# Midges

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A true, short story about pesky mountain Midges. Written with younger readers in mind.

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# Midges

After a pleasant afternoon spent descending into a beautiful valley it was time to find somewhere to camp for the night. The path hugged the side of a small ridge. We stopped to look back and could see Skiddaw Mountain in the distance, the late afternoon sun casting it's shadow over the surrounding hills. The path itself was level and easy, no puffing, panting, or struggling like that morning on our ascent from the cozy valley village of Keswick eight miles behind us. Eventually the path wound around the ridge and dropped quickly to a stream . Sheep were grazing in the fields below, every now and again they'd look up from their meal but we weren't bothering them so they carried on, ears twitching to keep the flies from settling. We crossed the stream and decided to make camp right there. A nice level spot, the view below, a warm evening, and being close to a water supply were all we needed.

My friend, Owen, pitched his small one-man tent, as did I. We made a cup of tea, cooked dinner, then sat around until after dark talking and thinking about what may lay ahead of us the next day. We were both sleepy so climbed into our tents and fell into a nice deep sleep. I was the first to wake up the next morning, it was quite early. There was just enough light coming through the tent to realize that dawn had barely broken. The sound of the stream running gently over the polished mountain stone and the sheep stirring below kept me in my sleeping bag, just listening and enjoying. One other sound slowly came to my attention, a buzzing sound, a whirring of tiny wings that seemed to be everywhere and nowhere. I sat up and rubbed my eyes. It looked as though the bug netting on my tent was moving, like a colony of ants moving, yet disguised by the dark color of a forest floor. I soon realized that there were thousands of tiny black flies, or as they are known in the mountains, midges!

They were swarming all over my bug netting, attracted to the carbon dioxide in my breath, all waiting to get a chance at eating a small piece of me. I wasn't sure what to do. If I left the tent and packed up i would surely be eaten alive. I could hear Owen stirring in his tent. We mumbled at each other briefly about the flies and how we would get out of there without losing any blood. I decided to try and pack up inside my tiny tent. There was just enough room to sit up with my head touching the netting. I was scared of being bitten through the netting so had to lay down on my front and try to pack everything away. My arms were very close to me, very constricted, it was like trying to scratch your own back while wrapped in a sheet. The moment came when it was time to leave. I held my breath and quickly unzipped the tent. I threw my back pack outside and in a flash I'd pulled the tent stakes, grabbed the tent, skipped uphill away from the stream and was running as fast as i could along the path. Owens tent was still closed and peaceful looking, like a little cottage nestled in a dell. I was sure that there were stirrings inside, much like my own packing up ordeal but I was focused on getting away from that place as quickly as possible. Those little midges would not be eating me for breakfast!

I stopped running after a minute or two and threw my tent down. A cow was standing behind a fence in front of me. It looked over and licked it's lips, the flies hovering all around it's head. I sat and looked at the cow for a while but wondered how long it would take the flies to notice I was very close by. I heard Owen running up the path before I saw him. He appeared around the corner with his tent in hand, running like I had. He threw his tent down and sat with me in front of the cow, still licking it's lips and chewing cud. We wondered what the cow must be thinking of us, clearly not too much. It just stood there and stared. Slowly but surely the flies began to come back around to us. We hastily rolled up our tents, packed them, then headed onwards. The morning was crisp and bright, the smell in the air of early morning dew on lakeland grass was very welcoming. When we thought we were far enough away from the swarms we sat down and enjoyed a nice cup of tea.

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