

Eight days later Hannibal reached the pass. He halted there and stayed for two days, so that the survivors could get some rest, and the stragglers could catch up. While they were there, an extraordinary thing happened: many of the horses that had fled in panic, and many of the pack animals that had shed their loads, rejoined them. They had followed the army's trail to the encampment.

[54] Snow had already settled on the peaks, as the setting of the Pleiades was imminent.\* Hannibal could see that the hardship they had experienced, and the anticipation of more to come, had sapped

morale throughout the army. He convened an assembly and tried to raise their spirits, though his only asset was the visibility of Italy, which spreads out under the mountains in such a way that, from a panoramic perspective, the Alps form the acropolis of all Italy. So he showed them the Po plain, while reminding them in general terms that the Gauls living there were on their side, and he also pointed to where Rome lay. With their confidence restored to a certain extent, the next morning he broke camp and began his descent.

Apart from the occasional ambushade, hostile natives no longer bothered him on the way down, but the terrain and the snow were such that his losses were almost as heavy as during the ascent. The descent was narrow and steep, and snow made the footing uncertain, while the inevitable result of missing the trail or stumbling was a plunge down a precipice. The men were by now inured to this kind of misadventure, and they put up with their trials and tribulations, but then they came to a place where an old fall had carried away nearly a stade and a half of the track, and a more recent landslide had only made things worse, so that it was too narrow for either the elephants or the pack animals to get through. Once again, spirits fell and morale plummeted throughout the army. At first, Hannibal tried to find a way around the obstacle, but a fresh fall of snow made this alternative route equally impassable, and he gave up.

[55] It was a unique and extraordinary spectacle. The first snow of the year had recently fallen on top of old snow, left over from the previous winter. The fresh snow offered little resistance, because it had the softness of a recent fall and because it was not yet deep, but they could not penetrate the layer of compacted snow underneath, and when their footsteps broke through the fresh snow, they found both feet slipping and sliding on it, as people do when they tread on a layer of mud spread on the ground. Further irritation was to follow. When the men used their hands and knees to support their attempts to stand up again, they found themselves sliding even more, on all their extremities at once, over the impenetrable layer of ice and down a very steep slope. On the other hand, when the pack animals tried to get to their feet after falling, they did break through the lower layer and so they got stuck there with their loads as if they had become frozen in place, because of their weight and the solidity of the old snow.

Hannibal therefore abandoned this plan, made camp on the ridge (once the snow there had been scraped away), and gave his men the

extremely arduous task of repairing the cliff. After a day's work they had widened the path enough for the pack animals and the horses, and he had them taken through straight away. He set up camp in a place that was still free of snow, and let the animals graze, while the Numidians took on the construction work. It took them three days of hard labour, working in relays, before they were able to lead the elephants along the trail. By then the elephants were badly malnourished. The peaks of the Alps and the parts near the top of the passes are completely treeless and bare, because they are blanketed in snow all the year round; shrubbery and woodland begin about halfway down the flanks of the mountains on both sides, where they are perfectly inhabitable.

[56] With his army reunited, Hannibal continued down the descent, and at the end of the third day after leaving these gorges he reached the plain. Over the course of the whole march, he had lost many soldiers to the enemy and to rivers, and the Alpine crags and badlands had also taken a heavy toll, not just of men, but more especially of horses and pack animals. The whole march from New Carthage took him five months, with the crossing of the Alps occupying fifteen days. When he boldly appeared down in the Po plain and the territory of the Insubres, the surviving remnant of his army numbered 12,000 Libyans, 8,000 Iberians, and a cavalry contingent of not more than 6,000. These are the figures he himself gives in the inscription on the stele at Cape Lacinium.

Meanwhile, as I said earlier,\* Scipio left his army with his brother Gnaeus, with instructions to take care of matters in Iberia and to wage a forceful campaign against Hasdrubal. Then he sailed with just a small force to Pisa and marched through Etruria and into the Po plain. He took back from the praetors the legions that were engaged in both defensive and offensive manoeuvres against the Boii and, after making camp, he waited impatiently for the chance to engage the enemy in battle.

[57] My narrative, the generals of both sides, and the war have now reached Italy, but before the action begins I want to say a few words about the governing principles of my history. The point is that, since I very often mention places in Libya and Iberia, some people may wonder why I have not written more about the strait at the Pillars of Heracles, or about the Outer Sea and its distinctive features, or indeed