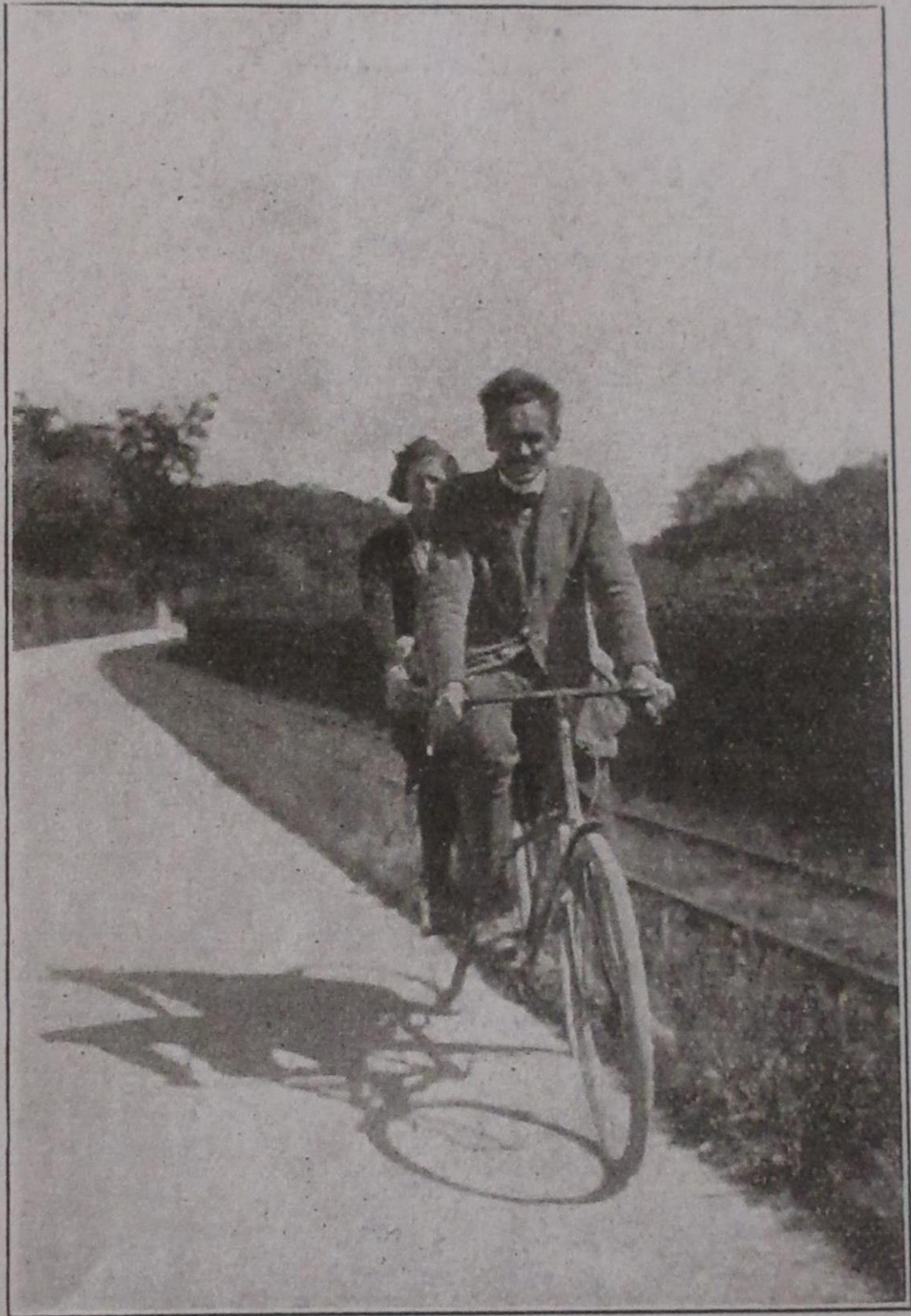


## The Charms of the Push Bike

CYCLISTS' TOURING CLUB'S TRIUMPHANT SURVIVAL.



The President, Mr. W. M. Robinson ("Wayfarer") and his elder daughter.

The multiplicity of motors and motor-cyclists has by no means supplanted the push bike judging by the activity of the *Northamptonshire District Association* of the Cyclists' Touring Club. The President of this Club is Mr .**W.M.Robinson**, whose lectures and writings as "*Wayfarer*" are so popular. In some respects "*Wayfarer*" is a remarkable figure. Occupying an important commercial position in the Midlands, he cycles for pleasure to the extent of some 10,000 miles a year, and finds time to contribute regularly to the journal "Cycling" and also to lecture (on an honorary basis) for the Cyclist Touring Club in all parts of the country. Even during the war, when "*Wayfarer*" saw active service in France, he wrote regularly, in billet, tent or trench, and he beguiled the tedium of eight months in hospital, the result of a severe gun- shot wound, by sending home a steady stream of those essays on wheel topics which have done so much to fan the flame of cycling enthusiasm in this country and to extend the army of cyclists. Coming out as a lecturer a few years ago, "*Wayfarer*" was an instantaneous success. His first effort, "**The Open Road**," has been delivered to fifty crowded (and overcrowded) houses.

At his third appearance in London the would-be audience was so immense that the lecture was given twice over in the same evening, and even then several score of people were turned away.

In March last "*Wayfarer*" faced an audience of practically 2,000 in the Kingsway Hall London, every seat being sold ten days beforehand, and hundreds of applications for tickets having to be refused.

### **Local Cyclist' Country Runs.**

Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays, always find the Northamptonshire Cyclists' Touring Club on the open road. Mr A. *Aston* (Press Secretary) supplies the following interesting notes on their outings.

**"I would rather entreat thy company**

**To see the wonders of the world abroad**

**Than, living dully sluggardized at home,**

**Wear out thy youth in shapeless idleness."**

At this time of the year one feels that they would like to break away from the claims of daily routine, and go out and explore the country, somewhere off the beaten track. To realise this desire there are many ways, but the best way is by cycling.

Pardonable pride is worthy of the C.T.C., when we say that by no other means can you better yourself than by coming along with us. Our cycles give the key, as it

were, to independent travelling. The magic of nature and the ever-beckoning countryside is given freely, and freely taken.

A recent Thursday afternoon (and a grand afternoon too!) found a happy carefree party of cyclists en route for Northey Farm, Bozeat. Getting off the beaten track, and by pleasant roads and by-roads, their cycles carried them to Castle Ashby, where a halt was made to inspect the old church and grounds, and to admire the wonderful scenery.

Remounting their trusty steeds and cycling through more pleasant country until Bozeat was reached, there we had a goodly tea of many varieties, after which cricket and tennis were played until the sun went down, and then lamps were lit and so home again after a very enjoyable afternoon and evening.

Sunday, the morning run to Chipping Norton was hindered somewhat by a strong head wind.

There is a very interesting church at Chipping Norton and some of the members spent a pleasant time inspecting same. A favourable wind prevailed after lunch when the club rode to Aynho for tea. After tea and a smoke they returned home via Brackley, Silverstone and Towcester, all agreeing that the day had been well spent.

A hearty welcome is extended to all cyclists who would care for a run with us.

Other officers of the Association are: Chairman, Mr James E. Scott; Hon. Secretary and Treasurer, *W. Pugh*, 41. Kerr street; Hon. Social Secretary, *K. Barr*; Hon. Press Secretary, Miss *H. Chantrey*.

### **In Praise of the Push Bike.**

Another famous journalist, the late *Mr W.T.Stead*, found in cycling his most healthful relaxation. Many years ago he wrote the following characteristic rhapsody:-

“Although I have been and am zealous in waking up John Bull, I have an affection for old things – old clothes, old shoes, and old cycles. After a time these inanimate things seem to become so imbued with my personality, to cast them on one side seems like sacrificing part of oneself. Especially this is the case with my old cycle. Through what adventures have we not been together since first I called it mine-now nearly seven years ago? Through what vicissitudes of wind and weather have we not passed together, and how many hundreds-nay, even thousands- of miles has it not borne me, if not without accidents, at least with a dumb fidelity that is beyond praise! For a cycle is like a watch, marvellously susceptible to the moods of its owner. Nothing will make me believe that my “old crock,” as it is disrespectfully termed by my own children, has not got a good humoured character, a well-marked idiosyncrasy of its own-capable of sympathising with its rider. It has been to the

wars, and it bears tokens of many hardships. It has new springs, new handle-bars, new tyres, new bell, new pedals; but the dear old thing is still dear, preserves its individuality, and stands at this moment, all scarred and worn, waiting like the steed in the stall at Bramholme Hall, in instant readiness for its rider to mount and sally forth.

“When I ventured to plead the virtues of my old cycle to the head of a great cycle firm he was absolutely unsympathetic. “What, he exclaimed, “riding a cycle seven years old!” Nor did he relax even on hearing that the old creak, my Boer pony of a cycle, that will go anywhere and do anything and carry everything, that never needs grooming and never refuses any mount, no matter how heavy or how inexpert, was made by his firm. In his scornful glance I saw and recognised one of those of whom Tennyson wrote –

**The latest seed of Time,**

**New men, that in the flying of a wheel**

**Cry down the past.**

Nevertheless, as one who finds a cycle an indispensable substitute for a pony, and who rides not merely for amusement but to get over ground speedily and without fatigue, there is a great virtue in an old machine. The better the machine the longer it lasts, and while the racers and smart people may buy a new cycle every year, the great majority of the community in this country at least prefer a bicycle warranted to wear well and to last for ever, and need no incessant cleaning”

(Northampton Independent 1927)

The C.T.C Gazette – March 1927

The annual general meeting of the N.D.A was held at the County Café, Northampton, on January 27<sup>th</sup>, when the following officers were elected:- **President, Mr W.M. Robinson**; hon secretary and treasurer, Mr W.Pugh; hon auditor, Miss A.Chantrey; hon. Press secretary, Miss H Chantrey ; hon consulting solicitor, Mr M Beattie.

WAYFARER - in shorts for the first time, on Buttington Bridge

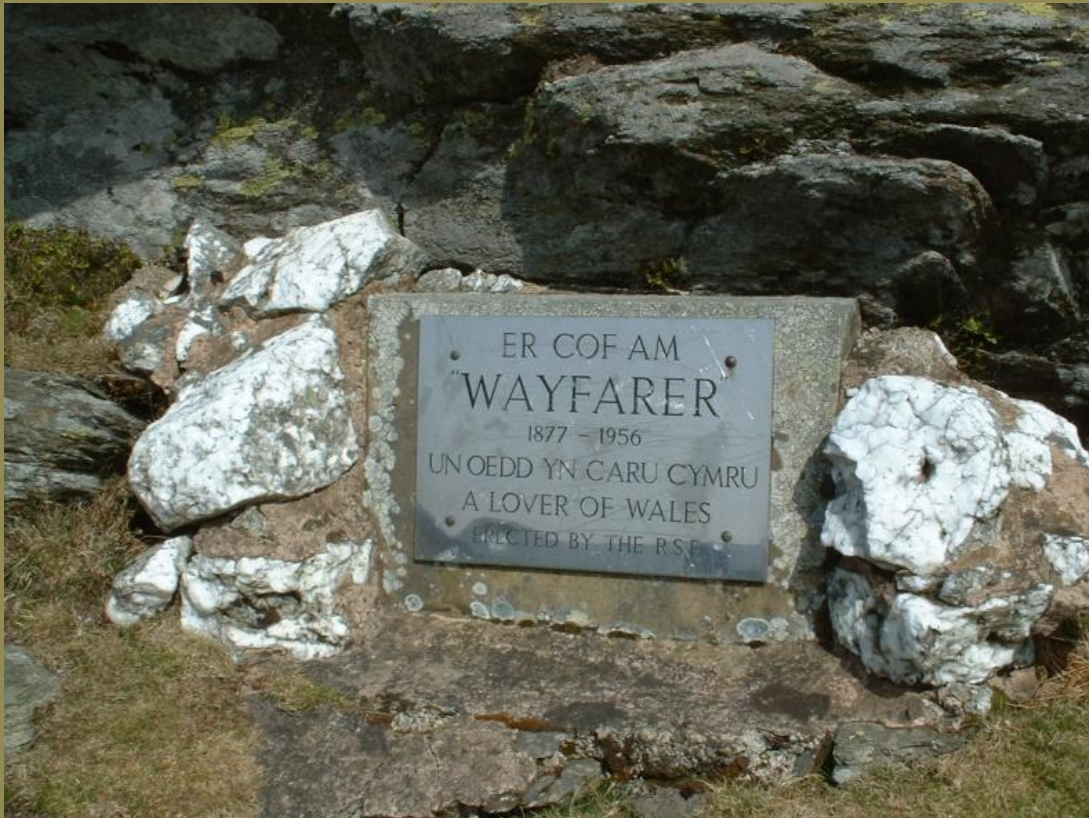


The short obituary in the CTC Gazette (1956). "From 1924 to 1946 he represented various Midland counties on the CTC Council. He became a Vice-President of the CTC in 1945 and also held office locally as President of Birmingham and Midland DA." He died on 17 September 1956. He has a Memorial seat on Meriden Village Green in Warwickshire, designed by John H Hunt, it was set there by CTC in 1959.



Memorial seat and plaque to W.M.Robinson, The Green, Meriden

Also a commemorative plaque at the summit of the Nant Rhyd Wilym pass over the Berwyns - one of Wayfarer's favourite crossings and the subject of one his best known articles, under the title '**Over the Top**'



A Metal Plaque now replaces the stone inscription's. Written in Welsh and English.

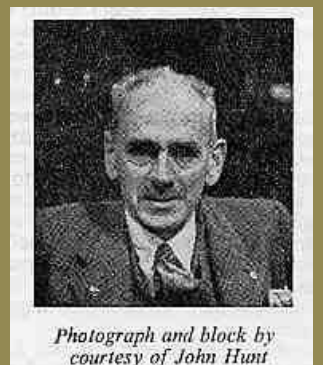
## OVER THE TOP

### **CROSSING THE BERWYN MOUNTAINS IN MARCH**

by "Wayfarer" - (Walter McGregor Robinson)

Reproduced from "CYCLING" dated 8th May, 1919.

Just as I celebrated the departure of "the Season" last September by means of a cycling week-end trip, so I celebrated the end of the "off-season" in March by a cycling (and walking) week-end trip. I am, indeed, a bit of a stickler for observing these feast days and holidays, deeming it fitting that, when the "sensible cycling season" comes to a close, one should note that fact in a proper manner, just as, on the passing of the "off-season" (when "nobody rides for pleasure"), one should do something special to mark the event.



The last Saturday in March witnessed the worst snowstorm of the winter in London, but London has nothing to do with the matter. I rode forth, to attend a club run, under particularly favourable conditions - brilliant sunshine, clear sky, and a very strong helping wind. My destination for tea was 24 miles away~ and, as I was three hours on the way, you may presume either that I am a doddering old man who can do "eight miles per". or that I went Round the World.

The latter guess is the correct one. From high ground on the Welsh marches a comrade and I stopped and looked far across the Cheshire Plain, noting here the bluff headland at Helsby, there the picturesque hill on which rests Beeston Castle, and yonder the snug little city of Chester through which we had ridden an hour before. We noted, too, that here and there earth and sky were connected by a grey smear, and we knew that somebody was "getting it in the neck". Subsequently, at our destination, one or two of those somebodies joined us, disguised as Father Christmas. They reported passing storms of snow and hail, through which they had ridden -a pleasant change from the monotony (?) of sunshine cycling.

So, after tea, four of us set forth for the Glyn Valley, where we intended to lie for the night. We disposed of Wrexham by means of an avoiding loop (of which I wrote something a few months ago), and the poisonous and tramlined main road beyond was similarly dealt with, pleasant lanes carrying us into Ruabon. Here, long past the Defence of the Realm lighting-up time, our lamps were lighted, and thereafter we tumbled down through Newbridge into the Dee Valley and climbed up again to Chirk, where we turned off the Holyhead road and set forth on the last stage of our journey.

The road up the Glyn Valley for the first few miles has been "repaired" in a manner which suggests that the local authority wishes to discourage cycling and motoring visitors, upon whom the prosperity of the district in a measure depends, but with the aid of two acetylene lamps we managed to keep clear of the numerous patches of stones which have been dumped down in higgledy-piggledy fashion. The little River Ceiriog, which keeps close company with the road, intrigued us with its full orchestra, and overhead, in a clear sky, a brave show of amazingly bright stars added to the evening's entertainment. One great star in particular - Venus - attracted our attention. We almost imagined it to be an arc lamp on a near-by hill.

At Glyn the valley turns to the south and the grading of the road is less easy. But on so perfect a night, with one's bed secured in advance, one can afford to be delayed by little hills, and walking proved a pleasant diversion. Then, suddenly, a change came over the scene. The air was full of swirling flakes of snow, which stung our eyes and so -

### **Reduced Visibility**



that down went our pace to little more than that of a pedestrian. A grey pall blotted out the starry display which had rejoiced us coming up the valley, and under these conditions we completed the last few miles of our ride and reached Llanarmon-Dyffryn-Ceiriog.

Rejecting the more elaborate comforts of "the room", we foregathered in front of the roaring fire of the inn kitchen - a kitchen that would delight the heart of Frank Patterson (this was the simultaneous thought of each of us) with its brasses and pewter, its bench, its old table and chairs-and there we supped and yarned. It was the plan of three of us on the morrow to attempt the passage of the Berwyn Mountains - to scale the lofty and rugged barrier which lay between us and the Valley of the Dee - and we were in some doubt as to the feasibility of such a trip so early in the year. Conversation on the subject with our hostess afforded little encouragement or comfort. The crossing was out of the question, we were told. One of the villagers who had attempted it a few days before had had to give it up. During the week a woman, anxious to visit a sick relative in the next valley, had been imprisoned in a snowdrift up the mountain side, and was providentially rescued alive the following day. Our prospects of getting through to Corwen were not very rosy, but we suspended judgment till the morning, and, advancing our watches in accordance with the Summer Time Act (Heavens! "Summer" Time!), we found that it had suddenly become midnight, and went to bed.

The little window of my bedroom stood wide open (which was as it should be) and the snow was blowing in. I knelt on the broad casement and looked out. It was still snowing-but feebly. The stars had asserted themselves again in all their wonder and brightness, and I opined that the storm had nearly passed.

Right opposite to me 1,500 feet of mountain upraised itself, clad in ermine. Immediately above me the inn sign swung to and fro in the wind, droning its changeless song. Below me, just across the road in front of the inn, a small and altogether unimportant tributary of the Ceiriog bustled noisily over the stones and scampered off to "join the brimming river". The track we were to follow crosses the Berwyns at an altitude of some 1,700 feet above sea-level, I reflected. Would our journey to-morrow be possible? Then I remembered that, thanks to our "intelligent anticipation" of an Act of Parliament, this was already to-morrow, and two minutes later I was in bed fast asleep.

It was snowing when I got up at 8 o'clock, but clearly this was a new effort, for no depth of snow lay on the road. I took a walk up the hillside before breakfast and returned to find the Old Gentleman looking over our machines. He at once began to pump his views into me. "I think", he said, "that they're exaggerating the condition of affairs on the mountain. Things aren't as bad as they say .... I think we might venture. What do you say?" I decided that what was good enough for him was good



enough for me, "and anyhow", I added, "it will be an adventure". The Chairman took the same view, and so we sat down to breakfast with our minds made up, our hostess still dwelling on the impossibility of the crossing. "We'll take our chance", I said. "Violets are my favourite flower-and nobody to go into mourning, please".

We had a fair enough start, the sun shining as though it were Midsummer, and the sky of a clear blue so far as we could see it. And thus we were lured to our fate. We rode quietly up the narrow lane that leads to the mountain, following one another in single file, and then, when we were fairly on our way, a shutter slipped over the sun and it commenced to snow heavily! There was but one possible course for us to pursue. We "carried on", hoping that the snow would be nothing more than a passing phase. This proved to be the case, and by the time we became pedestrians the storm had blown over.

We obtained no sight of the path which we were following save at one place where it was a running stream. Sight was there vouchsafed to us simply because snow will not lie on moving water! The first gate we struck was -

### **Amenable to Reason**

and consented to let us through. One other gate we managed to force sufficiently open to pass our machines through, but the rest of them were blocked by deep drifts and immovable, and we had perforce to lift our mounts over and scramble after them. Keeping close to where we thought the track to be, we picked our way as well as possible, now on this side and now on that, sometimes sinking into the snow up to our knees, and occasionally carrying our machines over a drift. The worst disaster that befell us was when the Old Gentleman, who was leading the procession at the time, travelled part of the way through to New South Wales. The snow suddenly gave way, and only the upper half of him remained to us. When he considered that the "joke" had gone far enough - and told us so, with emphasis - we pulled him out again.

In spite of all our difficulties - and it was no easy matter to fight our way through the snow and against the brisk north-wind - we had time to admire the wonderful world in which we found ourselves. Everything - or nearly everything - was pure white, which glistened in the sun and dazzled us. As we neared the ridge we found the wind had a curious effect on the snow, which looked for all the world like the ruffled sand of the sea-shore when the tide goes down. Our crowning joy came on rounding a bend at the highest point. Then we glimpsed that Promised Land. The mountain side fell away and rose again, and in the misty distance we saw the snowy peak of a great fellow thrust up to the clouds. The nearer mountains were wrapped in what looked exactly like satin coverings.

A question arose as to the way, but, on arriving round a shoulder of the hill, we saw far below us the snow posts which were our sufficient guide. Afoot - for cycling was impossible - we reached and passed the posts, and felt that our difficulties were over. Vain thought! Walking was still the order of the day, and further on we came to the worst drift we had yet encountered. Further still, we found that a single wall first and double walls later had acted as a revetment. The snow of probably all the winter had been successfully penned up - the bare mountain side close by indicated whence the supplies had come - and, fortunately for us, had frozen hard. We walked over the snow almost on a level with the top of a six-foot

wall. If the snow had been soft, I think that we would have had to return the way we came, thus acknowledging defeat.

One or two more recalcitrant gates followed, and then we found ourselves below the snowline. A fine view into the Vale of Edeyrnion, with the pleasant village of Llandrillo and stretches of the swollen Dee in sight - a tricky drop (still down the mountain side) into Cynwyd - three miles of main road - Corwen - lunch. Our journey of some ten miles had occupied exactly four hours, and we reached Corwen at 1.30 p.m. as per schedule!

Thus did we three travel over the top of the Berwyn Mountains on the penultimate day of March. At Llanarmon it had been a case of - "Try not the pass,' the old man said", but we decided to chance it - to face such risks as there were, and, in the event, our enterprise, or courage, or folly, or whatever you like to call it, was rewarded.

"But was it worth it?" cries somebody. "And is this your conception of cycling?" asks another. An emphatic affirmative reply is given to both questions. Was it worth it? Well, last August I crossed the Berwyn Mountains by this same route, but in sunshine and shower - chiefly shower, and more than shower. I am glad to have made the crossing in more or less easy and more or less normal conditions, but it is an infinitely more interesting and adventurous trip when done in deep snow. Normally, this journey over the top is well worth doing, for there is much to be seen. When, however, you add snow to the picture, the result beggars description\* and I am more than glad - I count it a privilege - to have crossed the Berwyns on a "white" day in March.

And is this cycling? Per se, possibly not altogether. Some of the way over the mountains was ridden, but for the most part it was a walking expedition, as has been made clear. It should be emphasized, however, that only through the medium of cycling was the outing in any way possible. Prefaced by a 60-mile ride and followed by one of nearly 50 miles. I claimed that, broadly, this is cycling. At least, it is cycling as I understand it, for my conception of the pastime includes much besides main roads and secondary roads and much beyond the propelling of a bicycle. And, though I am almost a "one-pastime man", I fling wide the boundaries of that pastime and include whatever is incidental thereto. Some of the best of cycling would be missed if one always had to be in the saddle or on a hard road.

\* \* \*

Of the return journey I have hardly room to speak. It was an adventure in itself. We ignored the main road along the Vale of Llangollen and travelled on the hill (or mountain) road via Llandegla. Ascending to an altitude of 1,000 feet, and afterwards one of 1,100 feet, we found all the snow we wanted. A wide area around the high-up village of Llandegla was deeply coated with snow. Underneath was a surface of we knew not what - frozen ridges of mud, ice, loose stones. East of Llandegla lies a charming little moor over which the road climbs steeply and drops steeply. That fall was something of a nightmare, and we each had a sufficient ration of front wheel skids to last us for years. In one part the Choirman lured the Old Gentleman on to the "best" part of the road, and the Old Gentleman incontinently lay down in the snow and the Choirman rode over one of the wheels. I myself, when nobody was looking, experienced the pleasure of being flung off - and then I gave an encore. Snow choked the mudguards and clustered round the rims and hubs. Snow thrashed down from the sky and lashed our faces and tried to get down our necks. But an end comes to all

things. We tumbled down-hill to lower levels where the snow had melted as it fell, and, encouraged by the prospect of a very belated tea in Cheshire, began to "get 'em round" to some purpose.

Thus, at the end of the "off-season" for cycling, we went over the top and obtained all our objectives.