

## ADVICE TO A YOUNG CLIMBER: HOW TO BEHAVE AT A CLUB OUTING.

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You are going on a snow-climbing excursion to Lochnagar, and for days beforehand you've been in a state of tense excitement. Anything and everything connected with your chosen sport becomes invested with a halo of romance: your heart leaps at the mention of an ice-axe and the word "piton" sends you into a flurry of tremulous anticipation. You devour every published article about the rock-face, you glean every scrap of information from back numbers of the *Journal*, and you know by heart Bell's comments on each new variation on the Spectre Route B. The tension mounts and the day approaches.

The Saturday before the outing is a day of feverish activity. Boots are dubbined, ropes are coiled, and lengths of window cord surreptitiously cut off the bow window in the lounge to provide abseil slings. Any cord won't do: it must be window cord. So with your ice-axe sling: on no account must the young climber purchase one of those ring and screw-stop affairs. Lamp-wick is the only permissible ice-axe sling. Then you will arrange about your food: this is a vital matter, as only certain foods can be eaten at high altitudes, a point to be strongly impressed on the cook. You need things like chocolate biscuits, raisins, condensed milk, and so on—energy foods that are easily assimilable if not so easily obtainable. Your flask should be filled with "Mummery's Blood"—equal parts of bovril and navy rum, drunk piping hot—an elixir which warms the heart, lightens the step, and makes the impossible possible.

If the bus is timed to leave at 6.30 give it ten minutes grace and rush up just as the party has decided to leave without you, so that everyone will know you've come. This is just the opportunity you've been waiting for to curse the maid for sleeping in: do so in the roundest terms as you



enter the bus—it never fails to impress. Climb into the bus in your tricounis—there can be no better test of coachmanship—and remember to carry a case as well as your bergen to make a thoroughly good job of cluttering up the passage. Be as boisterous as you please, for everyone is full of the joys of life at this time on a Sunday. Talk vaguely about the climbs you have done, call every well-known climber by his christian name, but be very, very mysterious about what you intend to do: nothing is further from your mind than that you should *climb* anything, but there are some topographical details which might be cleared up in the Spectre Route B. In all this it's most important to create the right impression. Your appearance should be a trifle swashbuckling and an open neck in mid-winter helps. Wear a waist-loop and karabiner, and have a few pitons chinking at your waist. Carry a selection of photos, preferably where others have caught you on that breathtaking traverse from Issac's Ledge on Hallelujah Staircase, and speak modestly of your second coming off at the crux of Agag's—after all there was a lot of snow that day! But if anyone else dares talk about his climb on Damnation Prospect, make sure he agrees it's overrated and that the piton on the fifth pitch is sacrilege. Your tone of voice can express your horror at such desecration of mountains with ironmongery. Talk about nothing but climbing and snub remorselessly anyone who dares to change the topic. It is permissible, however, to appear knowledgeable about the weather. Remark that the clouds are rising, for if you can't see them in the dark then neither can anyone else. If you're wrong about the weather no one will remember what you said, but if you were right you can always remind people of your unerring prognostications on the way back.

When you arrive at MacIntosh's bothy greet the natives like long lost friends. Don't let their surprise perturb you. Stroke their spaniels and laugh loudly at those screamingly funny remarks you make. Remember that it is on these occasions that you will attract notice. Then there comes the difficult question as to the best way to approach the mountain. One alternative is to race on ahead—there's



very little room in the Cairngorms and someone might get there before you; the other is to keep well in the rear—you have much more important things to do than hill walk and your precious energies must be conserved. At all halts go a hundred yards to bury a bread-crumbs and let everyone see you do it: if others are lazy in this matter your expression can indicate that *some* people have no mountain manners.

When you get to the foot of your climb, don't on any account stop to rope up. Rush up the snow slopes and start tackling the first ice-pitch—let others suggest that perhaps the rope would be better there. If another party is on ahead, don't choose another climb but see what you can do to demoralise them. Wonder why they are going so slowly, criticise their technique, and be maddeningly patient as you wait for them to complete a difficult pitch. If, inexplicably, you should not be leading yourself, keep your leader cheerful by asking every second minute how he's getting on. Choose the moment of some awkward movement to shout, "Howl when you come off!" and make sure you race up the pitch in a third of the time he took, with the implied criticism that it's not so difficult as he seemed to find it, but make exclamations of wonderment at any pitch where you've been forced to dally. All these little things help. If it starts to snow be as inane as possible, "Well, we came here for severities!" When it's obvious the climb will never go, when you're frozen to an icicle and you've been dreaming for the last hour or so of a warm fireside and a hot toddy, remember your position as the enthusiast of the party. Even if you're dead keen to get back remember the traditions of the club—the top at all costs—and your conduct must at least appear to be in keeping with it. Of course, one useful line is a companion's disability—"Tomkins, poor fellow, can't go on with that foot of his"—or perhaps it is the cornice that on closer inspection seemed unsurmountable—but on no account has the climb itself defeated you.

If the climb is a success, don't on any account rush for the summit cairn—*your* climb is over and the summit is merely for misguided munrobaggers. When people ask



about the route, take an interest in the view. Attribute your success to vita-glucose or the new nailing on your boots—quite the most remarkable discovery since the atom bomb. Praise your companions' climbing ability to the skies and bask in the reflected glory. Should anyone try to be difficult and ask you the name of the peak you're staring at, don't let your imagination let you down. Your guess is as good as theirs and what does it matter anyway. The same applies to fauna, flora, geology, and the like: take an interest in all these things. Remember that the club was founded not merely to encourage the sport of climbing mountains but to achieve much higher ends, to "procure and impart scientific information concerning mountains." The stress seems to be on the imparting side of the activity.

Make sure you're *not* late for the bus on the way back. Quite apart from the walk down Glen Muick being rather tiresome, it will show that you're not one of these inconsiderate people who prefer a few minutes on the hills to a few minutes in that cosy little hotel bar. On the return journey enter into the spirit of the occasion, join in the unrestrained hilarity, and on no account be serious.

By this time it will be apparent that the young mountaineer must watch every step he takes with consummate care. Slipping up on a point of etiquette is far more dangerous than slipping down at the crux of the Church Door. Remember these little points: be as late as you please in the morning, but always, always make it a religion not to be late for dinner.