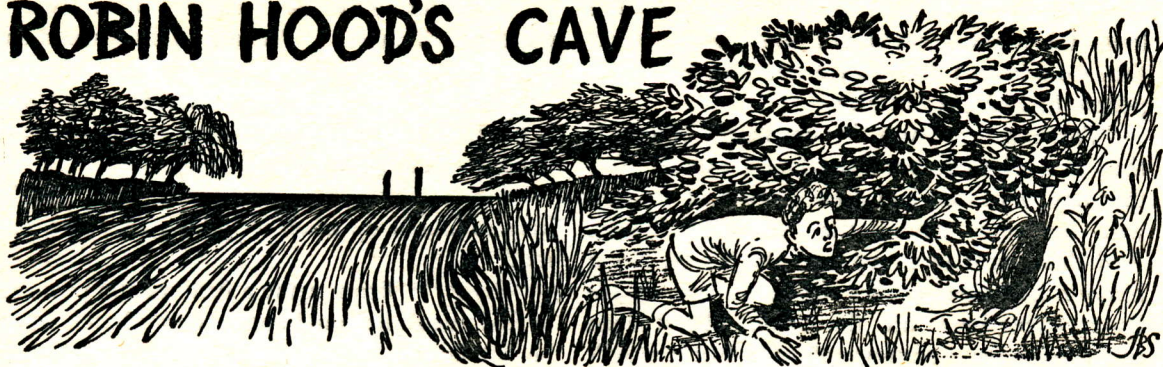


ROBIN HOOD'S CAVE



By Peter N. Walker

"LET'S go into Ferncliffe Wood," said Brian Mitchell to his twin brother, Michael. "There's a nuthatch nest in a big beech, and I want to see if the bird is nesting there again this year."

"Ferncliffe Wood, eh? It's ages since I've been in there," remarked Michael. "O.K. We'll go. Shall we take some sandwiches and have a picnic?"

"Good idea. Then we needn't rush back for tea!"

Mrs. Mitchell was most obliging and soon had egg sandwiches, tomatoes and some small cakes packed into a haversack, and the two boys began the walk into Ferncliffe Woods. Brian took the binoculars, which had belonged to their grandad, and they set a good pace as they strode along the rough track.

Ferncliffe Woods was one of their favourite summer walks, and indeed a favourite of visitors from far and near, who could now drive from the towns, park their cars on the waste ground near the entrance, and enjoy a long, leisurely walk through these enchanting woods.

But the twins, eager to learn more of nature, and to practise their Scoutcraft, seldom remained on the footpaths, particularly when the wood was full of visitors.

They liked to take to the rough ground, clambering over rocks and leafy mounds; trying to walk quietly over beds of dead leaves, and practicing their stalking. Sometimes they stalked the wild animals and birds; sometimes they stalked humans!

Brian remembered the time he'd found those

with a small log nailed to the centre on the underside. The umpire must ensure that the fore end of the plank is touching the ground before the rider reaches it. Penalty if the rider comes off the plank or puts a foot to the ground.

The fence is two posts with a very light rod balanced across them. It is a fault if the rod is knocked off as the rider takes his cycle underneath.

The stile must be very strong and set firmly on the ground. It need be only two or three crossbars supported by two strong posts, well

anchored. This is simply a time obstacle and no faults are awarded.

The ramp can be of three or four short lengths of plank, fastened side by side and raised by blocks or logs to twelve inches at the far end. Be sure that the whole ramp is fastened firmly together and doesn't wobble. Faults are incurred by failing to ride up the ramp at the first attempt, or putting a foot to the ground. A finish can be made by having the rider stop exactly on a finishing line, so make sure the brakes are good!

hoof prints on the main footpath. They were long and pointed; small and neat. He thought they were from a deer—a roe deer, he felt. But people had laughed at him.

"There are no deer in Ferncliffe Woods!" they had all said, but less than a month after that day, a farmer had seen a roe deer feeding with his cows during the very early hours. And then, as if to prove him absolutely, Brian himself had seen a deer while on one of his Scout excursions into the wood. He'd even managed to get a photograph of it, but it wasn't very good. Enough to prove that the animal was a deer, though!

Their walk today was uneventful; they'd seen two or three grey squirrels and had remarked that the poor old red squirrel was dying out because of the grey's viciousness towards the young red ones; they saw a heron, lumbering across the sky with huge wing beats, legs trailing, as he made his way towards his home waters for the night. . . .

But the object of their walk was the nuthatch's nest. They'd come across it last year, quite by accident, and had told Mr. Shippam, their Maths. Master, who was a keen ornithologist.

He had told his local Naturalists' Society, and some of the members had arranged to meet the twins in Ferncliffe Wood, so that they could point out the nest.

This had made the boys feel quite important, and they'd been asked not to tell any of the village lads about it, in case they robbed the nest or hurt the young birds.

Then the Naturalists had watched the birds, and made records of their movements, and a bit had appeared in the local paper.

And now, a year later, the boys wanted to see if the little birds, who were cousins of the woodpecker family and likewise nested in holes in trees, had returned to Ferncliffe.

It was plain to see by the state of the nesting hole, that the nuthatches had not come back to Ferncliffe. The tiny hole, with its doorway of caked mud, was old and worn. The mud was chipped and cracked from last year, and the birds had not come to re-build their tiny home with its circle of mud around the doorway.

"I wonder why they haven't come back?" pondered Michael. "Perhaps all those watchers last year have scared them away."

"They might have found another hole," put in his brother. "Anyway, do they always come back to the same nest?"

"I don't know!" grinned Michael, "We'll have to look it up when we get home. Remind me!"

"Right!" Brian made a firm mental promise to find out all he could about the nuthatch when he got home. He was a bit disappointed that the bird wasn't here. They had intended building an improvised hide in the bushes, and then to watch the birds at work and play. But now, they had nothing particular to do.

"What time is it?" Brian asked Michael, "Tea time?"

Michael laughed loudly, "You're a hungry sort of chap! It's only half-past three!"

"Is that all? We've got ages before we've got to return. Let's do a bit of exploring, shall we? We haven't to be in till six!"

"O.K. Where shall we go?"

Brian thought for a moment, his brow furrowed as he tried to think of some interesting places.

"I know! There's supposed to be a cave here, somewhere near this very place. It's called Robin Hood's Cave."

"I've heard about it! Do you know where it is?"

"Not exactly. It's almost overgrown now, so they tell me. But it's somewhere near the river, opposite the remains of that old bridge which was washed down in the big floods ten years ago. A footbridge, it was."

"Oh, I've seen the pillars which still stand in the river. Right, let's go and find this cave, eh?"

And with no more ado, the twins left the vicinity of the nuthatch's nest and returned to the footpath.

Just as they were about to climb down the bank-side onto the path, Brian hissed, "Quiet! Someone's coming. . . ."

They both flopped on to their stomachs, lying hidden in the bracken which carpeted this



The boys kept a good distance behind the man.

part of the wood, and waited as the footsteps came closer.

It was a hiker—and there was a small girl with him. They walked in silence, the girl a pace or two in front of the man who had an ugly look upon his face.

When they'd gone out of sight, Brian said, "Did you notice anything about them?"

"Well, I thought they didn't look as if they were going about together."

"That's what I thought. I mean, he was all dressed up for hiking, wasn't he? Studded boots, thick socks, sweater and a haversack."

"That's it! And the girl wasn't! She had a Sunday frock on, hadn't she? And white socks and best shoes . . . and he kept pushing her when she slowed down. . . ."

"She'd been crying . . . you could see the red on her cheeks . . . only about twelve or thirteen, I thought . . ."

They looked at each other, and knew instantly

that something was amiss. Here was a job for the twins! A job that was going to test their tracking and stalking ability to the full; a job that any Scout would do if he felt that something fishy was going on. . . .

"Let's follow them!" they said together, then laughed.

"We'll have to be careful," Brian commented, "If we stay on the path, they'll see us, and if we keep in the woods, we might make a lot of noise."

"We'll have to make sure we don't make any noise!" said Michael, "That's where real stalking matters; walking quietly and quickly over a noise-making surface like broken twigs! Come on, at least they're not animals, so we don't have to be too careful, nor do we have to worry about wind direction!"

The boys kept a good distance behind the man, who did glance behind once or twice, but the twins kept well to the trees, out of sight and out of earshot.

The man walked along the path, pushing the girl ahead of him until he came to a small, grassy track which led off the path to the right, and down towards the river.

"That's where we were going to go!"

Brian stared hard at his brother.

"Do you think he's taking her to the Cave? He must have kidnapped her. . . ."

"It certainly looks queer, pushing her like that, and her not being dressed for a walk in this sort of place. . . ."

"Keep them in sight now . . ."

The twins cut through the wood, and were pleased to see that they were now striding across short-cropped grass, instead of dead leaves. Their movements were silent, and they used the trees and undergrowth to good advantage.

Suddenly, Brian fell to the ground, dragging Michael down with him.

Brian felt like shouting, but prevented himself at the last moment.

Michael put his finger to his lips, indicating silence.

Then, after a few moments, he rose, brushing the grass from his clothes.

"What was that all about?" Michael asked.

"They stopped just around the corner, and the man was looking around. You couldn't see because of that rock . . . then he's picked her up. He's carrying her now."

"About time too. She looked worn out!"

"Come on. We don't want to lose them now."

The twins continued their shadowing, following the man and the little girl down a steep, grassy slope towards the river.

At the river's edge, the man stopped, and swilled his face with water, then picked up the tired girl again and followed the river side, downstream.

"He's going towards the old bridge!" Brian hissed, "I'll bet he's taking her to Robin Hood's Cave!"

"Then what will he do?"

"Dunno. It's all very odd," thought Brian. "Do you think he's kidnapped her?"

"Kidnapped? Here? Things like that don't happen here! They're probably just out for a walk and she's got tired. He's probably just showing her the Cave. Maybe she's a fan of Robin Hood!"

"It seems a queer way of going about things, him all done up for a hike, and her dressed for a Sunday afternoon. . . ."

"We'll soon find out. Come on. Keep off the skyline now; we'd better keep fairly near the path, but not too near. He'll easily see us here, if we're not careful."

"O.K.," Brian whispered. "No talking now until we find out where they're going. . . ."

Their trail took them almost half a mile downstream, until they could see the old pillars protruding from the rushing river. The man, and his strange companion, went on past the pillars for some hundred yards and then the man left the path, branching off into the wood.

Then he vanished.

"He's gone. . . ." hissed Brian. "Vanished. Just like that."

"And the girl. . . ."

"It must be the Cave. The entrance is probably overgrown now."

"Let's wait here . . . he'll never see us behind these bushes. . . ."

Almost twenty minutes passed, as the twins waited in complete silence. Then the man emerged from some undergrowth, without the girl.

Brian and Michael looked at each other, then Brian said, "I'll follow him. You find the girl. If you find her, and she's tired out, wait there. If she can walk, make your way back to the Old Wishing Stone. . . ."

Michael nodded.

The man was coming towards them now, retracing his steps, and when he was about fifty yards ahead of Brian and Michael, Brian melted



Michael acted swiftly.

into the dense undergrowth, moving silently and swiftly in the wake of this mysterious person.

* * * *

When all was clear, Michael moved swiftly towards the undergrowth from which the man had emerged.

He saw the crushed grass, the broken twigs and disturbed soil where the man had made his footprints, and there, behind a thick bush, he saw the opening of a cave. It was small, but inside it became larger.

He heard a muffled sound, and thrusting the bush aside, he fell to his hands and knees and crawled inside.

There was the girl, lying on a bed of dry bracken. She was bound and gagged!

She struggled when she saw Michael, and tried to shout something, but it was no use.

Michael acted swiftly: moving across the wide, dry floor of this cave, whose light came from the small entrance and, producing his Scout knife, he cut through the thin rope which bound her wrists and ankles, and untied the handkerchief which was round her mouth.

She broke into a tirade of sobs, crying and sobbing loudly within the small cave.

Michael didn't know what to do! He'd had nothing to do with girls, let alone crying girls! Then he decided he'd have to do something for her now; it was no use just listening to her. He realized that the girl would be shocked; and he knew all about treating for shock! That came with the first-aid lectures.

He produced a billy can and some tea and sugar, and said, "Look . . . er . . . you're all right now . . . I'm going to look after you . . . er . . . Miss . . . er . . . I'll make some tea . . . get water from the river . . . all right if I boil."

She nodded tearfully, and watched him leave.

He should have made a fire first, but wanted to get out of her way to think. Girls upset him!

Then he realized he wasn't being very gallant, and after filling the billy with water, returned to the girl and began to comfort her, letting her wear his old jacket, and he produced some sandwiches from his pack which he gave to her. She ate them hungrily as he made a fire from leaves,

birch bark and small sticks, eventually laying on larger wood until he had a good, hot fire between a couple of large stones. The billy began to bubble gently.

"Now," said Michael, when he had finished all his immediate jobs, "what's happening to you? You can tell me. I'm a Scout, although I'm not in uniform today. My brother is following that man . . ."

"Oh, thank you," she was very well spoken. "I hope the police catch him. . . ."

She sat a moment, her hands trembling still, and ate another mouthful of sandwich.

"Who are you?" Michael had a grasp of himself now, and was treating this girl, a pretty girl, he felt, like any other person.

"Monica," she told him, "Monica Breckonsworth. I live at the Old Hall, Habton Bridge."

"Oh, I know. Your father must be the Brigadier, is he?"

"Yes, that's right. Well, this afternoon, I went for a walk in the village, and that . . . that horrible man said "Would I like to see a nut-hatch nest?" Well, I'd never seen one, so I said I would like to see it, and . . . I know I shouldn't have let him take me . . . but when we got out of the village, he said he had a knife and if I didn't go with him, he'd kill me . . . then he said he'd telephone Daddy and get £5,000 out of him . . . unless Daddy finds £5,000 he'd kill me . . . so he left me in that cave while he went to telephone. . . ."

"Is he coming back?"

"I expect so. But he said he was going over to Garsdale to phone, so that would take him an hour or more, to walk there and back."

"Here." Michael laughed now, "the kettle's boiling. Have a cup of tea!"

She was happier now, although still a little pale and shaking, and took the mug with Michael's home-made tea.

"Mmm," she tasted it. "Smashing! Do they teach you how to do all this in the Scouts?"

"Oh, yes, and more," he told her, and went off into a long discussion about they were taught to observe, track, pass proficiency tests and be of good use in any emergency.

When they had finished eating, Monica said,

"Are you going to take me home now?"

"I was going to wait here until Brian—that's my brother—came back, but if he's lost the man, or not had him arrested, then the man will be coming back, won't he? Is your home far away?"

"No. Only about a mile if we walk down the riverside."

"Oh, well. That's the best place. If I take you home I can telephone the local policeman from your house, can't I? I should think we'll get there before Brian gets to the policeman . . . can you walk all that way?"

"Oh, yes, thank you. I'm fine now." She looked at him with deep admiration, and Michael blushed. He'd never had a girl look at him like this before. . . .

"Come on. You show me the way, and I'll leave a trail for Brian . . ."

Then he picked up his belongings, and showed Monica how to lay a trail for some other Scout to follow. . . .

* * * *

Brian found it difficult to keep up with the man, who was hurrying through Ferncliffe Wood towards Garsdale with long, easy strides. Brian used Scouts Pace, keeping well out of sight of the man, until at last the man emerged near the entrance to the wood.

He paused for a moment, looking this way and that, then stopped a fisherman who was walking past.

"Where is the nearest telephone kiosk?" Brian heard him ask the fisherman.

"Top of the village. Keep to your left," was the reply, and with a wave of his hand in thanks, the man set off again at his fast pace.

The telephone kiosk was a good ten minutes walk, and Brian knew that the village policeman's house was five minutes away, along a short cut.

Should Brian risk losing the man to tell Mr. Robinson, the policeman, or should he follow the man to the kiosk. . . .

He had to make up his mind now . . . he chose the policeman.

Brian knocked loudly on the door of the

police house, praying that Mr. Robinson would be in. He was, and came to the door, smiling at Brian.

"Why, Hello, Brian. Something wrong?"

Brian gasped out his story, telling Mr. Robinson that he thought that the girl had been kidnapped, because of the strange behaviour of the man.

"Right. We'll go to the kiosk. Come along. We'll have to walk; my bike's got a puncture . . ."

There was no one in the kiosk.

"Are you sure he came here, Brian?"

Brian could see that the policeman didn't believe him now . . . where had the man gone?

"Positive, Mr. Robinson. I followed him right from Ferncliffe Wood, and heard him ask a visitor the way to the kiosk. He definitely came this way."

"I'll ask in the post office," said Mr. Robinson. "They'll know if anyone made a call from this kiosk. It's a party-line, and the bell in the post office telephone would ring as well."

He disappeared into the tiny village post office, and came out smiling. "A call was made from here less than five minutes ago!" grinned the policeman. "The postmistress heard the bell and thought it was for her, so she lifted the receiver. She heard a man ask for Habton Bridge 222. I know that number. It's Brigadier Breckonsworth—he's a local Justice of the Peace. And he has a daughter like the one you told me about. Come along, the man went along the lane, according to the postmistress."

"There's a bus stop on there," remembered Brian, "and the bus is due at five o'clock!"

"Ten to five now. It goes to Habton Bridge. I wonder if he's arranged for the money to be put down for collection. . . ."

They started to walk along the lane, when the postmistress dashed out and called them.

"It's for you, Mr. Robinson. Brigadier Breckonsworth. They've telephoned your house, and your wife said you were coming up here to the kiosk. Lucky he's caught you . . ."

Mr. Robinson went inside and spoke to the Brigadier. When he came out, he said to

Brian, "We'll let that man catch the bus. He's going back to Habton Bridge now, and the Brigadier will be leaving a brown paper parcel in the kiosk at six o'clock. It is supposed to contain the money, but it'll be paper only! The man will pick it up, and we'll get him! I'll have to borrow a car . . . the garage'll have one . . . mustn't let this crook see us knocking about or he'll suspect something. By the way, the girl is safe at home. Your brother has taken her straight home, so the Brigadier is pleased as punch! We could arrest the man now, but we'll need absolute proof that he's the culprit. You can watch us arrest him; you'll be good witnesses for us, and will be able to identify him as the man you saw in the wood with the girl."

In a borrowed car, Brian was whisked off to the Brigadier's home with P.C. Robinson, and there the plot was laid.

"The kidnapper will still think Monica is lying in that cave," grinned P.C. Robinson. "But he's been well and truly fooled, thanks to these two lads. Shows what good Scout training can do, eh, Brigadier?"

"By jove, yes!" thundered the bristling old man. "Thundering good show all round, I'd say . . ."

"Right, lads," said P.C. Robinson. "We'll wait in the cottage just over the road from the kiosk. We'll have to go now, as the bus will be here soon. The Brigadier will come and pretend to make a phone call at five to six. He'll leave a parcel in the kiosk. The man will then come into the kiosk and will also pretend to make a call. We'll get him as he comes out."

* * *

In the Old Hall afterwards, the Brigadier praised P.C. Robinson for his swift thinking in getting things moving, and arresting the man, who had admitted everything. He was now in the cells at the police station.

"I'm going to write to the Chief Constable," smiled the Brigadier, "and tell him what a good show you've all put up. My daughter returned even before I knew she'd been kidnapped! And by a Boy Scout too! I'm going to write to the County Commissioner too, and tell him that

I got up the mountain edge, and from the top saw the world stretch out—cornlands and forests, the river winding among meadow-flats, and right off, like a hem of the sky, the moving sea, with snatches of foam, and large ships reaching forward, out-bound. And then I thought no more, but my heart leapt to meet the wind, and I ran, and I ran. I felt my legs under me, I felt the wind buffet me, hit me on the cheek; the sun shone, the bees swept past me singing; and I too sang, shouted, World, world, I am coming!

MAURICE HEWLETT.
(*Pan and the Young Shepherd.*)

* * *

I am told there are people who do not care for maps, and find it hard to believe. The names, the shapes of the woodlands, the courses of the roads and rivers, the prehistoric footsteps of man still distinctly traceable up hill and down dale, the mills and the ruins, the ponds and the ferries, perhaps the *Standing Stone* or the *Druidic Circle* on the heath; here is an inexhaustible fund of interest for any man with eyes to see or twopence-worth of imagination to understand with!

R. L. STEVENSON.

the Scouts can camp on my land anytime they want! Jolly good show. . . ."

* * *

"I've just remembered something," said Michael, as they lay in bed that night when all the fuss had died down.

"What?" asked Brian.

"I laid a trail for you, from Robin Hood's Cave to the Old Hall. I wonder what will happen if a Scout finds the cave this week-end?"

They both laughed well into the night, then Michael suddenly said: "That girl was going to see a nuthatch too—the man said he'd show her. Funny that, eh?"

"That's it!" Brian almost shouted. "I knew I'd seen that man before! Last year, when all those naturalists came to see the nest. We were told there'd be eight, remember?"

"Yes."

"Well, there were nine. I counted them. One fellow had tagged on in the wood—it was that hiker! I remember now!"

"What a coincidence!" breathed Michael.

"Maybe not such a coincidence after all!" said Brian, turning over and going to sleep.