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Diary Dates for 2003

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Meet / Venue</i>	<i>Leader</i>
2-5 May	George Starkey Hut	Ed Bramley
23-26 May	Family Meet, Ashbourne	Andy Burton
6-8 June	Rhyd Ddu, North Wales	Ed Bramley
12-19 July	Alps Hotel Meet – Zillertal, Mayerhofen	Alasdair Andrews
19-26 July	Alps Hotel Meet – Oetzal, Obergurgl	Alasdair Andrews
26 July–16 August	Alpine Meet – Grandes Jorasses, Val Ferret	Pam Caswell
30 Aug–7 Sept	Alpine Walking Meet – Trient Valley	Alasdair Andrews
19-21 September	Autumn Lakes Meet, George Starkey Hut	Ed Bramley
3-5 October	Maintenance Meet, George Starkey Hut	Don Hodge
17-19 October	Alpine Reunion Meet, George Starkey Hut	Pam Caswell

2003 Alpine Meets

12 –19 July: Zillertal Alps

This will be a traditional hotel mountain walking and climbing holiday based at the 4* Hotel St Georg which is situated in a quiet location on the outskirts of the small mountain town of Mayerhofen conveniently placed for climbs in most of the Zillertal Alps. The cost of half board in the hotel will be 41 Euros per person per night in rooms with private facilities. Single rooms are scarce and will attract a supplement of 8 Euros per night. 19 members and friends have already booked but there is room for more.

19 – 26 July: Oetzal Alps

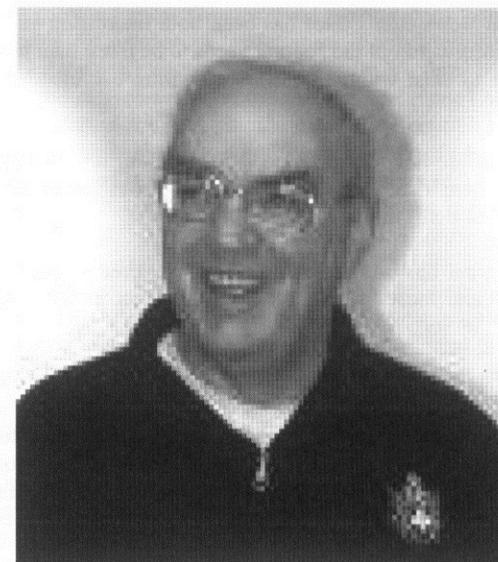
This meet will be based at the 3* Regina in Obergurgl one of the highest villages in Austria. The cost of half board will be 40 Euros per person per night in rooms with private facilities. There are very few single rooms and they will attract a supplement of 6 Euros per night. 24 members and friends have already booked but there is room for a few more.

30 August –6 September: Tour de Trient & Dents du Midi

The tour begins at the Col de Forclaz and travels in an anti-clockwise direction through magnificent mountain scenery with traces of dinosaurs, over attractive mountains and past several beautiful green lakes. Accommodation will be in huts and pensions. There are still four spaces left. When we toured Monte Rosa four years ago we only carried day gear and the spare clothing etc. was conveyed from place to place by Alf Lock in his car. If there are any members who can provide similar service this year please contact Alasdair Andrews soon. Reasonable expenses will be met.

Reservations for the Alpine Meets should be sent to Alasdair Andrews, 20 Monkwood Court, Edinburgh, EH9 2DY or by e-mail: alasdair.andrews@btinternet.com from whom fact sheets are also available.

The New President



Alasdair Ian Andrews

Born and bred in Edinburgh Alasdair Andrews joined the ABMSAC in 1968 and became a more active member in 1974 when he attended the first Northern Dinner Meet held at the Glenridding Hotel. At Easter that year he organised his first ABMSAC meet – to Braemar. Since then he has organised over one hundred and twenty meets for the Association mostly in Scotland or the Alps but also to the Lake District, Wales, Ireland and Crete. He served as Honorary Meets Secretary from 1979 to 1983, Honorary Vice President from 1985 to 1987, Honorary Treasurer since 1999 and acting Honorary Secretary in 2000/2001. He joined the Alpine Club in 1984.

His climbing career started in 1956 with the Edinburgh branch of the JMCS, continued with the Ferranti MC of which he is still a member. In his early days he was an active rock climber until increasing girth and fear converted him to simpler modes of ascent. He completed the Munros several years ago and has climbed dozens of alpine peaks very few of which warrant more than rather dismissive descriptions in guide books.

Most of his professional career was spent with Ferranti Ltd and its successor Companies from whom he took early retirement in 1998. His other great interest is in performing classical choral music and he currently sings with two semi-professional choirs in Edinburgh.

Editorial

My first year as Journal and Newsletter Editor has been both interesting and challenging. The Newsletters are fairly straightforward but the Journal needs to be more than just news. Above all both publications will cease to exist without contributions from our members, so please keep them coming.

I hope that not too many people have been reduced to avoiding me on meets when I prowl around trying to convince them that I need articles! My thanks go to all those who have contributed this time round, but don't think I won't be back.

I have tried to keep this Journal up to the standard set by my predecessors. It is a mixture of articles on current activities and locations round the world, together with some good tales of earlier adventures.

From the John Byam-Grounds Legacy we have been able to buy Microsoft Publisher software. This helps me enormously and saves us money each year. I now format and assemble the publications as copy arrives which enable me to push back copy deadlines to the last moment and then I give our printer the whole thing on a CD ready for printing. I am most grateful for this as it allows me to be more flexible over deadlines. That being said, please make sure that you note the deadline dates published in the Newsletter and please try to respect them.

We have a new President and look forward to the tasks in hand. I hope that by this time next year I will be able to report on some exciting developments on matters such as hut improvements and recruitment of new members. Watch this space.

Richard Winter – Honorary Editor

The Couloir

Many years ago when I was but a lad I was fortunate enough to meet up with two fellows who were climbers. Previous to that I had summer hill walked in Scotland for a number of years during which the most serious "walk" I had tackled was the Achir ridge in Arran.

One of these fellows, Graham, was a colleague for some time in teaching and this permitted us to climb on mid term holidays. So on one of these days we arranged to climb. It was a beautiful day in February and the hills were in excellent snow condition. Graham proposed that we should go and do the Upper Couloir on Stob Gabhar and I, being abysmally ignorant of what it meant, agreed. We reached Forest Lodge safely and proceeded towards the mountain. The route by which we approached the gully was not, as I found out later, the normal route because we set off straight up the tourist ridge route.

The climbing was magnificent and the snow-covered scenery was spectacular. The Glen Coe hills and Ben Nevis were particularly beautiful. Shortly before reaching the summit we stopped beside a steep snow slope and geared up. In those days this was elementary. We tied on the rope picked up our ice axes and were ready for the fray. Very few in Scotland carried crampons and as for harnesses and protection belay equipment we had none save our trusty ice axes. Graham led me to the edge of the snow slope, fortunately without a cornice, and said to me jump. I gulped, looked at this thirty-degree slope, and jumped. The snow was in such perfect condition that it was very safe.

We then proceeded to traverse down for about three hundred feet and round a corner of the buttress to reach the gully entrance. This involved kicking steps, leading in succession, with the odd slash being needed for patches of harder snow. Fortunately not a lot of step cutting was needed and we reached the gully in good time. The gully is a three hundred foot slit between two large rock buttresses and exits virtually on the summit. The guide book description, which I read afterwards, indicates a start of about one hundred and fifty feet of hard packed snow followed by an ice pitch which varies in length between fifteen and thirty feet depending on the conditions. The final slopes are sustained steep snow with the possibility of a cornice at the exit. The guide book also states that in very extreme or unusual conditions it may well be ice from top to bottom!

Graham and I then set off up the gully kicking steps and leading through and through until we reached the ice pitch. The ice pitch on this day looked to me quite formidable, it was about fifteen feet of quite steep ice, certainly steeper than the general angle of the gully. To put it bluntly for the uninitiated it was frightening. Graham started on this ice pitch and was lucky because someone had been up recently and cut steps at intervals suitable for a giant, they were very far apart, intermediate step cutting was all that was needed.

Some time later Graham reached the snow above the ice and after belaying summoned me up. Climbing the ice was very straightforward after someone else had cut the steps. However I did try cutting a step or two and realised just how difficult it was to cut and shape good steps in hard ice, whereas crampons, two short axes and good technique would make the gully ice pitch easy.

Above the ice pitch the snow was hard and at a sustained steepness of somewhere between thirty and forty degrees. Since we had no crampons step cutting was needed all the way up the remaining two hundred feet. We set to on this task knowing that the worst bit was behind us and leading through and through I quickly learned how to cut good steps in hard but firm snow. This was an enjoyable climb but with our old fashioned technique was slow but steady. Eventually we reached the last pitch only to find that there was no cornice, only a steepening of the snow. We overcame this minor difficulty and emerged to find ourselves on the summit of the mountain in beautiful sunshine having enjoyed an excellent climb.

After enjoying the wonderful views for a little while and partaking of some refreshment we set off down and Graham suggested we glissade down the corrie, warning me at the same time that it would be fast and control would be paramount. This we proceeded to do. I quickly learned that control was paramount but after an exhilarating and exciting thousand feet we safely reached the bottom. From here it was a lovely walk in late evening sunshine and glow back to the car at Forest Lodge.

Thus ended my first ever day of Scottish winter mountaineering and during that eventful day I was transformed by Graham from a pedestrian hill walker into a mountaineer. Since then the skills and experience have been enhanced and I have been back to the Couloir on three other occasions, where two were failures and one was successful, but then these are other stories.

Bill Peebles

The Ascent of the Dom, 4545m, August 1968

"John, I hope you don't mind". Toby was just back from Zermatt, where he had been getting fresh bread for breakfast. What had he done now? We were soon to find out.

Some words of introduction are required. It was my first visit to the high Alps, and we had chosen Zermatt, where the average height of the principal mountains is greater than anywhere else in the Alps. We were camping on the old campsite, some distance below the village: hence Toby's daily bread expedition, for which he had volunteered with typical generosity. There were five of us, and brief character assassinations of the other members of the party may be useful. Toby Norris was an international orienteer, and understandably was the fittest member of the party. He had done the Haute Route over the passes and glaciers from Chamonix to Zermatt the season before, but was very definitely not a climber: he quickly got nervous and very vocal in exposed or difficult situations. Martin Thompson, 37, was rather older than the rest of us. He was fit, and a good cyclist. He had been to Zermatt on a course the previous year, and had done some climbing both on rock and ice. But he was more of a follower than a leader when things became technical. Roger Havelock was quite fit and daring, and could lead V Diff. rock. But he was somewhat obtuse and very argumentative, almost invariably challenging any decision. We called him "Havoc". My wife Sylvia was technically competent and had a fairly cool head. We had done quite a lot of moderate climbing in the Lake District, Wales, and Norway, and had been on a course in the Austrian Alps. But the high Alps were different.

We underestimated the effects of altitude, the difficulties of sleeping in high huts and of carrying heavy climbing gear, and the importance of moving together quickly over difficult ground. But we learned fast, and after failing on the Zinalrothorn, we climbed the Alphubel 4206m (an epic), Monte Rosa 4634m, and the Trifthorn 3728m. Sylvia was so affected by the altitude at the top of Monte Rosa that we had to tie her to the summit cross. Now we hoped to climb the Dom 4545m., the highest mountain entirely in Switzerland.

What Toby had done was to meet an American called Marvin Goss and, subject to my veto, had invited him to join us on the Dom. Marvin was in the US Air Force, and was stationed in Germany. He was one of the most disorganised people I have ever met: if he were told to bomb Iraq, Iran would be in dire peril. I acquiesced in his inclusion in the party. But help was at hand. We had met two very experienced Alpine Club Members, Anthony Rawlinson and Patrick Limerick, aged 38. Anthony had got injured, and Patrick asked if he could join us. He was very welcome. He was very upright and "pukka", having served in a cavalry regiment and been on Himalayan expeditions. We later found out that he was the Earl of Limerick.

On the next day our assorted party set out for the Dom Hut 2928m. We first had to catch the train from Zermatt down to Randa, and then had a steep walk to the hut involving 1500 metres of ascent. We left the hut at 3am the next day, staggering uphill by the light of head torches. When the time came to rope up, I played my masterstroke: I invited Patrick to lead one rope with Marvin, Toby and Havoc, while I led the more amenable Martin and Sylvia. Marvin's rope management was appalling: he was constantly treading on the rope with his crampons. Patrick took it all with a stiff upper lip. The route went up The North Flank of the Dom. This sounds dramatic, but it was in fact quite a straightforward snow climb. It was long, with over 1600 metres of ascent in snow at high altitude, and involved considerable effort. We all got to the summit and safely down to the valley that night.

This account has been written at the request of Toby's daughter Calah, who is making a book of Toby and Joan stories to give to her parents for their 25th wedding anniversary in August 2003. Sadly, Patrick Limerick died on January 8th 2003, and his obituary appeared in the newspapers, giving details of his political, merchant banking, skiing and mountaineering achievements. He served as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under Edward Heath for two years, which he described as "absolutely not to be missed and absolutely not to be repeated". Surprisingly, there is no mention of his ascent of the Dom with Marvin, Toby and Havoc. Perhaps his comments on his time at the DTI would apply.

John Mercer

Four Alpine Gardens

Alpine flowers often give pleasure to climbers at the lower stages of a climb and they can be exceptionally pretty. It is not unknown for heated discussion to break out over the name of a particular flower. There is no better way of settling the argument than visiting an alpine garden, where a wide variety of plants are grown and where each plant is clearly labelled, generally with its common name as well as its botanical, Latin, name. Alpine gardens are a pleasure in themselves, with a wide variety of form and colour, often in a spectacular setting. There is a considerable number of such gardens in the Western Alps. In the summer of 2002 I visited four of them, choosing mid July for my visits, when the flowers are usually at their best.

My first visit was to La Rambertia, above Montreux on the Lake of Geneva. It dates from 1892 and is named after Eugene Rambert, a great naturalist and a devoted member of the Swiss Alpine Club. At an altitude of 6,500ft it is high for such a garden. The rock is limestone and for plants growing on acid soils peat and silica sand must be brought in. The flowers grown in all these gardens are not merely from the Alps, but from mountain regions all over the world.

At Rambertia I saw a fine clump of blue Jacob's Ladder, so called because the flowers are set alternately, ladderwise, on the stalk. The pink flowers of glossy cinquefoil, *potentilla nitida* were pretty, though not much like our garden *potentillas*. Many alpine plants cling to a pocket in the rocks, as did alpine balsam, *erinus alpinus*, with a multitude of tiny pink blooms. The yellow iris, *iris flavescens*, was both bold and colourful. The rich magenta of the Carthusian pink, *dianthus carthusianorum*, was an old favourite. I wondered whether the monks used the flower for medicinal purposes? I was drawn to a white flower from the arctic, of the phlox family, *polemonium boreale flore alba*, a very delicate looking thing for a hostile environment. And lastly two very familiar plants, edelweiss, which I had been surprised to see last in upland Tibet, and a small clump of gentians. True deep blue flowers are rare; in spite of its chocolate box image the gentian is a beautiful flower.

The setting of La Rambertia is also fine. The garden is set in a deep cleft in the rock that provides some shelter. Looking out from it there is a view of the mountains and lakes of the Bernese Oberland. But the view looking out from the rack railway on the way up to the garden is even more spectacular, encompassing almost all the Lake of Geneva including both the north, Swiss, and the south, French, shores, an unforgettable Alpine landscape. The garden has a good collection of plants and well repays a visit. Access is easy from Montreux.

My next visit was to the garden called La Thomasia, above Bex. This garden was begun in 1891, a year before La Rambertia, but is not so high, at an altitude of 4,100 ft. It is linked to the botanical garden and museum at Lausanne. I actually found it the least interesting of the gardens I visited, although there were some good things. I admired a striking purple and black thistle, *eryngium alpinum*. Most pleasing was a water feature, a swift flowing clear stream beside which were yellow and orange candelabra primulas, not alpine of course, but from the Himalayas. These primulas like having their roots near the water. Also by the water was one of the Himalayan blue poppies, *meconopsis betonicifolia*. It is another of the rare true blue flowers. I had last seen it in Tibet also. Wild iris, *iris versicolor*, grew beside the water as well. From the former Yugoslavia came *gladiolus byzantinus*, a purple flower, very like the common garden *gladiolus*. I took my leave of La Thomasia by examining a giant knapweed, *rhaponticum scariosum*, with purple flowers and the most curious bracts, looking like a tiny inverted beehive. The setting of La Thomasia is a meadow, sheltered by a cliff; it is not as impressive as that of La Rambertia, although pleasant enough. The garden is worth a visit if one happens to be near.

The next garden I visited was the Paradisia, near Cogne in the Gran Paradiso National Park. It is relatively new, having been begun in 1955, very well laid out and kept. It lies at an altitude of 5,600 ft. The garden included a number of areas of floral meadow, the dominant plants being varied. One of the meadow areas was filled with martagon lilies. I have always found it a very striking flower. I once came across a wild martagon lily on a path near Mont Blanc, with its form silhouetted against the mountain. I got quite carried away. In the garden I saw a planting of houseleeks, *sempervivum*. They are rather curious plants, but I have seen them en masse in an upland meadow near Courmayeur on the Tour du Mont Blanc and they were a very attractive sight. The garden included a yellow gentian, utterly unlike the low growing blue gentian but of the same family. The gardeners at the Paradisia had planted some orchids, *dactylorhiza fuchsii*, our common spotted orchid. There was a deep red clover. The effect of the ultraviolet light in a mountain setting is to intensify the flowers' coloration, which is one reason why these gardens are so rewarding. Many people have heard of asphodel, but relatively few have seen it. In this garden there were some plants in flower. I have seen it grow in great profusion in Corsica – literally fields of asphodel. And in the garden also I saw alpine aster, the companion to many an alpine walk. The setting of the Paradisia is fine, looking up to the west face of the Gran Paradiso massif. A visit is very well worth making if the opportunity occurs. The garden is not far from Cogne.

The last garden I visited was the Jardin Alpin du Lauterey. It was begun in 1899 and is linked to the University of Grenoble. It is high, at an altitude of 6,900 ft, and like the other gardens it has mountain plants from all over the world. I saw orange hawkweed, *hieracium aurantiacum*, aglow with colour in a meadow. I also saw rock soapwort, *saponaria ocymoides*, forming a cushion with a multitude of small pink flowers. The cushion form gives resistance to stress, wind and cold, and it is also very pretty; it is often found near the snow line. I chanced on a delightful corner with orange lilies and blue iris pallida, Dalmatian Iris. The latter is not found wild in the Western Alps; as its name implies it comes from the former Yugoslavia. Another plant in something of a cushion form was pink saxifrage, *saxifraga paniculata*. The Jardin Alpin du Lauterey also had a water feature, and the pink candelabra primula, *primula rosea*, was growing beside it, as was a beautiful specimen of the Himalayan blue poppy, *meconopsis grandis*. The dark red *potentilla atrosanguineum*, was included, although it does not grow wild in the Alps. It is sometimes used as a garden plant although it is markedly different from the common *potentilla*s. Another corner comprised white iris, *iris spuria*, dark pink paeonies, *paeonia caucasica*, and yellow lilies. Gardeners know that getting plants to flower together and form an effective picture can be difficult; at the Jardin Alpin du Lauterey they have it to perfection. A

true alpine flower was the white poppy, *papaver rhaeticum*, the yellow stamens contrasting with the white petals. From Greece came a columbine, *aquilegia elegantula*. The flowers were pure yellow and the form very similar to the common garden flower. There was a clump of orange lilies from Alaska.

The setting of the Jardin Alpin du Lauterey is most impressive, standing as it does beneath the north face of the Massif des Ecrins, with the glacier 'L'Homme' in full view. In the old Michelin guide books sights were classified 'see if possible', 'interesting', 'worth a detour' and (the best) 'worth a journey'. The Jardin Alpin du Lauterey is rather isolated and would probably demand a journey. However it is certainly worth it and I would strongly commend it to anyone who is interested. All of these gardens can give much pleasure.

James Bogle

An Australian Cycle Tour

Why go for a cycle tour of Australia? Distances can be vast, it can be hot and arid, and winds can be very strong. Australia was the only major English speaking country that I had not visited, and the opportunity to miss six weeks of the English winter was very welcome. My knee continues to deteriorate, and my walking is very limited: cycling seemed the best option.

Return flights have to be booked before departure, and so it is necessary to have a good idea of route and rest days before you leave. I used the excellent Lonely Planet Cycling Australia guide, which describes a number of routes, including the East Coast Explorer, which goes from Melbourne to Brisbane via Sydney in 31 days. Details are given of accommodation and food stops. My only complaint about these routes was that they often used unsealed (dirt) roads. Early trips to wineries convinced me that my laden touring bike needed to keep to sealed roads (tarmac). I decided to cycle from Melbourne to Sydney, with an extension along the Great Ocean Road and an excursion inland, crossing the Great Dividing Range twice. I followed Lonely Planet routes about 60% of the time, and devised my own for the rest.

I arrived in Melbourne on October 29th 2002, and left Sydney on December 10th after cycling 1500 miles in six weeks.

Accommodation was available in: Backpackers and Youth Hostels, Caravan Parks and Pubs. Cooking facilities and washing machines were available in the first two: I cooked where possible to keep costs down. Typically, a bed for the night cost £10, and food was cheap. A main course in a pub cost £5 to £8.

It is rumoured that I am addicted to beer. My trip proved this to be false: I am addicted to hops. These are almost totally absent in the bland, cold liquid the Australians call beer, so pub lunches were out. But cafes and small country general stores sell excellent hot pies for about £1. Meat is cheap, and Australians have had the original idea of using good meat in their pies.

Tourist offices were unfailingly helpful. They provided good maps and details of food and accommodation. This was very necessary on one route where there was no shop for 60 miles and the only accommodation was 3 miles off route.

I visited about 20 wineries on my tour, and had some interesting tastings and conversations.

Subjects included fire fighting in Australia, and life in Rumania under communism. I was impressed by "cool climate" pinot noirs on the Mornington Peninsula and in the Yarra Valley. The Shiraz and Cabernets were generally not to my taste: they were very different to their French equivalents. I enjoyed the Rieslings and Semillons among the whites.

My idea of Australians was largely based on the image of their sportsmen. This is of flinty faced individuals of undeviating purpose and tremendous application who give no quarter, going round at the end of the game counting the dead and bayoneting the wounded. The reality is quite different. I found Australians very helpful and welcoming, and very willing to help a passing tourist.

On two occasions, Australians went out of their way to give me a lift (with my bike) to take me where I needed to go (to a camera repairer and a bike repairer respectively). In a remote country hamlet with no shop or pub, a family gave me an excellent evening meal with unlimited wine, bed, breakfast and sandwiches for the next day for £15 when the two listed bed and breakfasts were unavailable. A caravan park owner cooked my meat and asked me to join his young family for their evening barbecue, providing all the trimmings free. This friendliness generated very warm feelings, particularly when I was in some difficulty at the time.

My only problem was with the very strong Australian accent. My hearing is not good, and at times I found it difficult to understand what was said. I did not dare to interrogate a man in a rural pub in Victoria who said he was down from New South Wales "crotching sheep".

Melbourne is an attractive city with wide streets, and is easy to cycle in. I enjoyed the Melbourne Cricket Ground (100,000 capacity), which is also used for Australian Rules football, and was the site of the 1956 Olympics. The old sections are progressively being knocked down and rebuilt. The other striking visit was to the gloomy 19th century Melbourne gaol, where Ned Kelly was hanged. His last words were "Such is life". I also took a combined bike and train trip to visit several wineries in the Yarra Valley.

To start the cycling proper, I took a train to Warrnambool, about 200 miles west of Melbourne. This is the start of what is modestly called The Great Ocean Road. This is the best-known coast road in Australia, and is a fine route along the Shipwreck Coast, with a good limestone coast and many sea-stacks. A series of pinnacles called the Twelve Apostles is one of the most photographed sights in Australia. Nature does not stand still, and the number has now been reduced below twelve.

The Shipwreck Coast is a reminder that Australia is in the Roaring Forties. Winds are very strong, and dominate the weather and cycling. The prevailing winds are west to southwest, giving cool weather on the coast with some rain. When the north wind blows off the interior, temperatures can rise to 35C.

The route goes south of Melbourne via two ferries and across the Mornington Peninsula to Phillip Island, home of Australia's biggest natural tourist attraction. (The Sydney Harbour Bridge is unnatural) This is the Fairy Penguin Parade. (no kidding). At dusk, hundreds of penguins come out of the sea, waddle up the beach and along paths to their burrows, which can be up to a mile from the sea. This is highly organised: you stand on viewing platforms to see it all, but the penguins do not seem to mind. From Phillip Island, I cycled along the coast to Sale (sic) and Bairnsdale. This was flat country, and with a good following wind, I did 80 miles one day.

Is there no end to Australian Greatness? It would seem not. The Great Alpine Road goes across the Great Dividing Range. I had one very hard day when I climbed 1500 metres, which was just about my limit. In the middle of it a cycling group who had a van offered me a lift. I refused: foolish pride. The names along the road were great fun: I stayed at Dinner Plain, crossed Jim and Jack Creek and Flourbag Plain. A horse thief called Bogong Jack was an early user of the road.

The Ovens valley on the other side of the range was green and pleasant, with many imported deciduous trees – a nice change from the ubiquitous gums. Bright and Beechworth were both attractive and well-preserved Victorian gold rush towns, and Milawa and Rutherglen provided more winery visits. At Chambers in Rutherglen, I met Bill Chambers, 5th generation winemaker, who is described by Robert Parker as "the undisputed king of fortified wines in Australia". He invited me to stay the night, which was very generous. I then cycled up the Murray River valley to Khancoban, where the big hills began.

Now we come to the difficult bit. Since crossing the Range, it was very hot: 35C in the shade, and hotter on the road. This brought out the flies, previously absent. They swarmed around you at any speed below 6 mph. All this was a bit enervating, and I had to re-cross the Range. Unless I was prepared to stop in an intermediate campsite with no tent, the next day would involve 2500 metres vertical ascent in a day: much too much for me. So I hitchbiked, quite easily, to the pass called Dead Horse Gap, where there was a herd of brumbies (wild horses). It was easy to freewheel down from the pass to Thredbo, Australia's main skiing village.

Mount Kosciuszko, 2228m. is Australia's highest mountain, and a chairlift from Thredbo does most of the climbing. So I could not resist the temptation to join the hundreds of others who walk to the top each day. It is a gentle walk through fine, rolling country. There was still a fair amount of snow and a few snow patches had to be crossed.

When I dropped down from the mountains, the flies vanished, and I rode over high, grassy plains to Canberra, where I spent an interesting couple of days seeing the sights. The new Parliament Buildings are very high tech, but rather soulless. They are built on top of a hill, but are underground, so as not to dominate the city. Why not? The guides to the public buildings were excellent, and taught me a lot about the Australian political and legal systems.

From Canberra, I had two tough and hilly days to the coast, and then two days up the coast to Sydney. The last day was very dramatic. I started at 6.45am, and had a trip through a national park for the first 30 miles. National parks are usually hilly and covered in eucalyptus or gum trees: this was no exception. I then took a ferry to Cronulla, and was soon on the shores of Botany Bay. A short detour took me to Captain Cook's first landing place in Australia. Then back round the shores of Botany Bay, the last five miles being on a lovely cycle path along the beach, with fine views of the city, getting closer and closer. I was then projected on to a three-lane motorway, which amazingly was open to cyclists, and a tunnel under the airport. Initially there was no hard shoulder, and fast traffic joining from slip roads was quite a challenge. Somewhat shaken, and pretty tired, I arrived in Sydney, and a backpackers hostel.

I needed a rest day. I was staying near the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG), and England was playing New South Wales in a one-day game, so I went to watch. It was great fun, but England lost comprehensively.

Somewhat to my surprise, I found cycling in Sydney quite easy. Perhaps it helped that I was there at the weekend. I was only a couple of miles south of the centre, and used my bike to get

around. Cycling is an excellent way of moving from one tourist site to another. Sydney Harbour is magnificent. I did all the standard tourist things, cycling over the Harbour Bridge, visiting the walkway on the other side, and touring the Opera House and the Art Gallery. I also took a ferry to Manly on the north side of the harbour. On my last day, I did the Sydney Olympic Explorer ride. This follows the Olympic road race course, and visits many of the beaches around Sydney, including Bondi Beach.

It was a magnificent trip, thoroughly enjoyable and an excellent way to see Australia. On consideration, I think I went at about the best time for the areas I visited. The temperature was about 15C for the first fortnight, and I often wore my rain-jacket in the mornings to keep warm. It was very hot (35C) to the west of the mountains, but once I had re-crossed the mountains to the east, temperatures remained at a very pleasant 20C right up to Sydney.

John Mercer

A E W Mason 1865 – 1948 Author, Mountaineer, Parliamentarian and Secret Agent

It may surprise some of our members to learn that the president of the ABMSAC during the period from 1913 to 1922 was one of the most popular authors of the first half of the 20th Century. Furthermore, few of those who have enjoyed his novels are aware that many of the thrilling incidents in his books are based on his own experiences in real life.

A E W Mason was born at Camberwell in 1865. After his schooling at Dulwich College he went up to Trinity College, Oxford where he read "Greats". It was one of his tutors, the then youthful Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, who introduced Mason to the hills. Every Easter vacation Quiller-Couch used to invite a number of undergraduates to a reading party at Wastdale Head in the English Lake District and Mason was a member of his party in 1885 and 1887. Besides learning to rock climb, Mason had the unique opportunity of watching "Q" write his novel *Dead Man's Rock* with the result that Mason concluded that he ought to be able to write a novel too! After leaving Oxford, Mason spent no less than six years with a series of provincial touring companies trying to make a career as an actor before realising his limitations and turning to his ability with pen and ink. His first novel *A Romance of Wastdale*, which was published in 1895, was an immediate success and, with his financial position at last stabilised, he set off for the first of his many Alpine seasons.

Novels followed in steady succession and, with the publication of *The Four Feathers* in 1902, Mason was a household name ranked among the foremost authors of his day. He was a great traveller and took enormous care with the background to his novels. For example, *The Four Feathers* was partly inspired by an extended shooting trip that he made to the Sudan in 1901 and *Miranda of the Balcony* was the result of a journey through Spain and Morocco in 1899 – the first of many. Prior to 1910 most of Mason's works can best be described as romantic thrillers. It is easy to understand why his delightful heroines inspired the chivalrous acts of his heroes. Amundsen was so inspired by *The Four Feathers* that he took it with him to both the North and South Poles.

In 1906 Mason successfully stood for Parliament as the Liberal Member for Coventry but this did not prevent him from spending a portion of his summers in the Alps. Like his hero, Jim Frobisher in the *House of the Arrow*, Mason climbed Mont Blanc five times and each time by a different route – via the Grand Mulets, via the Dôme du Goûter; via the Brouillard Arête shortly after its first ascent in 1901, via the Col du Midi and Mont Maudit and via the Brenva Arête. He often climbed alone and it was his solo traverse of Mont Blanc via the Brenva and descent to Chamonix in 16 hours which, in 1907, inspired him to write *Running Water* which many consider the finest mountaineering thriller ever written.

Mason's definition of a mountain was "something to spend all possible time on; you might never pass that way again". "Mason has got home from his Alp climbing" wrote J M Barry to R F Scott in 1906 "and is to climb in the house for a month and then going to climb in India". He was evidently completely hooked!

In 1908, after a climbing holiday in Zermatt, Mason's novels changed direction with the introduction of Monsieur Hanaud in *At the Villa Rose* and the many detective novels that followed. It could be argued that Hanaud was the inspiration for Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot, but there was an important difference – Mason's stories are completely "honest"; all the clues are there and if you re-read them you can't think why you didn't work out "who dunnit" the first time!

In spite of all his successes, Mason, like his autobiographical hero Martin Hillyard in *The Summons*, had been seeking his own "summons". Shortly after the Great War broke out, Mason, who was then aged 49, deducted 15 years from his age without a moment's hesitation and joined the Manchester Regiment as an infantry officer. Although he was only with the regiment for a few months, there is a wonderful tribute to Mason in a letter which he received in 1930 from an ordinary soldier in an uneducated hand; "you were, and no doubt always will be, remembered as one of the finest officers of our regiment – that is for all of us that managed to survive".

Early in 1915, Mason was himself summoned – by Commodore (later Admiral Sir Reginald) Hall, R.N. the famous Director of Naval Intelligence, who created "Room 40" at the Admiralty. In *The Summons*, Hall is known as Commodore Graham and his secretary Miss Chayne. They are of course the precursors of "M" and the Miss Money Penny who Ian Fleming (who worked in Naval Intelligence during the Second World War) immortalised 30 years later in the James Bond stories. Hall needed an agent in Spain. Mason was fluent in Spanish, very strong and fit, an accomplished actor who could sustain a part indefinitely, a first class shot with a rifle and possessed an intimate knowledge of Spain. He adopted the part of the millionaire owner of a large private steam yacht flying the red ensign, who, in spite of the U-boat menace, persisted with a pleasure cruise around the east coast of Spain and the Balearic Islands. In reality he was seeking proof that the Spanish government was turning a blind eye to the refuelling of U-boats in isolated inlets.

He was also very active on the mainland in disguise, intercepting fuses destined to sabotage French munitions factories, reporting on a plot to introduce an epidemic in England by implanting anthrax germs in the bristles of imported shaving brushes, etc. It is interesting to note that Admiral Canaris, then a lieutenant and later Hitler's Chief of Intelligence, was Mason's opposite number on the German side. It was almost certainly Mason who tipped off Hall that Mata Hari was travelling in a neutral Dutch ship from Spain to Holland with the result that the ship was intercepted by the Royal Navy in the Channel and after being interrogated by Hall in London, Mata Hari was handed over to the French. This explains why Mason, *en route* to

London from Spain, made a point of witnessing her execution by firing squad.

Mason was then sent to Mexico, in the guise of an English lepidopterist. His most important achievement was to destroy the eleven irreplaceable "audion lamps" (i.e. valves) which were a critical component in the high powered wireless station at a place called Ixtapalapa which the Germans used to transmit and receive signals across the Atlantic. (It was of course Hall's disclosure of the Zimmerman telegram - the German plot for Mexico to enter the war against the United States - that brought the latter into the war on the Allied side).

Mason was involved in numerous other exciting exploits before his cover was finally blown and several attempts were made on his life.

Mason never married although he is said to have had numerous love affairs. The real love of his life was the American singer, Edna May, who made her name in the London performance of *The Belle of New York* but she married someone else. Mason is said to have carried her photograph with him for the rest of his life.

In all, Mason wrote about 35 novels as well as a number of plays and other works. He died in 1948 at the age of 83 having lived an extraordinarily full and varied life.

The author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to the excellent biography of Mason by Roger Lancelyn Green, Parrish, 1952, for much of the information that is used in this article.

Robin Richards

The Western Atlas Allure

More years ago than I care to remember I was sitting in a café on the square in sunny Taroudant, the mini-Marrakech tucked in below the Western Atlas, desperately trying to complete some publishing deadline. A local kept interrupting and was eventually told to leave me alone for a week and then I'd give him my attention. He proved to be from a village in the mountains, near the twin fens of Awlim and Tingerwet that so dominate the rooftop views. The following year he persuaded me to visit the Medlawa valley and Tichka Plateau - and I've not missed a year in the Western Atlas in the twenty years since. Ali has become a close friend since and has travelled and climbed with me all over the Atlas, in 1995 being the mainstay of our 96-day, 1400km complete traverse of the Atlas.

One of the major joys of the Western Atlas is that it has not been sucked into the damaging sphere of commercial trekking so the friendly Berber hospitality remains unspoilt and the children have not become beggars. The area is extremely beautiful with deep-cut valleys vividly cultivated while the lost world of the Tichka Valley (the venue of the TV Wilderness Walks film) is ringed by precipitous peaks crying out for climbers. Trekking through this wild landscape is surprisingly easy, if strenuous, as mule tracks criss-cross the range and follow major valleys and we employ mules to carry good food, communal tent(s), and our own tents and gear. The weather is so much better than in the Alps or at home. Frequently a two-week trek will see no rain whatever. If nothing else, this takes me back and back.

Hooker, Ball and Maw in 1871 were the first to touch the fringe of the peaks west of the highest summit, Jbel Toubkal (4167m) and Joseph Thomson in 1888 romped through the Atlas while

Cunninghame Graham tried in 1897, was arrested, but wrote the most interesting book by these early explorers, all British. Europeans until would not visit the Tichka Plateau after World War One and often enough we trek or top summits probably never seen by outsiders. This exploratory element is another lure. Imagine been given the Alps before the visitors came!

The way into the Western Atlas is either by Land Rover or, more interestingly, in the back of a camionette (pick up) with its all-round views: deserty argan trees and palms give way to orange groves and olives then walnut trees about the highest villages, the houses piled on each other above the precious irrigated terraces. On the barren slopes above shepherds lead their flocks, in spring among a riot of flowers, a scene straight out of the Old Testament. Frequently the first night will be in a village house, being treated to a tagine (casserole-style stew), freshly baked bread and endless brews of mint tea.

We depart early, leaving the mules to be loaded, and they will soon storm past and have the kitchen tent pitched and the mint tea waiting when we reach the agreed stop; usually early in the afternoon so there is time to relax, look at birds and flowers, read, chat, and have supper at dusk before early bedding. All very civilised - usually. Over reaching or weather can produce a ration of epics.

Having mules allows fresh provisions to be carried so there is endless fresh fruit and tasty vegetables. Ali bakes bread each night. There are few areas in the world that combine such mountain pleasures. Life is hard in the mountains but traditional values and strong family ties still exist: it does us no harm to go back to basics occasionally as an antidote to our destructive western ways.

An Atlas Bibliography

The Rough Guide to Morocco gives a lot of good background information, potted history, cultural matters and extensive mountain coverage - which I wrote!

Atlas Traverse: Afoot from Taza to Tamri Is the book/report on our end-to-end traverse, privately printed, but there are copies in the Alpine Club library and the RGS. They also have books of the early explorers

A Tour in Morocco and the Great Atlas.

Hooker & Ball, 1878.

Travels in the Atlas and Southern Morocco.

Joseph Thomson, 1889.

Magreb el Acksa.

Cunninghame Graham, 1898.

Lords of the Atlas. Gavin Maxwell (1966) has recently been republished in a splendidly illustrated edition and tells the not so old story of the years up to independence among the tribal chiefs.

Appointment to Fes. G H Selous is my favourite more historical work. Up till World War One Morocco was forbidden territory, a mediaeval survival, the last country in Africa to be colonised though the closest to Europe.

There are a range of trekking guides to the more popular areas which have the usefulness of indicating where to avoid! 90% of Atlas visitors head for the crowded Toubkal trail. The best lies elsewhere, a score of magnificent areas, with the Western Atlas still one of the best. Try it some day. I'll be happy to pass on practical details and Ali would be delighted to take you into his splendid mountain world.

Hamish Brown

Scratching The Surface - Trekking in Patagonia.

In January 2002, responding to an invitation from Chris Hooker of Andean Trails to join him in Patagonia, my long-standing hill companion Tony Perrons and I flew down to Puerto Montt via Santiago. The aim of the trip was to reconnoitre less frequented areas in the north for future treks then continue south to see the renowned peaks of Fitzroy and Paine.

In Puerto Montt we met up with the fourth member of the party, Rob Lord. The Puerto Natalas bound Navimag ferry then took us overnight down the inner coast of Chiloe Island to Puerto Chacabuco. From there a minibus completed our journey to the nearby busy town of Coihaique where Chris was waiting, fresh from an epic on the Southern Icecap.

Our objectives were to explore the Castillo National Park then investigate access to the Northern Icecap from the Leon Valley, a few hours travel to the south. This, we hoped, could be completed in twelve days. Provisioning at the local supermarket was based on a misconceived notion that we all had an unflagging appetite for pasta. Back at base, food and fuel were split and repacked. Half was to be carried and the rest brought to us at the end of the trek by our hostel owner Santi in his 4WD, who would then take us on to the Leon.

Two hours in a crowded minibus down a fraction of the 1200km. Carretera Austral took us to the nearest access point to the Castillo National Park, where we were abandoned on the lonely roadside with a copied sketch map and 25kg each on our backs. The periphery of the park is cattle country, hilly grassland claimed from extensive forest. A dirt road was a gentle prelude to the rigours ahead. Beyond our overnight camp the pasture disappeared and the road turned into a trail under a canopy of sequoia-like conifers and dense small leafed *lenga* or southern beech. After a morning's walk it was a relief to break free and be confronted with the crenellated mass of the Cordillera Castillo and the meltwater fed Rio Turbio. Our intention being to explore its source, we followed the river's stony banks to grassy moraines about a mile below the Penon Glacier. A spectacular but cold place to camp.

The retreating glacier had cut deeply into the adjacent basalt peaks creating a loose rubble corridor leading up to its snout. We climbed it direct up frozen melt-water runnels then crunched over corrugated ice to a shattered *rognon*. Beyond it a barrier of high cliffs split the glacier into two tiers forcing us to make a 90-degree turn up the lower level. Turning an inconvenient patch of crevasses led unavoidably to beneath the serac topped rocks. With some haste we gained height up to a snow covered convex slope which soon proved to be greatly foreshortened. Transverse lines of deep crevasses constantly checked progress before the incline relaxed revealing a heavily crevassed bowl above which rose a high rock tower. It seemed a good point to aim at, especially as the now easily accessible upper tier offered an apparently easy route. On reaching the higher level we were surprised to find it was just a small part of an extensive undulating ice dome. How far it stretched we will probably never know. The edge certainly did curve invitingly up to the tower but unfortunately within a few hundred yards of our goal it was split by a '*schrund*', frustratingly just too wide for an uphill jump. Perhaps with more time we may have found a crossing but it was already late afternoon. However, ample compensation was found in our superbly elevated position with a backdrop of the turrets, spires and hanging glaciers of Cerro Penon, 2416m

Descent was rapid, made more so by following the dry glacier round the *rognon* on its down side to reach the terminal moraines. A boulder trail and solid rock rib spied earlier provided a far safer and drier exit than the snout now awash with melt-water.

Back at camp the day had a marvellous finale. High in the blue evening sky a flock of over thirty condors soared and wheeled above the sun lit summits.

Next morning we contoured round into a deep cut side valley, gaining height through thick beech and traversing bluffs and screes to reach the Pasada Penon, 1453m., a snow filled alley leading to the south side of Cerro Penon. Precariously loose moraines led into a wild corrie beneath the peak's glacier clad walls from which fell a string of sinuous cascades. The white-water outflow eventually tumbled into a densely forested basin to join a wider flow from the distant Laguna Cerro Castillo. Before the junction we were able to make a trouserless crossing to put us on course for the lake, though not before a trying spell of bushwacking among prickly thickets and fallen trees. Upstream, a small clearing beside the river provided enough space for our tents and an abundance of firewood.

Early morning saw us clear of the arboreal slopes and at last able to see the imposing -rock and ice scenery of Cerro Castillo Chico. Alpine meadows soon gave way to moraines and the turquoise *laguna* set in a deep basin beneath the dramatic towers and overhanging glaciers of Cerro Castillo, 2675m. High above the lake we had our first taste of the notorious Patagonian wind, blowing us over as we headed across a broad col on the flanks of the peak. A long scree slope beyond channelled us down into a stream bed, the only apparent passage through a forested side valley. Apprehension after being forced to rope down the side of a waterfall was unfounded and we soon picked up a trail into the Estero Parada, a deep wild valley leading to civilisation.

It was a long walk, first through interminable trees then down over steep grassland to an *estancia* above the floodwater flats of the Rio Ibanez. The final few miles along the sandy valley floor were enlivened by separate encounters with elderly inebriated *huasos* (*gauchos*. Arg.) returning from a horse sale and pleased to come across new faces in their remote environment. A less sociable event occurred in a narrow lane as we approached Villa Cerro Castillo when we had to leap for our lives to avoid a herd of horses driven towards us at the gallop by four young riders. Sadly the town was not to live up to this Wild West image.

The Carretera Austral is described as a *camino ripio*, that is, paved with stones. Certainly the only smooth part between Villa Cerro Castillo and the Lago General Carrera was where the surface had been coated with volcanic ash from the eruption of Cerro Hudson, some thirty miles away in 1991. Not far beyond the sleepy town of Rio Tranquilo we crossed the deep flow of the Rio Leon and turned up its long glacial valley.

The Leon Valley is the most northerly of five parallel valleys running eastward off the 70 miles long Northern Patagonian Icecap. It's around 22 miles in length and a couple of miles wide with several side valleys cutting deeply into its mountainous sides. The only information we had was a short report of a New Zealand expedition who spent a month based at the foot of the ice beside Lago Leon in 1970. They made several first ascents of icecap peaks and also climbed Cerro San Valentin, 4058m, the highest mountain in Patagonia.

A rough road led to an *estancia* at the start of the valley, after which it became a rutted sandy trail more favourable for horses. Santi seemed to enjoy the challenge, risking his vehicle to reach a ramshackle wooden homestead at about halfway. From there on we were on our own.

A mile on, the trail was obliterated by the remains of a huge landslide, the result of a high glacial lake bursting its banks. A flow of moraines, massive boulders, mud and trees, about a third of a

mile wide and running with melt-water swept across the valley floor. Not much further the trail rose steeply *above the river persuading us to camp whilst there were still grass patches among the pines and calafate* (berberis) bushes. Morning proved us right as we climbed high up a wooded spur then descended onto flats, thick with thorny shrubs. Ahead lay a curving barrier of tree covered moraines. Around the far end of it the river flowed from its source, the hidden Lago Leon. Although the earlier elevation had given us a distant sighting of the icecap summits the access to them had remained concealed. The sense of excitement as we stepped onto the moraine crest quickly changed to one of mixed emotions. The view was superb; the topography immediately raised doubts.

There were lakes to the left of us and lakes to the right, fed by glaciers and all running into the central Lago Leon. Connecting rivers were wide and rapid. Thick forest grew down to water's edge. The uncrossable and the impenetrable confronted us. Beyond, the icecap lay at least another three miles away. The significance of the remains of an aluminium canoe seen behind the homestead was suddenly apparent.

So far we had followed a horse trail, mystified by its purpose. Now it wandered airily along the moraines before descending steeply through the trees *above a cascade filled gully before levelling out into a wide clearing sandwiched between the moraines and wooded valley flanks.* There, among the prickly undergrowth, three cows were happily grazing. Never could there have been a more worthy case for a hill cattle subsidy.

We squeezed our tents in between the edge of the trees and the stream. A fine sheltered site with views of the *summits and regular visits from Chilean flickers* (woodpeckers) and green austral parakeets. The next day and a half were spent searching for a feasible route out of our cul-de-sac. A break in the forested flanks offered at least some upward progress and the possibility of a *minor summit.* However two hours to climb 300m. of prickles, scree and fallen trees left us with both shredded flesh and no desire to go further. Apart from running out of time and energy we were clearly too lightweight for the terrain. Retreat was agreed. Round a campfire we drowned our sorrows and celebrated our last pasta meal for a while with Chilean Red and *pisco.*

Descending the moraines we ran into two *huasos.* They had come to collect their cattle. If we waited for them at the homestead they would hire us horses. As it turned out only three were available but the relief of having our sacks carried made alternate turns at walking almost a pleasure. We reached the road in the early evening with a couple of hours to spare before flagging down the last minibus to the nearest village, Puerto Guadal.

So ended our exploration but not our journey. Over a thousand miles of travel lay ahead. First there was a rest day at Chile Chico on the shores of Lago General Carrero before crossing into Argentina to Los Antiguos by Lago Buenos Aires, (same lake, *different name.*) From there a seventeen hours bus journey on 400 miles of rubble road across undulating steppes under vast skies with little more life than the odd armadillo and fleeing rhea took us to Chalten in Los Glaciares National Park. Above the expanding town a busy path led up to the base of Fitzroy and an even busier furrow to Cerro Torre; rock spires worthy of all the superlatives they attract. A more haunting memory is that of the endless line of snow peaks fringing the Southern Icecap, seen across *Lago Viedma from the evening bus to El Calafate.* From this smart town on Lago Argentino we took an early morning taxi to the Perito Moreno Glacier. Separated by a narrow arm of the lake and from the safety of wooden catwalks, the final towers of blue ice can be seen *constantly toppling into the water, a spectacle no less impressive for all the tourist attachments.*

Later that day we were 160 miles south, crossing the border back into Chile and heading for nearby Puerto Natalas. A self drive vehicle took us back north for three days wandering in the Torres del Paine N. P., the highlight of which was a walk up to the wild and desolate corrie beneath the celebrated Towers. It was pity it should rain for the first time on our last day.

By evening we were back in Puerto Natalas for a farewell dinner. Next day Tony and I flew out of Punta Arenas on the Magellan Straits back to Santiago. It only took four hours.

Peter Farrington.

A Grand Day On The Bec

It was summer 2002 and we were having a splendid ABM holiday in the Vanoise. Luxuriating in the opulence of Laird Andrews' French hotel bargains, we had become tigerish table tennis players, useful bar billiard performers, occasional fitness room fanatics, always first with towels on the side of the swimming pool and established a mastery of the sauna controls as well as becoming connoisseurs of the regional wines and cuisine. When somebody spoiled it all by saying "shouldn't we be doing a climb?"

This surprising and highly reactionary suggestion was naturally brushed aside but after another round or so of beer, consciences were duly pricked. "Well let's make it a decent route then." Grand Bec got the vote over Grande Casse on the grounds of quality, proximity and the chance of a complete traverse. The following morning saw a well laden foursome, consisting of the Three Musketeers (John Edwards, John Brooks (JB) and Ron Hextall (RJ) plus a courageous David Watts, braving the Pralognan cableway to Mt. Bochor to give a welcome kick-start to the near 4,000 ft. walk up to Grand Bec Hut. A delightful walk followed with beautiful scenery first up to the Creux Noir cirque then swinging like monkeys on the cables to ascend the steep rocks and rising traverse to the Col de Leschaux at around 8,500 ft. Another hour or so contouring the Vuzelle Cwm saw us on the Col some 500 feet above Grand Bec Hut. As planned, having shared the load carrying and after a leisurely lunch, JB and RJ set back to Pralognan to make sure they arrived before the bars opened.

On arrival at the hut, David and John were given a warm and noisy welcome by the resident cockerel; the warden explained that there had been six hens to keep the cock happy until a fox called in two nights previously! After an excellent supper with good red wine we deployed to our comfortable bunks armed with no less than three electronic gadgets set to awaken us for a dawn start. Unfortunately the red wine proved more effective than the alarms and we eventually trudged out of the hut two hours after our planned start time. At the Col above the hut we stashed our excess gear under some rocks and after a few hundred feet started searching in the long rockband above for the "obvious gully" appraised in the guide book to give access to the West Ridge and thus our traverse of the Grand Bec. Although hampered by low cloud we searched thoroughly but in vain and eventually, conscious of the passage of time and cursing yet another unreliable guide book, set out to see if we could locate the Vuzelle glacier and climb the Bec by the South-East ridge. *Happily we were more successful in this venture and after an hour or so were climbing the glacier with increasing steepness and in improving weather.* Harnesses and crampons were donned and we roped up to tackle the 40° slope, somewhat reminiscent of Whymper's Couloir on Aiguille Verte, which extended above us to the distant ridge, which we

were able to occasionally glimpse through the billowing clouds. It was clear when we approached the snout of the glacier that there had been significant recession over recent years and as we climbed I pondered what effect this might have as we approached the narrows and more importantly the headwall. As we kicked into the snow, tinkling ice particles frolicked down the slope but as we got higher and steeper the texture changed and the surface became increasingly unstable. As we had not geared up to provide protection in these circumstances and it was unlikely that either climber could hold the other in the event of a fall we took the rope off and climbed solo but using the same steps. Apart from negating the risk of being pulled off, each could take the climb at his own pace and by keeping some fifty feet apart we lessened the load on any particular section of the surface. As we passed through the narrows the angle continued to increase to the worrying extent that it became seriously difficult to fill and light a pipe during rest stops. The sun was now showing between floating clouds and after an hour of front points and aching calves we reached the headwall of the glacier which was almost concave in shape and presented a near 60° angle up to the rocky saddle above. This was negotiated safely enough but not without a thought of the descent to be made in two or three hours time! Transferring from glacier to rock was a hazardous exercise due to the shrinking headwall exposing some 150 ft. of polished and loosened rocks which crashed down at the lightest touch of axe or crampon. We were relieved to reach the ridge and relative safety of the Pte. du Vallonnet at some 11,200 ft. About two kilometers of near horizontal South-East Ridge now lay between us and the summit but the height gain would be only some 100 ft. The ridge proved to be sharp and narrow, composed of sound granite and studded with towers and small gendarmes with some elegant and exposed situations. We were able to move together on the rope for some of the pitches mainly climbing towers direct and finding plenty of abandoned slings in position for the abseils. It was enjoyable climbing, mostly grade II to III+, the only ingredient missing was a view of the surrounding peaks.



Grand Bec Summit Ridge.

Photo: *David Watts*

An hour or so of fine mixed climbing saw us happily taking lunch on top and rewarded when the clouds cleared from time to time to allow us to admire the nearby peaks of Gliere, Grande Casse and Grande Motte. Although the more distant splendour of the Mont Blanc range remained hidden.



John Edwards on the summit. Photo: *David Watts*

The sun which now warmed our backs reminded me that we were some way from home and had a long and potentially dicey descent down a steep glacier which would really be warming up by now. Without further delay we reversed the South-East Ridge at best speed and came up to the saddle above the Vuzelle glacier. The sight below was daunting. The loose rock wall between the saddle and the glacier was literally melting. What we could see of the snow on the glacier did not look too promising either - the reasonably crisp snow seemed to have turned to watery ice. We took the rope off and took separate routes to cautiously reverse the rock wall. As soon as I stepped down to the glacier an internal warning bell rang urgently in my head; this was lethal! I called to David who was about to step off the rocks about 20 yards to my right. He acknowledged and carefully transferred to the glacier but within seconds was hurtling downwards at an alarming speed desperately trying to brake with his single ice-axe. His downhill performance quickly relegated Alberto Tomba to silver medal position and all the others to "also-ran". Noisily encouraged and when all seemed lost, David reversed his axe from adze to pick and executed a brilliant arrest - one of the best I had seen in 45 years of snow and ice climbing. Shaken but not unduly stirred he calmly secured his position. Thereafter using an axe and a shortened ski stick each and facing inwards we began a slow but more controlled descent. It took an hour or so of fairly tense activity before we cleared the glacier and took a well earned break for chocolate, drinks and a pipe. Another hour saw us back at our stashed gear where we took on the extra loads and set off on the long trail back to Pralognan. Having long since missed the last cable car from Mt. Bochor we had plenty of walking time to fully appreciate the wondrous "blue hour" amongst the beautiful Vanoise Alps. We reflected on our 14 ½ hour day and a highly enjoyable climb which, although in the conditions was no more than AD+, had provided plenty of adventure. On return to Hotel de la Vanoise we were grateful to our friends for arranging a very late supper and for not having over reacted to our delayed return.

John Edwards

The Comeragh Mountains of Ireland

The Comeragh Mountains are just south of the town of Clonmel in Co. Tipperary, two hours from Rosslare and two and a half hours from Dublin. There is a full range of accommodation in Clonmel and excellent B&B/Guesthouses in the hills themselves.

Other ranges in Ireland may be more famous, Wicklow, Kerry, Mourne, but the Comeraghs have a charm and challenge of their own. There are difficult gullies, mighty ridges, extensive routes and many lakes. On the Knocanaffrin Ridge I once looked down into the cockpit of a glider, and more recently, have been buzzed by a peregrine falcon.

The Comeragh Mountains are an isolated massif surrounded by the rich agricultural land of County Waterford in the south east of Ireland. Strictly speaking there are two mountain ranges, though the distinction between the Comeragh and Monarullagh Mountains is not entirely clear. 'The Comeraghs' is the name usually applied to both ranges combined. The word Comeragh is from the Irish, Cumerach, meaning "abounding in hollows and river confluences" and Monarullagh is Móin á Mhullaigh, meaning "bog of (or on) the summit" from McGrath D - *A Guide to the Comeragh Mountains, Waterford Institute of Technology 1995*. [This is a complete guide - flora, fauna, geology, climate etc. The maps of walks however, use the Irish names of peaks, passes etc.]

A more recent publication *New Irish Walks and Scrambles - The Galty, Knockmealdown and Comeragh Mountains* by Barry Keane, Collins Press is specifically to do with walks, scrambles and climbs. The relevant O.S. Map is Discovery Series No 75. There are VS, HVS and E1 climbs around Coumshingaun and the Mahon Falls.

The top plateau is mostly bog, and climbing up and down is thus fairly tiresome as well as challenging. Map and compass skills are the order of the day as cloud fog is frequent, and the area is not too far from the sea. (Dunvargan is a yachting centre and Clonea Strand nearby, a marvellous sandy beach).

In June I spent seven days out of nine on various routes, anything from four to seven hours depending on my own time limits. On only one day did I meet anyone else, and that was a Saturday. Rain gear and compass were a necessity!

It is an area not at all large, and yet I can feel alone on this planet. So it does not have the great vistas of the Lake District or the starkness of North Wales, but there was one winter when my photographs look truly Alpine.

If anyone wants further information I will be happy to supply it.

Pat Brennan

A Day In The Sun

I was able to get a week at the camping meet before the family flew out for the summer holiday. The rainstorm that stopped the motorway traffic at Geneva should have warned me; and the comments from everybody at the campsite that I should have seen the weather last week....

The mist hung in the trees above the Servoz campsite. Every now and again it would lift to reveal the mountains above and the snow line getting ever lower. The weather forecast, pinned up on the wall and avidly read each day, always promised better weather the day after

tomorrow. After a wet afternoon wandering around the gear shops of Chamonix a plan started to emerge - book a hut and then go and try to find the elusive weather. Tomorrow came; good weather forecasted for the following day, Henry had booked two hut places but was changing his mind as it was raining. We hesitate and then decide to take his booking; Mike and Jeff try to book into the hut, but it is full.

After lunch in the rain we pack our sacks, load the car and drive round to les Contamines. As we approach we are greeted by blue sky and sunshine - looking back there is a veil of mist and drizzle over the Servoz area. We set off for the Conscrits Hut in mid afternoon in shorts and T-shirts, only to meet a Scots climber and his mates descending totally clad in waterproofs. The Scots chap tells us that there is deep fresh snow down to the hut and they have been snowed in for two days! Although this doesn't bode well we decide to go for the exercise anyway. The walk through the woods on the windy uphill path to the Refuge de Trelatete was steady going and we were making good time in the sunshine. After the hut, which was surrounded by picnickers and day-trippers, we head for the glacier and follow the cairns across the rubble strewn surface of the glacier to reach the heavily eroded path up to the ridge. The path has chains bolted to the rock face to help haul ourselves up; we eventually emerge onto the ridge path leading to the new Conscrits Hut. We can see no snow at all, never mind fresh snow - a rapid thaw has taken place?

We spot the new hut a while before reaching it, a grand affair with panoramic views from its terrace. We check in and are put in the winter room annexe outside the front door, which is cosy. On unpacking Pete discovers that he has left his crampons back at the campsite in Jeff's car, he thinks he might need them in the morning. We plan ways of doing the climb without crampons and think that we can give it a go. Pete asks at reception if they have any spare crampons - yes they do and they fit his boots, what a stroke of luck. Back to plan A.

After an excellent dinner we watch the sun set and sort out our gear for the morning. It seems that most people in the hut are attempting the same route as us, which will be fun. The usual fitful sleep follows; being woken up by early starters wasn't helpful - why can't people get up quietly? Then we are up and off. We set off in the pack and follow the head torches in front. We slowly overtake parties as they stop for drinks/put on coats/take off coats/rope up/put on crampons/take off crampons etc - I've never seen such range of activities in such a short distance- we haven't even reached the glacier yet and there is still no fresh snow.

When we meet the glacier de Tre la Tete there is a trail from yesterday. More parties stop to rope up and put on crampons. The fresh snow on the glacier is firm and makes walking along easy and we kick steps on the steeper sections. The dawn has broken and blue sky is all around - a great morning. After a short pull at the head of the glacier we are at the shoulder and stop for a second breakfast and a look at the view. There are now only about five parties in front of us. We continue on up, the fine snow ridge to the summit of the Domes de Miage. It has turned out a perfect morning with great views of the higher peaks, the bad weather of recent days vanishing from my mind.

Most parties are returning to the hut by the ascent route, but we planned to do the traverse of the ridge to the Aiguille de la Berangere. The ridge looks good with a few rocky steps and will complete the day nicely. The fresh snow on the ridge has been softened by the early morning sun and slides away as we descend from the summit along the ridge. A parascender takes off from the Aig. de la Berangere end of the ridge and lazily circles around the peaks before vanishing back down to les Contamines. The ridge is more interesting than the snow plod to the summit,

with several rocky steps covered in fresh snow. Pete and I are enjoying ourselves. We are held up by a couple of slow parties on the steps, but they let us through. At the summit of the Aiguille we swap pictures and admire the view before heading off back to the hut. On the long snow descent back to the rocky area above the hut I'm glad that my newly bought "anti-balling" plates are working well.

We have lunch on the sun terrace of the hut – a welcome cold beer and our hill food. Pete returns his borrowed crampons and makes a "donation" to the hut for the loan – everybody is happy! A quick change back into shorts and T-shirt and we head off back down the track in the afternoon sun.

Mike Goodyer



Pete on the summit.

Photo: *Mike Goodyer*

MEET REPORTS

Scottish Winter Meets – 2001/2002 by John Foster

Tulloch Meet - October 2001

The meet was reasonably well attended with ten participants. The accommodation was well located for hillwalking and extremely convenient for those arriving by train! The bunkhouse is the former station building.

The weather was generally wet, cloudy and mild but did not deter us from making excursions into the hills that were very wet underfoot.

On the Saturday, John and Marj Foster and Geoff Urmston climbed Stob Choire Claurigh in the Grey Corries (only finding on the way down that they could have driven over a mile closer)

whilst Jim and Margaret Strachan walked in upper Glen Nevis in the vicinity of the Steall waterfall. Peter Farrington and Philip Hands originally set their goals on Creag Meagaidh but decided on something less strenuous and smaller because of the poor weather. They climbed Beinn Tealach, a summit within easy reach of the bunkhouse.

On the Sunday the weather improved. John and Marj climbed the Drumochter Geal Charn on their way home and Peter Farrington and Philip Hands decided upon and climbed Creag Meagaidh. None of the parties alas, enjoyed views from the summits.

Attendees: Alasdair Andrews, Colin Armstrong, Peter Farrington, John Foster, Marj Foster, Phil Hands, Alf Lock, Jim Strachan, Margaret Strachan, Geoff Urmston.

Braemar Meet - November 2001

Ten of us converged on Braemar for this meet. The weather on Saturday was cloudy on most of the mountain tops, high winds, and because of heavy snowfall immediately before the meet rivers and streams were full. However, several parties set off in various directions and with various degrees of success. An ascent of An Socach was successful and also provided views for most of the day), an attempt on Lochnagar resulted in half of the group getting to the top and another excursion was called off after the group got lost in the surrounding forestry!

River crossings provided much of the excitement in each case. John Foster's reputation took a knock when he and the rest of the An Socach party waited for Marj to take the lead in crossing a bridge labelled unsafe. Half of the party ascending Lochnagar were turned back by a swollen river, and Margaret Strachan parted company with her mountain bike whilst crossing a third river during the abortive trip into the Cairngorms.

Anyway, a very pleasant dinner followed in the Fife Arms in Braemar, but unfortunately the weather deteriorated by Sunday morning, so no further summits were attempted.

Attendees: Alasdair Andrews, Geoff Bone, John Foster, Marj Foster, Alf Lock, Bill Peebles, Mike Scarr, Jim Strachan, Margaret Strachan, Geoff Urmston.

Fearnan Meet - December 2001

This was a small meet with 7 attendees. The weather on Saturday began very poor, with high winds and cloud, but improved during the day. After an initial decision to stay low on a valley walk, a last minute change of mind resulted in parties ascending Beinn Tulaichean and Farragon Hill. Conditions on top of the hills were surprisingly icy, but the day was good enough for most of the Beinn Tulaichean party to continue on to Cruach Ardrain before returning to the cars.

A very enjoyable day was completed with a meal in the Tigh an Loan hotel, and they did us proud!

The following day was very cold and windy, but John, John, and Marj, climbed Carn Gorm, Roger and David completed another Corbett, and Phil and Geoff waded part way up Beinn Chabhair, before retreating hurriedly to depart for warmer climes.

Attendees: John Dempster, David Ellis, John Foster, Marj Foster, Phil Hands, Roger James, Geoff Urmston.

Braincroft (Comrie) – February 2002

Eleven intrepid hillwalkers gathered on the Friday evening for this meet, battling high winds and blizzards to find a very well appointed and warm bunkhouse (and a similarly-described local bar with its own performing canine). Four more personnel joined us for the day on Saturday, probably because of a rumoured bottle of malt whisky in the bunkhouse. Having made plans to attack sundry different summits, we all set out for Ben Vorlich on the grounds that we *might* be able to get the cars as far as that through the snow!

Having slithered to the parking place for the mountain, the ascent proved “entertaining” with soft snow over ice, high winds, and intermittent blizzards. However, most of us completed the ascent (though the intended extension to Stuc a Chroin was abandoned without argument) and returned fairly safe and very satisfied – though with several posterior bruises - via a warm bar before partaking in a very pleasant meal in Crieff.

Sunday’s weather promised to be a repeat of Saturday, and sights were lowered accordingly, but in fact the expected bad weather never materialised, and a very enjoyable day resulted for those who took to the hills before returning home. Unfortunately a lifeless car battery thwarted Phil, who had been intending a particularly intrepid excursion. Deciding on discretion, he disappeared back over the border faster than the English survivors of Bannockburn!

Attendees: Colin Armstrong, Bert Bowes, John Dempster, Heather Eddowes, Mark Eddowes, John Foster, Marj Foster, Phil Hands, Jim Strachan, Margaret Strachan, Geoff Urmston. Day-Trippers: Alasdair Andrews, Geoff Bone, David Jamieson, Bill Peebles.

Kintail - March 2002

Kintail is further than we normally go for a Scottish winter weekend. Nevertheless some 17 club members and friends sat down to dinner at Conchra Lodge on the Saturday night; with the added pleasure of celebrating John Foster’s half century (years not Munroes – his score of the latter must be much higher).

Those of us who had arrived earlier in the week had been rewarded with some glorious weather, with postcard-type views of the hills under a good covering of spring snow. The highlight was a trip to Skye when one party reached the South summit of Blaven and another did the Bellig – Garbh-bheinn traverse, which proved the limit of our capabilities in the conditions.

Alas the Saturday of the meet was one of those days that started gloomy and looked as though it was going to get worse. Undeterred a large party set off for Beinn Fhada: the rain never came to much and they duly made the summit. Likewise John Foster’s party, who had been repulsed by strong winds the previous day, duly succeeded on Saileag and Sgurr a’Bhealaich Dhearg. Others limited themselves to Corbetts or lower walks.

Those who did not have to start the long journey home on Sunday morning were rewarded with an excellent day. Two parties did different Corbetts proving that these hills can be at least as rewarding as their higher cousins. We often grumble that Scottish winters are not what they were. This weekend reminded us that even in these days a trip to the North West Highlands can be well worth the long journey.

Attendees: Alasdair Andrews, Colin Armstrong, Geoff & Janet Bone, Bert Bowes, John Dempster, Graham Daniels (guest), John & Marj Foster, Peter Goodwin, Bill Peebles, John Percival, Terry Shaw, Jim & Margaret Strachan, Geoff Urmston.

Annual Dinner Meet, February 2002

The Swiss were well represented this year with Consul-General Ulrich Hunn and his wife Marie-Claire from the Embassy, who was representing the Ambassador. Consul Dirk Meierhoffer and his wife Silvia also attended from the Consulate in Manchester. Both couples are keen hill walkers and skiers and Ulrich and Dirk are involved with us in the project “Dialogue Across Mountains”.

We had some of the worst weather that Lakeland can provide with roads closed due to overturned vehicles and floods. The beck managed to find its way into the ‘Ratchers Tavern’ at the hotel on Saturday morning but only for an hour at high tide. Strangely among the extreme weather conditions both Saturday and Sunday afternoons were fairly dry so members who went out for half days didn’t get too wet. Those who went for the full day did.

The Officers of the Association were busy in the extreme with two committee meetings, two AGMs and a directors meeting, which must have been more fun that going out on the hills.

For the third successive year ninety members and guests attended the dinner. We had quite a few last minute cancellations due to illness, otherwise we would have been back up to one hundred or so.

One of the cancellations was our guest speaker Kev Reynolds and we were fortunate to be able to persuade Walt Unsworth to stand in at short notice. Walt’s speech was light and humorous, just right for the occasion. Ulrich Hunn responded to the toast “The Swiss Confederation” and spoke mainly about the project “Dialogue Across Mountains”. He proposed a toast to “The Association” to which the President replied.

Ulrich very generously provided wine for the toasts, which enhanced the happy atmosphere.

W. Brooke Midgley



Walt Unsworth.

Photo: Jack Ashcroft

Rhyd Ddu - May 2002

Despite the mixed weather, there was a good turn out of people for the meet, at the Oread hut on the west side of the Snowdon range. It's all change next to the hut, as reinstatement of the railway continues apace.

Everybody rose early on the Saturday, to make the most of what middling weather there was. Parties set off in a number of directions, including several groups on Snowdon, both by the Rhydd Ddu path, and by swinging up via Clogwyn and the railway path. Others of us ventured onto the Nantlle ridge, where low cloud and drizzle stuck with us for the first part of the excursion. Despite this, it was good fun on the rock scrambling, particularly on the ascent of Mynydd Drws-y-coed. By midday, the rain had stopped, and views were appearing through the cloud. After dinner at the obelisk on Mynydd Tal-y-mignedd, we pressed on to the summit of Craig Cwm Silyn, before descending south east into the valley. As ever, the steep descent to the mine tramways was arduous, but we were rewarded with carpets of bluebells in the valley. It was then head down for the slog back home, past the old slate workings, and the impressive holes in the hillside.

That evening, with a hot shower to soothe way the day's aches, the communal meal was voted a success by everybody. A starter of salad and garlic bread, followed by spaghetti Bolognese and helpings of red wine did much to restore bodies back to square one, finished off with a pudding of fruit and custard.



Alison Henry in charge of the kitchen!

Photo: Ed Bramley

The next day greeted us with further rain but, by the end of breakfast, had cleared enough to tempt us out. After the normal "shall we-shan't we", a large contingent set off for Ogwen, and Tryfan by the north ridge. Whilst occasional splashes of rain tried in vain to dampen the spirits, the moves up the lower rock scrambles soon had us all hooting with laughter. Could anybody manage the chimney move with grace? Not in the least. Where have the skills of our forefathers gone? As we wound our way further up the ridge, so more moves loomed out of the swirling mist. Just enough to get the blood flowing, but without too much excitement. As we headed up

further, so the wind increased, making the final moves near the summit even more entertaining. After a hurried lunch, it was quickly down again before the rain restarted, and a friendly cuppa in Capel, before we all headed home. Another great weekend.

Attendees: Ed Bramley, Mike Goodyer, Mike Pinney, Alison Henry, Stuart Tucker, Pam Caswell, Dennis Mitchell, Wendell Jones, John Dempster, Penny Austen, Elizabeth Wells, Richard Winter, Roger James, Tony Strawther, Suzanne Strawther, Terry Shaw, Nigel Cooper, Alasdair Andrews, Pamela Harris

Ed Bramley

Derbyshire Camping Meet at Callow Top near Ashbourne 28 to 30 June 2002.

Friday 28

Arrive early evening, pitch tents, then down to the Fish and Chip shop in Ashbourne for tea and then a bit of a chinwag to catch up on the news before retiring.

Saturday 29

Bacon butties!!

Walk to Wetton, and then up to Thor's Cave and over to Fecton. Stopped at a nice little pub for a wet, and returned to the cars after another stroll in the sun. Drive back via Hartington and pick up some fine cheeses from the little shoppe.

Return to campsite and set to barbecuing for all. The youngsters all went swimming and returned in time to eat. Then the wine and conversation flowed and eventually we all retired to the President's tent to avoid the breeze blowing in from Spitzbergen.

Sunday 30

The youngsters migrated to the TV room in order to watch the World Cup Final. The rest of us having all made that massive intuitive leap that evades many, i.e. that football is only a game, and a very overrated one at that, (unless your own children are playing), walked from the campsite through the fields of hay and grass, ideal for hay fever sufferers testing out their various homeopathic medicines, to Dovedale.

A leisurely lunch was had at the Izaak Walton Hotel followed by walking back through Thorpe and then along the Tissington trail.

Then it was strike camp and attempt to get everything back in the cars. Brief goodbyes all round and a steady drive home.

Attendees: Andy Burton, Lynne Burton, Paul Burton (Post GCSE), Gail Burton, Ian Burton, Ed Bramley, Janet Bramley, Simon Bramley, Mike Goodyer, Anne Goodyer, Robert Goodyer, Robert's friend Mike.

Andy Burton

Haut Maurienne and Vanoise, Hautes Alpes – July 2002

It is not true that the inhabitants of Lanslebourg are only three and a half feet high, although from the size of their baths one might think so; at Pontresina, the baths had a seat at one end – suitable for supping whisky – without the locals becoming L shaped. No doubt the good people of Brussels will insist on common standards.

Lanslebourg, base for the first half of a two-centre tour, brought back memories of a one-horse town in the Wild West in a “B” movie. Steep slopes rising on either side, with the sheriff and his posse riding in at one end of the main street as the outlaws self-ejected from the other.

In the centre stood L’ Hotel de Deux Cols with easy-angled parking in front; more room existed at the rear, but any taking advantage of this were found scraping a paint like deposit off their vehicles. Two star in its facilities, Les Deux Cols rated a higher grade for its catering, particularly for some wonderful cheese dishes and fondues. Madame Gagniere was ever present in the restaurant to supply our needs.

The main peaks were well set back and a car was useful for excursions to the Mont Cenis Pass or for penetrating some of the numerous and delightful side valleys. Mont Cenis itself was festooned with massive firs and peaks called Signals of 3000 metres plus, up which The Musketeers and other energetic souls were soon scrambling. In the main valley we were surprised to find the topmost village L’Ecot (2100 metres) being meticulously restored to former stony glories.

The weather proved less kindly than Madame Gagniere with Intermittent rain and low cloud forming the pattern for the first few days. It takes more than this to deter the ABM and Alasdair’s team on their first day out were so late back that supper thereafter was postponed for half an hour.

Meets are seldom devoid of incident and this one put the organisers on their mettle. The unlucky James Bogle suffered heart palpitations. Fortunately apart from a direct line “upstairs” he had included Nigel Cooper in his party, and the latter diagnosed the problems and escorted him down. By divers means he, his luggage and his car were conveyed to the hospital in St Jean de Maurienne from where in due course a devoted spouse collected him.

Bill Peebles is a friendly fellow and sought to extend his acquaintance to include a large mastiff chained up near the lift. There is a French satirical paper called Le Chien Enchaîné which indulges in the sport of savaging politicians; the dog was clearly a reader and gave the unfortunate Bill a quick left which would have done credit to Mike Tyson with claws on. Second thoughts revealed that it could not have been Tyson, as Bill remained slashed but unbitten.

A little later Pamela Harris elected to cross a stream in spate without wetting her toes, and alas fell face first into the water. Alarm at this collision with nature abated two days later when, with a few stitches, she wafted herself 4000 feet upwards without noticeably stopping to draw breath.

Geoff and Janet Bone arrived in the aftermath of ‘flu and Mr James Senior’s illness and temporary departure was attributed to this.

Towards the end of the Meet John Edwards, d’Artagnan of The Musketeers, and David Watts ascended the Grand Bec an outlier of the Grande Casse, a route involving front pointing up a couloir. Accounts of the descent were no more coherent than the hard snow under David’s front points. Fortunately years of training in the Archer School of Iceaxe Arrests were put to good purpose and Alasdair was spared yet another admin. problem.

The second half of the Meet was spent at Pralognan, ten miles off by crow and ninety by road. The ABM mobile column ascended a windy Col de L’Iseran (2764 metres), descended to Moutiers (500 metres) and bounced up again to second base. Pralognan has little in common with Lanslebourg save its height of 1400 metres. Surrounded by magnificent headwalls of 4000 feet, it can only be at the end of the road. A large camp-site makes for a busy community, yet it retains something of the traditional alpine resort. We stayed at the Hotel de la Vanoise on the rambling main street and were well looked after. There was parking space opposite and, whilst car theft may not be as common in France, latecomers protected us from it by blocking us in.

Apart from a wet Sunday, when some discovered that vin chaud in a pub seated round a hot stove was at least as good as gluhwein, the weather proved more friendly. The ABM duly spread itself over the hills and raced to every hut. James Baldwin’s new toy informed him that he had spent ninety-three hours in a fortnight on the mountain. This may have included a few dampish visits to pubs, demonstrating the Club’s dedication to exercise. Reluctance to stay in huts reflected oddly on the manifest enthusiasm for mortal combat over the fate of our Patterdale Hut – but let me not dwell on that!

The Club has never lacked character or characters. One member’s breakfast only served as a refresher for light lunch. Mike Scarr, doyen of Alpine Alleingnagers, would reinvent himself from time to time. In the side valleys, as evening closed in and most of us were concentrating on keeping close to the man with the car keys, Mike’s sole concern lay in wandering back to base over any intervening hills.

I had met Henry Day at Kanderstag in the early sixties. He was then as Sandhurst and now had metamorphosed into the guise of a retired Colonel. As such he betrays no signs of Colonel Blimp although there may be shades of both James Bond and Peter Pan. He dwelt in a Bondmobile clearly recently refitted by Q, whilst parked on the campsite; this vehicle remained in instant readiness to commute to China. I led him up the thousand metres between the Cenis Lake and the Col de Loue, a generous gesture on his part, improving conversation by preventing him from being six hundred yards ahead. On arrival at the Col he sat down for lunch and declared an intention to go no further; “No mountain of less than eight thousand metres was worth his notice”.

We were pleased to welcome Roger and Gabrielle Leese, the latter the daughter of the late John Byam Grounds who let us use his North Wales cottage as a hut and helped to plant the cross on the Dent Blanche. After a while the Leeses found that Glenridding Rules - meet at 09.30 for departure fully assembled at 10.30, do not apply in the Alps. Meet at 09.30 and depart at 09.28 sharp and devil take the hindmost being the order of the day.

The Three Musketeers were, as usual, much in evidence and seemed to train as a team, two Wing Commanders escorted by a lawyer to sort out any problems. Their summit bag was better than most and even when their lead climber teamed up with David Watts for the ascent of Le Grand Bec, the others formed a devoted hut escort party.

Mark Davison, our Swiss Geordie, although deprived of his inseparable companion Tony, was much in evidence in the first week, especially if one was in earshot. Following the feats of Madonna di Campiglio last year, he and Henry found some Via Ferrata to hang themselves on.

It was reported as an unusual coincidence that three of the participants – Henry Day, John Brooks (fall out lawyer to the Musketeers) and your scribe went to the same monastic establishment. The latter two being exact contemporaries, same year, same term, same house. Owing to a mutual non-aggression pact no further information can be given, save that was the period when we cornered the market in Archbishops.

A two-centre meet was anew departure for the ABM; it worked well enough and one was rarely conscious that the mountains of Pralognan were just the other side of the range from Lanslebourg. La Grande Casse was an impressive sight, the limestone hole potted ridge of the Crete du Mont Charvet was a curiosity, whilst the ski-bared slopes of Meribel and Courcheval attracted some condemnation.

As usual much was due to the good-humoured bonhomie of Alasdair and the hare work of Pam, all tested to the full by the series of disaster that befell individual members of the Meet, all of whom lived to tell the tale thanks to their help.

Wendell Jones

A Walk In The Hills.

P S Harris and Co. went for a walk in the hills one day
And on the way they came to a stream.
Said Alasdair, "Take care Dear this looks like a splash."
So he gives her a push
And off she goes with a hop, skip and jump.
The flight was short, the landing hard and wet.
The handling was a treat,
When Pam was back on her feet.
Cuts, bruises and blue eye were all to see.
"We will have this sorted in a while," says Bill.
With a pile of First Aid in his pack
He sets to with a tender hand.
Pam is duly trussed and bound
And found more or less to be sound.
"We will have to take down to town and have a fete,"
Says Alasdair, "To celebrate."
The day P S Harris went for a walk in the hills.

By Mark Davison following Pamela Harris' accident in the Alps last summer.

Servos, French Alps Summer Meet 2002

Despite changeable weather - tee shirts, thunderstorms, and enough snow to make the Grand Jorasses look like winter, we did achieve things.

The meet has gone from strength to strength with some 30 individuals attending over the three-week period.

Most people arrived by the first Sat when an informal get together was organised. This resulted in a mass (10 of us) Traverse of the Tour Noir the next day. I don't like to mention names as someone always gets missed out, but the credit/initialisation must go to Mike Pinney and Steve Town.

On that note another credit must go to Malcolm and Judy Eldridge for providing an awning/gazebo to be a focal place for socialising.

Francois Call hosted a lovely barbecue at a chalet above Les Houches and being French was invaluable in providing information and translations.

A variety of routes were achieved including traverse of the Tour Noir, Aig d'Argentiere, Aig de Crochures, Dome de Miage traverse, Petit Aig Vert, Aig Vert-Moine Ridge, Aig du Pouce-Voie des Dalles, Aig d'la M, and Mt Buet. A lot of walks were also achieved in the Aig Rouge, Gorges de la Diosaz and Plan Joux area.

Next years meet will be based at the Grandes Jorasses campsite in Val Ferret from 26th July. I hope to see a lot of you there.

Pam Caswell.



Lac de la Forcla—Tour des Muerans

Photo: *Ed Bramley*

Tour des Muverans, 2-6 September 2002

This was a five day tour of an area of Switzerland that although readily accessible is I suspect bypassed by most British parties on their way to Arolla or Zermatt or wherever. The Grand Muverans (3051m) and Dent de Morcles (2968m) are almost directly due north of Martigny and although the tour could be completed in 4 days an extra day allows for an ascent of the Grand Muverans.

We gathered for a somewhat meagre dinner at the Auberge Communale in Pont de Nant on Sunday 2 September although some had gathered earlier for a generous and liquid lunch at Bex a few hours earlier. One always regrets not having some little item of comfort or convenience on a trip such as this and a few hours later I was cursing my lack of earplugs as the snorting and snoring of my companions reached Wagnerian proportions!

Still we all stepped out fairly briskly the following day and enjoyed a gentle ascent to the Col Ester and a leisurely stop for lunch at Anxeindax before strolling onwards to Derborence. Overnight the heavens opened and a long day to the Cabane Rambert seemed longer than it should, as we were all gradually soaked to the skin. One or two of the stream crossings were only just passable but soon we were all gathered in at the Rambert with its friendly guardians and their dog that rejoiced in the unlikely name of 'Jeff'.



Cabane Rambert

Photo: Richard Winter

The Grand Muverans as seen from the Cabane Rambert was unimpressive and closer inspection revealed quite a bit of looseness in the limestone, made trickier by the recent rain. Most of us gave it a wide berth contenting ourselves with shorter walks. However David Watts, Myles O'Reilly, Mark Davison and Andy Burton made the ascent and reported zero visibility from the summit.

The following day we did at last have some visibility and indeed had splendid early morning

views of the Valais and further afield possibly even to the Gran Paradiso. Our route this day took us via Petit Pre and Col de Fenestrol to the Cabane Demecre via the west side of Lac de Fully. This hut guarded only at weekends in September was plentifully stocked with food, wine etc. and we soon had the stove going and supper on the table.

Our final day was to have included a high traverse which take us back to Pont de Nant but the Swiss army was on one of its shooting trips and we were obliged to descend via Morcles (18 inhabitants, no bars and only the occasional bus) into the Rhone valley itself and return to our start point via Bex.

Many thanks to Alasdair Andrews and Pam Harris for making all the necessary arrangements.

David Seddon

Dartmoor Meet at the Forest Inn, Hexworthy - October 2002

On one of the finest weekends of the autumn a select group of four members convened at the Forest Inn on Dartmoor for the Southern Meet. The low turnout was disappointing but we were determined to make the most of the fantastic weather, beautiful scenery and excellent hostelry conveniently located about ten paces from the door of the bunkhouse. And we did.

Saturday dawned clear and sunny so we opted for rock climbing. We made for the Dewerstone on the southwest edge of Dartmoor - a first for both Mike Goodyer and me. We climbed in T-shirts with the sun on our backs as if it were the middle of summer, and practically had the place to ourselves. Where was everyone? Clearly, for some still unfathomed reason, Dartmoor was not the 'in' place to be that weekend, but we didn't care; "it's their loss, not ours" we chirruped smugly as we basked on the warm rock. After limbering up on a couple of easy routes Pete led me up the classic Central Groove on the main wall whilst Mike Goodyer rapidly found his climbing legs again, seconding Mike Pinney up Climbers Club Ordinary. We then moved over to Lower Raven Buttress where Pete and I scared ourselves on the aptly named Valhalla Wall, and Mike P stormed up Spiders Web with the hapless Mike G in his wake.

We really felt we'd earned our beer that night. I should have slept soundly and contentedly but, despite having the pick of the beds in an almost deserted bunkhouse, I still managed to find myself settling down for the night only a few feet away from a champion snorer.

Through my bleary eyes the following morning I perceived that it was yet another fine day. With our numbers swelled by the arrival of Gerry Martin from Yeovil Mountaineering Club we decided to treat Mike G to a classic Dartmoor tor and headed for Sheepstor. Unfortunately so did half of the climbing community of the south west including several school groups. Our hearts sank. Don't get me wrong; I like kids and I know they've got to climb somewhere, but its just not good for your self esteem to struggle to second a VS only to watch some child scamper up it like a gibbon as you sit breathless at the bottom nursing pumped arms and shaky legs. After queuing for several routes including Mushroom Wall and Fingerin, we thought we'd try and escape the crowds at a less frequented spot, Leather Tor. So unfrequented in fact that not even Mike P or Gerry had ever climbed there. Neither had anyone else in recent history to judge from the quantities of algae and guano adorning the rock. Pete surveyed Dies Irae, the only VS on the tor, with contempt; "that's never a VS, you could solo that in trainers". After thrutching over the final overhang relying on grass holds he was forced to admit that first impressions can be deceiving. "Good value for a minor tor" commented Mike P.

As I reluctantly headed for home with the sun setting behind me I reflected on one of the best rock climbing weekends I'd had in ages, but I was sad that so few people had been able to join us. The question now arises whether or not to organise another meet at the same venue in 2003. With a splendid venue offering a choice of bunkhouse or hotel accommodation, and the option for climbing, walking, mountain biking or even horse riding all on the doorstep I thought we could offer something for everyone. Where did we go wrong? Any feedback from members would be most welcome.

Alison Henry

Attendees: Alison Henry, Pete Loxston, Mike Pinney, Mike Goodyer, Gerry Martin (Sunday)

Lakes meet – George Starkey Hut – September 2002

For once the Indian summer was reliable, and there was great weather for this well attended meet.

On both days people did a variety of activities. For Andy Burton and I, it was a day of climbing on the Saturday, with an excursion round to Troutdale Pinnacle in Borrowdale. We were on the road early to avoid the queues on the route and this paid off, as we were virtually first there. The first two pitches started easily enough, but by the third pitch, the moves through the overlaps into the amphitheatre of slabs above were causing some thought. The traverse out and down across the slabs started tentatively, but livened up as the confidence increased. Positive moves up the short but steep wall above easily overcame those obstacles, with a superb belay looking back across the slabs. With other routes converging on the top of the pinnacle, exits from the crag were starting to get congested, so we decided to run the pitch to the top of the pinnacle, and then the final crux rib pitch together as one. As extreme climbers crossed our route and climbed the rib, one was heard to remark "this is quite something for a severe". Then I was out onto that exposed rib myself, with superb views across to Derwentwater and down to the trees and scree. And there I was at the crux. That high left step onto the polished knobble on the edge of the rib, quick balance on it, release the right and reach up with the left to YESSSS – the mother of all jugs. Andy follows close behind and we crash out on the top, with a quick snack and delighting in the day. Never hard, but often thought provoking, a true Lakes classic, rounded off with a farmhouse lunch. It's a wonder we can move at all.

Sunday started late, but with the weather again good, we set off with Mike Pinney for an ascent of Pinnacle ridge on St Sunday Crag. The rock was again lovely and dry, and we are getting well versed in finding the bottom of the ridge these days. We solo the route, and with light sacks we make swift progress up the route. Before we know it, we have already arrived at the gun barrel, and pass by another party who are practising alpine belay techniques. As we approach the short crux chimney they wave us through and we are then threading and dancing our way across the top pinnacles, with delightful moves all the way. As we come out on top, we were aware how much the mountain had been sheltering us from the freshening wind. As we sit on the summit of St. Sunday crag, now wrapped in our anoraks, the clouds race across the sky just above us, alternately coating us in sunshine and mist. Its like being in a speedboat cutting through water. What a great weekend for the end of September.

Ed Bramley

Aviemore - October 2002

The meet was based at Ord View House situated on the road to Loch Morlich. The house was very well appointed and six members attended namely John and Marge Foster, Jim and Margaret Strachan, Alasdair Andrews and Bill Peebles. The North East Coasters Alf, Bert and Colin were sadly missed but the two invalids were reportedly recovering rapidly. The house had a few dominant features including three showers, one bathroom and a separate loo so we were well catered for. The walls were decorated with trophies of the hunting and fishing type with three large salmon, one stag of about six points and one rather small roe deer. In some ways it was rather overpowering for we intrepid mountaineers.

After some discussion on the Friday about where to go on Saturday Braeriach became the most favoured with three possible routes – the Lairig Ghru, Glen Einich or from Glen Feshie. Each route had its advantages but a nine o'clock start and the Lairig Ghru was agreed. In retrospect a nine o'clock start proved to be about two hours too late.

Saturday dawned with clear skies and wind at higher levels. The hills were beautiful with fresh snow. After finding Alasdair's forgotten piece the party started up the Lairig about nine, and for anyone who has not walked through the Rothiemurchus woods in October it is a delightful experience with sunshine and Autumn golds.

After a rough, hard but beautiful two and a half hour walk up the Lairig we reached the start up the mountain (where the Sinclair hut used to be) at which point we all realised that the distance and soft snow had ruined our timetable. Here we had to decide what to do and we decided to traverse over to Glen Einich.

The party set out in soft snow over very rough ground. Long John, the strongest member of the group, was soon some distance ahead with the rest of us strolling along behind using his broken trail. The view and lighting effects looking towards Braeriach summit and the adjacent corries was certainly the highlight of the day and numerous photo stops were duly made. Long John stumbling into the odd bog hole and having to extract himself in an undignified manner somewhat like a stranded whale enlivened the traverse at intervals. The rest of the party trod very warily because no one wished to emulate John. Once down in to Glen Einich there only remained a pleasant easy walk out through the woodlands to the car park thus completing a seven and a half hour day.

The day was successfully concluded with dinner in the local pub where Roger and Shirley joined us. As the evening wore on and the wine was imbibed the tales got taller and taller. Sadly Sunday was a very poor day with continuous rain so all reneged on climbing a local Corbet and decided to wend our weary way home to Dunning, Edinburgh and Manchester and so ended a good weekend without the traditional Scottish sunset.

Bill Peebles

Whitby Meet – November 2002

Unfortunately illness prevented Jim and Margaret Strachan from joining this meet. The rest of us met up in the Backpackers Hostel at Whitby during Friday evening, and elected to walk together along the Cleveland Way from Ravenscar to Whitby. This determination was somewhat shaken when a very early drink was taken in Robin Hood's Bay, but we struggled on. The weather had

started sunny, but became overcast as we approached Whitby and finally deteriorated into rain as we reached the abbey. We decided to visit the old St. Mary's church near the abbey, and although it had closed for the day the guardian let us in and gave us a personal tour. This must be one of the oldest and least-modified churches in the region (it is still lit by candles for services and still contains box pews). Geoff then drove John back to Ravenscar to pick up his car, and unfortunately managed to get very lost on his return by taking a road into Whitby which left him – unknowing - on the wrong side of the river. Geoff fortunately rejoined the group in time for dinner.

Having agreed on the Magpie Café for dinner, we had to queue outside for 40 minutes insulting people with reservations before we were able to get a table. It was well worth the wait – the Magpie's reputation is for fish and chips, and is fully earned, but its other dishes proved equally memorable!

On Sunday morning, in spite of a clear sunny morning most of the group elected to travel home immediately rather than walk on the moors first. The day stayed sunny and clear giving good long-distance views, and (apart from the disappearing path syndrome requiring the use of GPS on occasion) the walking was very pleasant.

The owner of the Whitby Backpackers Hostel had warned us when we booked that mountains were in short supply in the immediate vicinity, but in spite of the depleted attendance this meet proved extremely enjoyable.

Attendees: John Foster, Marj Foster, Suzanne Strawther, Tony Strawther, Geoff Urmston

John Foster

Onich Meet - January 2003

After seven consecutive days of glorious weather in the West Highlands it was perhaps too much to expect it would extend over the weekend. However twelve members assembled at the Inchree chalets on a frosty Friday evening, the early ones being rewarded by a breathtaking sunset with Loch Linnhe burnished gold and the Ardgour peaks in striking silhouette.

A cold dry morning saw four parties optimistically heading in different directions, the Mamores being favourite with ascents planned at both ends. A couple headed further west beyond Loch Lochy whilst three Corbett baggers made the short crossing to Ardgour. With the wind rising and low pressure advancing from the north-west some were to be luckier than others.

Starting from Mamore Lodge above Loch Leven, John and Marj Foster, Phil Hands and Geoff Urmston took the estate road and stalker's path up to Coire an Lochain to gain the summit of Sgurr Eilde Mor by the south shoulder. Wind, mist and a few inches of powder snow underfoot provided unpleasant conditions though not as hazardous as the extensive sheet ice on the lower approaches. At the western end of the range, Jim and Margaret Strachan with Mike Scarr settled for a straightforward ascent of Mullach nan Coirean via the N.E. ridge from Achriabhach in Glen Nevis. Though clear of mist conditions didn't encourage them to linger on the top and they quickly retraced their steps.

Equally fortunate were Alasdair Andrews and Roger James and Shirley Mackay who took the shorter but steep climb up Stob Coire A Chearcail (110m.) from Inverscaddie, a couple of miles north of the Corran Ferry.



Cabane Rambert Panorama,
Tour des Muverans 2002

Photo: *Ed Bramley*



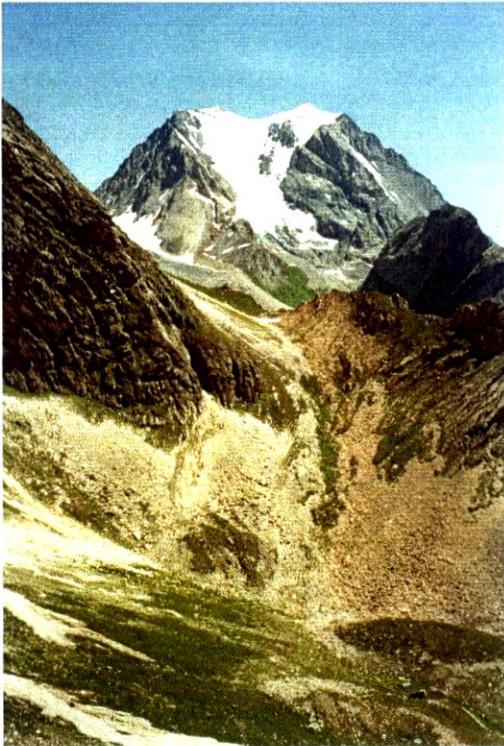
Ait Youl
Dades Gorge
Morocco

Photo:
Hamish Brown



Jardin Alpin
Du
Lauterey

Photo:
James Bogle

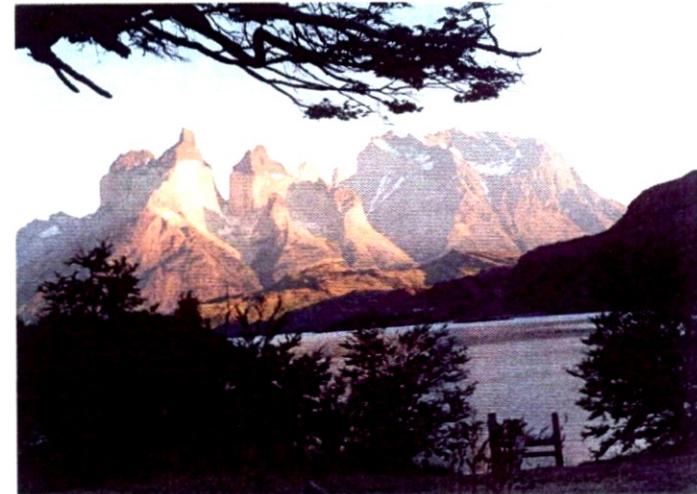


Grande Casse
Over the
Rosset Col

Photo
Wendell Jones

Grand Bec Hut

Photo:
David Watts

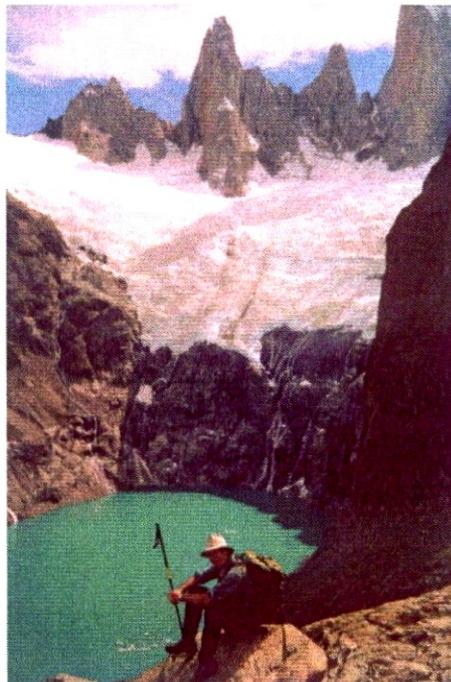


The Horns
and
Towers of Paine

Photo:
Peter Farrington

Laguna Sucia
And
Aguja del Paine
Patagonia

Photo
Peter Farrington

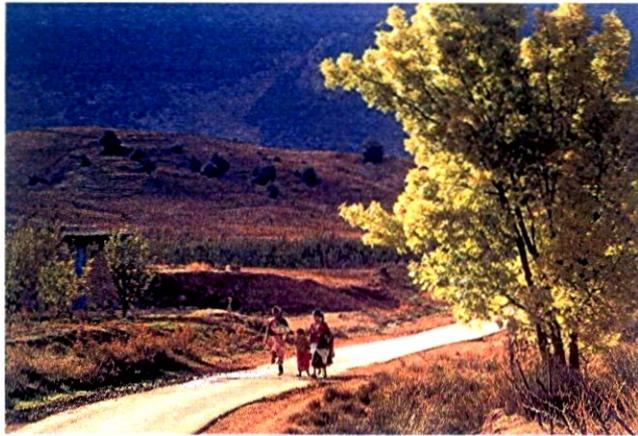


Twelve Apostles
Great Ocean Road
Victoria
Australia



Heading for the souk

Photo:
Hamish Brown



Delayed by the extra drive northward, Peters, Goodwin and Farrington set off up Gleann Cia-aig from the Dark Mile with the cloud ominously gathering. A steep grind from the upper glen led quickly to Meall Odhar and then the summit of Meal I na Teanga. However they then became somewhat misled in their attempt to descend to the Cam Bhealaich. Around four o'clock the mist lifted to reveal impressive views and confirm the accuracy of their belated compass work.

The Inchree Restaurant, conveniently situated only a few yards from our accommodation, provided an excellent dinner, a braw cloutie dumpling and a fine array of malt whisky to put everyone in good spirits. Later our chalets proved ideal for extended socialising into the early hours.

Overnight the wind turned to the west bringing in heavy cloud and torrential rain. Being long past heroics all members headed homeward, all that is except the meet leader whose next ferry home wasn't until the following morning. Still, as he had enjoyed an extra few hours of sunshine on the Arrochar Alps en route to the meet, he couldn't complain.

Peter Farrington



Lago Grey
Patagonia

Photo:
Peter Farrington

Annual Dinner Meet 2003

There was plentiful snow and ice all weekend but it was, unfortunately accompanied by violent and bitterly cold winds. Very few attempted to gain much height and some were up-ended by wind and ice in the valley. Sounds about normal for this Meet of late. Even more normal and selfishly pleasing were the days of perfect weather when most of the members had gone home!

86 members and guests attended the dinner at the Glenridding Hotel. Due to problems of weather in "the frozen South" and illness, we had cancellations from 12 other members.

Our guests were Consul General Ulrich Hunn and his wife Marie Claire representing the Swiss Ambassador. George Watkins – President of the Fell and Rock Climbing club was the other speaking guest. It was with great pleasure that we were also able to welcome as our guests Hans-Ulrich Tanner and his wife Yvonne from the Manchester Consulate where Hans is the new Consul General.

Responding to the toast to "the Guests", George Watkins (SAC member for 40 years) gave a polished, very humorous and well received speech and proposed the toast "The Swiss Confederation."

In response Ulrich Hunn included in his speech references to the Cumbrian Mountain Festival in which he had been deeply involved with David Penlington, who with Janet shared Top Table. Ulrich hoped the Festival would continue into the future after its great success. He proposed the toast to "The Association" to which outgoing President, Mike Goodyer, responded.

After the dinner George gave an illustrated lecture "The Keswick Brothers go to Coniston", some wonderful slides from the F R C C Abrahams Archive. The house was packed and very appreciative.

Brooke Midgley

Petit Muveran
Tour des Muverans 2002

Photo:
Richard Winter





Annual Dinner 2003 – Top Table

My thanks to James Bogle for the following grace written by him for the 2003 Annual Dinner in Patterdale.

Bless, O Lord, us hungry climbers,
Not forgetting the old timers;
Bless us all both friend and stranger;
Keep us safe from every danger.

Bless us as we walk the mountains
Even when it pours in fountains;
Bless us at this festive board, as
We bless you, our bounteous Lord.

Amen

Braemar February 2003

Arrived in Braemar in early evening after collecting Mike Scarr from Perth railway station. We were staying in the Rucsac's Bunkhouse in the centre of Braemar a place we have used on a number of occasions in previous years and where we have always had a warm welcome from the owner. We repaired to the local hotel, The Fyfe Arms, for a meal and to meet up with the rest of the party who arrived at intervals during the evening.

The next day, Saturday, dawned fair but with cloud on the mountain tops. Parties set off; most heading for Derry Lodge and the summits in that area, Derry Cairngorm, Ben Breac via Glen Derry. One Englishman hoping to complete his last Corbett set off from Glen Quoich for a point between the North and South top of Beinn A Bhaird, a round trip of some twenty miles. Having joined forces on the way with a Scotsman and an Irishman was unfortunate to miss out after encountering whiteout conditions, at least he lived to try again.

Saturday evening an excellent meal was enjoyed by all members of the party at the Inver Hotel just outside Braemar where both the wine and conversation were stimulating. The day's activities were discussed to the full and past experiences relived over again. An enjoyable evening was had by all.

Sunday - as sometimes happens on these winter meets the weather changed, it rained. Our brand new President Alasdair arrived just after breakfast to show the flag and rally the troops. Two parties set off for walks: one to Glen Ey with Alasdair, John Terry and Mike, the other with Peter, John & Marj Foster and Jim & Margaret Strachan headed for the Ochils, Glen Dollar and Culross - they reported a decent day was had by all. On the whole it would appear to have been a successful weekend.

Attendees: Bert Bowes, Colin Armstrong, John Dempster, Terry Shaw, Mike Scarr, Jim & Margaret Strachan, John & Marj Foster, James, Shirley Mackay, Peter Goodwin.

Bert Bowes.

Members' Activities: Alasdair Andrews

Day one of the new currency dawned bright and sunny in Antibes in spite of a pricy celebration of the St Sylvester feast the previous evening. We headed through the deserted fleshpots of Cannes to the Esterel peninsula. Our objective was the Pic du Cap Roux 453m a small but perfectly formed mountain. Initially the route was shared by all and sundry including young mothers with prams but after reaching the first high col we mostly had the mountain to ourselves. The route wound round the back of the mountain down to a place of pilgrimage known as La Sainte-Baume then a brief but steep *via ferrata* type of path up to the Chapelle de la Grotte Saint-Honorat. How St Honorat survived on the side of a mountain without any obvious means of sustenance I don't know but he must have been hardy. Reversing the *via ferrata* we continued on a gradually ascending path through large unstable scree till at length we reached the summit where once again we encountered the masses who had come up the easy way. Magnificent views in every direction. We fled downwards taking a more adventurous route which threaded its way through the flame coloured rocks back to our parking spot above the sea. Returning to Antibes we were held up for ages at the autoroute toll booth by many from La Belle France who had neither euros nor current credit cards and the attendants were, of course, on holiday! A few days later we climbed the Pic de Courmettes

1248m from Courmes, an attractive village in the Haut Pays Grassois. A fine day, frozen ground and wide views of the snow covered Alpes Maritmes. The next day we traversed the Baou Blanc and the Baou Noir above Vence. I can recommend this area for a winter break and it is easily accessible from the UK.

This was followed by a wet and blustery weekend in the Lake District where I spent more time in meetings than I did on the fells. In most of the other climbing weekends in the UK whether in Scotland, the Lake District or Wales the weather was invariably poor. For every fine day there were at least four days when the weather was poor or appalling.

At Easter we visited the Cinque Terre in western Italy. If you like energetic walking in dramatic coastal scenery then visit this lovely area. However it is not cheap and is best visited mid week when the crowds have dispersed. Linear walks are easy to organise as there is a frequent rail service from villages on the walk back to the starting point. The surrounding countryside is also very pretty.

At the end of June we set off for the Ticino. Our base was Gordevio in the Val Maggia. Unfortunately our visit coincided with some pretty poor weather and though we were walking on every day bar one we rarely if ever viewed the tops of the mountains as they were usually shrouded in mist - very similar to pictures of rural China. I was surprised that the area was so quiet given that it is not far from the busy tourist resorts of Locarno and Lugano.

The meets to Lanslebourg and Pralognan were happy occasions in spite of the mixed weather and a variety of minor incidents and illnesses. As a leading member of the indolent tendency I maintained my climbing image by not doing a lot well. A few more easy peaks were added to my modest tally.

In September I shuffled round the Tour du Muverans suffering from some sort of virus which diluted what little energy I had. However help was hand in the shape of Sherpa Davison who on three occasions came back to look for me and to relieve me of my pack. I looked in vain for his name in the New Year's Honours list!

In the autumn I visited the Tirol to suss out accommodation for the 2003 alpine meets. This visit coincided with a public holiday and the Zillertal was packed. By contrast Obergurgl was deserted. Prior to that we had attempted the Dent d'Oche 2222m a fine looking peak which lies to the south of the eastern end of Lake Geneva. The route follows a muddy track up to an *alpage* where are found a variety of shrines and then zig-zags steeply up to a hut via a modest scramble which is protected by chains. From the hut it is less than twenty minutes to the summit. Our intention was to traverse the hill descending by another easier route. However the high traverse path appeared to have slipped off the edge of the mountain and what was left looked uninviting so as we were not carrying a rope we decided to reverse our route of ascent back to the car.

After Christmas we set off for Bordighera at the southern end of the Ligurian Alps. The journey down was marked by the fine views from the motorway of the Italian versant of the Gran Paradiso, the Queyras and the Alpes Maritimes; all snow covered and basking in the sun. Monte Viso in particular looked magnificent. The final climb of 2002 was the ascent of the Cime de Baudon 1108m from St Agnes above Menton. A fine mountain with superb views over the Cote d'Azur.

A reasonably active year: no really outstanding mountains but a variety of interesting ascents and mountain walks in areas of great beauty and with excellent company.

Members' Activities: Ken Baldry

2002 started with a ski trip to Saalbach delayed by Avis having a cancer operation. However, she had bought new skis at 66 and one expects at least 7 years use from skis... We managed to find sufficient snow in March but not easily.

I had two objectives for my June trip: to take decent photos from Bella Tola (3025m), the best viewpoint in the Alps and to walk the Europaweg. Starting on foot from Sierre, it is 6,000' up to the Bella Tola Hut through steep woods and fortunately, through Chandolin, where a splendid lunch can be consumed. It is only 2.5 hours up from hut to hill and starting at 0630, I took my photos (see www.art-science.com/Ken/Alpine) before the weather turned unpleasant, as it did on the walk down to Gruben a longer way than my 1982 trip, via Zer Pletschu and being hailed on. Expensive stay in the Hotel Schwarzhorn in Gruben. I had intended to cross the Augstbordpass again but heavy rain pushed me back to the Rhone Valley via Ergisch along a hairy wasserleitung. So, I inadvertently traversed Bella Tola from and to the Rhone.

Thumbing lifts to Stalden, I walked up the end of the Mischabel ridge to Grächen for a necessary rest day. The Europaweg is a highly artificial footpath from Grächen to Zermatt high above the Mattertal and with a hut halfway, some way below the Domhütte. Much dynamite and miles of fixed rope have been expended on it. Even so, there are two places with signs saying 'Cross the danger zone quickly' in four languages. Now, I suffer from shortness of breath and, at 9,000', don't have any 'quickly' but the path is mostly safe. The views across to the Weisshorn range are splendid and the Matterhorn appears soon on the 2nd day. The most dramatic part is the Wildikin below the Kinhütte and there are two 'stone sheds' like avalanche sheds, one quite long. Although the signs suggest about 6.5 hours per day, 9 is more like it. Eventually, after an excursion towards Ottavan, one gets round to Tuftern for the drop to Zermatt. North to South is clearly the best direction to do this path.

Members' Activities: Peter Farrington

After a January visit to Patagonia I attended the winter meet at Bridge of Orchy before taking off again with my wife for some spring walks in the Greek islands of Paxos, Andros and Evia. The latter was especially enjoyable with a stay at the Mount Ochi Refuge, an ascent of the rocky peak (1398m.) and descent of the Dimosaris Gorge. The weather was perfect and an abundance of wild flowers added to a pleasant week.

In June, partnered by Davie Mack of Jura, I competed in the Lowe Alpine Mountain Marathon on the rain soaked Braes of Balquhiddy. Several slides too many left me limping a the back of the field with a damaged knee ligament and cartilage - unlike members Les Swinden and Geoff Causey who won the Veterans Handicap Prize in the same class.

The injury influenced the rest of the year and restricted me to moderate walking, first in Wales on the Prescelly and Cambrian Hills and Cader Idris then in British Columbia on Mounts Seymour and Grouse near Vancouver, Cheam Peak (2107m) near Chilliwack and on and around Whistler Mountain.

Members' Activities: Peter Goodwin

'The Great Outdoors' magazine described the May 2002 Coast to Coast event as "..... the walk of wind and rain"! Whilst the wind seemed ever present, one gust sheared my tent rod near Garvamore, I escaped the severest downpours. Firstly with an extended lunch stop under the Fords of Avon Refuge and secondly with whisky and spaghetti bolognese generously provided by Jim Mason at Charr bothy accompanied by a thunderous chorus outside. One highlight of my crossing included the Cluanie Horseshoe with alternating short hailstorms and longer brilliant sunshine. Later a rough approach to Stob an-t'Sluichd lead to clearing mist on Ben Avon, enabling me to include three unexpected tops. The traverse included obligatory bum shuffling on the summit top to avoid immediate despatch onto the rocks below. One feature of the event was meeting just one other challenger on the hill, out of the mist on the Sneck, the whole way across Scotland. As usual, quite a different story in every pub visited along the way!

More bridge than climbing seemed to be a feature of our time in Servoz. However, Dominic and I enjoyed the traverse of the Aiguille de Bionnassay (4052m), though this was preceded by great difficulty in finding our starting point, the deserted Durier Hut, in thick mist. The summit arête is exhilarating to say the least. I was most grateful that the only other climber approaching the summit did not mind waiting for us to pass on what appeared to be the only (relatively) safe passing place for some distance. The precarious nature of the arête was unforgettable and in retrospect enjoyable.

The John Byam-Grounds Legacy

John Byam-Grounds, a former Vice-President of the Association, died in 2000, his obituary appeared in the 2001 Journal. The Association has benefited from a generous legacy from his will and Alasdair Andrews has been in negotiation with John's family on the best way that the Association can use this. We are all particularly keen that the money is not just "frittered away".

Firstly the Committee has purchased Microsoft Publisher software for use by the Honorary Editor to help in the production of the Newsletter and Journal. By doing this it means that copy deadlines can be held until the last moment as the printer now receives the copy ready formatted for printing. This saves time and considerably reduces the production costs.

Secondly the Honorary Registrar has purchased Microsoft Access for use in maintaining and processing his membership records. Again this will cut down on a great deal of the fiddly work he has each year, will facilitate the maintenance of membership records and renewals and the production of all the labels.

As was announced at the AGM, the balance of the legacy is being kept to support the production of the history of the Association on which James Bogle is currently working.

The Peter Ledebøer Memorial Fund

Nigella Hall and Elisabeth Parry send grateful thanks to all who have contributed to the Peter Ledebøer Memorial Fund. It has now been wound up and the impressive total of £1400 has been passed to the Alpine Club Library Committee. This will be used towards the re-development of the Library where Peter spent so much of his time working voluntarily during his last years. It is intended that there will be some area that will bear his name. Members will be informed about this as soon as we have full details.

Obituaries

Peter Boyes 20 May 1934 – 17 June 2002

Peter joined ABMSAC as an Affiliate Member in 1977 and regularly attended meets over the years until a rare form of Parkinson's Disease prevented him from enjoying the hills. His sense of humour sustained him and those around him through his illness up to the total paralysis of the final months.

Peter climbed in the UK and European Alps, mainly classic, moderate routes. During the period 1960s-1980s these included a number of 4000m peaks and many lesser ones. He was at his happiest, though, on long walks in the mountains.

Peter was an accomplished skier and a leading member of the Milton Keynes Ski Club, spending many ski holidays with them in Europe and the USA. His other interests included motor sport and he competed as a navigator in National and International rallies.

The last major ABMSAC meet Peter attended was the 1999 Alps meet at Saas Grund, but the disease was, even then, limiting what he was able to do. He managed some easy walks with great difficulty and obtained some measure of enjoyment.

In the early 1980s Peter served for a few years on the Hut Management Committee. His expertise as a Chartered Engineer and Project Manager was put to use. During the first few years of bi-annual maintenance meets very many man and woman hours were spent cleaning the mould from the kitchen walls, a dreadful task that had to be repeated at least twice every year. Peter introduced us to "Steridox" a plastic paint with insecticidal and fungicidal properties. It has held together the kitchen walls for many years! The improvement was dramatic and maintenance meet members have Peter to thank for saving them many miserable cleaning hours, did they only know.

Peter will be greatly missed by all who knew him and we send our sympathies to his wife Lynne and children Jason and Rebecca.

W Brooke Midgley

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held in the Glenridding Hotel Cumbria on Saturday 1st February 2003.

The President Mike Goodyer was in the chair. 45 members were present.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Georgette Butler, John Chapman, Sheila Coates, Nigel Cooper, Graham Daniels, Peter Fleming, Nigella Hall, Ann Jago, John Percival, Terry Shaw and David Watts.

2. Minutes of the AGM held on 2nd February 2002

The minutes were approved

3. Matters Arising

There were none.

4. Proposed rule changes

The hon Sec reported that during the year the Committee had reviewed the club's constitution. It was felt that a committee comprising 12 officers plus up to 9 elected members was unnecessarily large for a club of only 270 members, and some of the offices were now unnecessary. It was difficult to find volunteers to fill the various places and this in turn led to a situation in which some people held office for very long periods. The Committee therefore proposed that the number of offices be reduced to 8, by dropping one vice-President, the hon vice-President, the hon Solicitor and the hon Social Secretary. The number of elected members should be reduced to 4, thus giving a committee of 12. It was also proposed that the President, the vice-President and the elected committee members should serve for a maximum of 3 years (as at present) and that the other office holders should serve for a maximum of 6 years, with a proviso that the Committee should have the power to waive this rule in exceptional circumstances.

The Committee had also discussed the composition and terms of reference of the Hut Management Committee, which were in need of clarification. However the TCC had separately proposed some changes in the management arrangements for the hut and the two issues needed to be considered together.

After a brief discussion the rule changes were approved by a large majority.

5. Election of officers and Committee

The Committee had proposed Alasdair Andrews as the next President and he was elected unanimously. Two nominations had been received for the vacant committee place. Following a show of hands Stuart Tucker was elected.

The President thanked the outgoing Committee members David Watts, Wendell Jones and Bill Peebles for their work during their period of office. Alasdair Andrews thanked Mike Goodyer

for his leadership of the club during the previous 3 years.

6. Hon Treasurer's report and accounts for the year to 30th September 2002

The hon Treasurer circulated the accounts. Membership of the club was roughly static although the average age of members was rising and the proportion of full members was dropping. A small surplus had been achieved during the year despite a substantial donation to the Cumbrian Mountain Festival.

Legacies had been received from the estates of Mr JAF Hailwood and Mr John Bryam- Grounds. It had been agreed that the latter would largely be used to support the publication of the history of the ABMSAC on which James Bogle was currently working.

The accounts were adopted.

7. Subscription rates for 2004

The hon Treasurer proposed that the subscription bands for 2004 should remain as before. However it should be noted that the BMC affiliation fee was due to rise by a further £1 in 2003 and further increases were likely because of the rising costs of insurance. Also the pound had dropped in relation to the Swiss franc which was likely to lead to an exchange loss. An increase within the bands was therefore likely to be necessary. His proposal was agreed.

8. President's report

This is reproduced below.

9. Any other business

There was none, and the meeting closed at 18.40hrs.

Presidents Report 2003

Fortunately last year was not beset with the problems in the countryside, as was 2001, and the Association has had another full year on the fells and mountains.

Membership

As you have just heard our membership numbers continue to remain much the same as over the last few years. On the positive side we have had several new members join over the year, which have been coming out on both domestic meets and the Alpine Meets. I hope that you enjoy your time with the Association.

Finances

We have had the Hon. Treasurers Report and so I need to say little more about the finances of the Association. Many thanks to Alasdair Andrews for his work as the Hon. Treasurer and for presenting the accounts.

Meets

Over the year we have had more than 20 meets, including the London lectures and Alpine Meets. We have had a couple of meets to new areas, organised by new Meet Leaders, which is

an encouraging sign. The UK meets have been generally well supported. Many thanks to all the Meet Leaders for their time and effort in helping the rest of us enjoy the hills. I must thank John Foster and Ed Bramley for arranging and co-ordinating the domestic meets programme. I also thank Harry Archer for arranging the London lectures.

The Alpine Meets were, once again, the highlight of the Meets Programme. We had a two-centre meet in the Vanoise Alps from mid to late July. This was followed by a three week camping meet, with the CC and AC from end of July through towards the end of August. The summer was rounded off, in early September, by a walking tour in the Muverans. Over 80 members and their guests attended this extended summer Alpine meet programme. Many routes on big mountains, rock climbs, and days out were completed. A full account of these Meets is presented in this years Journal. Many thanks to Alasdair Andrews and Pam Caswell for organising the Alpine Meets.

George Starkey Hut

Over the year work has been going on behind the scenes and a sub-committee set up between the TCC and the Association. The sub-committee has now reported back to both Committees for final approval of the work. The initial response of the Committee was favourable and they will meet in the next few weeks to give final approval of the work to the Directors of the Company. The TCC are at a similar attitude and position. We hope that the work will start in late spring/early summer.

I would like to thank Ed Bramley, Mark Eddowes and David Penlington for their work on this sub-committee and for putting the final proposal together.

Committee

During the year the Committee several times on meets. I would like to thank everyone on the Committee, who give up their early evenings on the Saturday. I know it can be a pain to come off the hill early to be ready for the meeting.

Special thanks go to David Watts, Vice President, Wendell Jones and Bill Peebles who all have retired by rotation, for their time and commitment on the Committee. Your support and views were much valued. Thanks must also go to Richard Winter, who took on the role of the Newsletter Editor last year, for continuing to keep us all up to date on news and meets.

Our thanks should also go to David Penlington, who co-ordinated the Cumbrian Mountain Festival. This Festival was well supported by the Association and has been so successful that David has been asked to extend some exhibitions for another three months.

I would like to mention that James Bogle has offered to write a history of the Association. The idea is to have an account prepared for the Associations' centenary in six years time. (James replied that his account will be ready before six years time!) He has started researching the project and I wish James all the best on this venture.

Finally I would like to say thank you to all the members that have supported me as President and contributed to the continuing success of the Association. Thanks for the many great days out on the fells, crags and mountains I have had with you over the years. I hope that the new President, Alasdair Andrews, will continue to receive your support.

Mike Goodyer