

‘Just Horsing Around’: Richard Vasey

Christopher’s legs were cramping up as they hung loose around the massive girth of Duke the fifteen-year-old palomino gelding on release from agistment. He thought, ‘Now I know why a saddle is a good idea.’ Ahead was Robin, astride Domino a black mare at almost twice Duke’s size, sixteen hands at least. At any moment Duke was liable to pull Christopher off his back as he attacked anything he could eat, so the bedraggled party trudged along.

Both horses carried saddlebags and a bedroll in the expectation of camping along the route. They had spent the first night on the shores of Lake Penrhyn, a few short miles from home at Valley. The aim was to follow the West Coast of the island to Amlwch on the North Coast.

Progress was slow as the boys frequently got lost on the myriad bridleways and tracks and they had to stop to orientate their ordnance survey map. The Orienteering Badge, so absentmindedly earned at a scouts’ retreat last year, was now really helpful. Each night the boys lay down on their bedroll, under the ancient canvas tent, feeling content after devouring a large tin of baked beans. The horses snorted nearby, while hopping from one clump of grass to another against their hobbles.

After a long day of riding the boys were determined to camp that night on the North Coast. Through the gloom they could hear but not see the raging sea below. They quickly set up camp and settled in for the night. In the morning the roar of the sea was deafening and on exiting the tent were shocked to see that they had camped right on the cliff edge! One false move and they would have tumbled onto the rocks below!

The return to Valley was uneventful and the boys released the horses once again to their top paddock. Christopher returned home after the four-day trip to find his mother saying,

'Did you have a lovely time?'

Before Christopher could answer, his mother left saying she had a hair appointment. Father looked over his newspaper and said,

'Back in one piece then?'

Christopher decided not to respond.

Looking back, Christopher was amazed that there was ever time when such FREEDOM was possible or allowable.