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THE WAY TO THE HILLS

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THE Scottish Committee of the Central Council of Physical Recreation ran three courses of one week each in the Cairngorm Mountains in 1947. The first was based at the Aviemore hotel and took place in March, and the second and third took place in August and were housed in Glenmore Lodge. Forty-two students attended in March, and sixty-two in August. The students were men and women in about equal numbers, and were from every walk of life, of many different trades and professions, although university students preponderated. There were very many applications for these courses and some attempt was made to select people of a calibre and type who could in the future influence others. The object of these courses was to introduce people to the hills, and to teach in the short time available how to get the best out of the sport which the Scottish hills provide.

The weather in March was very wintry, and a deep fall of snow at the beginning of the course ensured good skiing conditions throughout. By contrast, the weather in the August courses coincided with the last fortnight of the year's perfect summer weather, so that students who attended both in March and August were able to get a very fair sample of both winter and summer conditions, and to see at first hand some of the possibilities they presented.

From the beginning it was stressed by the staff to the students that mountaineering included many things from hill walking to skiing, and snow and rock climbing, and it was pointed out that the Scottish hills offered first class sport of their own kind for people who approached them in the right way, and it was indicated that to get the best out of the hills, to learn a full appreciation of them, and to derive the greatest benefit physically, mentally, and spiritually, there was a series of steps to be followed to the full development of mountaineering in all weathers.

Wordsworth once said : ' Mountains are the beginning and the end of all natural scenery.' Indeed, mountains are an attraction, drawing many people to the country and to a development by training and study which may end in the student becoming a confirmed mountain lover and climber, for the two generally go together. Rambling, or country walking, or—that ugly name—hiking, may be the first step,

consciously or subconsciously, to the hills ; but if this is the first step, the others follow naturally one on another.

Rambling often leads to an interest in nature study : botany, geology, meteorology, local zoology, and local history. It also leads to a desire to read a map, to use a compass, and to learn way finding in different types of country. These studies are not merely phases in mountaineering : they are progressive in themselves, and can continually enrich the way of the mountaineer or Rambler.

Camping or hosteling and self-maintenance in these conditions may come about now, or they may have been the first of all, and the Youth Hostel Movement, by the provision of facilities, has been responsible for the introduction of thousands to the country and to the hills.

Hill walking is the next stage which the tyro will probably want to undertake, at first accompanied by a leader of experience ; but the beginner is already to a certain extent equipped to undertake hill walking if in his rambling he had learnt a degree of way finding by map and compass. Hill walking at all seasons requires a good knowledge of way finding in thick weather, and an understanding of and feel for the country.

Meteorology is also a great help, and it must be speedily understood that sound protective clothing must always be carried, especially in winter, where conditions on the Scottish tops can easily become literally arctic. I sometimes think that the conditions often found on the tops of Scottish hills in winter are nature's way of reminding us of what the whole country would be like were it not for the Gulf Stream.

A knowledge of hill walking will enable a man to climb to the top of most Scottish mountains, except in winter ; but to be able safely to go into the hills in all weathers, the hill walker should and will probably want to progress to the other branches of mountaineering, which can be broadly classified as snow and rock climbing, and skiing. Easy snow climbing, *i.e.* climbs up moderately steep snow slopes with the surmounting of a rather more difficult obstacle in the shape of a cornice at the top, is something which can be made quite easy for beginners. The risks are not great and many more people would go in for this type of climbing if they were introduced to it in the right way. Rock climbing, on the other hand, needs more care in introduction. A beginner should climb for some considerable time behind an expert, until he has gained a large degree not only of climbing skill and technique, but of judgment and knowledge of what he can himself tackle.

Snow and rock climbing have their own progressions. For example, there are the very difficult rock climbs mostly done in summer, and the combination of snow, ice, and rock which is done in varying degrees of difficulty in winter conditions. These latter attain, in the climbs on Scottish hills of some of our well known Scottish climbers, examples of outstanding mountaineering feats. Mr. W. H. Murray's book, *Mountaineering in Scotland*, describes what a first class sport mountaineering in Scotland is, and what endless opportunities for development exist.



Photo, Wm. S. Thomson.]

REACHING THE SUMMIT PLATEAU OF COIRE AN-T-SNEACHDA.



Photo, Lord Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton.]

ROCK CLIMBING PLAYGROUND.

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The point that was made to the students at these C.C.P.R. courses, however, was that while the very difficult routes were there to be done by anyone with the skill and knowledge, the emphasis in training for mountaineering should always be to climb well within one's own powers. There is great satisfaction in doing the easier climbs, although there is the knowledge—by way of keeping one humble—that there is always something more to be learned. As a general goal, however, a certain standard of all-weather mountaineering is taken ; which means simply, ability to undertake climbs of moderate difficulty in winter or summer alike. It is difficult to lay down a definite standard which will please all mountaineers in this respect ; suffice it to say that the aim for a climber is held up to be the ability to go into the mountains and climb safely at all times of the year. Skiing is, of course, another branch of mountaineering, and this again divides itself up into various developments : downhill running and racing, jumping and ski touring ; racing and jumping, of course, being only for the expert.

The Glenmore courses were too short to tackle the various steps thoroughly. However, it is possible to give within a week demonstrations and experiences of value. In the March course there were three choices given for students : hill walking, skiing, and snow climbing, and the students divided themselves about evenly between the three. In summer there are only two choices ; hill walking and rock climbing, but in some ways more scope for both, since long expeditions and camping out can be done, and were done by all the students in August.

The sequence of training for both winter and summer was broadly the same, *i.e.* it started with map and compass exercises not far from base, went on to demonstrations of climbing, and then to a climbing playground where first practice could be obtained in technique, and finally to expeditions. In March a climbing demonstration was possible up a frozen waterfall behind the hotel. Nearly everyone witnessed this and most students actually did climb the 200-ft. course, ending up with 100-ft. roping down. After this demonstration, hill walkers, skiers and climbers would separate during the day and meet again in the evenings for lectures. Also in the evenings some talk of interest, where possible in some of the nature studies already mentioned, was given. The talk was usually followed by a *ceilidh* in which students were encouraged to show their talents.

During the day the hill walkers undertook long expeditions to places of interest, and the skiers repaired to a convenient nursery slope on Cairngorm. The climbers went on to a period of playground climbing made possible by the exceptional snowfall last winter, which gave, about half an hour from Glenmore Lodge, a slope of 200 ft., ending in cornices of every sort and variety. This enabled a lot of useful practice to take place in the use of ice-axes, and roping, glissading, falling, recovery, etc., and gave a great deal of confidence for the expeditions later. The final exercises for the climbers were expeditions to places like the Shelter Stone, which included short climbs, roped.



Photo, Wm. S. Thomson.]

NEAR GLENMORE LODGE.

Both in summer and winter the number of climbing leaders available limited the number of climbers because it is not practicable to take and instruct more than three on a rope in winter, and two in summer. The climbing playground, however, provided opportunity to observe how each person shaped, and it was sometimes possible to increase the number on expeditions by making a competent student lead a party behind one led by a more experienced leader.

In August a first rate rock climbing playground was found and used at Creag a' Chalamain. After this the time was divided up between expeditions for the rock climbers, which included short rock climbs ; expeditions without rock climbs ; and further map and compass exercises for the others. Field sketching was also taught to all. In August the amenities of the course were greatly enhanced by the presence of Loch Morlich and its sandy beach, while very fine weather made bathing a pleasure.

The climax of the courses, however, was an expedition which involved camping out at night. Parties went to the Shelter Stone, to Corrou bothy, to Ryvoan bothy, and a tented camp was set up by the rock climbing party at the Pools of Dee. In the two days some parties covered nearly forty miles, including the climbing of the four 4000-ft. peaks : Cairngorm, Ben MacDhui, Brae Riach, and Cairn Toul. The rock climbers from their camp at the Pools of Dee found some of the best rock in the Cairngorms in Corrie Brochain, which is normally so inaccessible.

At the end of the courses the staff summarised the work done in a discussion which all the students attended, and the students were advised how they could join a climbing club in their own locality, and so continue their climbing training. It was emphasised, however, that there was a more serious aspect to the course : that mountaineering was not only a first class sport, but something more than that, and it could become almost a way of life. It was a great way to get people to see things in right perspective. The hills are big, and humans and all their problems by comparison small. Thus, we may draw strength from the hills to tackle life's problems. We have as a nation one particularly outstanding problem : our vast urbanisation has meant that the greater proportion of people is brought up in cities with all the false values and deterioration in character possible when city life is undiluted with that of the countryside. We have therefore a task as a nation to get our townspeople more acquainted with the country. Those who, at these and other courses, have experienced the country at its best, as one does in mountaineering, have an opportunity to put across to others how worth while country activities can be.

Another national aspect was also stressed : our mountains are an asset to us which we, as a nation, do not fully use, either for our individual enjoyment, or as part of our potentially great tourist industry. We cannot rival the Alps for skiing, although we can often get good skiing, but we can nearly always climb and hill walk, and get the best out of our own particular mountains and what they offer in their own peculiar way.

The response which the students gave to the courses was very gratifying to the organisers and staff. There was no regimentation on the courses, and the general atmosphere was that of a normal climbing meet, with perhaps just a little more accent on instruction. The general impression was one of work and achievement in an atmosphere of absolute freedom. Such results were only made possible by the full and willing cooperation of staff and students.

From the number of applications and the indication that there will be more in the future, it is evident that what is really needed is a mountain school with a permanent staff, operating throughout the year and running courses ranging from a week to a month to suit the novice and the more experienced alike. Indeed, from these courses—if foresight is used—an interesting development could take place in the shape of short term schools in country places which would teach young people, for a month at a time, some subject connected with the country which will make them think and exert themselves. I have already mentioned some of the subjects which might be taught which are contained in the steps towards mountaineering : nature study, way finding, and hill walking. These subjects cover a multitude of studies in themselves.

We may not hope to be a nation of mountaineers, but we can hope to become more country-minded than we are at present. Country schools, or short term schools, could do a great deal towards this end, and towards improving the stamina of the nation. The chief prerequisite for the successful operation of such schools is the availability of men and women capable of running them, and this is one way in which the establishment of the mountain training school would be important. Here would be the source from which such men and women could be drawn. Such a scheme of short term schools will cost money, but it will be money well spent, and if we can help in this way to develop the natural potentialities of the nation, it will be worth it ; for a nation has no greater treasure than the human nature of its citizens.

It is, in conclusion, good news to report that the Scottish Education Department has been so impressed with the results of the courses that Glenmore Lodge is being made available to the C.C.P.R. for three years as a mountain training centre ; and it is to be hoped that full use will be made of it. The success of the venture will, however, depend to a large extent upon the help of the climbing fraternity, and experienced climbers can be of great help by volunteering their services for instruction at future courses at Glenmore.

These courses will be organised by the Scottish Committee of the Central Council of Physical Recreation, 21 St. Andrew's Square, Edinburgh.