
RACHEL HEWITT
In Her Nature
Alpinism and Suffragism



Elizabeth Hawkins-Whitshed (1860-1934), better known to posterity as Lizzie Le Blond, first president of the Ladies' Alpine Club, Irish heiress and mountaineering author.

Out of all sports, mountaineering was especially relevant to suffragists' fight for representation; in part because outdoor leisure activities such as hiking were already widely accepted to be fundamentally political pastimes in the context of 'right to roam' campaigns. In a 1908 short story called 'The Suffragette', author Frank Savile made sure that the fictional women's rights activist was a 'lady mountaineer'. Marjorie Milsom thought that early 20th-century female climbers brought to mind 'thoughts of window-breaking suffragettes ... emancipation, in fact – another aspect of the new feminine attack on masculine sanctuaries.' Suffragist mountaineers directly embraced the political symbolism of their sport. In 1909, a group of women ascended Mount Rainier (in the Cascade mountain range of the Pacific Northwest) and placed a 'Votes for Women' pennant at its summit. One of the group's members Cora Smith Eaton, was a founder of the Grand Forks Equal Suffrage Association and treasurer for the Washington Equal Suffrage Association, and when she subsequently climbed Glacier Peak in the same range, she wrote 'Votes for Women' after her name on the register. In 1911, the American mountaineer and suffragist Annie Smith Peck unfurled a yellow 'Votes for Women' banner on the 21,000-foot peak of Nevado Coropuna in Peru, and the following year, Fanny Bullock Workman was photographed holding up a newspaper with a 'Votes for Women' headline on the Siachen glacier in the Himalaya.

Enough members of the Ladies' Alpine Club were ardent suffragists that, in 1909, the British *Votes for Women* newspaper suggested that its membership roster would make a good recruiting ground for militant campaigners. The Club's most prominent mountaineering-suffragists were friends Eva McLaren and Frances Heron-Maxwell. Eva was known to be engaged in 'long and strenuous work for the enfranchisement of women': she served on the central committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage, was a leading member of the Women's Liberal Federation, active in the Union of Practical Suffragists and the Liberal Women's Suffrage Union and, with Frances Heron-Maxwell, she co-founded the Forward Suffrage Union in 1908. Although a few upper-class women were wary of associating themselves with the militant suffragettes who smashed the windows of gentlemen's clubs, the majority of the Ladies' Alpine Club's members were sympathetic to the cause. Early member Violet Roy-Batty served on the ladies' council of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association, which expressed the conviction that women should play a greater part in 'the government of the country'.

Lizzie Le Blond confessed that 'I am not a suffragette, because I lack the courage of my opinions' – but she promised that privately, her views 'entirely coincide with those of the that courageous sisterhood' and that she hoped that, if the suffragists 'make themselves sufficiently unpleasant during a sufficiently long time, they will get [the vote]'. All of the female climbers who comprised the Ladies' Alpine Club had experienced how mountaineering could radicalise women and offer a taste of freedoms that they subsequently wanted to be granted elsewhere. As Mary E Crawford – a member of the

Alpine Club of Canada, president of the Political Equality League in Winnipeg and campaigner for women's rights in the Province of Manitoba – explained in 1909, outdoor leisure helped a woman to 'know herself as never before – physically, mentally, emotionally', to 'gain confidence with every step' and to 'gaze out upon a new world'.

Lizzie spent her middle age with the Ladies' Alpine Club, finding ways to claw back freedoms despite the marginalisation of women in sport and public life that had stolen many of the glorious liberties of her youth. Her final two decades were also seen out in this long-lasting era of male backlash. In those years, Lizzie came to see how her skills in mountaineering were relevant to political issues beyond female suffrage – such as international relations and women's role in global diplomacy.

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