The Wrong Path

by Jon Mayhew

Three paths lay before them, leading off into the dense forest. The rest of the party shouted and laughed not far away but it wasn't certain which path they had taken. Kenny Cheung scowled at Jake and Aji. "Nice one, you two," he grumbled. "Now we're lost."

Aji raised his eyebrows, like he always did when Miss Pearson told him off. "It wasn't me," he squeaked. "Jake nearly pushed me in that stream!"

"Don't start crying, Kenny," Jake snorted. "They're just down here. I know the way. I've been here before."

Kenny had been looking forward to the geography field trip to these Welsh mountains for weeks. Miss Pearson had shown them photographs and they'd been learning about the different features of the area: valleys, forests, peaks and all kinds of other things. She'd talked about how, thousands of years ago, glaciers had carved out the bottoms of the valleys, making them flat and 'U'-shaped. When Kenny had been paired up with Jake and Aji, his heart sank. Now here they were. Lost.

"Brilliant," Kenny muttered. "Alright then. Which path did they take?"

"That one," Jake said, pointing at the left path. "Come on. Let's go."

"Wait for us!" Aji shouted after the rest of the school party and sprinted up the path.

Kenny and Jake ran after him. The path wound around the trees. They stumbled along but the voices became more distant.

"We're going the wrong way!" Kenny yelled, but Jake and Aji weren't listening; Jake had started powering up the other side of the hill. For a moment, he thought about running back up the path and waiting for Miss Pearson to find him, but Jake and Aji were disappearing further into the forest. Kenny couldn't leave them to get lost. With a sigh, he ran after them.

"I can see daylight!" Jake shouted. Up ahead, the trees thinned out and the grey clouds peeped through at them. Kenny broke out of the tree line and caught up with the two boys who stood, panting.

"We need to go back," Kenny gasped. "They'll be looking for us. We'll only get more lost this way."

Jake had recovered his breath and snorted at Kenny. "Are you scared? Look, if we get up to that high bit, we can see where they are. Come on, Aji."

Shaking his head, Kenny pulled his backpack straight on his shoulders and hurried after them. The ground grew bare and more rocks covered it. Kenny's breath became ragged as he clambered up the steep hill.

"Where is the... top?" Aji panted.

"Not... far... now!" Jake called back, having trouble talking and walking.

Soon they could see the tops of the trees in the forest as they rose higher and higher above it. The air grew cooler and Kenny stopped to pull a woolly hat out of his backpack. Aji hugged himself and Kenny could

see him shivering in his thin coat. Jake didn't have any proper outdoor gear on either.

"This isn't safe, look," Kenny said, pointing back down the hill. A thick mist boiled up from the valley floor, smothering the trees in white.

"Oh shut it, Kenny," Jake snapped. "We're fine. If we get a bit further up, we'll be able to see." Kenny pursed his lips and followed them; everything behind them was lost in a sea of mist.

They came to a path and trudged along, silently. The whole world had become white. Kenny could barely see Aji or Jake in front of him. He could hear Aji's teeth chattering and Jake kept stumbling over rocks in his cheap trainers as he stamped ahead, stubbornly. The ground rose until they were climbing, sometimes grabbing rocks to steady themselves. "This isn't right," Kenny said, but the other two seemed lost in a weary nightmare.

"I'm tired," Aji mumbled. Jake said something but it sounded like a foreign language to Kenny. The boys were cold and exhausted.

Suddenly, the cloud broke and they found themselves standing on a flat plateau strewn with rocks. In the middle of the clearing stood a pillar of concrete. "That's a Trig Point," Kenny said, excitedly. "We've reached the summit of this mountain."

Jake looked blankly at him and swayed a little. "So what?" he said, his voice sounding slurred.

Kenny pulled his backpack off. "I'll be able to use my map and compass to work out where we are and how to get down," he explained. "If you lot hadn't run on

ahead, I could have done it ages ago."

He looked at the peaks of other mountains and hills poking through the clouds. He didn't have time to stop and admire the view. "Here," he said, pulling out three energy bars from his backpack and passing them round. "Eat these. You'll feel a bit better."

Soon they headed back down the path into the cloud. Aji leaned on Kenny's shoulder, limping from a twisted ankle; Jake stumbled behind him like a zombie. The path dropped and Kenny had to keep himself from running downhill. "Listen," he said. Somewhere in the distance voices called out their names. "It's Miss Pearson. If we stick to this path, I think we'll be okay."

Jake nodded and Aji gave a weak smile. Somehow, Kenny thought that these two wouldn't be messing around quite so much next time they went on a field trip.