flanking column under Backwell's guidance had reached their goal, and were raising the pæan.

Their climb, which was likewise a new one, falls to be considered under the three headings of the steps, the chimney and the upper chasm.

These pitches, naturally independent of each other, were linked by art into a continuous climb. The first is approached from the east end of the terrace upon the main face. Last Easter it was rightly judged unfit for attack owing to threatening artillery ; however, Backwell, M. K. Smith and I managed to dislodge the mountain battery—an operation of some delicacy, for it was necessary for the operator to stand well in the line of fire, and submit at the critical moment to be jerked from his stance into cover by his vigilant comrades. This task was performed not only with praiseworthy precision, but with a merciless vigour that could only be prompted, I grieve to say, by a wholly unchristian craving for revenge.

The connecting chimney is of convenient width for backing up, and leads to the terrace in front of the upper chasm. The exit is seen at a glance to be guarded by a cracked and rocky sentinel. The pass-word is caution. From an erect position on the top of the obstacle, excellent holds are reached for effecting the escape, after which a simple scramble brings us to the summit.

It will have been noticed that the summer storms in this locality are often confined within a strictly limited area. On August 15th, our co-mates at Pen-y-Pass enjoyed sunny weather in Nant Gwynant, while A. E. Elias and I were crouching for shelter under a boulder in Cwm Glas, watching for hours the rolling cloudland. A lucid interval was utilised for the exploration of the lower chasm, whose position entitles it to be regarded as a component part of the climb described. The whole height is ninety feet, but little difficulty is experienced in reaching the cave that forms the upper section. Finding no room for pacific penetration through the skylight, we were forced to attack the left wall and to struggle out with what grace we might on to a narrow ledge on the face. We were here upon the upper side of an overhang, with impending rocks above us. After a very careful inspection of the wet slabs on our left, we traversed horizontally across them, finding small but sound nicks well spaced over the whole fifty feet. This passage is impressive, and is similar in character to that by which a well-known gendarme on the Charmoz arête is circumvented on the Nantillon side; in both cases the surroundings are of a nature that make it superfluous for first explorers to counsel meticulous footing.

We came off at a well-marked corner, and thence, by perfectly easy rocks, gained the foot of the intermediate chimney.

The cold and dreary weather experienced last Easter did not deter the enthusiasts assembled at the Gorphwysfa from diligently seeking the surrounding summits. M. K. Smith, Backwell and I were less aspiring, and devoted April 3rd to further explorations in Cwm Glas.

The West Buttress consists mainly of a vertical wall, from which an outer covering has to a large extent sloughed off, leaving the smooth surface of the living rock exposed to view, but part of the outer layer yet remains, and running obliquely up the face forms along its top a species of steep corridor, which thus occupies a position, in regard to the wall,

**Little or West
Buttress of Cynr
Lâs.**

similar to that of the outside staircase of a Swiss chalet. Here we found a short climb of a singular character.

After getting up some slabs that rise immediately from the small scree, we struck the foot of the corridor, which begins with a pitch of moderate difficulty ; this gives access to what may be termed a giant's staircase, and at the top lies the crux of the climb. The final riser is some twenty-five feet in height ; an attempt to climb this may or may not prove a failure, but the chances do not, I think, favour success. In any case, we preferred a ledge on the right, promising enough at first, but afterwards narrowing to nothing ; not, however, before it had brought us within reach of a rock needle which the Alma Mater seems to have left here for one purpose only. At this point Backwell joined me, and payed out the rope. By leaning forward from the top of the needle, we can grasp some minute rugosities on the face, and transfer the centre of gravity by means of a spring, the friction of the clothes seems of some service for the brief space that intervenes before satisfactory holds can be seized, and the remaining portion is relatively simple.

We came out upon a grassy terrace, and after erecting a cairn, went down by the North Ridge.

Cynr Lâs has thus been annexed to our playground in this district, and the acquisition of fresh territory may be welcomed by those who are familiar with the older climbs, but it may be added in this connection, that the very cliffs on which the latter lie, afford, in many cases, far greater scope than is commonly supposed. As the Editor desires me to be discursive, I will here invite attention to the north face of Clogwyn Garnedd. A widespread notion exists that there is here but one gully that has been climbed or is worthy of being climbed ; in fact there are seven. Of the Big Gully, a very popular, but, in my view, a much overrated climb, nothing need be said except that it is 300 feet in height, and is more conveniently reached from the zig-zags than by the usual route from the head of Glaslyn.

As far back as 1894, H. Hughes and I, finding this gully

replenished with a fresh supply of *débris*, passed over the portal pitch beside its entrance, and traversed along a terrace to the foot of the "Little Gully." We were rewarded by finding a pleasant route, four and a half hats, and a varied assortment of useful sundries—the votive offerings of pious visitors to the summit. There is one pitch of considerable difficulty near the exit; indeed, were it not for a mere fragment of quartz jammed in a crack, it is doubtful whether a climber would succeed unaided.

In September, 1898, M. K. Smith, Roderick Williams, Tom Williams and I, spent a long day on this face, and climbed in turn the remaining five gullies. The first two of the Trinity group had, I believe, been ascended before. Each of the three branches contains a jammed block, easy to pass, but in winter the central channel affords the best snow ascent on Snowdon, and the conditions are often excellent at Easter. The gully next in order may be identified in misty weather by a fallen slab that bridges its entrance, or by the rock ladies—not less life-like than the Dames Anglaises—cutting the skyline to the right of the exit. A fine pitch, with good holds on its left wall, is succeeded by a grassy continuation, which gives out at a notch on the Bwlch Glas ridge. Not far below this, a similar gap marks the termination of the last and shortest of the series, which contains the most formidable problem of all. The "Cave Gully" gradually narrows to a chimney, surmounted by a precipitous slope of earth. Here the difficulty in finding sound footing seemed to me materially increased by the consciousness that anything disturbed must strike the men gathered below in the funnel. The leader ascended these sixty feet alone, and made good his position in the cave before the rest of the party followed. The upper reach of the gully is coated with rather treacherous turf, but possesses no special features.

A stone-shoot provides a short and direct route down from the ridge, so that, if descents are not desired, these gullies may still be climbed in succession without unnecessary loss of height and repeated ascents of the scree.

