

REMINISCENCES OF STORE
SKAGASTØLSTIND

BY EILERT SUNDT

WHEN, on the 6th of August 1956, I stood in good company on the summit of Store Skagastølstind, 57 years and 15 days had elapsed since my first ascent of that mountain, and memories came to me of the thirty-five ascents I had made during that long spell of years and of the many interesting people who had been my companions, too many of whom have since passed away.

Till late in my schooldays, Store Skagastølstind enjoyed a tremendous fame in Norway, thanks to the accounts of Slingsby's sensational solitary first ascent of the mountain in 1876, and of Harald Petersen's almost equally famous second ascent, also solitary, in 1878, and of the very few ascents during the following two decades. As late as in 1899, 'Storen' had only been ascended thirty-three times in all, and those who had been on the summit were looked upon with a respect most stimulating to youthful ambition.

My opportunity came in 1899. With two friends of about the same age I arrived one day in July of that year at the Skjolden farm of Torgeir Sulheim, one of the famous guides of the age. At supper-time we met a fellow-countryman who told us he planned to climb Store Skagastølstind with his son, a boy hardly fourteen years of age. On declaring that we had come there for the same purpose, he suggested that we should join hands with him, a proposition we graciously accepted, on condition that he, whose stoutness made him appear poorly fit for tough physical efforts and who, besides, was to bring with him a minor (compared to us, who might be some four or five years older), agreed to pay two-thirds of the guides' fees, leaving one-third to be split between the three of us—the maximum we could anyway afford to pay.

We started from Turtagrø early one morning with Ole Berge and Per Bjerck as guides, and with all the ceremony customary there in those days. Ole's leave-taking of his wife and his children was such as to give one the impression it was the last time he expected to see them. The effect was as intended. We started with our hearts beating, accompanied by expressions of admiration and of warning from those left behind.

Walking in single file, we arrived in due course at the stone hut on Bandet where, after a prolonged rest for lunch, the ropes were put on. The ledge below Heftye's Gully was reached without any particular difficulties, but there an incident occurred which no one had reckoned

with. Overwhelmed by the surroundings, particularly by the precipices overhanging the Slingsby glacier, our benefactor declared : 'So far, but no farther.' A most depressing statement, for neither would it be possible for us three ambitious youngsters to reach the summit alone, nor could we afford to pay the guides a penny more than we had agreed to. This was apparently instantly understood by good old Ole, who was in no mood to miss such a good day's income. He simply appeared to have heard nothing and quietly began to climb the gully, after a most significant nod to Per. As soon as Ole was safely anchored at the top of the gully, Per ordered our reluctant friend to follow. By the efforts of Per from below, and by the aid of the rope from above, the victim was finally got up and into the gully, where it must have appeared safest to him to rely on the rope and to proceed upwards. For a long time we heard scratchings, mingled with groans and protests, but at long last a faint shout of triumph sounded down to us from above, and we knew our turn had come. The incident had worked on our nerves, so we were no longer too cocky ourselves ; but once under way, things went more easily than we had feared.

The last part of the ascent up to the summit offered no difficulties to anyone, so finally we found ourselves surrounding the cairn, celebrating the thirty-fourth ascent of the mountain, with a fascinating feeling of being masters of the world.

A few comical incidents occurred during the descent, which took its time, but everything went well, and in due course we made our re-entry at Turtagrø, the colours dipping and greeted like heroes by the small crowd there gathered, as was customary at that mountain inn in the early days of climbing in Norway.

The following summer, that of 1900, I was again at Turtagrø without other special plans than to get as much climbing as circumstances and my limited means would permit, the first days being spent traversing the easiest ridges, mostly by myself. Then, one night, Turtagrø was honoured by the arrival of a party of alpine celebrities : Wm. Cecil Slingsby, G. W. Baker, Howard Priestman and Miss Therese Bertheau, who had been climbing together, earlier that summer, in Søndmør and in Nordfjord. Slingsby, who had come to Norway that year for the purpose of trying to force his way up from the 'V'-gap, the missing link which would permit a continuous traverse of the entire Skagastøl ridge from north to south, had brought with him Elias Hogrenning, a guide from Nordfjord.

The next few days were rainy and cold, obliging everybody to remain indoors, which under the primitive conditions at Turtagrø at that time, brought the guests there in close touch with each other, resulting in a very merry party. Slingsby, who in the meantime must have noticed my juvenile ambition to become a mountaineer, made me one day

extremely happy and proud by inviting me to take part in the expedition he had in view. With Baker and Priestman, and with the two guides Ole Berge and Hogrenning, we were therefore a party of six who made our way up the slopes of Nordre, as soon as a fine morning permitted a start.

On the ridge between that summit and Nebbet, deep new-fallen snow was encountered, and it was deeper still at the bottom of the 'V'-gap, from where we should have to tackle the steep wall up to Mellemste. The wet snow made everything so slippery, that it soon became evident that the attempt had to be abandoned for that day. The weather in itself was fine, so on our return to the ridge between Nebbet and Nordre, Slingsby suggested we should try to descend directly to the Styggedals glacier, a route never tried before and hardly repeated since. Priestman preferred to refrain from this, so returned to Turtagrø by the usual route, accompanied by Ole.

The rest of us embarked upon the descent and met with no difficulties till we reached the bergschrund between the rocks and the upper spur of the Styggedals glacier, too wide to be jumped and with no bridges in sight. We managed to get across and down some steep slabs to the north, and so onto the glacier, the descent of which was accomplished while the sun was setting behind the distant Jostedals glacier, leaving a curtain of the most wonderful colours across the horizon.

After a few days of sunshine had improved conditions, Slingsby decided to make a new attempt from the 'V'-gap, and again he was kind enough to invite me to join him. Baker and Priestman had arranged to go on a visit to Skjolden that day, so this time the party consisted of only Slingsby and myself, with Ole Berge and Hogrenning as guides. The result was a most memorable mountaineering adventure, such as only a successful first ascent can be. The weather was perfect, the rocks dry and everyone in the highest spirits. Slingsby was like a child in his enthusiasm and christened the first terrace we reached from the 'V'-gap, 'Ole Berge's Stol' (O.B.'s Chair), in recognition of Ole's gallant leadership up the wall, a name the place has retained ever since.

The remainder of the ascent of Mellemste was easily accomplished, wherewith the entire route to 'Storen' along the ridge from north to south, had been opened for public traffic. It had been the intention of Slingsby to complete the traverse of this long and magnificent ridge that very day, and so re-visit the summit of his great success twenty-four years earlier, but it was already late, so this had to be given up. Instead, we descended from Mellemste by way of 'Hall's Hammer', an interesting route, known only to very few at that time.

On our return to Turtagrø, I met Kristian Tandberg and Henning Tønsberg Senior, who that year were initiated into the great sport of mountaineering and who, after my first three years' absence in South

America, became my companions in many of my mountain expeditions in Norway by summer and winter. Both have passed away, as have our great friends, the Dane Egill Rostrup, the Swede Eric Ullen and the Yorkshireman Jack Procter, all enthusiastic rock-climbers, who frequently came over to Norway to join us during the years before the First World War.

Only twice again did Slingsby revisit the field of his great success in 1876. The first time was in 1908, when he climbed Store Skagastølstind by Vigdal's Gully and descended by Heftye's, and the same summer made the whole traverse of the Skagastøl ridge from Nordre via the 'V'-gap to Mellemste, continuing via Vesle and Mohn's Skar to 'Storen', on which expedition he was accompanied by C. W. Rubenson and a couple of others, including a son of G. W. Baker. The second time was in 1921 when he was 72; accompanied by his daughter (Mrs. G. W. Young) and by Mr. and Mrs. Schjelderup, he intended to repeat the ascent of 'Storen' but was prevented by bad weather, the party turning back at the old Skagastøl hut.

Slingsby's other visits to Norway were mostly spent in the north of the country, where still unexplored mountain districts appealed more strongly to him, and where he took part in a number of first ascents. In 1912 he was with H. Jentoft, Rubenson and Schjelderup when they made the first ascent of Store Strandaatind by the North ridge. In later years we occasionally had the pleasure of seeing him in Oslo, where he used to stay with our mutual friend, the late Judge Ferdinand Schjelderup, and when he was a much venerated guest at meetings of the Norsk Tindeklub, of which he had been an Honorary Member since 1909. Personally I am very happy to have enjoyed Slingsby's friendship and feel particularly grateful to him for having proposed me, in 1918, for membership of the Alpine Club.

In 1899 I found the ascent of Store Skagastølstind rather exacting, and not much less so in 1956, but how different during many of the years between when, as leader, I had felt the thrill of fully commanding the situation, however intricate. How well, for example, do I recall the day I climbed the crack in Patchell's Slab, (a route nowadays seldom used when ascending), and the first time I ascended 'Storen' by the S.W. cliffs, both in 1906, with Jack Procter as an encouraging and reliable second on the rope. Also the day when, with a Hungarian rock-climber unaccustomed to snow, after a successful ascent of the summit, we were descending the snowslopes towards Bandet, and he refused to glissade. I pulled the rope sharply, so that he fell on his back, and we both slid rapidly downwards till, near the bottom, I just as suddenly stopped and made him believe we had been saved by a miracle.

With the passing years, my turn came again to be second or third on the rope, where I enjoyed myself almost as much as in the days of my

youth. My many ascents of 'Storen' and of other summits with Boye Schlytter, Hans Chr. Bugge and others as leaders, will always remain fresh in my memory for the glorious events they were. I especially recall the climbs made with Schlytter during the summer of 1944, when by all sorts of tricks we had managed to make a temporary escape from German-occupied Oslo, and climbed 'Storen' by the N.W. and by the S.W. routes on the same day, and a few weeks later by the formidable South Wall in record time, thanks to weeks of perfectly dry rocks.

Memories of less pleasant ascents of 'Storen' also remain fresh, but of such there have fortunately been very few. One went better than we feared at the time. It happened in 1918, when the late Alf B. Bryn and I, with three others, were repeating the ascent by the N.W. route, of which Bryn and I had made the first complete ascent the preceding year. We had arrived just above the great slabs and were taking a rest on a ledge, enjoying the scenery and a sandwich, when Bryn was suddenly attacked by the Spanish 'flu, a plague-like disease, well-nigh 50 per cent fatal during the short period it lasted in Norway, and which was always, almost instantly, followed by an alarmingly high fever. Being so near the summit of 'Storen', from where the descent would be easier than by returning by the route we had come, we hurried on as fast as our sick friend could possibly be made to move. We finally got him over the summit and down by Heftye's Gully and by the slopes to the stone-hut on Bandet, from where he was assisted down to Turtagrø, with the additional help of friends from there. That no accident happened that day was almost as much of a miracle as that Bryn recovered from his illness, after a fortnight's terrible and painful battle with the furious infection.

About the middle of the 'twenties, a few of us were taught a lesson never to be forgotten. We were to ascend 'Storen', this time also by the N.W. route, and had allowed ourselves to be lured by days of sunshine and dry rocks into sending our nailed boots and our rucksacks on with some boys who were on their way up to Bandet, so that we might climb more comfortably in rubber shoes and with the least possible weight. Half-way up the great slabs, the weather changed suddenly. Heavy rain and sleet swept the slabs, and in no time the rocks were covered by a mush of wet snow, more like soft soap, making progress despairingly slow. Although soaking wet and bitterly cold, we had no alternative but to continue upwards, our slippery rubber shoes prohibiting a retreat down the slabs. We finally reached the summit and got down to Bandet without anything serious happening, but I am perfectly certain no one in the party has ever been on a mountain since without being properly equipped for such an emergency.

Another quite dramatic but entirely successful expedition I had with Per Augdahl in 1934 when, after an interesting ascent in glorious



STORE SKAGASTØLSTIND, NORWAY.

[To face p. 156.]

sunshine of Store Styggedalstind from the north, we were met on the summit by the ugliest thunderstorm I believe I have ever experienced in the mountains. It developed into such a dense fog, accompanied by lightning and rain, that we had to proceed along the ridge to Centraltind and down from that summit and along the ledges to Vesle, depending entirely on the compass, and did not reach Mohn's Gap till about 9 P.M. There we got a particularly heavy downpour of rain, but as the ascent of 'Storen' from there is comparatively easy, we reached the summit all right, but not till it had become almost pitch dark. Thanks to the white traces left on the rocks by the nailed boots of numberless predecessors we succeeded in keeping to the most used route of descent, but little by little these scratches disappeared, so we got into many a blind alley before we reached the hut on Bandet shortly after midnight, and Turtagrø—at last—at about 2 o'clock in the morning.

Since 'Storen' was first climbed by William Cecil Slingsby eighty years ago from Mohn's Gap at the top of the glacier to which his name has been linked and so perpetuated in Norway, a number of new routes to the summit have been found, seven main ones in all, including 'Andrews' Gully', discovered and first climbed by A. W. Andrews in 1899. Of these seven routes, only one, that by the South Wall, first climbed by B. Schlytter, A. Gunneng and O. Furuseth in 1927, is nowadays classified as 'very difficult' by the *Guide to the Horungtinder* issued by Norsk Tindeklub. Two are classified as 'difficult', those by the N.W. Face and by the S.W. cliffs; the other four are classified as 'moderately difficult' only, but they offer good sport, nonetheless.