



LES BANS

Photo by F. Oakes Smith

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FORTY YEARS ON.

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To the members of the Yorkshire Ramblers' Club the past forty years are full of interest ; in the remnant of the oldest, they arouse memories dear to all of us. Many have passed away, younger men have taken up the responsibilities of management and leadership, ever increasing the range of our activities and adding to the fame of the club. To me there seems to be energy and spirit which should give the greatest satisfaction to the survivors of the early days.

One naturally asks, what led to the idea of forming the club. The first of us were already beyond the youthful age ; but rambles, walking tours, and other expeditions had frequently brought a few keen fellows together, and thus arose a condition favourable to the birth of the club.

The happiest memories of my earliest years are of walks round Leeds, to Adel, to Harewood, to Linton. Then later, as I became more ambitious, with trusty friends I undertook longer tours, among which that along the Roman Wall from Bowness-on-Solway to Newcastle-on-Tyne has left the strongest impression, then alone from North Tynemouth to Berwick by the coast, broken by ten days at Holy Island. Many were the week-ends we spent in Wharfedale at Appleton, whither I have twice walked alone at midnight from Bolton Abbey by the Strid and Barden Bridge, weird experiences. Down Bempton Cliffs for seabirds' eggs was exciting. Holidays in North Wales, Lakeland, Switzerland, Norway, Canada where a descent to the Cave of the Winds at Niagara recalled to my mind a wish I had uttered long before under Thornton Force at Ingleton, that I might one

day stand under the Father of Waters Holland, Belgium, and other countries followed, visits in which the ascent of Vesuvius, not by the railway, proved the most interesting event. Scrambling on Almescliffe nearly sixty years ago and cave exploration of the seventies and eighties was mere child's play compared with our later standard, and yet the inclination was strengthened by those early efforts.

Most noticeable about these expeditions was the change in companionship. Friends came and went, a few kept their interest and we stuck to the outings. When an expedition was proposed half-a-dozen men would respond to the invitation, but more than once, at the last moment, only two or three would turn up. This was very disappointing.

One of the walks which we looked upon as distinctly arduous was the traversing of Ingleborough, Wharfedale and Penyghent in one day. Slingsby used to refer to the first record of this walk; J. A. Green and others did it, then Charles Scriven returned from the successful tour of the three peaks. Before a beaten track could be made I arranged to make the attempt at Whitsuntide 1892, but when I got to the station in Leeds I found only one friend, W. Ramsden. We stayed at the "Flying Horse Shoe" and on Sunday morning set off in a drizzle up to the village of Clapham and the long slope of Ingleborough. Holtzmann of Bradford joined us for the first mountain but Ramsden and I were left to complete the ascents. It was during the tramp through Trow Gill, while we were talking about the failure of our friends to join us, that I told Ramsden I should approach all the men I knew to be interested in rambling over our Yorkshire moors and fells, with a view to forming a club and thus improving the chances of collecting larger groups for our outings.

In those days we did not realize the possibilities of such an organization; but a "Three Peak Club" floated in our minds. I spent some time in discussing the project with my friends and asked each one to do the same until a good number were sounded. In the meantime Slater, Green, Bellhouse and myself had a preliminary meeting at Slater's house in Headingley, where we drew up an outline of our proposals and a rough draft of rules likely to be useful. Our

leas were not justified, the club was formed and has been a success from the first.

The titles suggested may appear somewhat curious and are therefore given at length:—The Yorkshire Pedestrian Club; The Leeds Pedestrian Club; The Leeds Walking Club; The Yorkshire Ramblers' Club; The Three Peak Club. The final choice was not made without careful thought. Eventually the majority decided upon our present title which delineates roughly the principal area of our work.

Notices were sent out to men in the Leeds district likely to join us and the inaugural meeting took place at the Skyrack Inn, Headingley, on the 6th October, 1892. Nine attended and it was decided to form a club, thirteen members being elected at the time. The proposed title was approved, officers were appointed, and the rough draft of rules accepted as a basis for the final decision. I had the honour of being elected the first president, with J. A. Green as secretary, H. H. Bellhouse as treasurer, and a small Committee.

From the first we steadily grew in numbers. Our papers at the fortnightly meetings in the Smoke Room of the Skyrack Inn were not ambitious, but they were the personal narratives of our exploits and led some of our members to attempt literary work for the first time. Our explorations have given the club a recognised position in the county and have made it an authority on many matters pertaining to Yorkshire.

Our next development was to associate ourselves with men known to fame in the climbing world and for this purpose we requested several mountaineers to become honorary members. The first of these was Edward Whymper, then W. Cecil Slingsby, C. T. Dent, C. E. Mathews and others. Of these the one who did more for us than any other was, of course, Slingsby, who was our president from October 1893 to 1903. Most assiduously he worked, not only introducing new members, but exercising his influence, so that at the opening lecture of each season the members had the pleasure of meeting and hearing in successive years, C. T. Dent, Herman Woolley, C. E. Mathews, C. P. Pilkington, Dr. N. Collie, Rev. Walter Weston, Mrs. Aubrey Le Blond, and others famous as travellers and climbers. The direct consequence was that the members took an ever increasing

interest in climbing in spite of the occasional protests from Slingsby, whose own example was most stimulating in spite of his precepts. It has extended the original ideas of the founders, and the prominence given to this elevating branch of sport has considerably widened the scope of the club. So much is this the case that in a candidate's applications for entrance particular attention is paid to his qualification as a mountaineer.

The original members, *mirabile dictu*, were affected by the craze for finding the most awkward and difficult way up mountains. The gullies and crags in the Lake District, North Wales and Skye were climbed. Many spent their holidays in Switzerland, Norway, Morocco and other climbing centres. Notable peaks were ascended and new expeditions were made before the end of the century. The south arête of the Rothhorn and the south east arête of the Nesthorn from the Bel Alp, the west arête of the Gross Ruchen, peaks in Arctic Norway, Mountains of Lofoten, Traverse of Mount Blanc without guides, etc. To day the Club must include a dozen men who count their Alpine guideless expeditions by scores, its President has climbed in four great ranges, and there are Everest men in our ranks.

One branch of our work is historic, the exploration of the caves, pot-holes and hidden watercourses of the Craven Highlands. A direct impetus was given by the descent of Gaping Ghyll for the first time in July 1895 by that plucky Frenchman, Mons. E. Martel, who entered this modest little note in the visitors' book at the New Inn, Clapham:—

E. A. Martel (and Madam) On Thursday 1st of August
29 July 2nd August 1895 1895 I went down Yaping
Paris, France. Gill hole, etc.

Edward Calvert was the first Englishman to tread the floor of this mighty pot-hole, a veritable Giant's Hall in the heart of Ingleborough. The strong combinations which our club has provided, have carried out this and many successful explorations:—Long Kin West, Sell Gill Pot, etc. Within ten years of Martel's visit the first wave of Yorkshire Ramblers had accounted for every big open pot-hole in the Craven area. One of the most awful chasms in Yorkshire, Rowten Pot, only yielded after repeated attempts. I was not

included in the first party organized by Edward Calvert that descended Gaping Ghyll on the 10th May, 1896; but I was invited to the second three weeks later, and I shall never forget the awe I experienced when I looked up to the sunlit orifice at the top of the great hall, 350 feet above me.

To those who are fond of excitement and desirous of adventure this form of mountaineering reversed is both novel and interesting to a degree scarcely appreciated by an outsider. It has brought some of the men closely together and taught them to know each other in a way years of ordinary life would fail to do. The interdependence of the party, the various duties pleasant and otherwise, which have to be performed, bring out the best sides of a man's character. To feel infinite trust in the man who holds you on the rope in a position where light is scant and unknown dangers may abound is a mark of confidence which we give and take with each other repeatedly. Where to fail may mean a crash, where carelessness or inattention courts disaster, the value of every member of the party is fully tested and respected accordingly. The seriousness of this has never been absent from our minds and the resulting friendships have been firmly founded on mutual esteem.

As a training ground for those anxious to practise the steps to more ambitious ascents, our county affords some superb opportunities, even for busy men, Almescliff, Crookrise, Simon Seat, Brimham Rocks, and over the border, Laddow. We are essentially an open air club and our aims should recommend us to every man blessed with health and strength. To see and come into contact with nature in her wildest and sternest moods far from the madding crowd, is worth striving for. To escape from the rut and conventional dullness of everyday life is a marvellous tonic. In these days to do this we are driven into the inner recesses of our glorious county and amid the variety of hill and dale, moor and wood, or on our rugged coastline we approach an ideal, and eventually seek the snowclad peaks of the mountain ranges.

To see Gordale Scar in a winter garb of snow and pendent icicles glittering in the sunlight, is a picture as marvellous as a glimpse of fairy land. To breast Ingleborough clothed in deep snow, or in a raging blizzard, is an experience not to

be forgotten. The fitness to accomplish and endure it is well worth the training which constant practice gives.

In the nether regions many things strange and mysterious impress the human mole burrowing in our limestone caverns. Beautiful calcareous formations encrust the roofs and floors or drape the sides with wonderful cascades. The stalactites and stalagmites vary from reedlike stems to massive columns where the progressive deposits in the hidden chambers and passages, have in the course of ages been free from disturbance. To look up the great shafts is awe inspiring, but Nature, whether above or below ground, to those who appreciate and court her is a never ending book of new and charming delights. How long the present conditions may continue no one knows, the remote hills, last to be improved, are now being attacked, and soon the tar macadam and the unheeding motorists of the towns will invade our choicest haunts, to desecrate them in their own peculiar and objectionable way.

It will not be out of place to give a few details. On the 6th October, 1892, the birthday of the club, thirteen members were elected, increased to thirty four by the end of October 1893. A larger room for our meetings was necessary so we removed to the Victoria Hotel, behind the Town Hall, in December 1892. Again in 1896 a change was made to the Thoresby Society's Room, in Park Street; lastly in 1924 we took a room at 10, Park Square where our library is installed and the committee meetings are held. The old tree and easy gatherings amid the fragrant incense of burning weed have been transferred to the meets. Personally I should like to see a revival of these Bohemian evenings in town at least once or twice a year.

The *Journal* has given our exploits prominence and helped to strengthen the position of the Club. It was talked about in 1895, but did not begin until 1899. In a remarkable letter, dated February, 1895, Gray, the first editor, prophesied that the Club would reach 100 members in 1904, and laid down the lines on which he considered Club and *Journal* would be successful, namely, by putting mountaineering in the forefront.

So well did Whympers think of the Club that he left us a legacy (£50), which may be considered as having been well

expended among the substantial sums the Club has granted to the Everest and Kamet expeditions.

The promise after forty years is good and the records of these years in our *Journal* are a tribute to the spirit of the members, now over 160 in number. Since our foundation, many kindred clubs have been founded with the same interests and enterprising enthusiasm. Several of them have a greater number of members and their own journals of great literary and illustrative merit. That we have grown more slowly has caused a little adverse comment, but it should be remembered that in a great number there is some difficulty in getting the friendly association which should be fostered among us, and it is something to hear it said of us, "They all know one another." Intimate companionship is one of the things we want and try to establish among our large family of young men.

In looking back over the years to 1892 the oldest of us must feel the loss of our old and tried companions; Slingsby, with whom in 1895 I traversed the S.E. Arête of the Nesthorn to the Bel Alp and the Oberaletsch Rothorn S. Arête; Lewis Moore, whose personality embodied the very essence of good fellowship with a keen sense of humour and hearty geniality; Swithinbank, Ellet, Green, Cuttriss, Ralph Smith, Waud, and Buckley most faithful of Ramblers; each one dear to us for hard work, ready help, and high spirits, especially when the conditions were unfavourable or trying.

Hill, a scientist and keen cave-explorer, Benson, a contributor to mountaineering literature and an entertaining lecturer, great figures like Wingfield and Payne, great rock climbers like Fred Botterill and Frankland, famous for their style and balance, all these have come, and gone.

The men now in charge are trustworthy and keen. They show remarkable vigour and common sense in all that concerns the club. We feel assured they will carry on and that we may without anxiety leave the Yorkshire Ramblers' Club in their keeping.