

SNOWDON.

By JOHN FLEMING.



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SNOWDON, THE LAST HALF MILE.

In the summer of 1889, in the month of June—that very hot, dry, and dusty June which we all remember—I spent a week in North Wales; one of the most enjoyable weeks I ever spent. It included an ascent of Snowdon, which I am about to describe, but I hope to be excused for giving a few notes by the way of my journey there, as they may be of service to some “Cairngormer”, who, like myself, has ascended the more familiar Scottish Bens and sighs for fresh fields and pastures new.

I left the north in the morning and slept the first night in Chester, spending the succeeding day wandering about this most interesting old city. Chester dates back to 700 B.C. The Romans made it a great seat of arms and walled it round and round, and visitors can to this day make a tour of the city on the wall-tops. Chester also boasts a very ancient and interesting cathedral, but the most

attractive characteristic of this really intensely interesting old town is the structure of the old buildings with their long "Rows" over the street floor—pleasant lounges on a hot or rainy day. The wares there spread out partake largely of the "curio" order, and many a Yankee dollar is left behind (Chester is a great shrine of Americans), and we have no doubt but that now and then "bang will go a Scottish saxepe"!

I had determined to make Bettws-y-Coed (the station in the wood) my centre during my sojourn in Wales, so took train for Bettws, *via* Rhyl and Llandudno, in the afternoon, skirting for the first half of my journey the English Dee (how different from the Scottish!), and then passing, after reaching the open bay, many beautiful watering-places. This is the mail route to Holyhead, and is a very busy road. Changing carriages at Llandudno Junction the route is almost due south up the valley of the Conway. After leaving the sea coast the scenery grows in beauty until Bettws is reached, and *it* is a spot to dream of. It is quite a small place at the junction of two large streams, the Llugwy and the Conway. It is embosomed amongst woods, chiefly the ivy-clad oak, and is surrounded on all sides with pretty high hills rising to 1500 and 2000 feet or so. It is provided with some good hotels—I stayed at the Waterloo, which has the finest situation, and possesses an additional advantage in being owned by a Scotchman.

Several days could be spent in the vicinity of Bettws-y-Coed, exploring the Fairy Glen, listening to the music of the Swallow Falls, or dallying in the vicinity of the romantic Miner's Bridge. The valleys here are narrow and have not much cultivated land in them. The farms, strange to say, are largely on the flat tops of the hills; but the peak of Snowdon seemed to act like a loadstone to draw me on.

The train had hitherto been my conveyance; now it was to be the char-a-banc or stage coach. These coaches have regular routes, north, south, and east of Bettws; they run every day in summer, and are well appointed and make moderate charges. The conductor, who is stationed behind, carries a long trumpet on which he blows frequent blasts,

and at certain places on the Llanberis road the coach is pulled up where a wall of rock runs parallel to it, and quite a treat is afforded by the echo of his stentorian notes.

Snowdon lies due west of Bettws-y-Coed, about 10 miles as the crow flies. To suit its ascent, coaches run to Llanberis and to Beddgelert. I left with the morning coach to the former spot, sending on my traps with the Beddgelert coach, to lie there at the Prince Llewellyn Arms until evening, and this method of seeing Snowdon, and at the same time Llanberis and its famous Slate Quarries, I would strongly recommend to others, as it was entirely successful in my case.

Snowdon rises to an altitude of 3560 feet, the highest peak being known as Y-Wyddfa, the conspicuous. The shape of the entire mountain mass is something like a cross, being composed of four ridges, culminating in the one peak, but each separated by immense gorges or "cwins". These ridges run out from the central peak to the four points of the compass as nearly as may be. The commonest direction from which to make the ascent is from Llanberis due south, on the back of its longest ridge stretching northwards. This road, about five miles long, is a very easy one. Ponies are much used and can be taken the whole way. After lunching at Llanberis, however, and viewing the Slate Quarries (Mr Smith's), I returned to Pen-y-Gwryd, the nearest point to the eastern spur, and within about three miles of the summit, and there descended from the coach, and took to my feet. The sun was setting late in the day ere I rested at Rhyd-ddu, on the other side of the mountain, but between these two points I had to do one of the hottest bits of work one could meet with. The day was intensely sultry, and a slight haze veiled the valleys below; not a breath of wind stirred. Some Dutch ladies, mounted on ponies and accompanied by guides, had preceded me, and I kept the cavalcade in sight as it wound its way along by the small tarn of Llyn Teyrn, and thence still rising by the larger lake Llyn Llydaw. These waters are of a lovely pale blue colour, in contrast with our dark and mossy Scottish lochs.

To the back of the Llyn Llydaw and up the mountain face are several large copper mines; fortunes have been made and lost gambling in their shares. Through the *debris* the path strikes up the face of the hill, zig-zagging as it goes; a marvellous road for ponies and a dangerous one for all. There is no vegetation, simply a barren waste of stones, something like the upper part of Ben Nevis. Through this sterility the path winds its way till it reaches within a few hundred feet of the total height of the mountain, when, with a long sweep to the west, sheltered on the right by the steep rock face, and sloping away down at your feet to the left sheer for 1000 feet or more, it makes for a junction with the road from Llanberis. All the way along this path is but a few feet in width, and a slip here would be fatal. Indeed, one of the disagreeable features of a Snowdon climb is that a guide will point out to one occasionally the presence of a marble cross, where the spot of some melancholy accident is marked out. Never shall I forget the intense heat of that June day as I clambered on, coat on arm, nor the refreshing coolness of that delicious quaff of lemonade in one of the three hostelries on the summit, although I *did* pay a shilling for it!

The view from Snowdon is very extensive, but the haze limited my range to the grand "cwms" or gorges of the mountain itself. Among the numerous points visible may be named:—Precelly (Pembrokeshire), Tara Hill, Ballycreen, Kippure, Hill of Howth and Slieve Donard (Ireland), Holyhead, Berule (Isle of Man), Sca Fell and Black Comb (Cumberland), Ingleborough (Yorkshire), Pendle Hill, Whittle Hill (Lancashire), Axedge (near Buxton), Mowcopt (Cheshire), Cryn-y-Brain (near Llangollen), Longmount (near Church Stretton), Cradle (Brecknockshire), Plynlimmon, Cader Idris, and Aberystwith. The summit of this fine mountain is desecrated with three small restaurants; sleeping accommodation can even be had (bedroom, about the size of a railway compartment, 3s.). Photographs and all sorts of trifles are also on sale. I felt glad to think that the Cairngorms had not yet, nor were likely to be, "tripper-ised" to this extent.

Since my visit, however, Sir Edward Watkin has bought Snowdon; but whether he has pitched these erections over the cliff, or built a new hotel, I have not been able to find out as yet.

After a short halt, I commenced the descent of the mountain by its western shoulder to the lonely terminal station of one of the Welsh narrow-gauge railways, Rhyd-ddu, whence coaches run to Beddgelert, three miles off. This route off the hill is a very peculiar one. For the first half of the descent the position of the path is such that, with a gale from the north, it would be positively dangerous. The ridge is razor-like in sharpness, sloping sheer down to the left, and pretty steep also to the right for some distance down, after which it breaks away to an easy slope. A young school lad, a budding guide, accompanied me on my downward journey, glad to get some news from the outside world, and giving me in return a lesson in Welsh pronunciation. Well on in the afternoon I reached Beddgelert, a strong rival to Bettws-y-Coed for beauty of situation, and after dinner strolled to the outskirts of the village "to muse o'er Gelert's grave". The name of the village is said to have arisen from its near vicinity to this spot—the bed or grave of Gelert. A rude stone under an old tree marks the spot where rests the faithful hound. It is enclosed by a paling, and lies in a green meadow on a lovely path along the bank of the river Glaslyn. Long may it be ere the rude latter-day despoiler of old tradition deprives us of our Gelert.

" And there he hung his horn and spear,
 And there, as evening fell,
 In fancy's ear he oft would hear
 Poor Gelert's dying yell.
 And till great Snowdon's rocks grow old
 And cease the storm to brave,
 The consecrated spot shall hold
 The name of 'Gelert's grave'".

As I passed south to Tremadoc next day I got a lovely view of the Snowdon range. It had a grand effect; indeed, I came quite unprepared for such a Scottish like scene.



SNOWDON FROM LLYN LLYDAU.

Little do we Northerners think how like in many ways Wales is to our native land.

My notes may now end here. I jaunted from Tremadoc to Festiniog on the toy railway—the gauge is as narrow as one foot eleven inches, and the line twists and twines round the sharpest of curves on the face of the steep valley. You sit in open cars back to back, and looking behind can see several sinuous bends on the length of the long train of tiny carriages and slate trucks; indeed, so sharp are those bends that it is said the guard on the rear van going one way can shake hands across the gorge with the engine-driver coming the other way on the same train! I also ran down to Barmouth, a busy sea-bathing resort, and passed back by Dolgelley with its pretty torrent walk (a prolonged Garbh Allt with rather less water and in a more sheltered dell), but Snowdon had been visited and all else seemed tame, and so I quickly returned north, past Bala Lake and on by Corwen and Ruabon to join the London and North Western Railway again at Chester.