

Cromwell Cottage

Titch

n. Winchester.

also wrote 17.10.92.

Postmark 4.11.88.

Sept. 8/11/88.

↳ Dear David

I must first apologise to the delay in replying to your letter; I was away on a holiday on canals (Via Didsbury and Manchester and Chester) and found your letter waiting for me when I arrived home.

I am glad that both plagues are in good condition.

I shall be pleased to tell you what happened on that walk - I shall never forget - Sometimes - quite often - I live it over again whilst lying in bed.

I remember as if it was yesterday - Gordon, Michael and I having a late breakfast - together in Rosthwaite (in ROSE Cottage).

The rest of the party had left early on a long walk. Gordon opted for an easier shorter trip for the first day, and suggested that we climb Glaramara and Allen Crags, neither of which I had been on before.

He said that there were 5 summit cairns on Glaramara, and that it would be good practice to find them all in the thick mist that prevailed

There was some snow on the hills which was thawing rapidly and creating fog.

We managed to locate all the summits which pleased him, and finally descended Allen Crags in wet sloppy snow and down Langstrath Dale keeping Langstrath Beck on our left.

I think it is important here to note that Gordon showed no signs of being tired - in fact he walked in front of us, and on one occasion stopped and asked if he was going too fast for us.

As we got further down Langstrath, it was obvious that the river had become a raging

torrent, and we stopped to look at our maps and to locate the bridge before it went dark. We expected to reach the junction of Langstrath and Greenup Gill at about 4pm.

What happened next was vital and tragic! I had pulled my map out, and opened it up when Gordon said "We'll use mine as it's a brand new one". Sad to say, if I had got there first and Gordon had not opened his, he would probably be alive today.

The new map had wrongly placed the bridge over Greenup Gill instead of Langstrath.

To make matters worse, when we reached the junction of the two streams, and found the remnants of a bridge, we naturally thought it had just been washed away.

Gordon shone his torch on it, and in handing it to me, we both slipped and the torch went out. I remember Gordon saying "Now we're in the Basket!"

So there we were - down in the valley, not far from our hotel, but cut off by two raging torrents.

We did not treat the situation lightly.
It was the darkest night I ever remember.
All we could see was a glint on the water and
the noise was horrific - You could not have
lived if you'd fallen into the stream.

We were faced with two alternatives -
Either a long retreat back to where we had
come from, or an ascent of Greenup Gill; and
we opted for the latter.

But first, I suggested that I should
retreat a little way back up hangstrath to
see if I could possibly find another bridge.

I crawled along the bank, feeling my way
prodding with an Axe - It was so dark,
I was fearful of falling into the stream.

I felt my way round what I thought
was a Sheep Pen - It was in fact - the entrance
to a bridge - It doesn't bear thinking about!

I returned to the others and Gordon told
me he had just fallen into a stream and was

Soaked with icy cold water.

From now on, he began to show evidence of collapse. We felt our way over 3 walls and he sat down and thought he would have a cigarette. Unfortunately although we had 2 boxes of matches - they were all wet.

At this point I suggested that Gordon and Michael should stay put, and that I would climb to the top of the gill and get help; but Gordon came out with a remark that astonished me — He said "If I stay here, I shall die"

I have lived this moment again and again in my dreams, and I think that Gordon was right — He would have died and possibly Michael too in view of his later collapse. I would have had difficulty in fording the stream unaided and it would seem as if I had neglected them both.

The rest of story was like a nightmare. I walked at times in front, feeling my way with an Ice Axe to prevent us from constantly falling over boulders.

We lost all count of time - Michael had the most difficult job of all in Supporting Gordon.

We tried carrying him, an ice axe held between us.

We managed at one point to cross the stream which ~~had~~ had split into two parts but we got very wet and unable to cross the second half.

We considered at one place, climbing on to a tree which crossed over the stream but quickly realised that Gordon would have fallen in and been drowned.

At one moment whilst we were resting Michael + Gordon shouted lights! Team see lights! They are coming to rescue us.

But I knew that this wasn't so, but just cars motoring through the valley.

At one point, Gordon said he knew he was dying but said "It's funny, I don't seem to mind".

He then went on to say "If we get out of this we'll be life long friends".

Then soon after, the darkness went, and we found ourselves on a plateau over which the stream was still flowing swiftly.

Michael got a piece of timber off a fence and with this, I held one end, and he got over the stream holding on to the other.

We then got Gordon over, by laying him over the pole. He slipped into the water on the far side, and Michael managed to push him out and climb out after him. I came over holding on to my end.

We were now on a pathway leading down to Stanthwaite but Michael now began to collapse.

I carried Gordon (Tiernan's lift) over my left shoulder and held Michael up with my right hand - but Michael would fall and drag me and Gordon down.

I could feel Gordon stiffen up on my shoulder and knew he was going to die - I then put him under the big boulder that you have seen - I put some extra clothing off Michael on to him and Michael's balaclava helmet.

I then got Michael down a little further, and then put him in a Sheep Pen to try to stop him falling into the river.

I then ran down to slopes to Stonethwaite Knocked on the door of the farm house and threw stones at the window but couldn't get a response, so I ran on to Rossthwaite and got everybody up (There were 3 Doctors in the party).

One man (Philip Brookbank) went ahead passed Michael who was delicious, and by arrangement

with me, flashed his torch when he had found the Rock where Gordon was which was level with a 3rd wall on the fell side.

I went back with the rescue party but knew it was hopeless, and Brockbank persuaded me to return back to the hotel with him.

Michael was taken back by Professor Mordall and his son and put in a hot bath.

He woke me up during the night and said "It's a funny thing, but I can't remember going to bed last night."

I attended the Inquest, and told them the story of what had happened.

They asked me, what did I think was the cause of death; and I said he died because he fell into an icy cold stream.

They said ~~me~~ No - he must have had a bad heart - which of course was nonsense.

In retrospect, I think these accidents often

Start with small beginnings and progress from there.

For example Snow (Melting) → Mist → ~~Death~~
→ Dark Night → Map Error - Wrong Bridge
→ Broken Task - Fall into Cold Stream

Nobody knew anything about Hypothermia at the time when Gordon died which is rather surprising when I look back on some accidents which have occurred.

- ① I remember reading of 2 girls being found dead on the Black Sail Pass and nobody seemed to know what had occurred - It was very cold They were probably dressed in the wrong clothes
- ② 3 Treadermen died whilst descending into the Ogwen Valley in Wales when all three fell through some ice into a tarn
- ③ 2 men recently died whilst climbing Scafell in this idiotic race they have to climb Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike & Snowdon. They were probably ~~wearing~~, wearing running shorts

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I must now apologise for this long
Screed which I have sent you - but it is
a relief not have have it all bottled
up inside me.

I will finish by saying that Gordon
& Michael will always be my friends

Yours

Douglas
