

The Final Push



It had been raining when they set off and the top of the mountain was covered in cloud but they couldn't let anything slow them down, not if they wanted to beat the clock and achieve their goal, climbing three mountain summits in twenty four hours. It had been Dad's idea; a unique way to celebrate his special birthday. When he'd suggested that they could do it together, Ben had been really thrilled. They'd been training for months, right through the year, every season and in all weathers and now as they set off on the final push to the last summit, it looked as though the wind and rain were going to be their companions right to the top.

It was a steep climb and the pathway was narrow and very rocky. The overnight rain had made it very slippery and Ben was glad that his boots were strong with a good, thick tread. He glanced ahead to Devil's Crag, the towering rock face they would soon be climbing. It was the last big hurdle before the summit and the biggest challenge of all. It would take all their energy and strength to get to the top. "It's not just about being fit," Dad had said earlier, "sometimes it's more about strength of character. You just have to set your mind to it and tell yourself that you can do it."

They rested briefly at the base of Devil's Crag waiting for a party of walkers to come down. The person bringing up the rear was dressed in a

bright orange waterproof jacket that seemed to shine in the gloom. Ben sipped from his water bottle and ate a chocolate biscuit, watching them picking their way carefully down the slope.

"You all right?" said Dad.

Ben nodded, "Nearly there, aren't we? I think we're going to do it in time. We'll be champion walkers then won't we, Dad?"

Dad pushed up his sleeve and glanced at his watch, "It's looking good," he said, "and the weather's getting better. With any luck, we might even be able to look at the view when we get to the top. Are you ready to push on, only one more man to come down."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when there was a sharp cry followed by the sound of stones and rocks rattling down the hillside as the man in the orange jacket crashed down from the rock face and landed in a heap at the feet of his companions.

Dad slipped the rucksack from his shoulders and dropped it at Ben's feet, "Don't move!" he said, "look after the bags, I'll see if I can help."

The man was conscious but it looked like he might have broken his leg and he was in a lot of pain. Dad offered to help in any way he could but one of the man's friends was a doctor and he said that they would be able to make him comfortable. Another was already phoning for help. Reluctantly, Dad turned away.

"Do you still want to climb up?" he said, hitching the rucksack back onto his shoulder.

"I think so," said Ben, "we're so close to the top now, I don't want to give up." When they finally hauled themselves on to the top of Devil's Crag, they could see the cairn on the summit and when at last they trudged to the pinnacle of the mountain, Ben cheered loudly and punched the air in triumph. A mixture of relief and elation surged through him as they looked around at the hills and valleys below them. They picked up two stones and added them to the cairn, "That should bring us good luck!" said Dad, "We'd better start making our way down if we want to get back to the car for six o'clock."

"I wonder if the man who fell put a stone on the cairn?" said Ben.

"Well it didn't bring him much luck if he did," said Dad and they turned to begin the descent, "Listen! Can you hear that?"

Way below them they could see a flash of yellow as the Mountain Rescue helicopter, its blades whirring, came in to pick up the injured climber. By the time Ben and Dad reached the foot of Devil's Crag there was no sign that it had been the site of an accident and emergency rescue. It was almost as if they had imagined the whole event! They continued on their way back to the car happily recalling the highlights and challenges of their own mountain adventure.

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Section A

Choose the best word or group of words to fit the passage and put a ring around your choice.

They wanted to beat the clock and achieve their goal of climbing three mountain summits in

1 **12 hours.** **18 hours.** **24 hours.** **30 hours.**

They had been training right through the year in all

2 **weathers** **winters** **winds** **locations**

and now they were setting off up the final summit. Ben was glad his boots had

3 **tight laces.** **comfortable insoles.**
a good, thick tread. **been polished.**

Just as Dad looked at the time they heard the sound of

4 **a man** **a rucksack** **stones and rocks** **a sheep**

rattling down the hillside. Dad ran to help. The man had

5 **cracked his skull.** **broken his arm.** **broken his leg.** **fainted.**

As the man's friends were able to make him comfortable, Dad put his

6 **fleece** **jacket** **rucksack** **boots**

back on and they continued towards the final summit.

Section B

- 1 Why do you think Ben was really thrilled when his Dad suggested they could do the climb together?

- 2 Why did Dad say "You just have to set your mind to it and tell yourself you can do it."?

- 3 Why did Ben think they would be 'champion walkers'?

- 4 Why do you think Dad told Ben not to move when he went to see if he could help?

- 5 Why did Dad 'reluctantly' turn away from the injured walker?

- 6 After the accident, Dad asked Ben if he still wanted to climb. Why did he do this?

- 7 Why do you think the rescue helicopter looked like a 'flash of yellow' to Ben and his Dad?

- 8 Which of the following phrases suggests they did not find the climb easy? Give reasons for your choices.
'trudged to the pinnacle' **'set off on the final push'**
'they'd been training for months' **'hailed themselves to the top'**

Section C

Describe an event or activity that you have been involved in that you found really challenging.

Answers

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Section A

- 1) 24 hours.
- 2) weathers
- 3) a good, thick tread.
- 4) stones and rocks
- 5) broken his leg.
- 6) rucksack

Section B

- 1) Accept an answer that indicates it was a special thing for a father and son to do together.
- 2) To encourage Ben to have a positive attitude even if it was hard physically.
- 3) They would achieve the goal of climbing 3 peaks in 24 hours.
- 4) Accept either: to make sure Ben stayed safe or to prevent him seeing something that might be upsetting.
- 5) He really wanted to be of some help.
- 6) To make sure Ben was still confident and had not been put off or upset by the accident.
- 7) 'Flash of yellow' indicates speed/poor visibility as the helicopter passes in and out of clouds and mist.
- 8) 'Trudged to the pinnacle' and 'hailed themselves to the top'
- 8a) Answers should show an understanding of the words 'trudged' and 'hailed' indicating that it was hard work or needed an effort.