

WATCH ME, I'M AN EXPERT!

It was June 1986. The Munro bagging boom was well under way. I had succumbed after reaching the 100 mark in 1982. It had even encroached on valuable crag-ratting time. I found myself motoring ever further north and west for new 'ticks' instead of grappling with the local outcrops and quarries. Many of the Blairgowrie Hillwalking Club were on the trail as well. Their problem was the Inaccessible Pinnacle in Skye. It rises like a shark's fin above the screes of Sgurr Dearg, and to a non rock-climbing Munro bagger it is about as ominous! To climb it requires the use of a rope and a suitably skilled companion. To get off it requires an abseil. After years of climbing, many abseils, including multiple ones in the Alps and the more awkward corners of Skye and Arran, the club reckoned I would be a reasonable choice as instructor.

So, on a fine night in June an impressively large squad from Blairgowrie arrived at the steep cliffs of Craig a Barns, Dunkeld. We would practice a short abseil, progress to a longer one, probably doing a rock-climb in-between. A clean slab below the main face at Polney Crag was ideal, and I had used it before for the same purpose. Such familiarity is not always an advantage!

Suitably rigged up, with everyone watching intently I said, "this is the part nobody really likes" and leant back from the stance. At that moment the anchor sling gently flicked itself off the boulder and I was, in an instant, depressed! I managed to get my legs under me to avoid falling backwards- that would have led to consequences not for thinking about. I hit the ground with a hefty thud, left foot first, and rolled down a slope of tussocks and boulders, missing the boulders. I got to my feet in a confused mixture of embarrassment and anger and announced, inanely, that I was "all right!" A crescendo of throbbing and pain soon confirmed this to be untrue.

Ian Mitchell, the dentist, cautiously examined the foot, clearly not so quite at ease with this extremity of the body. His "hmmm" seemed in agreement with others that I should get to a casualty department! Strangely, the steep parts of the path

were easy as I swung down using my arms, gibbon-like, with occasional bum slides. On the level bits, Ian gave me a cuddy-back. Rob Robertson gave me a lift to PRI. Doug Rennie, who had since arrived on the scene, not only supervised the roped activities, but also drove my stranded car back to Blairgowrie. A day later I noticed each of my fingertips was crowned with a blister. I had tried to use some extra friction on the way down!

Now, years later, the ankle complains from time to time. Stepping out of bed after a previous long day on the hill sees it a bit reluctant to take the weight! However, the injury hasn't stopped me doing anything I wanted to do, once the acute phase was over. In fact, it was probably a timely reminder to take more care!

I see from the list of Blairgowrie Hillwalking Club Compleaters that the Inn Pinn must have been dealt with safely by many of those present that day! The main memory today is not of the fall or its physical consequences. It is of lying there in the turf and bracken gazing up at the row of concerned faces, realising that almost every niche of Blairgowrie society was represented, and thinking "Oh no! I'll never live this down!"

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