

**PALL MALL GAZETTE**  
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**THE FATALITIES AT BEACHY HEAD**  
**An Interview with Mr. Aleister Crowley**

The occurrence of another fatal accident at Beachy Head—the fourth since Easter—by which the other day Mr. Dorman, of Eastbourne, lost his life, will, it is surely not too much to hope, draw definite attention on the part of the local authorities to the danger of this recognized climbing place, which owes its popularity to its proximity to London and the comparative remoteness of other climbing places from the neighbourhood of the metropolis.

A *Pall Mall Gazette* representative has had an interview with Mr. Aleister Crowley, of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, who is described in Messrs. W. P. H. Smith and H. C. Hart's "Climbing in the British Isles" as *the authority* on Beachy Head, the possibilities of which as a climbing resort he was the first to develop. He contributed to the *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal* for 1895 (Vol. III.) an exhaustive article on Beachy Head, illustrated by photographs of its various climbs, which remains the authoritative article on the subject, although it has also been dealt with by Mr. H. S. Bullock in the *Climbers' Club Journal*.

The representative of the *Pall Mall Gazette* found Mr. Crowley preparing to start for Switzerland and the Tyrol, where he proposes to attempt some hitherto maiden peaks, and very ready to dilate on the subject of Beachy Head and its unnecessarily long record of fatalities, having climbed there so recently as the week after Whitsuntide, when two persons met death upon its treacherous chalk.

"Yes," he said, in reply to a question as to the attraction of Beachy Head for men who are at home in the Alps, "there is no doubt that climbing on Beachy Head compares well with more ambitious mountaineering. So far as step-cutting, screens, and so forth go, it affords everything you get in the Alps. It is the nearest spot to town at which first-class climbing is to be had; and it offers to the climber, the most difficult and dangerous bit of climbing in the British Islands, although its height, 550 ft., is not impressive. It is not, however, climbers who are killed at Beachy, but those persons who, without knowing the rudiments

of climbing, essay to ascend or descend the face of the Head as though it were a marble staircase. This you will perceive to be a fairly numerous class, when I tell you that there are not more than twenty men in England who know the rudiments of climbing. It is no wonder that so many persons should be killed, nor that the local coastguard men are chiefly employed in rescuing alive those in difficulties. It is no exaggeration to say that hundreds of men are rescued every year.

"In order that your readers should form some conception of the place, I should say that the Head is composed of broken chalk. On either hand are miles of unbroken cliff which presents no opportunity for climbing. But the Head itself is weathered out into gullies, shoots, and pinnacles which afford every variety of climbing, from the easy to the impossible. These different climbs are known as the Devil's Chimney, Etheldreda's Pinnacle, the Cavern Climb, Pisgah from the West, Crowley's Climb, the Waterhouse Climb, and various gullies. Thus, it will be seen that on Beachy Head one climbs the gullies, precipices, and pinnacles on the cliff face, leading from the grass ledge or traverse to the top of the Head.

It is not on the climbs that people get killed; but about half-way up the total height of the Head the face is seamed by a horizontal grass traverse or ledge of varying breadth. This may be reached from the top by two distinct ways, involving only the roughest and easiest kind of scrambling. The ordinary tourist goes down these paths with the idea that he will be able to reach the sea by their means. Unfortunately, however, as he descends the ledge steepens, and gives place eventually to more or less precipitous chalk. When he gets to this the tourist invariably sits down. Now, when a novice sits down it is because he feels himself in danger, and the effect of his sitting down on that kind of ground is to make him actually more in danger than he feels himself to be. His heels no longer bite into the chalk, and he begins to slip. Feeling himself slipping he struggles, and as soon as the chalk feels him struggling, it gently precipitates him. He then falls 250 ft. on to the beach and is taken up dead.

"There is a quite unfounded superstition that Beachy Head has never been climbed from the sea. As a matter of fact, there is a way so easy that it has been climbed in eight and a half minutes, and I am sure that a good man with 'claws' (*steigeisen*) could do it in five. On the other hand, on the climbing part of the Head proper, the climbs are so difficult that I have been more than two hours doing twenty feet. The prin-

cipal climbers who have done the Head are Mr. H. S. Bullock, of the Climbers' Club, Mr. Walter Weston, the Rev. A. C. Downer, and Mr. J. S. New, who helped me to make a map of the Head. I have often taken friends down, and they have always expressed themselves highly delighted with the climbing—and refused to come again under any circumstances. That is because the discomfort of climbing Beachy is extreme. As I wrote in the *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, 'climbing Beachy Head has a place of its own among the fine arts. But let no devotee seek to penetrate the shrine of the spotless deity when she forbids—I mean on wet or windy days. On the former the sodden chalk is slippery and dangerous—too unpleasant, in fact, to be indulged in by the most enthusiastic. Dry, windy days, on the other hand, when chalk particles, varying from very fine dust to large nuggets, are being driven about, are fatal to the eyes, which may be bloodshot and sore for days afterwards.' "

"And what precautions do you suggest, Mr. Crowley, should be taken to prevent this annual waste of life on Beachy Head?"

"Well, at present, you must know, practically no precautions are taken. The police, I believe, are empowered to take proceedings against persons who break or damage the cliff; and there are two absurd notice-boards. The one at the top of the Head is directed against persons *ascending* the cliff and the one at the foot against those *descending* it; which is manifestly as useless a precaution as it is ridiculous."

"The only preventive measure I can recommend is that notice-boards should be erected at places where the descent appears easy; and that instead of these boards bearing merely a vague warning, they should contain particulars of the numbers of persons who have been actually killed there.

"Such a simple and inexpensive precaution would effectually scare all but *bona-fide* climbers, and these are the very men who do not get killed on Beachy Head. Failing this, tourists and trippers will continue to meet with violent deaths there, or at best to be rescued in their hundreds by the local coastguardsmen."