Stephen Robertson

On Skiddaw

Holiday cottage, the edge of the Lake District—
family wanting to rest and recuperate.
Skiddaw is looming, inviting explorers—a
challenge I cannot allow to go answerless.

Lone expedition to conquer the mountaintop.
Bottle of water and lunch in my haversack.
Climb by the obvious route from the valley, with
Derwent behind me and scrambles ahead of me.

Out of the pastures and onto the fell side, still
climbing the contours and catching my breath again.
Skirting the back of the Little Man precipice,
one final push up the ridge to the pinnacle.

Now to descend, an alternative route which is
known as the Allerdale Ramble, traversing a
difficult scree but then joining an easier
path with spectacular views over Bassenthwaite.

Walking down quickly, not paying attention, I
stumble, fall heavily forward and land with my
shin on a knife-edge of rock that protrudes from the
edge of the path, not yet blunted or bowdlerized.

Broken? It must be, if agony's evidence.
Lying there wondering whether there's any chance
I could attract the attention of anyone.
Haven't passed walkers for more than three hours now.

When are they likely to send out a search party?
Probably not until well after dark has come.
Should I start crawling the miles remaining, or
should I stay put in the hope of a rescuer?

Slowly I realise the pain is subsiding, the
leg was not broken, and after a while I can
think of resuming my journey unaided—I
just have to check on my map for the best way back.

Reading a map now, I have to use spectacles.
Carry them with me wherever I wander… but
help! They are missing, I must have mislaid them when
finding my way through the scree so much earlier.

Later, much later, I limp into harbour. My
family playing, completely oblivious.