EYES TO THE HILLS

THE MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPE OF BRITAIN

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To be able really to see, it is not enough to open the eyes,
one must first open one's heart
GASTON RÉBUFFAT

GORDON STAINFORTH

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IN MEMORY OF MY MOTHER
JUNE STAINFORTH (1920–1966)
WHO INSPIRED

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MOUNTAIN APPEARANCES

SAVAGE OR BEAUTIFUL?

'Beauty, horror and immensity united' – that is how the landscape of the English Lake District was described by a typical tourist in the late eighteenth century.[1] So used are we today to superlative visual sensations that a tranquil scene like the LANGDALE PIKES FROM TARN HOWS* seems very tame to us, though certainly beautiful. What we have to realise is that before the eighteenth century it was very difficult for people to see any beauty in mountain scenery at all. It was regarded by the superstitious and the rational alike as wasteland, full of hidden dangers and entirely alien. *(*All subjects that are illustrated in the original book edition are indicated in small caps.)*

Yet before we scoff at this lack of appreciation we would do well to remember just how far the way we see is coloured by the values of the particular society in which we live. We can only ever perceive the world, in effect, through a dense filter of prejudice and fashion.

The similarity of several visitors' accounts of Loch Coruisk in the Cuillin in the early nineteenth century is particularly striking:

'I never saw a spot on which there was less appearance of vegetation of any kind; the eye rested on nothing but brown and naked crags . . . .'[2]

'Not a billow curled on the shore of the black lake, which like Acheron, seemed as if dead, and fixed in eternal silence. Not a bird was to be seen. . . .'[3]

'. . . no sound, nor sight of any moving thing – nothing but a dead and stony, seemingly, a God-forsaken world. We almost longed, in

this cloud-capped thunder-stricken region, to hear the voice of a gladsome bird. . . .'[4]

It is as if each of these writers had simply read some of the existing accounts and rehashed them, or decided what they were going to see before they had even been there. And their preconceptions were so strong that, when they did get there, they were unable to remove the filters from their eyes. Or rather, they saw only what they *wanted* to see, and they didn't see what they didn't want to see.

The reader will perhaps be interested to see what LOCH CORUISK looked like through the unbiased eye of my camera on a fine summer's day in 1989. It was a scene full of colour and the clamour of seagulls – and, quite incongruously, from the verdant island in the middle of the loch came the contented call of a solitary cuckoo.

This type of picture postcard view will serve as a very fair example of the way we prefer to see mountain landscapes today. They no longer threaten or frighten us, but are seen in a purely aesthetic, visual way, as an attractive backdrop of vaguely interesting peaks.

THE 'SUBLIME'

But there is a third, much more interesting way of seeing mountains – which the ancients had not found, and which we have largely lost – and that is as being both awesome and beautiful at the same time. Early mountain enthusiasts, like the 'typical tourist' I mentioned at the beginning, found that their sense of 'horror' did not prevent them from finding these tremendous objects rather attractive, in a strange way; the new-found pleasure of looking at mountains was, for them, much less to do with beauty than with excitement. They were not ashamed to admit that they found these awesome scenes thrilling.

Because this new type of beauty was not like beauty in the ordinary sense, these eighteenth-century travellers preferred to talk instead of the 'sublime'. Edmund Burke, who was the first to consider this new way of seeing in depth, defined the sublime by such paradoxical phrases as 'a sort of tranquility tinged with terror' and 'delightful horror'.[5] And

because he regarded the element of shock or astonishment as 'the effect of the sublime in its highest degree', he concluded that the most important quality of all in a sublime landscape was 'vastness'; for only this, he said, has the unfailing ability to astonish us.[6]

However exaggerated this response to mountain scenery may seem to us today, we must admit that these early sightseers – who, it must be remembered, were unaccustomed to such landforms – were more likely than we are to be impressed by the wonders of nature. Nowadays we tend to reserve most of our enthusiasm for the achievements of man.

ILLUSORY AND EVERCHANGING

The archetypal first sighting of a 'sublime' mountain is a sudden, breathtaking glimpse of something impossibly high, awesomely big, and utterly otherworldly in appearance. So extraordinary is it that at first we are not quite sure what we are looking at. We cannot tell how big it is, and how steep different parts of it are. It is at the same time both very real and very unreal, a paradox of solid fact and dreamlike illusion. We are not quite sure, in a word, what the image is *made* of.

And, if anything, the more we look at it, the more puzzling it becomes. The brain attempts to supply hard facts, but the eye is transfixed by the strange shifting effects of an optical illusion. The apparition starts to 'slide about in our eyes', to use the climber J. Menlove Edwards' memorable phrase.[7] And to complicate matters still further, the vision really is changing even as we look at it. The everchanging weather not only affects the way the scene is lit, but physically – in the form of running water and accumulating snow – it continually modifies the actual surface of the mountain. Because a mountain can never be seen separately from the atmosphere of the moment, the weather should be regarded as *part* of it; and it is therefore literally never the same twice.

MOUNTAINS AS THEATRE

The appearance of a mountain is, then, extremely theatrical, full of illusion and visual trickery. In Britain's predominantly cyclonic climate, a summit will often be concealed for hours or even days at a time; and when the curtains part we are frequently presented with a major 'costume change' – new snow, for example, or a spate of streams that were not there before.

In addition, there is a whole range of other natural and rather magical 'special effects' that we may encounter, such as rainbows, lightning, snow plumes and 'Brocken spectres'. Not to mention some even less accountable phenomena, such as some MYSTERIOUS CIRCLES I once came across on Brandon Mountain in County Kerry in south-west Ireland….

BUILDING MOUNTAINS IN THE MIND

Because a mountain is so massive and difficult to travel around, and so often concealed by the weather, it is only ever revealed to us in glimpses. It is a series of transitory and ethereal 'appearances' rather than a single, solid object – an amalgam of different sightings rather than a permanent, unchanging thing.

No single viewpoint, of whatever height or angle – nor a large number of different viewpoints – will ever give us a true and complete picture of the whole mountain. Short of taking an extensive helicopter flight around it, we are left with the essentially creative task of piecing together a whole variety of disparate images – from different viewpoints, at different times, and in different weather conditions.

A mountain, as we observe and come to understand it, is a mental construct. To a much greater extent than we may be prepared to admit, it is 'moulded' by our imagination. More than we may realise, it is *our* landscape.

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MOUNTAIN MYSTERIES

'SHADOWY PERSONALITIES'

Because mountains have such a distinctive shape and presence, and yet are continually changing in appearance and mood, it is easy to start to regard them as 'shadowy personalities', as the Victorian mountaineer, Leslie Stephen, once called them.[8] In Britain this anthropomorphic tendency is reflected in many of our mountain names – from the Old Man of Coniston to the Old Man of Skye (the original name for the 'INACCESSIBLE PINNACLE'), with a host of young Maidens and Old Women in attendance, and all kinds of other strange characters like the COBBLER and the FIDDLER. And, thanks to the unpredictable British weather, these old mountains of ours are as moody and temperamental as any in the world.

The danger of characterising mountains in this way is that we might start to talk about them, as poets and mystics sometimes do, as if they really were living beings. This way of speaking, which John Ruskin called 'the pathetic fallacy',[9] may have some legitimacy as a literary device if it describes how a scene affects our emotions in a strictly metaphorical way, but there is a risk that we will become so carried away by our metaphors that our true perception of the landscape will be hopelessly clouded.

An example of this fallacious way of thinking is the assertion made by the mystic, R.L.G. Irving, that by climbing TRYFAN and Glyder Fach – 'getting to know them and loving to be with them' – he is giving them a personality. He actually goes so far as to claim that something of himself is in them and that, 'by the interchange of what we have given

them and they have given us, there is a part of our personality in them and of theirs in us that is indestructible.'[10]

The idea that we can have a two-way communion with a lump of rock is, of course, utter nonsense. But this is the mistake of mysticism in general: it claims more than can meaningfully be said. Mountains do not feel anything, nor do they say anything. They just are.

These crags, and heaths, and clouds, how great they are, how lovely, how for ever to be beloved, only for their own silent, thoughtless sake!

JOHN RUSKIN (1856)

THE LIVING ROCK

And yet, and yet. It seems that we can never quite rid ourselves of the idea that there is a definite spiritual presence in nature – that a piece of inanimate rock holds some inner secret. Stones of an unusual shape or colour still have a strange fascination for us, and often we cannot resist picking them up and taking them home with us.

One reason for this fascination is that, while there is a vast apparent gap between ourselves and the inanimate world, we know very well that in a basic sense there is no gap at all – that we are all made of the same dust and that we must all return to it. Dust to dust.

But it is the idea that rock is in some sense living that fascinates us most. For, with the development of subatomic physics, we now know that the mediaeval alchemists were indeed right when they said there is 'life in the stone'; and we are presented with the great new paradox that what appears so solid – rock-solid – and lifeless is actually a whirling mass of particles or 'energy packets', in a vast amount of space. We are told not only that there is energy in matter, but that matter is equivalent to energy. Rock remains a living mystery, its very substance a wonderful enigma – indeed the first great wonder of the world.

THE MYSTERY OF MATTER

The thing that is most baffling and wonderful about matter is the most obvious – its hard substantiality; and no amount of science can either reduce or explain it. Our knowledge of subatomic particles cannot change the way we experience rock, or take away its basic mystery.

Yet while we are only too ready to wonder at the existence of mysterious particles, we seem reluctant today to marvel at the wonders of nature as we actually experience them. We are determined, it seems, not to treat the mysteries of the world as mysteries.

To acknowledge that matter itself is a mystery does not imply that there is a puzzle to be solved, or that we are somehow deprived. We have to come to see that the natural world as it is given to us is quite wonderful enough in itself. Nothing is lacking.

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MOUNTAINS AS SCULPTURE

Mountain scenery is the antithesis not so much of the plains as of the commonplace. Its charm lies in its vigorous originality.

LESLIE STEPHEN (1894)

THREE-DIMENSIONAL ART

I have emphasised the mystery and wonder of matter itself because the fascination of a mountain's appearance cannot be separated from the enigma that lies behind it. Once we stop seeing a mountain simply as an astonishing, beautiful or awesome 'sight', we become interested in the thing itself – as a work of art. Our interest shifts from the two-dimensional and the pictorial, to the three-dimensional and the sculptural. Until we have some conception of the topography and substance of a mountain, our appreciation is limited to a strictly visual pattern of shapes and colours, a diverting arrangement of light and shade with a more or less distinctive or graphic outline.

We can apply just the same aesthetic criteria to mountains as to works of sculpture; and when we do so we will often be forced to admit that, as such, they are incomparably finer than anything man can produce. With their extraordinary qualities of uniqueness and unpredictability they have all the appearance of being the work of a creative imagination. Everywhere are to be found the sort of 'waving and serpentine lines' that William Hogarth admired in nature, which lead the eye on a 'wanton kind of chase'.[11] The uniqueness of line and form seems very much like the product of an imagination run riot – experimenting at will – to create something beautiful for its own sake.

You cannot have, in the open air, angles, and wedges, and coils, and cliffs of cold. Yet the vapour stops suddenly, sharp and steep as a rock, or thrusts itself across the gates of heaven in likeness of a brazen bar; or falls into ripples like sand; or into waving shreds and tongues, as fire. On what anvils and wheels is the vapour pointed, twisted, hammered, whirled, as the potter's clay?

JOHN RUSKIN (1860)

It is difficult, when looking at such extravagant inventiveness, to avoid the question: why is so much of nature so unnecessarily beautiful? Why does so much of it look almost as if it were *designed* … to please the eye, and for no other reason? The landscape need not be nearly this interesting. We can easily imagine the British Isles without such beautiful freaks as AN TEALLACH, or Suilven, or the Cuillin Ridge, just as we can imagine a world without flowers – or a world with no mountains at all. Take away An Teallach or the Cobbler and we would not be any the wiser. They are an entirely unnecessary bonus, a gift from the gods.

Unfortunately, many people are reluctant to see mountains in this way – as works of art – precisely because they are natural and not man-made. A Londoner to whom I recently showed the picture of the BASTEIR TOOTH, for example, admitted that if it were a giant man-made sculpture in Hyde Park he would indeed be impressed by it, but as a natural pinnacle on a remote mountain-top it left him quite cold.

The main reason for his attitude, I believe, was that he had never seen a mountain feature like this in the raw. Which only goes to support my argument that a mountain is something to be experienced in the round: it is not a piece of two-dimensional scenery – like a stage 'flat' or a backdrop – but a topographical intrusion that encroaches upon our three-dimensional world. It is not just a pleasing image to be glanced at from a distance, but something more in the nature of Marcel Duchamp's bottle-rack – a notorious piece of 'concrete art' of the twenties, of which it was once said, 'It is there to be used, ready for

anything: it is alive. It lives on the fringe of existence its own disturbing, absurd life.'[12] The very existence of a mountain is a presence to be reckoned with. It is not just a visual treat, but a physical challenge.

Once we start to see mountains as three-dimensional natural sculptures we will not be satisfied just to look at them from a distance; to appreciate them fully we will need to explore them.

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MOUNTAINS DREAMS AND REALITIES

A mountain is not an ancient, lifeless relic but a piece of living plastic art – put there, as it were, to be climbed. As a gigantic sculpture, it cannot avoid becoming woven around with climbing dreams.

THE COMPELLING LINE

A mountaineering challenge will not be of interest to a climber until he has a definite image of it in his mind, even if it is a false one. In fact, the aesthetic appeal of the proposed route is generally of far greater importance to him than the bald factual challenge of reaching the top – unless the mountain has never been climbed before. Far from simply being a matter of getting to the summit, the fascination of all forms of mountaineering, from easy hillwalking to extreme rockclimbing lies in the quality and interest of the line taken – that is, the whole challenge the route presents from the bottom of the mountain to the top and not merely its end point. It has very little to do with statistics, such as the length of the route or the height the summit happens to be above sea level (though there is a curious breed of list-ticker who thinks otherwise – see Glossary: 'Munro-bagger').

That the interest of a mountaineering challenge depends largely on the aesthetic qualities of the route was first advanced by the great Victorian mountaineer, Alfred Frederick Mummery. If the summit is the only thing that is desired, he said, then the easiest way up is obviously the right way, 'but from a purely aesthetic standpoint' the harder ridges will provide a far richer experience.[13] In fact Mummery

insisted that the aesthetic quality of the line was directly related to its difficulty, such that 'the more difficult an ascent, the bolder and more significant will usually be the immediate surroundings of the traveller.'

The greatest climbing lines – the ones which have the strongest hold on the imagination – are those that look both beautiful and awesomely impossible at the same time: 'sublime', that is, in the fullest, most paradoxical sense.

A bold line is not necessarily a simple one. Even the simplest looking lines are always much more complicated in close-up than they appear from a distance. It is this intricacy and complexity – the 'serpentine quality' that Hogarth spoke about – that gives a climbing route its uniqueness. Like a good melody or a good story, it is full of variety and unexpected twists and turns. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins once compared the outline of a distant hill to a 'slow tune';[14] and it was no doubt the strange power of such a line, with its irresistible blend of bold simplicity and subtle complexity, that led a famous 'climbing parson' in Snowdonia in the 1840's to acquire an obsession for always 'following the skyline' as closely as he could.[15]

A very complicated line can be as compelling as a simple one if it is the only solution to an obvious challenge. In fact, most long climbs are usually a clever linking together of several discontinuous natural weaknesses, with much less obvious sections in between. It is here that the pioneer's creative imagination is required; the image comes to mind of that great rockclimber of the 1930's, Colin Kirkus, cooped up all week in an office, pretending to work, but having the drawer of his desk slightly open so that he could see the photo of CLOGWYN D'UR ARDDU on which he had drawn all the existing and possible routes with red lines.

Perhaps it would not be too fanciful to say that climbing is like acting out an idea that has hitherto only existed on paper like the bare bones of a script: that an unclimbed mountain line is a storyline waiting to be enacted.

ENTERING THE FORBIDDEN WORLD

The mountaineering spirit is one that wants to abolish completely the 'otherness' of the mountain world, to bridge the vast apparent gap between it and ourselves, to unmask the secret reality behind the dreamlike appearance. And it wants to do this, not by simply reducing the dream to the level of everyday reality, but by entering the dream like Alice in Wonderland. For it wants to leave everyday life behind and become, for a while, part of the 'other' – the world that civilised man shrinks from, and yet is irresistibly drawn to.

This romantic aspect of the mountains is reflected in some of the names given to the more inaccessible mountain features of Britain by Victorian climbers. The 'High Man' of Pillar Rock in the Lake District was actually called 'The Promised Land' by the early explorers, who could view it, like Moses, from an adjacent, easily accessible summit known as 'Pisgah' (from across a 'Jordan Gap'). Similarly, there was a Pisgah on Scafell from which the (then) unclimbed SCAFELL PINNACLE could be viewed.

The romance of the inaccessible also carries with it a sense of the forbidden. The climber can never completely dispel a faint, nagging feeling that he ought not to be there, that this landscape was not really meant for man at all. Many inaccessible mountain features have been traditionally wrapped around with religious superstitions and taboos, and even in Britain there are a number of summits which were regarded until surprisingly recently as absolutely unclimbable; SGURR NAN GILLEAN, for example, was regarded as such until 1836.

THE 'INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN'

To enter the mountain world is to turn the two-dimensional world of distant appearances into a three-dimensional reality. It is the exact opposite of reducing the landscape to a small postcard view. For in this case it is the climber that becomes small - extremely small. The urge to enter right into the fabric of the landscape that has been called 'topophilia' – to understand all its inner secrets or, as Mummery said, to get to 'know every wrinkle'[16] – is to see the world as if through a powerful magnifying glass. A mountain feature, close-up, is as different – as beautifully different – as a geologist's rock-slide under the microscope. A smooth looking scree slope, for example, becomes more and more bumpy and three-dimensional, until it resolves itself into boulders the size of cars, and the walker finds himself not so much on it as in it. Once he is on the mountainside the climber has about as much understanding of the whole as an ant on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral.

READING THE ROCK

To climb a mountain is to be let into a secret, but it is a secret that is revealed only to a few. The climber always has a sense of privilege; he has become part of an exclusive band of those who have gained access to the 'upper world', to use Mummery's term – a world that is only open to the few who are prepared to make the effort or take the risk.

The secret that the climber finds out is what the mountain is really made of, and just how much of an illusion it is. He alone discovers its true strengths and weaknesses. Nothing is as it appears from a distance. There is always so much more detail and texture – that is to say, potential holds – on a rock face, even on one that appears dauntingly smooth, than the layman realizes.

W.H. Murray describes his discovery of the beautiful texture of rock on his first day's climbing: 'Always before I had thought of rock as a

dull mass. But *this* rock was the living rock, pale grey and clean as the air itself, with streaks of shiny mica and white crystals of quartzite. It was a joy to handle such rock and to feel the coarse grain under the fingers.'[17]

Always in climbing there is a sense of grappling with the very stuff of the Earth, the lithosphere, on a one-to-one basis. Even if the particular piece of rock has been climbed many times before, providing it is not worn smooth, it feels just as if no one has ever touched it. Always there is the quiet, all-absorbing task of 'reading the rock', the intimate pleasure that Gaston Rébuffat talks about 'of communicating with the mountain … with its material self, its substance, as a craftsman communicates with the wood, the stone or the iron with which he is working.… To discover little hidden holds and, by means of them, an approach, a way through.'[18]

ROCK ARTISTRY

Until it is found, this 'way through' is like a puzzle that has had to wait thousands, if not millions of years to be solved, a secret that has lain dormant, waiting to be unlocked. And this is why the expression 'route *finding*' is so much more appropriate to climbing than 'route making' (or 'putting up a route', as some climbers will have it).

Certainly some climbs seem, like the mountains themselves, almost to have been *designed* – there are sequences of moves so subtle, so imaginative, so right, that even the cleverest inventor or most sophisticated computer programme could never have produced their equal.

Climbing is a playful game between the climber and the mountain – a creative interaction between a rock artiste (as we could call a top climber) and a natural art form. A climber can be seen as someone who enters right into the creative, playful spirit of nature. Often a climb displays a certain gamesmanship, even a sense of humour, in its ability to surprise or mislead. Sometimes I have made what I have thought are the hardest moves, been fooled, nearly fallen off, solved it – and, once

over the difficulties, found myself chuckling in quiet appreciation at the sheer 'genius' of the climb.

The climber's enthusiasm for the genius of the rock – his topophilia – finds expression in the names he gives to the unique features of a climb: the Groves of Bollards and Rickety Innards, Droopy Flakes and Swords of Damocles, Man Traps and Obstetrician's Moves, Cracks of Doom and Amen Corners. (A personal favourite is 'the Quartz Babe'.) And the great climbs themselves: Cenotaph Corner, Cemetary Gates, the Footless Crow, the Indian Face – the list is endless.

No great climb ever resembles any other; it is something unique, having its own inimitable character and identity. Like Everest itself, once discovered, it can never be un-discovered. It is a permanent feature, accumulating its own unique history. JONES'S ROUTE DIRECT on Scafell, for example, will be his for ever.

SUPERMAN

Although a climber has to deal with the hard realities of a mountain, his experience of climbing it retains many of the qualities of a dream. Moving up steep rock or snow, in a 'world above the world' – with nothing but space behind and almost everything below – has an extraordinary, dreamlike quality that verges on magic. When he is climbing well, the climber feels as if he is floating in space, swimming upwards over overhangs like waves in a vertical sea, moving as it were in a new dimension, on the very edge of existence. This sensation of floating effortlessly, as in a dream, can be felt in all forms of climbing, even in strenuous hill walking (providing one is fit!) It is by far the most compelling reason why people climb: the magic feeling of fluidity, the sheer joy of movement.

Closely allied with this wonderful sensation of fluidity is the feeling, which many climbers have commented on, of extraordinary, unconquerable power – the sense, especially once the hardest moves are solved, that 'nothing can stop me now'.

At the same time, particularly on a very hard sequence of moves, the climber experiences a heightened awareness, with every faculty stretched to its limit, and everything in the immediate environment perceived with extraordinary vividness and intensity. It is not surprising that this effect, known in sports medicine as 'the Running High', should have something in common with the effects of drug-taking, for it is almost certainly the result of the production in the body of 'neurotransmitters' such as epinephrine (adrenaline) and endorphins, when it is *in extremis*. The fact that one may have this sensation while being in an outrageously beautiful or 'impossible' situation, poised on the edge of nothing in an extraordinary dream landscape, only adds to the overwhelmingly psychedelic quality of the experience.

BEYOND THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

It is often argued that such an extreme outdoor activity as mountaineering, which seems to be motivated primarily by a desire to get as far away as possible from ordinary experience, is nothing more than escapism, or the search for pleasure. But climbing is emphatically not just a matter of going out and enjoying oneself. A mountain landscape, as we have seen, is one that by its very nature stimulates a much broader and more complex range of emotions than mere 'pleasure', and this is therefore far too simplistic a term for the whole *sublime* complex of emotions we feel when climbing. At its simplest, climbing always involves a rather potent blend of exhilaration and fear. It is worth remembering that the term 'pleasant' is generally used in climbing guidebooks to suggest something rather tame and undemanding – a climb that is almost by definition less than great.

Certainly climbing is not a lazy man's activity, as some have claimed. Even the approach walks to some climbs are arduous undertakings in their own right, and the vast majority of rock and ice routes, above a certain elementary level, are very strenuous by any standards. Indeed, climbing in general is, without question, one of the most strenuous sports there is. If it is a pleasure at all, it is a pleasure that, as Edward

Whymper said long ago, is borne out of toil[19] – and often considerable hardship and very real danger. But, as Whymper insisted, 'out of the toil comes strength (not merely muscular energy – more than that), an awakening of all the faculties.'

Altogether more serious is the suggestion that climbing is an escape from reality. If we allow that movements towards or away from reality make any sense at all – I subscribe to precisely the opposite view: that climbing is actually a way of getting closer to reality, not only in the sense of coming face to face with some of the hardest and most fundamental realities of the inanimate world – of, as I have put it, grappling with the very stuff of the lithosphere – but also, by going to the boundaries of our own experience, of confronting some hard truths about ourselves, of discovering, perhaps, the limits of our courage and endurance. If we climbers have escaped from anything, it is from the essential unreality of the artificial 'space capsule' of modern existence. Instead, we have returned to a world that is entirely free of the wrappings of vainglory and pretension, and demands only that we should use all our faculties of perception and judgment as truly as possible.

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MOUNTAIN IMAGES

AN IMPRINT OF NATURE

The great benefit of being able to take home some of our most vivid landscape memories on film is that it enables us to appreciate them more fully. With large format photography especially, we can look even more closely at 'the given', and see much detail that we did not notice at the time we took the picture.

While the reduction of assorted landscape images onto relatively small sheets of paper, as in this book, admittedly excludes one of the key elements of the sublime, that of vastness, the eye is able to look at them all in the same way – whether they are extreme closeups or extensive panoramas – with equal ease and clarity. We are left simply with the rich beauty of the thing itself.

In fact, it is only once we start to look at nature in this rather detached and clinical manner that we can fully appreciate the French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard's dictum that 'macrocosm and microcosm are correlated'.[20] For although scale may be relevant to the sublime, it is of no relevance whatever to the beautiful. As Bachelard expresses it: 'If a poet looks through a microscope or a telescope, he always sees the same thing.'[21]

The scale of inanimate natural objects is an entirely human, or animal, concern. It has no bearing whatever on their complexity. A mountain ridge is just as intricate in close-up as it is on a much larger scale; indeed the close-up often mimics the more distant view. Modern scientists interested in the irregular patterns of nature have called this principle, which is seen in operation throughout the inanimate world, 'self-similarity'.

THE PARTICULARITY OF THE MOMENT

The photographer's main interest cannot, however, simply be in recording 'slices of nature' in this way – in taking home what amounts to samples for further study. For the essence of photography resides entirely in the particularities of a moment. Rather than taking bland, generalised, timeless images as a record of physical geography, the photographer tries to convey something of the landscape's impact on him at a certain moment so that others may appreciate it in much the same way as he did.

Everything about an extraordinary moment of this kind is by nature a surprise; and its particularity is such that it can never recur in precisely the same way again – just as the landscape photograph that has captured this quality can never be repeated. It is absolutely unique. Or, to put it the other way round: to the extent that it *can* be repeated, it is ordinary and lacks memorability. It doesn't do anything except record a view: that is, show how the scene 'normally' looks from such and such a viewpoint at a certain time of year.

Closely connected with this generalising, timeless conception of landscape photography is the fallacious idea that there is such a thing as the 'spirit' of a place and that the photographer's main purpose is to try and capture this on one frame of film. It is certainly true that any mountain area has its own special characteristics that can be summarised and encapsulated in a photograph in a very vague and general way, but its overriding quality is always its essential changeability.

This was the point those early visitors to LOCH CORUISK missed completely. They made the fundamental mistake – as extraordinary as it was illogical, given their knowledge of the British weather – of assuming that a mountain scene is always the same, ever of one mood. Whereas, what any seasoned traveller will know is that it will appear entirely different on different occasions, depending on when he

happens to see it, what part of it he happens to see, and his own particular mood at the time.

The tendency to generalise – which is a barrier to all true appreciation – remains an extremely common one. There are many people, for example, who seriously believe that it always rains in the Cuillin, or who do not like Llanberis Pass or GLENCOE because they are 'dark and forbidding'. I am sure many of them would be amazed to see just how different these places look under the mantle of winter snow. SNOWDON itself is transformed into a majestic white cone that bears a distinct resemblance to Mount Everest in miniature.

The true character of a landscape, through time, can only be conveyed by a portfolio of photographs that try to show all its typical and changing aspects – just as the real character of a person can only be discerned by observing his or her actions and moods at a wide range of different moments. The mountain photographer will want to see a landscape in as many different guises as possible, appreciating that they all have their own distinctive appeal. His special craft is to see always what is *different* around him, to see the world as something that is continuously changing and new, and to see it with fresh eyes. To see it always in a new light.

> *To see them is worth a week's waiting – to see the black peaks start out like living creatures, high above the clouds which wildly career up the cleft ridges, now hiding and now revealing their awful faces, or calmly rising, like the spires and towers of a celestial city, out of a snowy sea of mist …*
>
> ALEXANDER NICOLSON (1875)

LET THERE BE LIGHT

It is the quality of light, above all else, that makes a 'landscape moment' special. Fortunately for the photographer this is the one quality that his medium is uniquely and precisely able to record.

If we accept that the weather and light are part of a landscape, we will be as interested in the quality of the light as in the physical geography of the scene. Interesting topography is not enough. The photographer may have all the physical ingredients for the image he desires, but if he has not got interesting light he has got nothing – or, at most, something that is entirely unremarkable. Much of the visual potential of the landform will lie dormant; the surface will be dead, at rest, sleeping.

By the 'quality of light' I mean, of course, the whole colour spectrum and not just its monochromatic qualities of intensity and diffusion. The human eye is in fact very lazy when it comes to seeing the full richness and subtlety of natural colour, particularly in poor light when its black and white-sensitive 'rods' assume a greater importance than its colour-sensitive 'cones'. In such conditions it is only by making a very conscious effort that we may notice any colour content at all.

Landscape photography at its purest requires nothing more to be happening in the scene than the quality of light to be changing in an interesting way. And the most striking photographs of all occur when the light itself becomes an *event.*

THE QUEST FOR THE DREAM IMAGE

Special moments of extraordinary light are not something that the photographer can ever plan for; he has to content himself with chasing dream images of his own. In photography, as in climbing: first we have a dream, then we try to turn it into a reality. Only, for the mountain photographer, the dream image itself becomes the goal. He wants to fix it on a piece of paper for posterity. Ideally, he wants to produce the sort of photographs that Roland Barthes has called 'fantasmatic', which have the capacity to connect with a world that somehow already exists in the viewer's imagination.[22] The landscape becomes something we want to enter; in our imagination, we in effect get right into the photograph. Such a photo no longer remains a small, fuzzy image in a book or a photo album, but becomes an enormous, mind-filling potentiality that can no longer be contained by a little rectangular frame.

Although the photographer may not always have a vivid, welldefined image in his mind's eye, the dream image he chases after must always be sketchable, in some form or other. For, until he has such a clear visual concept he will have little chance of obtaining it. He will then be in the position of the famous mathematician who once said that he had had his solutions for a long time, but did not yet know how he would arrive at them.

THE CONQUEST OF SPACE

Just as we cannot see a mountain landscape properly except by becoming physically involved in it, so the process of hunting down our mountain dream images is unavoidably a very physical one too. The fact is that many of the major mountain features of Britain arc not visible from any road, and cannot be reached without considerable effort. Some form of climbing, if only in the sense of uphill walking, is almost always necessary. It seems that beauty in mountain photography

– like pleasure in mountaineering – only comes out of toil. There are always, as it were, major strings attached in the form of physical effort and discomfort – and sometimes no strings at all, when what is most needed for peace of mind or even safety is a substantial climbing rope.

Long days are the norm for the mountain photographer, whose lot is to spend hours wading through deep powder snow, or teetering down icy rocks in crampons with a heavy sack, or toiling up scree slopes under the blazing sun. But grand as it may sound, the aim is to conquer space – to levitate the camera so that it is no longer obviously earthbound but more in the nature of a disembodied flying eye that can look in on the beauty of the lithosphere from wherever it wishes. The existence of the photographer must be nowhere in evidence; the eye of the dream must have complete autonomy.

The grandeur of the extraordinary new world in front of the camera lens resists neat containment within a frame – but then a dream image is not something that ever has a frame. Its content is all. So rather than trying to contain the landscape, the photographer allows it, if necessary, to be too grand for any man-made rectangle – and lets the crags and pinnacles overrun the inconsequential framelines and become detached from their base, which has no more importance than the plinth below a statue. The untamed world of the NORTH-WEST FACE OF STRONE ULLADALE or even that of 'THE APPIAN WAY' on Pillar Rock, has very little in common with the much gentler environment in which it is set – just as the climbers making their way slowly upwards in it are entirely detached from their own base, and no longer have any clear awareness of the bottom – or the top, for that matter. For they are in an entirely different dimension.

THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME

'To be in the right place at the right time' is an obvious truism, but it is the key to landscape photography. It is probably best reexpressed by using the concept of 'ripeness': the time must be ripe, and the photographer must be ready, if the hoped-for image is to be recorded on film. It is extremely unlikely, for example, that a picture of a climber on a remote, outlandish mountain feature like STRONE ULLADALE will be obtained in interesting light by accident. Even for the time to be ripe – that is, for the photographer simply to be there in fine weather at a favourable time of year – is not enough: as many favourable circumstances as possible have to be organized and brought together. The riper the whole situation, the less need there is to rely on chance.

The first requirement, in Britain's predominantly cyclonic climate, is to try to get 'in phase with' the weather – that is, to try and organize one's shoots so that they coincide with any ridges of high pressure that may occur. This may mean, for example, having to go up to a high camp in the rain if the forecast is good in order to catch a 'window' of fine weather the moment it arrives.

But of course it is no good if the whole situation is ripe and the photographer is not ready. In medium and large format photography, it is not just a matter of having the camera loaded and wound on to the first frame; the shutter must be cocked, the dark slide extracted, and the aperture must be readjusted manually as every change of light is monitored with a separate meter. Only in this state of readiness can the photographer respond quickly to the unexpected.

To have the camera all ready in position with time to spare – at dawn, for example, after a long and difficult approach walk in the dark – is immensely satisfying. Equally, there are few experiences more mortifying in mountain photography than being just too late, for a magic moment never repeats itself. Indeed, catching the landscape at exactly the right moment is no less an act of precision than catching the

most vivid expression in a person's face. It must be caught immediately, for it will be gone in a millisecond. The perception that a scene has 'lost something' will always be borne out when the transparencies are projected in quick succession at home. But it is equally important, when using a large format 'view camera' – which cannot immediately be advanced to a new frame – not to be overhasty and take it too soon, for a magic moment always 'peaks out'. Ripeness is all.

THE STUFF OF DREAMS

Despite all the effort and patience that goes into obtaining a 'fantasmatic' image, it is still something of a shock when it suddenly materialises in front of the photographer's very eyes. Several times, in taking the photographs for this book, I have had the extraordinary experience of finding myself looking straight at an image that has existed up till then only in my imagination. But it has acquired such a powerful place in my mind that I am then truly in the state described by Novalis when 'dream becomes world, world becomes dream'.[23]

NO SHORTCUTS OR TRICKS

In spite of all his efforts, the photographer is always ultimately at the mercy of chance. There are periods when the gods seem to smile, and periods when nothing seems to work out as planned. There is no magic formula beyond patience and persistence, particularly as only about one day in five in the British mountains will provide moments of real photographic merit, while on at least two of those five days almost nothing of value will be obtained.

And so hours and days will be spent walking and watching and waiting, often with the camera covered with a polythene bag to keep out the rain; but one must never lose patience, for it is just when one starts to put the camera away that one's luck is most likely to change.

What one must never do is resort to gimmickry – such as coloured filters or double exposures – in the attempt to construct a , shot out of nothing. For one is likely to become so engrossed in one's own 'creativity' that the magic moment, when it does occur, may be missed; one may not even *see* it. If a scene is of so little intrinsic merit, or the light is so dull, that it requires such tricks, nothing will save it. Magic cannot be superimposed from outside.

We do not need tricks in mountain photography. All we need is what we already have – the magic of nature and the film emulsion.

> *I saw in the eternal evening glow the silent world at my feet. Every height on fire, every valley at rest, the silver brook flowing into the golden stream.*
>
> GOETHE

THE MAGIC OF THE MEDIUM

It is indeed all too easy when emphasising the importance in mountain photography of interesting light and topography to forget the magical contribution of the film medium itself.

Even the most experienced photograplier will readily admit that his results are always different, even if in some very subtle way, from what he expected. Because the camera and the film, by their very nature, see the scene in a different way from the eye, the photograph will always *add* something of its own – if only in the sense of those special qualities such as colour saturation and grain that arc inherent in the photographic emulsion. It is extremely difficult for the photographer to assess precisely how the very sensitive sheet of filni in the camera – kept until then entirely in the dark – is going to register that sudden finely focussed flash of light from the outside world. The photographer is in every sense a bystander, a solicitous outsider who simply sets the process in motion and then has to wait and see.

This will not be seen as a shortcoming once we come to realize that this is precisely where the true magic of photography lies. For, just as

there will be frequent disappointments, there will be occasions when we will be quite frankly amazed how unexpectedly beautiful a picture turns out – or, if we are honest with ourselves – just how exquisitely *different* it is from the way that we intended.

It is as if, at times, this particular fortuity of light and this particular sheet of film emulsion have joined forces in some kind of holy alliance – a sort of photographic alchemy – to produce an image that is aglow forever with the wonder of the moment. How right Roland Barthes was to call photography 'a magic, not an art'![24]

> *All southward the valleys brimmed with cloud, from which the tips of high peaks projected like skerries … On the broad snow-fields beneath our boots each crystal crumb threw its own shadow on to the gleaming crust. The whole frozen world was alive with the shining of light.*
>
> W.H. MURRAY (1951)

— 6 —
MOUNTAIN FRIENDS AND FOES

OUR APPRECIATION OF MOUNTAINS

I am always suspicious of people who say they *love* mountains. Genuine admirers of mountain scenery usually regard it with a rather ambivalent mixture of wonder and awe, which can degenerate, at times, into straightforward fear and loathing. But such forced sentimentality for these cold, unforgiving objects is all part of what one might call the consumer-package approach to landscape which derives from the 'glorious scenery' language of travel brochures. It leads to an inevitable blunting of our powers of perception. We tend only to see a view as very obviously 'beautiful' – or not at all. We react as we are expected to react; we have little time for our own feelings, or taste for subtleties. While any redder-than-average sunset provokes an entirely predictable, almost Pavlovian response of 'oohs' and 'aahs' from us, we are unlikely to dwell on it for more than a few seconds – let alone to witness the whole wonder of the transition from day to night.

Another common form of exaggeration is to call any unremarkable rounded hill a 'peak', or any steep, loose slope a 'sheer cliff'. The truth is that there are as many different types of mountain as there are people – all the way from the eminent, the elegant, and the forbidding, through the undistinguished and the nondescript, to those that are just plain ugly.

Ruskin, a most enthusiastic admirer of mountain scenery, was still capable of describing a scene in the Alps as a 'smooth, slippery, glutinous heap, looking like a beach of black scales of dead fish, cast ashore from a poisonous sea….'[25] We too must not be afraid of calling

some mountains ugly. We have to learn to differentiate, for example, the shapeless rottenness of Red Pike in the Lake District, or the Red Cuillin in Skye, from the nearby splendours of Pillar Rock and the Black Cuillin, respectively. One of the Red Cuillin, Glamaig, has been described as a 'graceful cone' when in reality it is the epitome of a slag heap – its obvious rottenness only accentuated by its unfortunate proximity to the solid grandeur of SGURR NAN GILLEAN. We need to distinguish the good, the bad, and the ugly when it comes to rock types. It is, indeed, an old adage of mine that where there is good rock for climbing there is a fine landscape – that the most aesthetically pleasing mountains are those that are made of the best rock.

Only once we have learnt to look more critically at landscapes will we be able to see that much that initially appears ugly contains unexpected beauties, which cannot be entirely separated from their ugliness. Appreciating these subtleties demands more than just using the eyes better; it involves the application of the whole intellect. As the artist John Constable said, 'the art of seeing nature is a thing almost as much to be acquired as the art of reading Egyptian hieroglyphs.'[26]

POINT-SCORING

One of the problems that the 'consumer boom' has brought with it is a shift in the values of those who visit the hills. Everywhere, it seems, there is an urge to turn the quality of the mountain experience into something quantifiable – not just in terms of height above sea level or mileage, but in terms of gradable achievement, so that it is all conformable and comparable with what other people are doing or have done. Everywhere, whole days are reduced to grades and numbers so that they are, in effect, given a *score* – the 'success' of hillwalking days being measured by the number of Munros climbed, and rockclimbing days (since the subdivision of the Extreme grade into E numbers) by the number of 'E points' gained. (See Glossary: E points.)

For a mountaineering day to be judged a 'success' is nothing to do with success in the ordinary sense of the word. The only relevant sense

of 'winning' in the mountains is that we win through, and this often means having to let the mountain 'win'. The clichéd idea, often heard in the media, of 'conquering' a mountain is a popular misconception: the idea that a mountain is an anthropomorphic opponent that we must crush – or it will crush us.

Once walking or climbing days are judged solely by their Munro-bagging or E-point productivity, they are reduced almost to the status of a job, to a repetitive routine that has been stripped of much of its meaning and adventure. More and more it is just a matter of another path to be followed, another well-worn script to be repeated. More and more the mountain day mimics, in a sort of grotesque ritual, the treadmill of everyday life, as a seemingly endless stream of walkers tramp along STRIDING EDGE or around such contrivances as the 'Buttermere Circuit' – which has the 'advantage' of providing more 'peaks' (protuberances) to be 'bagged', with only little more effort.

It seems to me that this approach to days in the mountains limits much of their potential for real adventure. The point of an adventure is that we can never have any clear idea of its storyline in advance; it always takes us somewhere new; and it always follows a complex, serpentine line, full of surprising twists and turns, some very abrupt. It is never a simple movement from A to B, but a journey in many dimensions: it opens up a whole new realm of experience.

The quality of a mountain day depends largely on how interesting its *shape* is, how far out of the ordinary its storyline, and how intensely its extraordinariness is felt. By embarking on such adventures we give a meaning and a shape to our lives; by reacting creatively to the structure of the mountains themselves we re-create ourselves.

THE SCOURGE OF 'DEVELOPMENT'

Unfortunately, a great deal of what goes under the name of 'development' – an appalling misnomer when applied to our wilder mountain areas – panders directly to the point-scoring, route-ticking mentality. All too often we find that, in addition to walks to be 'done' and peaks to be 'bagged', there are a host of other 'attractions' to be enjoyed: improved access roads to be followed, wonders of civil engineering to be admired, signposts to be obeyed, noticeboards to be read, dotted lines to be followed, souvenirs to be bought, and litter bins to be emptied by someone else.

Once an unspoilt area has been 'opened up' in this way – that is to say, been *spoiled* – it can never be unspoiled again. As a genuinely wild area it has been lost for ever.

It is true that we are faced with a major dilemma when it comes to the upkeep and repair of mountain paths, given the everincreasing number of people visiting the hills. But it seems to me that the blasting of rock and the proliferation of unwarranted signs are clear-cut examples of over-zealous 'improvement'.

But before we start pointing accusing fingers at the developers we would do well, as walkers and climbers, to put our own house in order first. The pressures on the mountain environment in Britain are now so intense that we need to state unequivocally what has long been a vague unwritten law: that in walking and climbing in the hills we should leave everything exactly as we found it, and that we should regard any recreation or sporting activity which entails modifying the structure of the earth – the surface of the lithosphere – in whatever way, as an act of vandalism.

In rockclimbing, there has been a recent outbreak of 'holdchipping', which has ranged all the way from over-enthusiastic 'cleaning' and 'improving' to the wholesale construction of new holds with a chisel. Which is roughly equivalent, in my mind, to taking a sledge-hammer to

Michelangelo's David or slashing the face of the Mona Lisa with a knife.

MINDLESS WALKING

In walking, the damage that is done is far less deliberate, but that in a way is the problem: people pay far too little attention to where and how they walk – about what they put their feet into and onto, and how carefully.

Recently, on a path below the Cobbler, I encountered a boggy section which had all the appearance of an army of a thousand having marched straight across it, thirty abreast, without looking to right or to left. My disgust at this particular example of mindlessness was all the greater when I discovered that, without being particularly clever, it was possible to cross the bog by stepping from one embedded stone to another without putting one's foot into it once.

Sadly, there is nothing at all unusual about this unnecessary damage; such unintelligent footprints can be seen all over the British hills today. Perhaps the time has come for us to take Edward Whymper's famous words 'look well to each step'[27] in a broader sense, and ensure that we tread more carefully, treating each foot placement as precisely as if it were a foothold on a potentially dangerous climb – and let the lack of noise we make and the absence of any damage we leave be a testimony of our love of the landscape, and of our worthiness to be in it.

A MIRROR OF OUR WISDOM

We must look after the surface of the planet, not just for material reasons, but because it mirrors our whole spiritual being. Just as the way we look after our homes is a reflection of our inner selves, so the way we treat our wilderness areas and national parks is a reflection of our national state of health.

The landscape is a mirror of our wisdom or our lack of it. If we spoil it, we must accept that it is because we ourselves are spoiled. If we

destroy it, it means nothing less than that we have lost the fight against our own folly.

When we look at a so-called development area in our mountains we have to ask ourselves whether it is a true reflection of ourselves, and whether it reflects us in the way we would like. Are we proud, for example, of the ski development in the Cairngorms? Or are we embarrassed that so many wild places reveal us to be merely consumers and despoilers?

Our appreciation of anything and everything in the world starts with a respect for the ground beneath our feet, the living rock. If we cannot appreciate the most basic material of the planet, what hope is there for the higher forms of life? If we cannot refrain from vandalizing the solid structure of the lithosphere, how much worse will be the havoc we wreak upon the fragility of the biosphere? The relation between the two is a very close one – we cannot separate them; and we are part of it all.

The sea itself, though it can be clear, is never calm in the sense that a mountain lake can be calm. The sea seems only to pause; the mountain lake to sleep, and to dream.

JOHN RUSKIN (1856)

AN ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

Through exploring mountains and climbing rocks, man comes into a very special relationship with the raw material of the lithosphere; by working out the problems posed by these natural forms, the human spirit – essentially a spirit of exploration and play, curiosity and cunning – comes into direct contact with the 'genius' of the rock. Here, where the earth's surface has been thrown up and laid bare in enormous three-dimensional sculptures of great variety and complexity, is to be found the supreme landscape of adventure, a playground *par excellence* for the whole superfluity of the human spirit.

A real mountain adventure, by which I mean anything from serious mountain walking to extreme rock or ice climbing in a mountain terrain (above *or* below 3000 feet), is the very opposite of an organised 'game', whose lifeline is the rulebook. When we are genuinely at play, that is to say, apparently playing around, or playing the fool, essentially what we are doing is getting to know more about our immediate environment by playing in it and experimenting with it, as a child does. And because this demands a spontaneous, improvisatory approach, it virtually necessitates the *breaking* of rules.

It does not, however, mean treating the environment as a playground, in the everyday sense of the word. This is a serious game because it is a potentially dangerous game; it involves a dangerous propinquity with the elements and, as such, demands our greatest respect.

But nor is it the perverse kind of game – which has been called 'deep play' – that deliberately dices with death. Though most climbers have at some time or other got themselves into a situation where their very lives have hung in the balance, this can never be said to be their *motive* for going to the mountains.

We go to the mountains not as reckless stuntmen, as dicers with death, but as prospectors of life. Any risks we take are carefully calculated ones in which the real danger to life is reduced as far as possible. We want to return at the end of the day. If we are right to say that a great day's climbing has the completeness of a good story or a piece of music, then we are not interested in unfinished symphonies.

Unlike a game, in which we want to conquer our opponent and improve our position in the league table, climbing is an adventure in which we do not want to conquer or change anything. We do not want to damage either ourselves or the environment; we want to leave everything exactly as it is. A game is something we are said to play, but it is pursued in a spirit of aggression; an adventure involves real danger, but is pursued in a spirit of play. And it is this ever-present duality of

genuine play and genuine risk, of lightheartedness and seriousness, that is the overriding characteristic of the mountain adventure.

FRIENDS OF THE MOUNTAINS

Those who come to the mountain landscape in this playful, adventurous, nature-loving spirit are a part of what gives it life. It could almost be said that, for a time, they belong to it. And because the mountain landscape attracts like minds, they will meet many of the same spirit who are in harmony with each other no less than with their surroundings. As Don Whillans said: 'The climb isn't the main thing, it's only half of it. The rest is being in the mountains and the company that I'm with.'[28]

The company of mountaineers and rockclimbers – which we may perhaps call 'the fraternity of the rock' – is a completely open society. International in spirit, contemptuous of all boundaries, indifferent to all considerations of status or background, nationality or wealth, it is open to all who treat the mountain environment with respect.

In entering the mountain world there is always a sense of returning home, to something very old that is in danger of being forgotten, to a world of no nonsense or artifice, peopled by an extraordinary assortment of cool-headed and warm-hearted individuals who are as sound as the rock itself. A world whose simple pleasures and playful adventures spring directly from a deep appreciation of all that really matters, which is based at heart on a deep appreciation of nature.

Like Ruskin, I believe that this love of nature, or 'landscape instinct', as he called it, is totally inconsistent with 'all care, hatred, anxiety, and moroseness'.[29] The high hills promote high spirits and good feelings towards each other. They enlarge and strengthen us. However often we join them, we will never tire of them. However familiar they become, they will always provide us with something new. They give us a rich succession of memorable days, that runs through our lives like an unfolding dream.

In these two eyes
that search the splendour of the earth, and seek
the sombre mysteries on plain and peak,
all vision wakes and dies.
With these my ears
that listen for the sound of lakes asleep
and love the larger rumour from the deep,
the eternal hears: –
For all of beauty that this life can give
lives only while I live;
and with the light my hurried vision lends
all beauty ends.

GEOFFREY WINTHROP YOUNG

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GLOSSARY

CRUX The hardest part of a climb, or of a section of a climb, usually consisting of a sequence of hard moves.

E POINTS A system used by some climbers whereby the success of a day's climbing is measured by the aggregate grade of the Extreme routes climbed. E.g. one E4, two E3's, and one E2 will give a score of twelve 'E points'. (See also 'British Rockclimbing Grades', below.)

MUNRO A summit in the British Isles that exceeds 3,000 feet above sea level. Named after Hugh T. Munro who, in 1891, first listed all the 3,000 foot peaks in Scotland, and classified them into 'tops' and 'mountains'.

MUNRO-BAGGER A hillwalker who is only interested in climbing Munros, the ultimate aim being to climb all 603 such tops in Britain and Ireland.

BRITISH ROCKCLIMBING GRADES

In ascending order of difficulty:

Moderate
Difficult (Diff)
Very Difficult (V.Diff)
Severe
Very Severe (V.S.)
Hard Very Severe (Hard V.S.), and
Extremely Severe, which is now itself divided into El to E9.
(Before 1970, the top standard was about E3.)

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