

All power to the new 'hippy' generation

NINETEEN 'HIPPIES' sat down to dinner at the end of a stormy day at the Pen-y-Gwryd Hotel at the foot of Snowdon. Most of us were old enough to have lived through the hippy movement of the 1960s – flower power and all that – but the real reason for our gathering was that most of us were modern 'hippies'. In other words we had been subjected to the surgeon's knife and now we wanted to test our new hips on the rugged terrain of Snowdonia.

Since hip replacement – or, in my case, hip re-surfacing – is a common operation these days it may be as well to turn your stomach with the gory details. The surgeon makes an eight-inch incision through the muscles of your buttock and thigh, gets hold of your femur and pulls it out of its socket. Black's medical dictionary describes the femur as 'the bone of the thigh... the longest and strongest bone in the body'. At its upper end it fits into a cup in your pelvis, thus forming your hip joint.

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The conventional operation is for the surgeon to saw off the top of your thigh bone, insert an artificial ball and then shove the whole lot back together and sew it up. I had the new Birmingham operation invented by Mr Derek McMinn which is called re-surfacing and which involves coating the top of the femur and the cup with some sort of metal amalgam.

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months ago my new hip has propelled me up a few Welsh and Scottish hills without the need for any sort of painkiller. I may be 72 full years old but at the present rate of progress and after a few more weeks of gradually increased walking and cycling I will be gambolling about the hills like a fit 40 year old.

Unstoppable

I was by no means the oldest person at our recent dinner. Stan Bradshaw, who some decades ago was one of our great fell runners, has had both his hips done and still walks six miles a day at the age of 89. And John Jackson, a member of the British expedition that climbed Kanchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world, is another Over 80 hippy and he is still visiting his favourite places in the Himalayas and India. Towards the end of our dinner he and I were plotting a trek from Darjeeling to Kanchenjunga for next September.

But first we had to try out our new hips on Esmè's path, named after the campaigner known in her later life as Esmè Kirby. This path takes a low hill route from the National Mountaineering Centre, Plas y Brenin in Capel Curig, to the Pen-y-Gwryd Hotel via the famous hill farm of Dyffryn Mymbyr. If you are wondering why a hill farm should be famous it is obvious that you have never read *I Bought a Mountain* by Thomas Firbank. Please beg, steal or borrow a copy and delight in one of the great classics of mountain literature.

At first sight

I cannot do better than quote Firbank's first sight of Esmè, whom he was eventually to marry and live with at Dyffryn Mymbyr: "She was small, lithe, with a hard, slim body and the face of an elf. She was dainty as a Dresden shepherdess." And, I might add, "a tough warrior who fought for Snowdonia throughout her long life". She founded the Snowdonia Society which wages war against the despoilers of those glorious mountains and another of her legacies (she died last year at the age of 89) is the path that traverses the lower slopes of the Glyders, avoiding all the traffic on the A4086.

It was that path that we hippies took in October on one of those days when raindrops turn into sheets of water blown by a westerly gale. And it is that path that should form an introduction to a new long distance path I have been advocating for years – the Circuit of Snowdon. I reckon that it would make a three or four-day route of excitement, contrast and beauty and do much for the local farming economy.

The hips, by the way, performed brilliantly.

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