

THE 1948 ULULA TREK REVIEW

(This is a copy of the 1948 Ulula account of the history of Trekking from its early beginnings from Grasmere camp in 1904 to its resumption after the Second World War in 1947.)

These notes are intended to be provocative. It would be unfortunate if the origins of that unique institution School trekking, were to be so clouded by time that it would be impossible to reconstruct the tale with accuracy. To a certain extent this has already happened. Many of those who could speak with authority are dead: many others, though probably still alive, have lost touch with the School. The only authoritative source easily available for a study of trek is Ulula, and Ulula, as will be shown, is not always satisfactory.

Only by gathering together as much information as is possible from the dozens of Old Mancunians who took part in the treks up to, say, 1924, can we guarantee that it will be possible to piece together the story of those early days. It may not be possible, in view of paper difficulties, to publish a memoir at present but any letters containing information or reminiscences, and addressed to Mr. T. M. Stott at School will be preserved until a more opportune moment. The brief account that follows, compiled largely from volumes of Ulula, is intended as an aide-memoire, and an irritant. It is certainly incomplete, probably inaccurate, and it poses more questions than it answers.

That School camping owes its origin to Mr. Paton is undoubted, though it should be noticed that boys from School had been present at earlier H.O.L.C. camps at Penmaenmawr. The first Alderley Camp, in 1904, was a "Cricket Camp". Its personnel consisted largely of members of School cricket teams who had a "festival fortnight."

That same year, however, a camp went to Grasmere, and at the suggestion of Mr., later Dr., T. H. Wells, some members spent nights out of camp, sleeping out in the open, and so being enabled to undertake more ambitious excursions. In 1906 some members of the Alderley camp walked over to Mellor, and spent the night in the H.O.L.C. cottages there. The following year the enthusiastic "Doc." Wells proposed a regular "Route March" from the Grasmere camp, but it was washed out.

So Alderley had the distinction of staging, in 1908, the first route marches. In the first week of the camp some fifteen campers, led by Mr. Wells, marched through Macclesfield, Buxton and Leek. On the organisation of this march, or its duration, Ulula is silent. Tents were taken and carried, as they were in the following week on a march through the Derbyshire hills, enjoyed by forty campers, again led by Mr. Wells. Since the whole expense of these marches was £3 10s. 6d., either they were very short or else most of the food was carried from Alderley. We know that "farmers were most generous in their offers of bread etc., and land whereon to pitch the tents." The rest is silence.

The indefatigable Wells, at the Grasmere camp of the same year, run for the last time by its founder, Mr Varnish, led a Route March lasting from Saturday to Tuesday via Langstrath Beck and Honister to Buttermere; holding there an excursion to Pillar; and returning to Grasmere in one leg on the following day. This little trek was obviously a fairly tough, serious affair. Without such trips the first foreign trek could never have been organised and carried through. But Doc. Wells did not venture abroad (why ?), and since it is to the series of ambitious foreign treks that the institution owes its uniqueness, we must turn to Mr. Paton himself, and his lieutenant, Mr. H. Nicholson, who were, as always, present at Alderley the following year when Wells again led two route marches. Here enters a new element.

There existed in Germany at that time a number of youth and camping associations known by the generic term Wandervögel—Wanderbirds. On July 18th 1909 a party of these "Wanderbirds" came to the School and "were addressed in their native tongue by the High Master." It seems probable that this visit was related in some way to Dr. Neuendorff, formerly a Lektor at the School, and a great enthusiast for camping as he had seen it there at that time. It may be not irrelevant to mention, too, that in 1909-10 the School had visits, and heard lectures from, Sandon Perkins, Grenfell, Shackleton and Scott; it would be odd indeed if some few schoolboys were not filled with wanderlust after such a series of talks.

Be that as it may, on August 6th 1910 two parties, one under Mr. Paton, one under Mr. Nicholson, left for Germany. The division into two parties, effective only after the actual trekking began, was made because it was impossible to obtain food enough for thirty boys in some of the villages visited. The members of the party were boarded out for the night in Frankfurt by the parents of boys of the Musterschule there.

Throughout the holiday the parties were led by German guides. They travelled a good deal by train and boat, but mostly on foot, camping out whenever possible (though apparently deterred on one occasion by a heavy fall of rain) but sometimes buying meals in hotels and cafés.

The Ulula account, too long to be quoted here, cannot be described as a masterpiece of lucidity. Some careful reconstruction will be necessary before it will be possible to draw up the exact itinerary of both parties, though that of Party B seems clear enough. This party went by boat and train down the Rhine, then trekked through the Taunas, returning eventually to Cologne. Some photographs still exist of the party and of some of its equipment, but we should like all the information it is possible to obtain about this, the first real foreign trek. The party, incidentally, were called the Wanderbirds. The name "trek" had not yet been given to this kind of holiday.

Mr. Nicholson and Doc. Wells combined the following year to lead the Three Shires Route March (which became an annual institution) from Alderley, and in that same summer of 1911 the second foreign trek, to the Black Forest, was arranged. This time passage was made by boat from Grimsby to Rotterdam, then the party made its way through Cologne and Heidelberg to Baden-Baden. During the "route march" proper great difficulties were experienced. Food was scarce and, after a day's semi-starvation, at least two days' supplies were always carried. Forest wardens were not pleased to see fires being lit, and in some places there was difficulty with water. Nevertheless, it seems to have been a thoroughly enjoyable affair.

On the return to Frankfurt a meeting was arranged with some of the local Wandervögel, and a joint excursion held. All in all the party walked about 200 miles, camping, except in very bad weather, and covered a further 700 miles by boat and 1000 miles by rail in three and a half weeks. The total cost for a party of twenty was £110 0s. 0d.; each boy was refunded 7s. 3d. at the end of the trip, so the cost per head was £5 2s. 9d. In 1947 each boy was charged £23 for a month's trek in the French Alps.

The development of trek was diverted at this point by the founding of the School Scouts. Mr. Paton was President, and Doc. Wells the Divisional Commander.

The Scoutmaster of Troop 1, Mr. A. H. Hope, organised a foreign trek in 1912—the word trek here appears for the first time in an Ulula account—an ambitious affair from August 1st to September 15th, costing each boy 42 guineas! The route was St. Malo, Chartres, train to Versailles, Paris, train to Orleans, the Loire Valley, Rennes, St. Malo. Many nights were spent under shelter and many meals were bought, but nonetheless it was a courageous effort. Most of the party were Scouts, but one or two "civilians" went along. The Scouts, indeed, took over many of the camping activities—camping at November half-term, trekking in Belgium at Easter; in August there were two Irish treks, one in Donegal, one in the South West. The only non-Scout trekking of the year was from Grasmere to Buttermere and Patterdale. The School was now thoroughly bitten by the camping and trekking bug, and in 1913 a camp was held at Christmas, and a trek in February, 1914, at half-term!

Up till the outbreak of the war Scouting camps and treks were predominant, then the war put an end to any ambitious trekking, though many camps were held.

In 1919 our story both ends and begins. Ends because it is already over-long for the severely rationed columns of Ulula; begins because in 1919 Mr. H. Green organised a trek in North Wales, the first of that series of Lob-Green treks that continued till 1939. During all this time there were many other treks organised by members of the Staff—many very excellent treks, and no attempt is made to disparage them. But it is true to say that when an M.G.S. boy in those years spoke of going "on trek" he meant with Messrs. Lob and Green. There is by no means sufficient information available about these treks. Ulula, bewildered by the task of having to report a dozen or more camps in one issue, in many years dismisses the whole lot in a couple of paragraphs. The 1920 trek in Brittany is excellently reported by—we presume—Mr. Louis Golding. But by 1922 we are down to "A Scotch trek was conducted by Messrs. Green, Lob, Heathcote, Smith and Radford."

Finally, it must be recorded that trek, interrupted by the second world war, began again in Scotland in 1946. Undeterred by rationing and by the lack of experienced trekkers, Mr. J. Lingard took unto himself the robes of Lob and Green, and in 1947 ventured abroad into the more profound difficulties of the French rationing system. Trek seems as near immortal as most things in this world, but man and man's memory—mortal indeed. So it comes about that we should like to have all the information you possess about trek. Slides from 1926 onwards exist at School. Earlier photographs are scarce. But we shall be grateful for any crumb of information, so that trek and its origins may be remembered in years to come.

S. D. M.