

As a nine year old in 1939 evacuation from London was arranged to relations in Lincoln famous for it's 'STEEP HILL' leading up to the Cathedral, whose beacon was also the marker for the bombers from Lincolnshire airfields to set out on their nightly raids.

At age 13 after D-Day a return to suburbia in Surrey with 'BOX HILL' accessible by cycle. Also a continued experience of bombing, this time the incoming V1 Flying bombs. Gave me my first experience of the sky at night looking up through the tileless roof after one very close explosion removed much of the house Sleeping under the stars was never the same again.

At age 18 the driving hill start test was on 'REIGATE HILL'. Then to Stafford as an English Electric apprentice where Hills were called Banks which was very confusing when asking directions.

As an enthusiastic member of the Scouts enquiries brought me into the 11th Stafford where Larry Lambe was one of the leaders who, within days, tracked me down in the training school with a gruff "Coming Climbing this weekend?" – I had absolutely no idea what he was talking about! Even more so as he went on to talk about Hills and Mountains!

But I took up the offer and started a lifelong friendship with Larry and the outdoor life for which he gave such encouragement.

So off I was taken to the Roaches. Sounds easy, but this 1948 – Post-war car manufacture had yet to take off so travel for impoverished apprentices was on foot, cycle, occasional public transport, and most frequently hitchhiking.

The first leg started Friday finishing time from the Works Gate waiting along with dozens of workers all heading home to the Potteries. Lorries going through the potteries would stop, 30 to 40 would climb onto the empty flatbed and off we go being dropped off in Hanley area after a collection for the driver.

Then a bus to Leek with a walk, and occasional lift to the Roaches arriving late at night and by torchlight a path to Wall End Farm's loft above the Cowshed our accommodation for the two nights. The good lady had a continuous supply of tea for sale, but I guess any other food we cooked on portable mini primus stoves under the rocks.

And two days of climbing! My first experience with the unexpected height exposure proved uniquely enjoyable. Use of the climbing rope was helped by the Scouting background, and my long arm reach made finding handholds easier. I was hooked and spent many weekends with Larry setting out on the after work lorry and steadily tackling harder climbs, though avoiding those frightening ones ending in overhangs even though one saw the experts making them look so easy.

At the same time Larry introduced me to the 'Snowdon Scout Group'. This had been established by the Reverend J. H. Williams, Vicar of Llanberris, who had been a Chaplain in the S A S during the war, and who wanted to encourage young people to safely enjoy the Mountains. Members had use of outbuildings at the Rectory. New arrivals, like me, brought by an existing member were taken under their guidance onto all the major peaks. When the Reverend was satisfied you knew the area you would be presented with a "Snowdon Group" name tag for sowing onto ones Scout shirt.

This was another weekend activity. Typically leave after work Friday on the "Potteries lorry" and then hitch-hike via Chester along the North Wales coast road towards Caernarfon and Llanberis. The ability to hitch-hike was unbelievable. So few people owned cars that it appeared they felt an obligation to give lifts to anyone with thumb raised. Also most lorries were locally owned with drivers who were happy to take us on board, frequently in the cab with them for an extended conversation. This was sufficiently reliable that we would expect to reach just past Rhyl on the Friday and reach the Rectory mid morning.

On arrival a quick unpacking and out again with a favourite being up Snowdon, over Crib Goch and return down the Pass. Other visits would take us onto Glyder Fawr and Glyder Fach. Sunday would encompass a shorter walk before returning to Stafford by the A5 and goodness of drivers.

At the same time 1948 to 1951 there was a growing number with similar outdoor interests leading to individuals organising group events. The idea of a more formalised arrangement matured in 1952 with the creation of The Mountain Club. I was studying in London at the time and returned to Stafford shortly after to learn of its existence and promptly joined, but sadly missed being one of the founder members.

We now had well notified club Meets organised by members covering locations near and far. The earliest distant one that stays in my memory was to the Cairngorms and was my introduction to Scotland. Leaving Stafford on the overnight sleeper to Inverness which passed through some magnificent scenery as we awoke. Then a lorry to take us to the campsite. These were hills beyond belief and the lower slopes proved more than adequate for their enjoyment!

Looking through old photographs 1955 was a very good year. In March there was the opening after much remedial work of Tyn-y-Twll, the first Club cottage in the Cowarch valley. The next Month the Club's first overseas trip which was to the Mourne Mountains. And in November the first Annual Dinner located away from Stafford at the Buckley Arms Hotel in Dinas Mawddwy which, as club secretary, I was rather proud to have organised.

Although, only on a three year tenancy' having the cottage established the Cowarch Valley and surrounding hills as the Mountain club's country home. As well as the normal walking and climbing other special gatherings took place such as one year members were invited to join myself and others to celebrate our July birthdays. It is interesting to see that this continues to happen in Bryn Hafod, though, instead of carefree singles, the bookings are from their extended families having a get-together.

Work pressures and job changes combined with advancing years steadily reduced my enjoyment of hills to a more passive role admiring from the comfort of the car. Most climbing took place around the cottage during its building to get to good vantage points for filming the work as it progressed. This covered from the preparation of foundations in 1959 to the opening in 1965 and has been converted from film to the DVD of which copies are currently available.

So now to retirement facing the challenge of the mountainous hill from our home on Castlefields up to Stafford's landmark Castle done while it can still be managed by Willyum our Cocker Spanie.l

Mike Jahn.
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