

A LONG CIRCUIT OF THE FELLS

BY EUSTACE THOMAS.

In the early part of this year regrets were expressed by some of those who had taken part in the big Fell Walks of previous years that there would be no Fell Circuit for their amusement in 1922, and that the usual happy gathering at Whitsuntide either would not take place, or would be without its accustomed object. Although, from the last year's failures, the writer could not be expected to afford much sport, in the end he had to try again in order that these young people might be kept amused; and happily the effort was successful, and he has not been subjected to any back talk or recrimination. The supply of 'company' for different parts of the walk was much above the demand, and, in addition, those who took part in earlier sections joined in on one or two of the later ones and put in some remarkable impromptu performances. At different times it was a considerable company that toiled or trotted over the hills.

The rules of the game are set pretty closely. In 1905 Wakefield did his circuit in shorts, shirt or jersey, and rubber shoes. He had five companions who went with him, one at a time, and carried all his food and any spare clothing and extras. He stopped for extra meals at Wasdale, Langdale, and Threlkeld. Exactly the same arrangement has always been followed since. An account of it all appears in the *Climbers' Club Journal* of 1906. The writer, however, apparently unlike his forerunners, has always been troubled by a weak digestion, accentuated by a sedentary life; and it has been necessary to be very careful with the food taken before and during the attempt. In the present case he was told two months before that his system was so loaded with by-products that success was not to be expected. However, he took seven weeks in Borrowdale on a very severe diet—

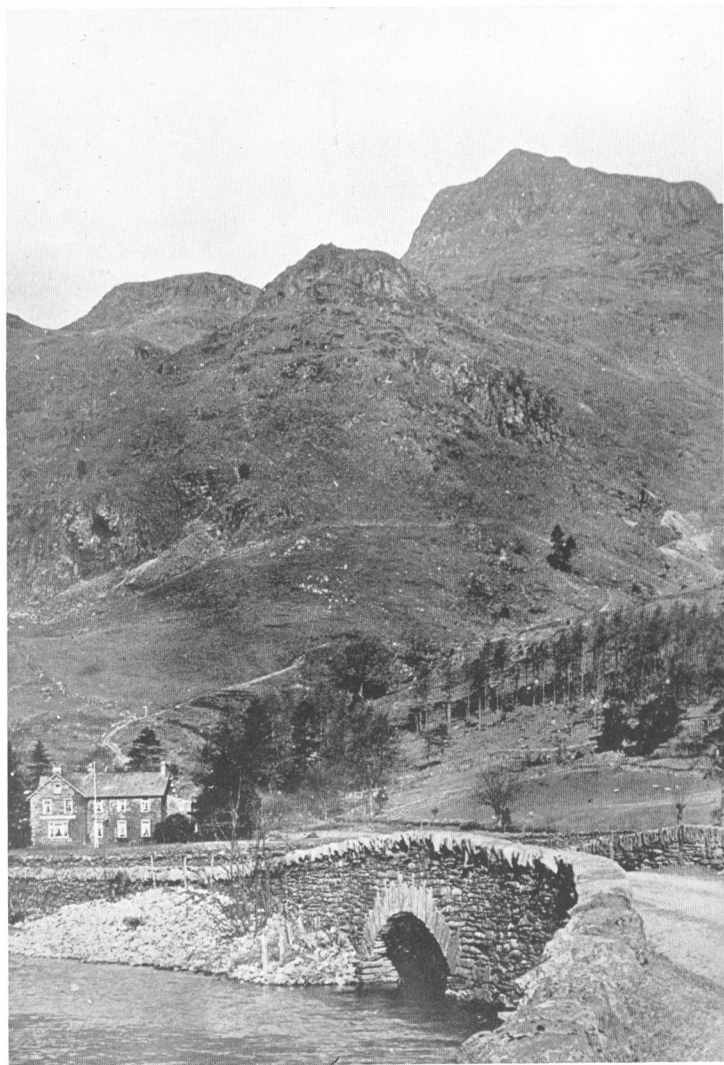
commencing with partial starvation—with unexpected and most happily successful results.

The peaks taken this year were the same as those of 1920, with the addition of the Dodds and Great Calva. These increased the aggregate height climbed to 25,500 feet as nearly as can be estimated. On the return to Keswick a number of the writer's friends were anxious for the course to be continued, if he felt fit enough; and, as a result, the hills of the Grassmoor Group were taken in, and the total number of feet ascended was brought up to 30,000—a nice round figure which had long been coveted, and which represented something more than the height from sea level of the greatest mountain in the world.

The weather conditions for many hours of the effort did not look favourable. It was very cloudy at 1 a.m. when the start was made from Keswick. Harris had been unable to take his usual part owing to a strained foot, but could not resist joining in, and walked and trotted the first few miles up Newlands. Robinson looked most forbidding with heavy dark clouds low down the slopes, and probably little expectation of success was felt. Arnfield and Gilliatt had started up earlier, and the writer joined them at the top of the steep ascent. An anxious search for the cairn was begun, and great relief was felt when it loomed up in the mist. The course to Hindscarth was also an anxious one, through the clouds and in darkness, as the compass direction had to be changed several times; but all went well.

With these first two peaks in hand, Arnfield expressed the growing confidence that the difficulties would not prove too great. The first signs of daylight appeared soon after, but the rough slopes down to Honister were poorly lighted for a rapid descent. On these and the ascent to Brandreth, Arnfield several times gave warning that the pace was perhaps too fast—it had been agreed beforehand that too high a speed at the commencement would be dangerous.

Minor, Huntbach, and Freedman were waiting—very cold—on Gable, and had brought up fresh warm drinks. The writer presently started off while Freedman and Arnfield were exchanging 'First Aids' and other gear. They were



Wallace May.

LANGDALE PIKES.

so much occupied that they started without carefully checking their direction. It had been raining a little on the way, and the mist was still deep. Hence Freedman presently became aware that they had gone wrong, and no doubt a frantic effort was made to find out where they were and to get on to the course again. Freedman is very familiar with the ground, but his attention was otherwise engaged. It illustrates how easy it was to go astray. As Freedman had not arrived at the foot of the ascent to Kirkfell, the writer took this ascent very leisurely, and, when Freedman joined him on Kirkfell, they were able to go the faster, and to make up most of the time lost before reaching Wasdale. Davies and Capper were met on the way, and the last again on Yewbarrow. The drop from the cairn on Yewbarrow to the Wasdale Hotel, including a change to boots, was made in less than seventeen minutes.

The journey to Langdale was made with Ping and Hirst, but Arnfield and Gilliatt cut in at Mickledore, and Freedman was seen on Esk Hause on his way to Rossett Gill. A perfect line was made to Scafell. But here the mist was very deep, and in a momentary uncertainty about the start down to Broad Stand, Hirst investigated a wrong line and eventually arrived, as was learned later, at the top of 'Keswick Brothers Climb.' Ping shouted to him from Mickledore through the mist: 'Where are you?' 'On Broad Stand.' 'You are too much to the right.' 'I'm on Broad Stand!' And Ping, Gilliatt and the writer continued the journey, while Arnfield stayed behind till Hirst should extricate himself.

Going up Esk Pike, voices were heard when near the top, and Walker, Scott, and Slack were found waiting. Pickstone was on Bowfell, and everyone was very cheerful, as the worst difficulties had been surmounted, and the party was well ahead of time and going well. It was very jolly coming out of the clouds and getting the first view of Langdale; and here a very joyful party was made with those who had driven round from Keswick, and who now for the first time learned that all had gone so much better than they had dared to expect.

With Richards and Humphry the next very long stage

was started. In Tongue Gill the writer had rather a bad time, but on Fairfield it was found that, after all, the pace had been quite good, and thereafter all seemed to go progressively easier and better. At last, for the first time, the tops came out of the mist. There was a little party of strangers on Helvellyn, one of whom had a bottle of the most delicious lemonade. Freedman joined in here again, and the peaks to Great Dodd were rapidly covered, and then the long downward slope. The last rise to Clough Head was then taken, and signals were made from the skyline to Threlkeld. Though much ahead of time, the signals were seen at once from the Salutation Inn. The descent was made very rapidly—considering—and at Threlkeld a considerable crowd gave a very kindly welcome.

Manning, Burton, and Knight were to accompany the last stage, but Humphry, Ping, Gilliatt, and Arnfield were keen also to see the thing through, so the party was a considerable one. Once more the clouds were down. The cairn on Saddleback was reached in fifty-five minutes, and it was then felt that all ought to be well. On a previous occasion the party, on leaving Saddleback, had turned in the mist and found itself presently facing again towards Threlkeld. This time the writer was told to do his own dirty work, and the compass was watched very carefully. Presently the cairn on Great Calva was reached—for the first time by most of the party. Then followed the most awkward going of the day, deep heather concealing rough ground. But, at last, Skiddaw top was reached, and the last foot of the circuit had been ascended. Without stopping to celebrate this, the descent was at once started, and a steady jog-trot brought the party into the Market Square at Keswick fifty-three minutes later. The square was full. The Cumberland folk love their fox hunting and sports and games, and many had come to see the finish. The writer had not previously the least idea that any number of them were interested, or even knew of the attempt.

The writer's condition was good, but food was needed; and appetite was lacking. This presently returned, however, and a very fair meal was taken. A party of seven (Harry

Summersgill, Manning, Richards, Ping, Humphry, Burton, and the writer) started out for Braithwaite, and commenced to climb the last group of hills necessary to complete a total ascent of 30,000 feet. There was no attempt to hurry, but Grisedale Pike seemed a hard grind, and it was very cold on the tops. However, at last, Sail was reached twenty-eight hours and thirty-five minutes from the start. Manning proposed going down by the old high-level mining road. The writer preferred the direct but steep descent to the valley. As soon as Manning was out of sight, the rest of the party pushed along as hard as possible to prove that their way was the best. They got down first.

On the way home, after coming safely through all the risks of the past day and night, the party nearly came to grief when 'Pummer', who was driving the car, fell asleep.

It may be an encouragement to others with weak digestions to know that the measures taken in Borrowdale were so successful that two days later the writer had not a single ache or any soreness to remind him of what Hirst calls one of his 'notorious little do's.'

The writer had learnt to know his own pace, and acted on his own judgment regardless of what his companions might do. This is very necessary knowledge to a mountaineer, and is only gained by experience. His companions in general adjusted their speed to his, but occasionally warned him if they thought he might be going too fast to last. Humphry particularly was anxious that the fourth section should be taken easily, so as to have more chance of accomplishing the ascent of 30,000 feet. In actual fact, however, less time was taken on the fourth section, with the Dodds included, than had been taken in 1920 without them.

It would appear that this test makes as near an approach to the conditions of the greater mountaineering as this country can afford. There are no new ascents possible, and no glaciers, but there were the difficulties of cold, fog, and rain, and of a journey through the mountains at night without moon. The course made a severe call on endurance in virtue of the great height ascended and distance travelled. Friends acted as porters, and carried food and extras—this being a

precedent already established. There was no snow at this time of the year. On other occasions, even this difficulty has been added by undertaking a long course in winter and at night, and meeting very severe conditions on ground not previously traversed. This is another variation of the same game, and is real mountaineering adventure, under the conditions available in England.

The course taken, with the time at each point, was as follows :—

Keswick (left King's Arms Hotel) 1 a.m., Robinson 2.38 ; Hindscarth 3.3 ; Dale Head 3.19 ; Honister 3.35 ; Brandreth 4.10 ; Green Gable 4.26 ; Great Gable 4.38½.

Left 4.44½ ; Kirkfell 5.19½ ; Pillar 6.11½ ; Steeple 6.28½ ; Red Pike 6.39 ; Dorehead 6.52½ ; Yewbarrow 7.13¾ ; Wasdale 7.30½.

Left 8.5½ ; Scafell 9.26 ; Scafell Pike 9.56½ ; Great End 10.21½ ; Esk Pike 10.43 ; Bowfell 11.1½ ; Old Dungeon Ghyll Hotel 11.44½.

Left 12.41 ; Grassmere 1.47 ; Fairfield 2.58 ; Dollywaggon 3.38 ; Helvellyn 4.3 ; Low Man 4.12 ; Whitesides 4.23½ ; Raise 4.32½ ; Stybarrow Dodd 4.50 ; Watson's Dodd 4.58 ; Great Dodd 5.9 ; Clough Head 5.36½ ; Salutation Inn, Threlkeld, 6.0.

Left 6.54 ; Saddleback 7.49 ; Great Calva 8.50 ; Skiddaw 9.59 ; King's Arms, Keswick, 10.54. Total ascent about 25,500 feet in twenty-one hours fifty-four minutes.

Left 12.54 ; Grisedale Pike 3.11 ; Hobcarton Pike 3.47 ; Grassmoor 4.46 ; Wanlope 5.6 ; Eel Crag 5.21½ ; Cray Hill 5.26½ ; Sail 5.35 ; Braithwaite 6.30. Total ascent just over 30,000 feet. Last peak reached in twenty-eight hours thirty-five minutes from the start.

The writer, his many companions, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Summersgill, Laughton, and Royle, are all mutually indebted to each other for a day which will stand out in the memory of each one.