

NATIONAL PARK S 7 (BLUESTONES).

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I WAS glad to leave my class of 450 youngsters. I still feel that 400 is a reasonable maximum, even with the aids that science gives us to-day. So I was looking forward to my holiday, even though I had made S 7 my third choice, and had now been given accommodation at the Corner Hotel. My acknowledgment card informed me that my room number was 635 and that I could have a bath on Tuesday and Friday, at 9 P.M., and that meals would be served to me at the fifth sitting.

The bus-train was late at Dee Falls, and as I waited in the checking-shed for the hotel car I reflected on the recent revision of names carried out by the Survey Committee. Some of the old names had become debased, losing their original meaning. The Committee had attempted to rename every point of interest, selecting names to accommodate local legend. For example, the Grey Pass was named to link up with the Grey Man of Black Mountain, and the former names of Larig Grau and Ben Dubh were no longer to be used.

An official approached me as I ruminated and asked me what I intended to do, as he was about to go off duty and had to lock the gates. The hotel car had left and there was no other means of transport. I asked if I could walk, and permission was granted after the official had taken part in a four-cornered telephone conversation between himself, his supervisor, Glasgow, and London. If I filled in an indemnity form. . . .

The official explained that the red path led to the Border Mountain, the green to the Low Pass, the black to the summit of Black Mountain, and the grey, leading up the Grey Pass, was the one for the Corner Hotel. The plastic tiles were electrically heated and glowed with fluorescent colours at night. It was forbidden to leave the paths.

I set off along the multi-coloured path and passed the Cleft of Yearning, where the red one went off up to the right. Derry Lodge, the notorious home of the Cairngorm Club, was skirted, and later I passed over a charming rustic aluminium and concrete bridge, up a long flight of steps, along the path, now grey in colour, and eventually came in sight of the Corner Hotel, which stands at the base of an impressive mountain called the Devil's Point.

From where I stood, looking up the Grey Pass, I could see the great mass of the wind barrier, with its patterned openings in which revolved the great wheels generating electricity. I would have a closer look at Norlek's schemes during my holiday.

I turned away, crossed under the Dee through the famous tunnel, and entered the hotel. Its interior was familiar, as it was one of the standard ones built by the Tourist Board in the latter half of the century. The reception was also familiar and I entered my room in possession of only my most personal belongings. However, my room had a view to the east of a long, towering ridge, nameless because the Survey Committee had not agreed, as indeed they had failed to do with many others. As the use of the old names, either by word of mouth or in writing, was forbidden by statute, the position was obscure at least.

I went to the dining-room, but ran into difficulty when I found that I could not get a meal without production of my acknowledgment card, which was at the hotel office with my other identity papers. Explanations of a busy television channel leading to delays in contacting the identification section of Somerset House did not satisfy me, and in desperation I said "Cairngorm Club" and was immediately given a reserved table.

It should be explained at this stage that the Cairngorm Club found themselves in a very strong position on the founding of the "S" group of parks. At that time its members, by clever negotiation, obtained for themselves and their nominated successors the right to travel within the park by any route and to enter or leave it at any point. They also had the right to obtain full service at the Corner

Hotel free of charge, in view of their connection with the previous building. Among other things, they also held the right to feed the reindeer and bears which comprise the principal indigenous fauna of the area.

After dinner I walked in the ornamental park surrounding the hotel. The use of soil-warming has allowed the introduction of many exotic plants into this garden, but perhaps the most interesting sight is the artificial hot spring and geyser, the latter working on the introduction of a £1 note into a slit. The display in colours is very fine and well worth the trivial expenditure.

My luggage was in my bedroom when I returned and I took the opportunity of trying the fit of the nailed oversoles I had smuggled in. Nails, of course, are forbidden on the paths. To leave the path is also forbidden, and the application of these rules is carried out by checking the entry of nailed boots. Cairngorm Club members, who were of course allowed, in fact entitled, to leave the paths and very rarely used them, were given oversoles of polythene, but apparently they never used them.

I arranged to leave the hotel early and wrote on the application form that I wished "to study temperature variations at dawn." This is much safer than to mention the study of flowers or animals, as one never knows when an inspector will appear to catch one stealing specimens or taking photographs.

Arising at 5 A.M. I took breakfast from the preateria, getting the standard meal of fruit juice, protein slab, toast and coffee by the simple process of pushing six £10-note packets into the machine. I noted that porridge was available with the served breakfast. The Parks Executive do really try to maintain old customs; and I mean "try."

Leaving the hotel a little later, it was with little hesitation that I crossed the Dee by the stepping-stones, now an ancient monument, and set off across the heather, spurning the path, towards the slopes between Black Mountain and the unnamed hill. I would have been better advised to keep to the path, but my unorthodox route enabled me to see the fence denoting the boundary between

land controlled by the Parks Executive and the high tops controlled and owned by Norlek.

In an hour I was at the fence, and soon found my way along it to a gate—open. I hesitated and then slipped inside. Now I would find out what happened inside the Norlek enclosures, the enclosures surrounded by a ring fence with open gates. The wind-stations were, of course, obviously generating electricity, but since the Nature Reserves had been taken over by Norlek some disconcerting tales had been given currency. However, the area within the fence had the appearance of being fairly normal but rather bare. I soon detected the absence of indigenous plants, contrasting with the carefully random planting of them in the "Park" area.

Bare stones with obviously misfit plants such as crowberry, cranberry, and moss campion seemed to indicate a reversion to the mid-century conditions, when "indigenous" was taken to mean that plants found growing in any place were natural to that place, when in fact they might be merely relics from glacial ages. In these more enlightened days "indigenous" is applied to plants and animals which are fitted to certain climatic conditions, and it was on this basis that the Parks Executive introduced strains of animals and plants, suitably conditioned, into the area and removed the misfit relics of glacial epochs.

On the other hand it was apparent that Norlek had done nothing. With its statutory control of Nature Reserves, obtained during the notorious "access" action at the New Bailey between itself and the Parks Executive, it had maintained the *status quo*.

As I stood, a flock of ptarmigan wheeled, circled, and landed and I noticed a man feeding them; that is, he threw some food on the ground and the ptarmigan ate it. It was evident that the food wasn't being weighed, the ptarmigan were not counted, nor even a photograph taken. I couldn't understand this lack of desire to collect statistical information when the opportunity was so splendid. I approached and we had a long conversation. His job was with Norlek, in the wind-station. When not on duty he

did what he wanted. He hadn't studied the diet of ptarmigan, but they liked the remains of his and his colleagues' meals. If they didn't they could go down to the Park and be studied. He didn't fill up a daily statistical card, he had a universal permit, he . . . well, he was as free as any human being could have been in the early part of the last century, and that is saying a lot. The world of to-day seemed a long way off, with its standardisation, planning, control, statistics, and official orderliness.

After further conversation we parted and I was free to roam where I liked on the tops of the Black Mountain. Below me lay the Grey Pass, with its carefully planned random groups of indigenous trees and plants; its path, properly graded; its standard rock-climbs, constructed, classified, and labelled in varying degrees of severity and conforming with those in every other National Park. I turned and went over the bare Norlek zone, untouched except for the wind-stations, linked by pylons, and after an exciting hour reached the summit cairns.

There were three. One erected by the old Ordnance Survey sheltered a little stone pillar with a badly chipped porcelain top. This was once a viewfinder, but none of the old names was now visible.

Dwarfing the other two was the plastic-bonded transparent one set up in the middle of the twentieth century by the Society of Strangers to commemorate the Great Fire of London. The State, of course, had control of cairns now, following the indiscriminate erection of them to commemorate odd events, which aroused public feeling recently and led to the official destruction of all the destructible ones.

I sat for a time and relaxed. I may have dozed off, but suddenly sat erect. Was I alone? I didn't feel alone. Surely someone, something, was watching, studying me, from behind one of the cairns. A picture of an official taking photographs and making notes sprang to my mind—I would break his beastly little camera. I jumped up and did a gyratory run round, in and out of the cairns. Nobody was there. I sat down again, still feeling watched.

The Grey Man! The thought came to my mind and a

flood of recollections of metaphysical studies poured into my conscious thought. Telepathy, hypnotism, thought control were established—spiritualism, demonology, black magic, all laughed out of existence, except for children's games.

Yet there was something—some nervous tension, something passing the thought to my brain that there was a better place for me than the summit of Ben Dubh.

I reached for my *familiar*, the only term I had for the complete and ingenious instrument with which all mountaineers provide themselves, a device indicating every variable factor concerning natural conditions, and with many more functions as well. "Check everything," said my mind, and I started. Temperature normal; wind direction and force normal; relative humidity normal; light value—a little low for the clear sky and sunshine I was enjoying, but so was the temperature, possibly my eyes had got over-acclimatised; magnetic field normal, as were total radiation from sun, colour of sky, ionisation—wait, ionisation was high. High indeed, it was visibly rising. I checked the temperature again. It was lower than before. Switching to humidity I found it rising; that was consistent with temperature drop. Light value was dropping, but sun's radiation the same. Ionisation was rising still and fairly rapidly, and a visible drop in temperature became apparent. I began to feel cold. The Grey Man or no, there was something inexplicable; and as I worked the instrument I felt fear, for I could feel darkness and cold creeping over me. Darkness and cold. No heat in the sun now and little light.

And then a sound came, a footfall, and I jumped up and fled. And as I did so, I thought I was followed, but had no time to look around and ran till I was exhausted and in bright sunlight again.

Later, as I neared the open gate in the Norlek fence, I met the man again. He has been busy, he ventured; trouble on the summit line. Queer it was, they often had flashovers on this line—just like a lightning stroke—when there was no storm within miles—and always when somebody was

wandering about. It was maybe warm air currents rising. Queer, it was.

Queer indeed, thought I, but not warm air currents rising. Cold currents coming down. Cold currents coming down.

REFERENCES.

Dee Falls	=Linn o' Dee.
Black Mountain	} = Ben Macdhui.
Ben Dubh	
Border Mountain	=Beinn a Bhùird.
Low Pass	=Lairig an Laoigh.
Corner Hotel	=At Corroul.
Grey Pass	=Lairig Ghru.
Cleft of Yearning	=Clash Fhearnaig.
Committee Hill	=Carn a Mhaim.
Norlek	=Northern Electricity Authority.