

Mountains—the lighter side

(an introduction to a series)

Edward Pyatt

As befits a journal of its reputation and traditions, the *AJ* has always treated mountaineering very seriously and indeed it always will. Yet now that there is so much fact about, so much science and so much introspection, it seems worthwhile to look around at a lighter side to mountains and mountain activities, which is most certainly there.

The indexes of the *AJ* are barren of prospects. Amusing doggerel has indeed appeared in 'Alpine Notes' on occasions, the writers demonstrating ingenuity and the breadth (or otherwise) of their classical (or otherwise) scholarship. There have been quarrels between eminent mountaineers, utterly serious at the time, which blown over and forgotten, now strike us as fairly trivial.

Mark Twain made celebrated fun out of an Alpine expedition. Since the War, one book, *The Ascent of Rum Doodle*, has tried to do the same for Himalayan expeditions, but the *AJ*'s reviewer (TSB) found 'too much forced humour and incessant conversation about love lives'. Frank Smythe wrote a chapter 'Humour' in *The Spirit of the Hills*, but there is little substance to it, indeed he did not seem to be able to trace very much. France, of course, has the brilliant artist Samivel, whose whimsical treatment of a whole range of mountain subjects is a sheer delight. *Sous l'Oeil des Choucas* is a mountain classic.

So the time has come, I think, to run in these pages a series of features—some literary, some artistic and thus compile an anthology showing that there is breadth and depth to the subject after all. I begin with Stephen Potter's chapter on 'Cragmanship' from *One-upmanship* and reproduction of a selection of the cartoons of Ivan Cumberpatch. The first owes much, it seems to me, to Kevin FitzGerald; the artist of the second will, I am sure, acknowledge his debt to Samivel, but he is more forthright, more of a cartoonist and less whimsical than the Frenchman.

Perhaps readers will make suggestions towards future years.

1 The art of not rock-climbing¹

Stephen Potter

Rock play of Odoreida

'JUST-A-SCRAMBLESHP', as Rockmanship is sometimes nicknamed, is actually taught in the grounds of our College where, between the croquet lawn and the putting-green, is an imitation concrete precipice, four feet high with a three-foot drop to a spring mattress. Believing that demonstration in the field is essential, students are here taught on the spot how to talk about 'holds', 'grips' and 'nice little problems', and how to come unstuck without actually mentioning it.

This art has a special interest for students of Gamesmanship and Lifemanship—not surprising when it is realized that it is the adopted relaxation of G. Odoreida. Some of Odoreida's gambits are objected to by the older members of

¹ Reproduced from *One-upmanship* Stephen Potter (Hart Davis 1952). Reprinted by permission of A. D. Peters & Co Ltd



our Council, but if Odoreida is the name on every rockman's lips, no less is he referred to as chief authority, by ourselves, in that aspect of this art which may be sub-titled: 'How to climb rocks without actually going up them.'

Our Matterhorn² Readers, K. Fitzgerald and B. Hilton-Jones, have described in a definitive conversation the technique of Odoreidaism, and from their comments this analysis is borrowed freely.

Students of Gameslife will be aware that in the actual playing of games Odoreida, though often seen on the edge of a cricket field, was a complete rabbit. The weight in his pear-shaped figure, although suggesting the attitude of one accustomed to standing at fairly deep mid-off, was so unusually distributed that genuine climbing looked to be, and was, almost impossible. Besides, it is known that on heights he once said he was 'frightened he might throw himself over'.

It was therefore plucky of Odoreida to life his way into this reputation of his as a skilled rock-climber.

How did he do it?

Odoreida Rock Basic is to be the Man Looking On. Older now, he is inclined, he tells us amusingly, for slippers. In that little place at Pen-y-gwryd, he is never very far from the fire.

There he will be knowledgeable about past climbs, or present routes. 'Yes', he says. Odoreida is encouraging at first. 'I do consider the bottom pitch of Charity to be harder than anything on Cloggy.' He speculates. 'You know' (making the wet sucking noise on pipe), 'I've always thought the wall on Craig Yr Ysfa would go.'

At this point an absolute stranger or complete new boy might begin to call Odoreida 'sir'.

'Would you, sir?'

'Well, one or two of us saw it the other day on a top rope. I think it would go. By the way, I see you are still using those nails.'

New Boy is made to feel the nails in his boots are unsafe, or out of date. Having by this and that prepared a Lifeman's wicket, Odoreida goes in to bat. Essentially his is climb avoidance play, while seeming to be eager. I know all Yeovil men will want to join me in emphasizing the importance of this gambit.

² The original name remains, although the Matterhorn is no longer an O.K. mountain.

The H'm Tinge

Maybe he's not going to climb just now because it's the wrong time of year. In June, Odoreida says, 'I only like Great Gully at Christmas-time when it's full of ice.' At Christmas, on the other hand, he recalls that everyone's done it every Christmas, and that everyone is doing it now. In fact it's pretty well got Stop-and-Go lighting.

Somebody else says something else is a difficult climb.

'Well—I seem to remember when Jack did it he did "Sunset" afterwards. After all, the Caldecott brothers took 140 pounds of photographic equipment along that ledge in 1903.'

A 'h'm' climate is built up.

'The Sceptre presents the same problem—only I suppose ten times more tricky. But I was rather surprised to find ironmongery all over the cliff—the whole place is getting bunged up with it. Bad as the Matterhorn. Look, I found this halfway up Great Slab the other day. Look.'

I knew that Odoreida always keeps a rusty piton, scarcely an O.K. climbing aid in this district, always in his pocket, and that he casts doubt on actual climbers by 'finding' it. Occasionally he has a rather technical way of saying a boot climb ought to be done in rubbers (or vice versa). Thus:

'No, I don't think so.'

So few climbs seem worth while to Mr Odoreida, thinks New Boy.

'No—I should have to take my rubbers. And it's essentially a boot climb. But the holds are so worn now. But you go, if you want a nice scamper in a pair of gym shoes. I've got my *War and Peace*.'

'Good old Wagger-Pagger', replied Gattling-Fenn once, knowing that Odoreida had never read this book, though he was always being found with it in chimney corners.³

If really pressed, Odoreida would be quite frank about it. 'No', he would say.

'Frankly I'm frightened of it.'

LAYMAN: Don't blame you. Hardly any holds of any kind, are there?

O: Well, the holds which do arrive, arrive well. Not holds perhaps—certain helpful rugosities. . . . But . . . no, I've got my family, and I think if one's got a family . . .⁴ No. For me Pinnacle Wall is out of bounds.

The danger of Odoreidaism was shown when he sometimes almost convinced *himself* that he was or had been an expert climber, and began talking himself dangerously near to having to make a climb himself. But he could always take refuge in the 'frankly I'm getting older' defence.

'The trouble is', he might say, after dinner, 'I get so tired standing on one leg looking for the next hold. Coming down I wanted to smoke—but I was finger-jamming all the way. . . .'

The New Boy may move in closer, now, to listen. 'Only the crook of a finger between Odoreida and eternity', he thinks to himself.

Feeling himself in form, Odoreida might now develop the Other Interest move.

'No. This was in '36. I thought an off-day was about due . . . and I heard that that lovely little Alpine ranunculus mentioned in Butcher—a kingcup in miniature—had been seen on the Devil's Cliff in 1876 . . . and of course I knew that

³ Odoreida's only genuine reading, besides the *Rockclimbers' Record*, which he memorized for its technical terms, was *Whitaker's Almanack*, in which he liked to check up on the salaries of his many acquaintances in the Civil Service.

⁴ The only person this could possibly refer to is Odoreida's sister-in-law, bolster-thighed Paulette Odoreida, whom he only saw once a year when he took the Odoreida children to the annual opening of the Chelmsford roller-skating rink.

Hanging Garden Gully has been stripped to the bone by botanists, from the local High School I guess . . . so I thought I'd have a look at the Kitchen proper . . . and there it was, well, just inside the mouth. I think I shall always remember it. Seeing that flower.'

I heard this and of course was simply waiting for the laugh. Odoreida and spring flowers!

'How did you get *there*, Odoreida?' I said.

Somebody said 'Sh!' Odoreida turned smiling towards me.

'Oh, I went up the first couple of pitches of Advocate's Wall, then broke out to the Gut for about thirty feet . . .'

SELF: That's new surely? . . .

O: Well as a matter of fact I think it probably is. . . . Having to finish up the wall was too sticky altogether for what I call good climbing.

NEW BOY: But that's one for the log, isn't it?

O: My days for logging climbs are over—that's for you younger people. But I'm afraid it is known, now, isn't it, as Odoreida's Rib? Of course, I wanted it called after Messinger, because he first saw it. And it was only chance that I found myself on it at all. The whole thing reminds me of the day I nearly got stuck in Lockwood's chimney.

I couldn't help joining, though for different reasons, in the respectful smiles which followed this, and made no use of my private knowledge that years ago Odoreida, lost in the mist when going to post a letter, really did get stuck near the foot of this climb, and insisted on being pulled out by three lady members of the Pinnacle Club and a Brownie.

2 Mountain postcards

Ivan Cumberpatch



10/70



12/70

It says 'the difficulties are now over — only scrambling remains'



14/70

One more size nine and we're there



24/77

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Layback the first twenty feet, handjam up the little crack in the overhang and then a peg belay — is that how you see the first pitch?



15/73

Hey, chum — you've forgotten something



16/72

It's the supreme challenge to human endurance, personal courage and integrity. I'm going home.

50-58 Some examples of graphic art applied to mountain subjects (These 9 drawings: I. Cumberpatch)



Superb — 2000 feet of smooth ice



Move over — here comes another juggernaut