

THE PEAKS ABOUT SLOGEN.

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(Read before the Alpine Club, April 3, 1917.)

IF the headquarters of this Club were fixed much North of Trent, I should scarcely dare to stand up and talk about Norway on the strength of one short climbing visit now more than eight years away. Over all that North country Slingsby throws his shadow from the High Craven, and the fervent climbing youth of those parts, who break their milk-teeth on the mill-stone grit of their own hills, are apt to cut their second teeth on the crags of the Jotunheim, and to learn icecraft on the glaciers that come down, glittering and clean, not fouled with Alpine rubble, from the ice-cap of the Jöstedsbrae. They will babble to you of Stagastolstind, the Slingsbybrae, and Ole Berger the guide, as who should say Jungfrau, Mer de Glace, and Melchior Anderegg. It is because I lived for six years where Slingsby was within reach, Priestman next door, and this same fervent youth all around that I was almost compelled to sample Norway. I speak to-night as a Norway taster, not as a Norse expert.

For our sample district we chose the Norangsdal and the peaks about Slogen, chose them on a theory which I believe was sound. One's friends generally said the Jotunheim—Stagastolstind, the Slingsbybrae, and Ole Berger the guide all over again. But fine as that country no doubt is, I could not make out that the crags were much finer than those of Scafell, or the glaciers peculiar in their excellence. Then there was the Jöstedsbrae—essentially Norwegian, a true ice-cap, a thing one cannot see in the Alps; but one could hardly spend a holiday on it. (Besides I had seen it long ago on a previous visit to Norway, before my enlightenment, when I travelled about on fjord steamers and high roads.) More typically Norwegian we thought were the peaks that spring right from the salt water and the glaciers from whose snows you can at times look out to the open sea. So we went to Oie at the foot of Slogen, very ignorant, having read up some climbs of Slingsby's in those parts, but having failed to buy even a map of them in Bergen, where we had counted on getting one. By good luck we found at Oie not only a climbers' book, but Patchell, who has

been in Norway yearly for a quarter of a century or so, and could tell us of every ridge round about, whether anyone had been on it since Slingsby, or whether anyone had been on it at all.

It was Patchell who put us on to the S.W. ridge of the Smorskredtind, the fourth day after our arrival at Oie. We had come overland, driving against salt rain under the terrible cliffs of the Upper Norangsdal, and by the spot where, that very spring, a rock-fall from the western side had filled the valley with rubble and giant fragments for nearly a quarter of a mile, and had dammed up the river into a small lake. For two days it rained on, and we were cooped up under the clouds. On the third Werner and I—Bennett was off colour—went out and began to accustom ourselves to starting for a climb, in a row-boat at 8.15; to these 5000-foot peaks which were neither Lake district hills nor Alps, and yet so like both; and to their glaciers, which were sometimes crossed in five and twenty minutes instead of the two hours which a first glance suggested. We had a very good day making rock-routes of our own on the Gjeithorn and Brekktind; we learnt some geography and had our first taste of a thousand-foot glissade on Norwegian winter snowbeds; we also learnt what happens when you lose your way in the matted scrub of birch and alder on the lower slopes of Norwegian mountains; but it was not the sort of day one can well describe.

The Smorskredtind came after it. It is Baedeker himself who says that the Smorskredtind is like the Wetterhorn, and I know what he means. The S.W. ridge, after flattening out, ends in a cliff that breaks away down to the valley. Patchell, if my memory serves me right, knew of only one ascent of this ridge. The ordinary route is by its *vis-à-vis* on the N.E. Both are easy of access from a high valley that lies between the peak and Slogen. Werner and I had seen ours the day before. It turned out quite as good as it looked. Its lower part had a notched edge, so we avoided it by grassy ledges on the S. side, gaining the crest by a long easy chimney which ended at the highest of this group of notches. Then came thirty or forty feet of pretty straight up work, and after that continuous and steep ridge-climbing of the best. Several times it went up so straight that we thought we were getting onto towers and should be forced to descend; but we never were. We only left the ridge once, to turn an obvious tower on cold, wet rocks and up a steep chimney on the N. face. Climbing continued right to the cairn. How long it all was I don't know. I noticed that on these peaks, where it doesn't much matter when you

get on or when you get off, one's watch comes out far less often than it does in the Alps. That day we were out about twelve hours; but this included a descent on the S. side of the mountain, the usual fight with the birches on the lower slopes, and a bathe in the Norangsdal to clean ourselves after the fight, at a point where a twenty-foot block of stone—part of the spring fall—stood on end, like a bit of Stonehenge, between the road and the river.

At the foot of the Norangsfjord a broad easily-sloping fan of ground, with a clear river running through it, and a level E. and W. valley behind, pushes out into the water and catches abundance of sunshine. Dotted about it are the farms of the village of Urke, some dull-red, others white picked out with yellow, or all ochre-yellow, or the silver grey of old weathered wood. Every one is roofed with green sods laid on birch bark. They lie among little oblong fields of oats and barley and potatoes. By the water are the boat-houses and slipways of the amphibious cultivators. Above Urke is the split peak of Saksa, and joined to it by a low saddle a promontory, Leknaes, wooded almost to the top and perhaps 1500 feet above the fjords which it divides. We were there on a hot, still day after the Smorskredtind climb; and on the whole it was the better day of the two. The little fields of the Urke delta were at our feet. All round the ness the 'wrinkled sea crawled' beneath us into the Norangsfjord. The mountains fell away in great sun-lighted cliffs into the water, pale-green in the narrow strip along the shore, blue further out, and wine-dark under cloud at the mouth of each side valley of the Jörundfjord; for every such valley—why I cannot say—had a little cumulus cloud standing sentinel. We lay there a very long time, eating bilberries and drinking in the glory of the summer: afterwards we pulled home content.

The clouds dropped again next day; they lay, close and dark and hot, from about one thousand to two thousand feet above sea level. We pushed up through them to explore the country S. of Jagta and had our reward. The cloud never lifted all day from the fjords and the valleys; but, above, it was amazingly hot on the ridge that runs from Jagta to Riesenaase—the Giant's Nose. On the W., the side of the main fjord, the ridge falls in cliffs for four or five miles, cliffs which are split by tremendous plunging gullies. On the E., the Norangsdal side, a snow-field, or tiny ice-cap, ends in glacier cliffs above the tarns of a high valley of pasture, to which they say the cattle get up by an impossible-looking ravine from the Norangsdal.

Due S. and end on to us, overlooking the pass from the Norangsdal to the Nibbedal, was one of the few peaks which were on our programme, Kvitегgen, the White Edge, a great lumbering mountain nearly six thousand feet high, with a steep eastern face and a long easy snow-covered western slope, which gives it its name; for the snow shows up nearly all the way above the eastern cliffs. We ran down that night through the cloud, determined to take Kvitегgen next.

It is eight or nine miles only up the Norangsdal to the inn on the hause, Fibelstadhaugen; but we made a day of it. For one thing we had come down the valley in rain, and now it was in sunshine, after midday at any rate. The cloud began to break up when we were under the cliff of Staven—a cliff of four or five thousand feet. We sat to watch it clear. The sun was behind Staven, and he threw a vast indigo shadow far into the mist. The mist, thinning now, was invisible in the shadow of the cliff; but at the top you saw it blowing out into sunshine, seemingly from nowhere, across a line ruled in the sky. A curious sight. Before we moved on, a few wisps and belts of cloud were all that remained, and we saw the upper pyramid of the Smorskredtind behind and the crested mass of Kvitегgen ahead.

At Fibelstadhaugen, which is twelve hundred feet above the sea, one felt as one feels in a high *châlet* after a close Alpine valley. A real drawback to this sea-board climbing in Norway is the moist clinging air of the fjords. Your clothes are always wet, and the drying arrangements at Oie anyhow are not equal to those of Wastdalehead. So Alpine did we feel, that we got off at 6 A.M. in the shadow, to climb the big N.E. buttress that comes down from the corner of Kvitегgen to the pass, as Slingsby, our master, had climbed it and no one else much so far as we knew. The ordinary route is up some steep rotten gullies on the N. end of Kvitегgen's ungainly bulk. The ridge route is certainly the only way for climbers and is not particularly stiff. Once or twice we were held up and, like Slingsby, we failed to climb the last hundred feet or so direct. We had most difficulty in getting onto the rock ridge at its foot, where it springs off a big green buttress. Our troubles were what you might call Lliwedd troubles—slab, mossy gullies, and ledges covered with bilberry wire and juniper. Above, there were good chimneys and plenty of steep places; but I do not recall any serious check on the upper, and most consistently steep, part of the ridge. On our left, imbedded in the mountain face, were two or three scraps of corrie glacier, one above another, which sent

down at intervals ice avalanches that ended in clouds of ice spray. They were very close, but we were always out of harm's way on the crest. We came in time to the foot of the last step. Its N. side was continuous with the great N. precipice of Kviteggen, which had long been on our right—very unattractive. Its E. side, its front, had a possible crack; but the whole mass bulged out just at the wrong place, say sixteen feet up. We skirmished on it a bit, and then moved away left and a little down, on the face, until we came to a point where the final rampart was broken and we could force our way up. The notes in my journal, I find, suggest analogies from the cliffs of Scafell; but as this is not the Climbers' Club I will not press them.'

Early next day we were back at Oie, and we caught the afternoon boat for Standal on the Jörundfjord, an attractive village among meadows and orchards of cherry trees. Twelve hundred feet above it, and not more than two miles inland, is the watershed, on a heather moor with tarns. Thence a long easy open valley and a good high road run down S.W. to sea-level and another system of fjords. Some miles down, when you have left the heather and got to the silver birches and the meadows again, on a well-tilled knoll is the highest farm, Kolaas, which will put up travellers and give them what food it has. Patchell had told us of a turreted and unclimbed ridge on the Kolaastind above it, and of the hospitality of old Nils Kolaas and his son Ingebrit Nilsson, to whom we had introductions.

So at eight in the morning—your Norseman is not an early riser: he sits up too late in summer—we were off up the road again. When the moor began we turned left on cattle tracks into a big corrie, round which sweeps a ridge of fantastic pinnacles with the Kolaastind on the right—the East. As we came into the corrie—it is paved with great rough slabs, over which poured many streams from the snow above—we prospected our ridge, and guessed that the main trouble would be a final notch and the tower of the actual peak beyond. It was. We were to attack from a lower notch between the last of the pinnacles and the ridge foot. We got there up a chimney at 10.50, and at 11.30, after lunch, the attack began. I started up a scoop in the end of the ridge, climbed some fifty feet, and came down because the rocks were rotten. Trying again a few yards to the right, we avoided the bad rocks, but were held up by a slabby pinnacle on the ridge itself. So we struck along ledges on the S. face and then turned straight

up it, the wall steepening as we went. It was all very like the opener parts of the face of the Pillar in Ennerdale; and, as there were no chimneys, would have been unclimbable—to us at any-rate—had not the handholds been well cut in owing to the lie of the rock. We spent an hour and a half on 350 feet, and were not sorry when we came once more to the ridge, where we expected easier work. But that also went slowly, and we got up less than 150 feet in the next hour. At the hour's end we were on a tower that dropped forty feet sheer to the final notch that we had marked from below. Across the notch, quite close and perhaps 200 feet above us, was a second tower, not jagged like the one on which we stood, but steep, slabby, rounded. We believed it to be the peak, and in fact it was, but we could see no way of attack, and no obvious way into the notch; for we did not carry pitons and things. I have often in imagination since fancied that there were ways and I expect there are; but that day we were unanimous against the assault.

We made a cairn and turned back. Somehow we did not want to descend the face, but tried one of a series of immensely long gullies whose heads ran up towards our ridge on the N., or unknown side, gullies which looked as if they would go. But the one we chose was hard to get into. You couldn't get in at the top because the ridge overhung. The sides too were steep. We dropped a little on a buttress between our gully and the next, and sent Werner down the wall on a hundred feet of rope to look about him. It was quite practicable, but another hour had gone before we were all at the bottom. We began to go down our gully on snow-slopes and over rock pitches. After a time the mist fell and into the mist the gully-floor broke away in a steep, impossible drop. This was depressing. However the gully was not walled in here so formidably as it had been; we broke out on our left and got without much trouble into the parallel gully beyond. In turn it also narrowed, between cliffs. There seemed an endless series of steep, wet pitches, all requiring care, though none really difficult. At the top of each I peered, rather anxiously I own, over into the fog, to see if the gully-floor continued at a possible angle below. It did. At last the walls splayed out, and we came onto a broken grassy hillside, after more than four hours, and between two and three thousand feet descent, in that pair of gullies. Their foot was not much more than an hour from Kolaas—that is an advantage of these low but respectable peaks—so that having started at eight in the morning we were home by eight at night.

Bennett stood out for a second attack on the Kolaastind, from its more accessible E. side, where it maintains an attractive little glacier, in a second corrie between itself and the Sætertind. So we took it on our way back to Standal next day. The route is described, not with guide-book precision, by Slingsby. (It is one of the many advantages of following Slingsby that you always know when to expect a good climb, but you also know that your climb will not be made fool-proof by too many literary or diagrammatic signposts.) It was a most beautiful climb. We lost our way a bit in the cloud and among the bilberries before noon; but by 2.45 we had crossed the glacier, met and defeated quite a spirited schrund, and cut a hundred and fifty steps in the snow above, before we could drop the adze. Once on top we went to look at yesterday's ridge. A full 200 feet below and not 30 away, on the horizontal, was that last notch; beyond, on its further side, our cairn; to the right our whole gully route, clearly mapped below, and now in sunshine.

That was the technical interest. But the real joy of the place was to look out over the foreground of rippled snow, set in rock bastions and turrets, westward, to where the sea isles and skerries lay in the quiet water. We had come for that and we had got it, with plenty of good climbing thrown in.

All this time we had never climbed Slogen himself. There are three routes to Slogen. One falls in broken cliffs and interminable slabs the whole five thousand two hundred and odd feet into the fjord. Raeburn, I understand, leads up that way; possibly also a few such Norsemen as Rubenson; not many other people. Another is by an easy shoulder on the Norangsdal side, screes, a snow-field, and some final rocks; that way those go who want the view only. The third side is far from Oie. Like most things in Norway, Slingsby invented it. You row down the fjord in the morning, to get round Klokseggen, the big wall which runs from the peak along the waterside for miles, and you land about breakfast time—English breakfast time—at Urke. In our case it was at 8.40 on a cloudy Monday morning, August 24. You go up round the end of Klokseggen, through the birches and alders, into an open heather-scented valley—the Langesæterdal—which runs almost parallel to the fjord, but behind Klokseggen. The cone of Slogen is at its right-hand top corner, so to speak. For two hours that day it was hidden by a cloud roof; but by 11.30 the cloud had gone, and we were on the screes, at 3300 feet. There was no mistaking the big gully which was to take us to the Skar—the col between Slogen and the Klokseggen wall. Its snow fan ran out over the stones, and more than a thousand feet up on the skyline to its

left were the rocks which Slingsby calls 'the man and monkey.' For once a fanciful name was justified. They were quite unmistakable. We got into the gully at 12.10 and out of it at 2.15. It is a full thousand feet high, very steep, but not—as we found it—at all difficult. We could not identify a certain big chimney pitch of Slingsby's narrative. Probably the snow conditions differed. We found the snow had shrunk, so that you could get up all sorts of stiff bits, very uncomfortably, in the wet and dirty trough between it and the wall. When we got to the top, the Skar, a place where you felt you must at once roll off into the fjord on the other side unless you were careful, we rested and dried for twenty minutes before trying the final peak. We found the names of one Norse party in a bottle there since Slingsby's party of discovery.

For 200 feet or so we worked up easy, mossy ledges; and then more complex climbing began—round the head of an awkward gully and up on ribs and in square, upright corners, or over doubtful blocks. Finally, as the ridges drew together, we crossed to the N.E. ridge and finished on it, steeper and steeper, until it ended in a forty-foot edge straight up to the cairn, something between six and seven hundred feet, I should say, from the Skar at the big gully-head. We were an hour and a half at it. A very fine climb, more British than Alpine in flavour, with its lack of glacier, its gully work, and the damp vegetation even of its uppermost rocks. We had hardly got on top and looked across to the Smorskredtind, vague in the mist, and to Jagta rising into a cloud cap, when cloud closed about us also. So there was nothing much to do but run down the easy way to Oie, in time to get a bathe in the fjord before dinner.

That was the end for me. We had only been a fortnight on our climbing ground, but I had to catch the quick boat at Aalesund next day; and I have never been in Norway since. I dropped Bennett and Werner at Standal again. They went to stay with Ingebrit Nilsson of Kolaas, and tried to learn Norse, catch trout, and shoot ptarmigan. I believe they made some progress except in ptarmigan shooting. Bennett has been back to Norway more than once; he was hung up there for a time in August 1914. If he were here he might add to my story, might even correct it; but he is in a motor-lorry on Greek territory, and the last mountain he wrote to me about was Olympus seen from fifty miles away at dawn. So I must ask you, Sir, to take my reminiscences uncorrected, and the Club to correct them if it likes. We take what we can get of the mountains these days.