

ABMSAC Journal 2004

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ABMSAC 2004 Meets Diary

Dates	Meet / Venue	Leader
30 April-3May	Lakes Meet, George Starkey Hut	Alasdair Andrews
28-31 May	Family Meet, Ashbourne	Andy Burton
11-12 June	Welsh Meet, Rhydd Ddu	Ed Bramley
26-27 June	Alps pre-meet, George Starkey Hut	Pam Caswell
11-25 July	Alps Meet – Zermatt	Alasdair Andrews
10-24 July	Innterkirchen – Joint Meet	Mike Pinney
24 July-7 August	Grindelwald – Joint Meet	Pam Caswell
4-11 September	Peaks and Passes in the Maritime Alps	Alasdair Andrews
17-18 September	Lakes Meet, George Starkey Hut	Ed Bramley
8-9 October	Maintenance Meet, George Starkey Hut	Don Hodge
22-23 October	Alps Reunion Meet, George Starkey Hut	Pam Caswell
November	Peak District, Edale	Ed Bramley
29 Jun 05	A Dinner	

For details of all Meets and of the winter Scottish Meets please see regular updates in the quarterly Newsletter

Editorial

Once again the Journal is the culmination of twelve months work. Actually this is eleven months dropping hints followed by one month of panic and late nights hunched over the computer. As usual my thanks go to all contributors of both words and pictures. Sometimes I do have to edit articles to keep them to a reasonable length and style for the Journal so I hope that I have not upset contributors.

The last year has been an important one for ABMSAC. In the autumn we were told that our landlords at the George Starkey Hut was willing to open discussions over our purchase of the hut freehold. Over the next few months a great deal of work was done to make sure that the membership were on side with this, that Tuesday Climbing Club were willing to work with us and to see if we could afford it. Everything was looking very positive when, out of the blue, we were told that the landlords had changed their mind and the offer was off the table. I am sure that we all regret this opportunity being withdrawn but in the meantime the Committee will continue with informal contacts to see if the process can move forward.

On a more positive note we are now getting on with the hut improvements. These have been in development for some time now and the hard work of the Hut Improvements Committee and the Hut Management Committee is much appreciated. Trying to satisfy all the people all the time is very hard work! Once the improvements are completed it will be a much better commercial prospect for us and will help with more and better bookings. In particular it will make it easier to sell mid-week bookings that provide good income and keep the weekends free for members to use. I hope that it will also provide the vehicle for us to launch a more positive drive to recruit new members, we must think of the future of the Association.

I believe that we have an interesting selection of articles in this year's Journal. Unusually there is no contribution from James Bogle who has been a regular contributor over the years. There is a reason for this as he is writing the history of the Association. I have seen an early draft and believe that this will be something of real value. We still have to put the final version together and organise the production but do look out for publication details in later Newsletters as this will be something that you will all want.

Thinking about the history of the Association reminds me that we are approaching our centenary. Admittedly this is not until 2009 but now is the time to start thinking about how best to celebrate the occasion. Please don't leave it all to the Committee, if you have any ideas that can make this a special and memorable anniversary please let us know.

Ed Bramley has taken over the task of Membership Secretary following Mark Eddowes' good work. The membership details published in the Journal come to me from him and, unless I am aware of errors, I take them as accurate. Please let Ed or me know of any errors so that we can update the records and publish corrections in the Newsletter.

Another change is to welcome John Foster as Meets Secretary, freeing Ed Bramley of the burden. John has been organising the Scottish Meet programme during the winter and it makes sense to have one person doing all the meets. As I have mentioned in the Newsletter John is keen to organise more meets and this can only be a greater benefit to members. If you have any good ideas for new places to visit please let John know and if you would be prepared to lead a meet he will be particularly pleased to hear from you. Organising a meet need not be an overly onerous chore, after the recent Dartmoor Meet the meet leader, Alison Henry, said that it only took one phone call!

Finally it is only a year to go until the next Journal so please start thinking about the articles that you are going to send me for inclusion. This year we have very few reports on members' activities, which is a pity, perhaps we can do better next year. What about some reports on particular events or climbs? How about some reminiscences or comparisons of something you did in your youth and have repeated? There are lots of possibilities and it is you who write the Journal, all I do is put it together. I look forward to hearing from you.

Richard Winter – Honorary Editor

ABMSAC membership database

As you may be aware from correspondence accompanying your membership renewal, we have recently been making some significant upgrades to our membership database.

We had a number of shortcomings with our existing software and, at the same time, we wanted to take the opportunity to make the system both easier to use, and more helpful to the club and its members in the information it produced. This not only helps us with managing our subscriptions and the information we are required to supply to both the SAC and BMC, but will also help us to understand the make up of our membership, and in communicating with people.

As part of the membership renewal this year, we took the opportunity to check the existing information we held on people, and over 120 people replied, typically with changes to addresses and telephone numbers. Another big area of change was in people now having e-mail addresses, and this offers us some new possibilities on newsletters and meets advertising.

We still have one piece of work to complete, which is to align the information we hold, compared to the SAC. For example, at present we have over 20 people with different lengths of SAC membership held by the two organisations, and in some cases this is affecting either veteran status, or subscriptions due.

One example of how the new database can help us understand our membership make up better is shown in the graphs below. These are based on people's year of birth, and the year which they joined the ABM and SAC. They reveal a number of interesting points about our club:

The bulk of our membership of our club is in the 40's to 80's age range, with a predominance in the 50's to 70's group.

The last two decades have been good for attracting new members, with an average of over 6 new members a year, against a backdrop of just over 260 members in total.

People are most likely to join the SAC in their 20's, although there are still a significant number joining into their 40's.

By contrast, the peak age for people joining the ABM is in their 40's, although there is a wide spread of joining ages, from under 20's, to over 60's. Whilst a small proportion of this will reflect people no longer being active in the SAC, this information has already been corrected for retired SAC members.

Armed with this information, we can then use this in planning how to attract new members to the club, as well as thinking about the spectrum of meets we offer to

our existing membership.

To make all this work well depends on keeping our membership database up to date. If any of your information changes during the year, please let me know either by e-mail or post.

Ed Bramley
Membership Secretary

A Little Pre-season Training: The Haute Route, August 2003

In the beginning...

A couple of years ago I mentioned to my friend and companion of the Three Peaks Challenge, Chris Ide, that I had a long obsession with the Haute Route, the high level tour across the Alps from Chamonix to Zermatt. "When are we going to do it?", he said and so the most challenging six days out of my twenty five years of walking and climbing was thrust into creation.

Planning...

The first major decision was should we take a guide? My initial inclination was of course. I then purchased the Peter Cliff book - The Haute Route, published by Cordee, and started to wonder if we could do it without. The route, although across the high glaciers and snow, was well travelled; I had clear directions, and there were excellent 1:25,000 maps. I contacted a colleague at the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club who said "Nah, just do an ice course before you go to make sure you fully understand the dangers of glacier travel, and what to do if something goes wrong". Rationalising this to my wife and friends, who thought I was both irresponsible and crazy, was another matter. I put the different arguments to our group of 7 and I believe the most persuasive may have been: "Look, we are a fit, intelligent (a subjective judgement), moderately experienced group. If we have a guide to hold our hands will the trip not lose its challenge?". We agreed it would.

So we read everything we could get our hands on, purchased mountaineering safety videos, allocated specialist responsibilities to each member of the team for first aid, weather, equipment, accommodation and route finding and booked a glacier course with the Bureau de Guides in Megeve.

The final team...

We had a training and trial weekend in Snowdonia 6 weeks before the off. Completing the Snowdon Horseshoe and Tryfan was a bit of a wake-up call for some and we sadly lost two members of our team who decided that they were either not fit enough or were unhappy about the volume of snow and ice likely to be encountered. So we departed for the Alps with the following members;

Angus Cater (51) – insurance executive and lifetime runner
Ian Hamilton (46) – consultant, entrepreneur, and triathlete
Jackie (46) – major event organiser and former ski-rep, mountaineer, climber, and polemicist
Rosie Hamilton (16) – County hockey player and future doctor
Rob Slinger (34) – entrepreneur, geologist, engineer, runner and all round enthusiast.

I was ostensibly the leader but in practice we were a small enough group for our decision making to be collective. Everybody contributed crucial nuggets to the success of the trip and as the days went by I felt the weight of responsibility lift from my shoulders. We were in this, for better or worse, together. I was not expected to make all the decisions and some fairly vigorous debate was held at times over route finding, which was anything but straightforward.

Conditions...

The Alps had had their hottest spell of weather for years. There was no snow below 3000m and the glaciers were all 'dry' below this level. This had pros and cons. The pro was that we could clearly see the crevasses and the con was that we had no obvious path to follow from previous climbers. The glaciers were melting at an alarming rate and we were exceptionally nervous about some of the ice bridges. In addition, a lot of the glaciers looked rather dirty and unattractive without snow cover. Above 3000m a lot of the snow was old and rotten and God only knows what was lying beneath it!

The Route...

Nowadays there are several 'Haute Routes' some of which cater for the luxury tourist market. Ours was the classic Haute Route that follows fairly closely the route skiers take in the spring.

We did our route planning on 1:50,000 maps (Mont Blanc Grand Combin – 5003 and Matterhorn Mischabel – 5006) but used the following 1:25,000 maps for route finding: Chamonix (3630 OT), Orsieres (1345), Chanrion (1346), Mont Velan (1366), Matterhorn (1347), and Zermatt (1348). The trip should have been one day longer because we planned to stay in Bourg St Pierre at the end of day 2 and go up to the Valsorey hut on day 3, and thence to Chanrion on day 4. However we were advised that the danger from avalanches and rockfalls on the route from Valsorey to Chanrion via the Mont Durand glacier under Grande Tete de By and Tete Blanche was considerable so we diverted to Fionnay and thence up to Chanrion.

When we arrived at the Chanrion hut we were advised that the route we had taken was in fact the normal summer route because the Mont Durand glacier was often dangerous.

Accommodation...

Apart from Fionnay, where we stayed in the dormitory of the Hotel du Grand Combin, we stayed in Refuges (mountain accommodation). We slept in dormitories with up to 20 others and 8 to a bed (very cosy). There were never showers and running water a luxury. So, although smelly, we were very well fed and there was no shortage of alcohol. Bed, breakfast, evening meal and picnic cost approximately £35 per person per night.

The Journal...

Thursday 13 August

We met Daniel, our guide, at the station where we were to catch the train up to the Mer de Glace glacier for our ice course. Daniel was a former member of the alpine rescue team, ski – instructor, qualified guide and photographer. After a nerve-racking climb down a series of fixed ladders onto the glacier he put us through our paces. In the morning this involved walking over all aspects of the glacier in our crampons. Up hill, down hill, sideways, along ridges, even ice climbing out of a crevasse! 'Ven, you go down, you bend ze knees, sit down, open your feet and go down like a duck. Quack, quack, Angus. Like a duck'!! In the afternoon we did belaying and crevasse rescue, using pulleys and ice screws. The whole experience, in spite of the first inclement weather for weeks, was amazingly useful and we used all of it in the ensuing week.

Friday 14 August

We drove from Megeve to Le Tour and parked in the car park by the Col de Balme chairlift. Collected all our gear, put on our boots and we were off. A beautiful cool and overcast afternoon with a steady but not too onerous climb along the obvious path from 2132m to 2702m in two hours. The two youngsters (Rosie and Rob) led the way while the older brigade trailed in their wake. As we climbed the last few hundred feet the Albert Premier Hut came into focus – a red brick 'prison' perched on the glacier edge. Rucksacks into special lockers and ice axes, boots etc. outside. Our dormitory was no. 4 with 19 others.

Excellent supper of soup, pasta, meat (not for our two veggies), tarte au pommes and cheese, plus beer and wine. Mind you, as I had calculated we were likely to burn 4000 calories per day we were going to need it. Met up with Russ and Kenzie, two British instructors, who were to be with us all week and who advised us about the dangers of the Mont Durand glacier.

Saturday 15 August

We surfaced at 05.00 (later than some) and were away by 06.20. The route went behind the hut and then ESE onto the Glacier du Tour. Crampons on and roped up into two teams: Angus, Rosie and Ian; Jackie and Rob. A beautiful morning for our first climb up to the left of Signat Reilly (2883m). Then some debate about the

route. We saw one group continuing ahead but we eventually worked out the correct route over the Col Superior du Tour. A massive avalanche over on the Aiguille du Passon reminded us of the dangers of the mountains. Up a very steep snow and ice slope in the shade (quite cold) onto the rocks for the final pitch into the sun. Climbing on rocks with crampons was interesting. We were now at 3332m and feeling the effects of altitude. Great views!

Down onto the wet snow of the Plateau du Trient and a nerve-racking trip down the Glacier du Trient. After a few minutes my left leg went right through the snow into nothing and I fell forward into the snow. Ian and Rosie both went down on their ice axes expecting me to disappear into a crevasse but the snow held. Very hot and lots more crevasses to be negotiated. Passed the Cabine du Trient to the left and came off the glacier 1 mile before Cabine D'Orly. Then a long hot walk down to the Brea telesiege. Once down in Champex we decided on a taxi to Fionnay.

Sunday 17 August

We split into two groups. Ian, Rosie and Jacks caught the bus to the dam, while Rob and I went to the dear little church for Mass. Suitably fortified we then walked cross country up to the dam for lunch and then a long steady climb up to the Chanrion hut (2462m). Very concerned about the weather as thunderstorms and rain were battering us during the evening and the hut guardian was pessimistic. Opened the window and a French lady promptly got up and closed it again. I explained in my best French that we were all likely to be dead in the morning without some air. It then kept slamming so I had to secure it with the emergency ladder. In the middle of the night gallant French husband got up and closed it again. The air was very choice by 0600.

Monday 18 August

Weather was OK. Down the path to the road and followed it to the hydro-electric dam. Happily, Ian had remembered that the book had stressed the importance of leaving the dam to starboard so we took the very small correct path up to the Otema glacier rather than the large obvious path to God knows where! A long flog up the glacier to the Col de Charmione in cold overcast weather with bursts of rain and hail was probably our low point. Rob wanted to know what was the point of my rather erratic weaving course up the glacier and I tartly informed him that as I was the one likely to fall into a crevasse I could take whatever course I bloody well liked! Later, seemingly much later, Jackie spotted our two English friends climbing up the scree towards a saddle over to our left. Much checking of maps, compass bearings and discussion and then we followed them! It was the right decision and brought us via another glacier to the amazing Vignettes hut at 3160 m perched on a rock at the end of a narrow ledge. Superb views of Petit Mont Colon, and a loo suspended over the rock face.

Tuesday 19 August

Crampons on and left at 06.40 in the first light. Back across the scree and down onto the Otema glacier. Stuck very close to Petit Mont Colon and then the fun started. Huge crevasses so after more debate took a group decision to go up the left hand side of the Mont Collon glacier under L'Eveque. Eventually found a narrow ice bridge to cross the crevasses followed by an ice climb using twin axes. Belayed using the ice screw at the top and up came the others. When I got up I was shaking so much from exertion and terror that I couldn't speak for two minutes! Thank you Daniel for teaching us so well. Crossed the Col de L'Eveque in rapidly thawing conditions (we had lost about an hour in the crevasses) and more debate about the not very obvious route. Eventually, thanks to Ian spotting a way through we went down the heavily crevassed centre of the Haut Glacier d'Arolla. Very narrow and steep descent at one stage "Like a duck, Jackie", I said. "*!?!* +!!! you", she said. Well earned lunch at the bottom of the glacier followed by a long walk down the scree and a right turn (due north) up the Plans de Bertol. The coup de grace was a horrendous 700 m climb up the path, then scree, then ice up to the Bertol hut at 3311 m. The last straw was three lots of vertical ladders up the rock to the entrance to the hut. We were all exhausted and dehydrated after a ten hour day and 1215 m up and 1060 m down.

Wednesday 20 August

Started across the Mont Mine glacier towards the Tete Blanche passing close to Dents de Bertol. Very heavily crevassed just to our left. Cut across towards the Col de Tete Blanche on very hard, ridged snow and then a steady climb in thin air up to our highest point of the week at 3610m. Rob and Ian went a further 100m up to the summit while the rest luxuriated in the sunshine and admired the incredible views including the Matterhorn.

We started our long descent in soft snow down the Stockje glacier. I tripped a couple of times but was saved from headlong descent by an alert Rosie on the rope. We followed the tracks, weaving in and out of the crevasses. One crevasse I had to jump; landed awkwardly and started to fall back into the void. Naked fear induced a world record jump back to where I started; Ian was already down in the snow expecting the worst! Got it right second time around! After multiple ice and snow bridges we made our way down to the Stockje, a rock island in the middle of the glacier.

After the Stockje the moraine started and, as it was early (1330), we debated whether to go on down to Zermatt and by-pass the Schonbiel hut. The thought of a hot bath and a warm Swiss bed helped to overcome the qualms about our late cancellation of the hut reservation. Getting off the moraine up onto the Zermatt path was horrendous. Very steep and slippery and we were all exhausted. (the worst part of the trip). We decided that we should have stayed high on the Stockje and

gone via the end of the glacier. Not obvious at the time though. Then the four-hour walk down into Zermatt. Ian shot ahead, seemingly untired, to book accommodation.

The next day, after looking at the fantastic museum and the cemetery we travelled by train to Tasch (the closest cars can get to Zermatt) where Henrietta, our taxi-driver, picked us up and returned us to Le Tour and the car.

Conclusion...

A truly amazing week that had everything. Hardship, much exertion, some danger, a few altercations, much laughter, and a real sense of achievement. We walked up and down a total of 32,000 ft and finished the week as a well-bonded team. We were very lucky with the weather and were fortunate to have no serious mishaps. Do I regret not taking a guide? No, but I am conscious that a guide really only comes into their own when something goes wrong. Fortune smiled on us.

Angus Cater

Lowe Alpine Mountain Marathon, June 2003

The Lowe Alpine has to be my favourite of the mountain marathons. The reasons for this are many: its distant location in the highlands of Scotland, the secrecy which surrounds the location, (this is only revealed late on the Thursday before the weekend of the event), the fact that the courses always include a Munro as a checkpoint and usually some surprise element. For me, the challenge is not only competing in the event, but also in getting there and back during the course of the weekend, Kent not being ideally placed for an event based in Scotland. This year the event centre was in the Southern Cairngorms at Spittal of Glenshee!

This year, the weekend for me started in school, I had the children with their chairs on the desks ready to go so that I could leave the minute the bell went at 3:20. Then it was the drive to Gatwick, hoping there would be no hold up on the M25 and the flight to Glasgow. From here on the organisation of the inimitable Martin Stone took over, a coach collected us and took us to the event centre. We camped in an idyllic place beside a stream and an old drove road bridge. I was fortunate that when we arrived at 11:00, my tent had already been put up by my partner Emily who arrived earlier as she lives in Stirling. We made a few plans for the next day and then fell asleep listening to the cries of the oyster catchers along the river.

My only real concern on the Saturday was how to prevent sunburn. The weather was ideal for being in the hills, sunny with some high cloud. Emily and I had en-

tered the D course, which on the first day was 17.9 km in length and had a height gain of 910 metres. There certainly seemed to be a lot of ascent as our second control which was on the summit of Glas Tulaichean was at a height of 1051 metres. The controls were relatively straightforward on this first day, there were two legs with clear route choices. At the overnight camp, maps showed the optimum routes. Apparently we were correct in our first route choice, which was to take a longer but flatter route which included a long path run. We still think we were right about our other leg with significant route choice: we again chose the longer flatter path route. We were influenced in this by the amazing beauty of the River Tilt as it tumbled along beside the track we were on. This was a section that we really enjoyed running so we stuck with the track and the beautiful scenery for longer than was strictly necessary. When we compared our splits with others, I don't really think we lost much time.

The overnight camp was as usual a wonderful spot, this year beside the River Tilt. It was such a lovely day that a number of competitors were swimming in the river. A pleasant surprise was that we found we had set up camp very near to some other Saxons: Sarah Kingdon and Steve Bush. We thought this fortuitous because we were carrying very little fuel and that we could borrow some from the neighbours if need be. In the event it was the neighbours who ran out of fuel! The only other concern at the overnight camp was the lack of a brillo pad to clean a burnt porridge saucepan. Another neighbouring camper came to the rescue with a bunch of heather which proved more than effective.

The weather on the second day wasn't quite as good as on the first, however we still ran in shorts and T shirt for most of it. The course length was given as 18.4km and the height gain as 800metres. On this second day I think the navigation would have been much more difficult if the cloud had been down. Our fourth control was the most difficult: it's easy to forget what scale you are on. I can remember thinking "go over the col and it will be just down and left," well on a 1:40 000 it's much further left! We eventually found it in the company of some other competitors who were using an altimeter. After the event Sarah and Steve said how useful they too had found an altimeter on the location of this control.

We were 63rd out of the 144 starters in the "D" class. I'm not sure how Emily felt about being in the 1st female veteran pair: she is after all only 36!

But for most of the competitors the event doesn't end at the finish tape: there is then the journey home. This year the return coach to Glasgow set off at the appointed time leaving some late finishers stranded. The ever resourceful Martin got the police to set up a road block at Blairgowrie to stop the coach and then chased after it by car with the stranded competitors!

I wrote this article originally for Saxons, my local orienteering club. Some ABM members compete in this and other mountain marathons. They really are enjoyable: why not give one a try this year?

Anne Jago

ÖTZI and the ÖTZTAL

When the Iceman was first discovered high on the Austrian-Italian border in September 1991, I was interested for two reasons: first as a mountaineer, and second as a teacher of Ancient History. I was intrigued that the body of a man over 5000 years old had been discovered in a glacier at 3000 metres, proving that even then men had ventured into the ice-covered regions of the Alps. A combination of unusually warm weather and a Saharan dust storm had melted the ice, exposing the man's head and upper body, his clothes and equipment scattered nearby.

Since I did not know that area of the Alps, at the start the location interested me less. It was my interest as a History teacher that took over as my class of eager 12 year-olds brought the latest newspaper articles to class. The body was quickly recovered from the ice by the Austrians, who had no idea at that stage of its antiquity and damaged it in the process. However, Konrad Spindler, archaeologist at Innsbruck, soon established that the body was 5300 years old, his equipment proving that he was of the late Neolithic Age, with a dagger and arrow heads of flint and an axe with a copper blade. His clothes were beautifully crafted: he had leggings, loincloth and jacket made of deer and goat skin, a hat of bear skin, shoes of bear and goat skin insulated with grass, and a long cape of grass and bark fibres. His equipment also included a bow, a tool for sharpening flint, a pouch with a tinder kit, and the frame of a backpack made of birch bark. This was clearly a discovery of paramount scientific importance since no well preserved bodies had previously been found of this period, and none at all with a complete set of clothes and equipment. But my students were most interested in what he was doing at 3000 metres and how he had died. In his book *The Man in the Ice*, Spindler put forward various theories: he had been escaping from his native village after a fight, or had been hunting or herding his flocks over the pass, then been overtaken by the bad weather. Even today, shepherds take their sheep from the Val Senales to graze in the Ötztal in the summer. Whatever the reason for his journey into the mountains, he was certainly well equipped for it.

Once the Italians realised the potential value of the Iceman as a tourist attraction, they took great pains to prove that the body had been found their side of the border- just 92 metres inside Italy. They allowed the Austrians to continue their research, then in March 1998 the body was moved to the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology at Bolzano. Alasdair had arranged the 2001 ABMSAC meet to be in

the Dolomites, with a week's walk in the Rosengarten, followed by two weeks at Madonna di Campiglio. The route linking the two centres went through Bolzano, and what better way to spend a Saturday morning than at the Archaeological Museum? The mummy itself was encased in a specially designed cold storage chamber and visible only through a small glass window, but the clothing and equipment, with reconstructions, were beautifully displayed in cases. Here were the cape, hat, leggings and shoes, with the dagger, axe, bow and arrows, backpack and all his other gear; labelled only in Italian and German, but self-explanatory.

Meanwhile, research continued. Samples from his intestines, teeth and bones showed that he ate a mixed diet of wheat, plants and meat, his last meal including deer and wild goat. An analysis of plant remains on his clothes proved he came from around Juval Castle, 2000 metres lower than where he was found, and in the south of the Val Senales. He had not died in the autumn as was previously thought, but in spring or early summer. In July 2001, X-rays revealed a flint arrow-head in his shoulder and a deep wound in his right hand. It seemed more and more likely that he had fled from an attacker and died of his wound. These findings were summed up in an article entitled *The Iceman Reconsidered* in the May 2003 edition of *Scientific American*.

So, when Alasdair arranged the second week of the 2003 meet to be in the Ötztal, I now became more interested in the location of the find. A detailed look at the map revealed that the body had been discovered on the Tisenjoch at 3210 metres, just above the Similaun Hut and at the foot of the Similaun peak. In fact, the two climbers who discovered the body had made an ascent of the Similaun from the southern side on the previous day and spent a night at the Similaun hut. Reinhold Messner had, by chance, also been at the hut and been one of the first to view the body and the first to realise that it was hundreds of years old rather than a recent death. The body was first called Similaun Man and only renamed Ötzi after the Austrians appropriated him.

It seemed fitting that on a meet to Ötzi's valley some of the group should climb his mountain, so on the last Thursday morning Alasdair and four others set out from Vent. After a wet walk via the Martin Büsch hut to the Similaun hut, followed by a night of snow, the next morning dawned bright and clear. They reached the summit of the Similaun (3607m) about 9.30, with views back north into the Ötztal from which they had ascended and south into the Val Senales from which Ötzi ascended.

My own ambition was less demanding, and early on the morning of their ascent I set out towards the Similaun hut, planning to reach the monument commemorating the site where Ötzi was found. After a four hour walk and about 100 metres below the hut, the track descended onto a glacier, the surface of which was a slip-

pery layer of rubble and ice. With no-one in sight, and Alasdair and the others planning to by-pass the hut on their descent, I decided that discretion was the better part of valour, and that I had got near enough to the Iceman. On another day others in the group did reach the monument, but it was clearly a more difficult route than indicated on the map, perhaps due to the lack of snow this year.

Since our return, articles about the Iceman have continued to appear in the papers. The most recent from *The Times* reported that an analysis of blood samples from his clothing and weapons showed that four people were involved in an attack on him, and that he died nearly two days after his first wounds.

The most intriguing question of why Ötzi was at such a great altitude and how he died may never be fully answered, but meanwhile the Italians go on selling Ötzi books and keyrings, and even naming pizzas and sausages after him !

Pamela Harris (AC, SAC)

Tower Ridge

Some time ago four not so elderly gentlemen set off from Glen Nevis to climb Tower Ridge on Ben Nevis. Tower Ridge is one of the nicest easier climbs on the Ben because it is mainly scrambling with a few places where a rope is advisable. It was one of these beautiful cold early October mornings with a promise of warmth as the sun got up. The route to the ridge is straightforward with 2000ft up the tourist path to the half waypoint and then a walk through the col passed Lochan Meall an t-Suidhe and a drop down into the Allt a'Mhuilinn and the CIC hut. From here we by-passed the Douglas Boulder – considered too difficult for us – and found the Eastern gully busy with quite a large party. To avoid a long delay we simply climbed on to the ridge on the face alongside the gully.

The ridge from here is about 2000ft of scrambling with the rope needed only for the difficult bits and so we set off almost strolling up this delightful ridge with our hands in our pockets, but not quite because hands were useful occasionally. The weather by now had become warm and we took our time so that we might enjoy the wonderful views not only of the Nevis cliff scenery but also the ever-widening panorama, which was opening up all round. Three of us had climbed the ridge before, so we knew what it was like but John, our medical man, was climbing it for the first time and to say the least he was delighted.

Proceeding up the ridge with no serious difficulties at this stage we came across another party. They were a young group and we were intrigued to see that they were roped up with two ropes, heavy enough to tie up the Queen Mary, and equipped with enough ironmongery to climb the Eiger. No doubt they were just as

intrigued to see four oldies who only had one rope between them. We were greeted with a wonderful statement “Eeh it’s like twenty greet stone crags stoock on end”. After a moment or two I translated this statement and understood that they were young tigers who were more used to climbing severe grit stone crags 100ft high. Never the less despite the difficulty of widely different English and Scottish dialects we did manage to pass the time of day and then we moved on and left them.

No serious difficulties are encountered until the Little Tower that is not really a tower but simply a steepening of the ridge. Here the rope was used to get round an awkward little corner. From this elevated viewpoint we looked back and saw our young tigers following us with only one rope and no visible Eiger gear. From here easy rock leads up to the Great tower and again the rope was used for the Eastern Traverse, an easy but quite exposed ledge by which the Tower is by-passed. Some further scrambling led us back on to the ridge at the back of the Great Tower.

We now approached the final difficulty on the ridge namely Tower Gap. Walking up to the gap there is no indication that there is any difficulty and it is quite dramatic to suddenly come across the drop into it. Crossing it is not really difficult providing the correct route down is used and once across the narrow bottom there is no further difficulty in the 200ft to the summit plateau. Three of us used the rope for safety but Alistair, our best rock climber, did his own thing and used a more difficult route. Safely across two of our group scrambled on up to the plateau while Graham and I sat down so that Graham could coil up his rope.

Looking back to the other side of the Gap we found that our friendly tigers from North England had arrived and were also coiling up and putting away their gear because from their viewpoint it looked easy. I said to my companion “lets wait and see what happens, this should be interesting”, so instead of pushing on we waited. Eventually the first of the group walked forward and lo and behold he discovered the Gap. He stopped rather suddenly in astonishment and we heard quite clearly his reaction “Jesus wept”. I was convulsed with amusement and the pair of us thought discretion was the better part of valour and departed for the summit above us.

We found our companions sitting at the edge of the cliffs a little way from the summit cairn where we had a lovely dramatic view of the ridge we had just climbed and with Tower Gap providing an ideal photographic foreground. As we sat there in the sun we realised that the young lads were still on the wrong side of Tower Gap and were obviously having difficulty finding the route. I felt a bit remorseful, having left them not realising that perhaps they were not as experienced as their gear indicated.

We completed our day by dropping down the North Eastern ridge and romping gaily round Carn Mor Dearg Arete to Carn Mor Dearg from where we dropped down into the Alt a' Mhuilinn and then retraced our steps back to Glen Nevis. So ended our wonderful day on Nevis.

However, there is a sting in the tail of this little story. The following winter the Mountain Rescue from Fort William was called out. Seemingly there was a party stuck on Tower Ridge at the gap. The quickest way to reach this stranded party was to climb the mountain by the normal route and then descend the 200ft to the gap from the summit. In the dark this they proceeded to do and without undue difficulty they crossed the gap to where the party were stuck. Having rigged their fixed safety ropes they then proceeded to feed the stranded party across the gap to safety and the top of the mountain. They got the first one over, then the second, the third and the fourth by which time they were somewhat concerned so they asked how many people there were. The total count was eleven none of them being capable of traversing the gap especially in the dark. Fortunately the weather was good or this could have been a major disaster. It goes to show that mountains must always be treated with a great deal of respect.

Bill Peebles

Too old for the Cuillin?

It was interesting to note the comment of our President in the July 2003 newsletter about 'greying membership'. Clearly, as we get older, we have to accept that we have slowed down and are not as adventurous as in our younger days.

You may be interested to know that three aging members (Phil Hands, John Percival and Jim Strachan – with an age ranging from 54 to 67) recently faced up to the challenge of the Black Cuillin, with the intention of completing the round of all twelve Munros (either in part or in full, depending on what Munros had been completed in the distant past). To ensure success, they hired a local guide. Despite the perennial problems encountered in the 'Isle of the Mists', of low cloud shrouding the ridge for most of the time, a delightful week was spent in June; involving contact with ropes, slings, harnesses and helmets, which for some of the party were things of yesteryear. The end result was that all 3 members have now completed the ridge, plus Blaven, with memories that now include the west ridge of Gillean (including Nicholson's Chimney) and of course the Inaccessible Pinnacle.



*Phil Hands, Jim Strachan, John Percival and George Yeomans (Guide)
Summit of Sgurr nan Gillean*

The guide used was 50-year old former teacher who has now been guiding on Skye for the last ten years. He is also a leading member of the local mountain rescue team and lives in Portree. He provides all the necessary equipment and is prepared to take up to 6 people to do the Munros. He is a very friendly chap and was highly supportive, one felt perfectly safe and secure with him at all times. He adjusted the pace to the fitness of the group. The other main value of using a guide in the Cuillin, other than for the rock climbing elements, is of course for route finding when the mists are down, which seemed to be most of the time. He was also a fund of knowledge about the local environment, local topography, plants, wildlife, etc. which provided a splendid background to the climbing week.

If any member is interested in seeking his services, his details are as follows: -

George Yeomans
Braes, Portree, Isle of Skye
Tel: 01478 -650380

E-mail – gyeomansonskye@hotmail.com / www.guidingon skye.co.uk

As regards accommodation the group found a good base at Carbst, at the head of Glen Brittle. We stayed in a cottage with 4 bedrooms, which can accommodate 6 people. The village also has a famous pub, the Old Inn, which provides both accommodation and has a new bunkhouse.

John Percival

Long Day on The Buachaille

The first sight of Buachaille Etive Mor is always inspiring. As the A82 swings west towards the pass of Glencoe, the pulse quickens as the acquaintance grows stronger. Its beautifully symmetrical cone stands sentinel looking out across the silent desolation of Rannoch Moor. Clothed in snowy raiment its magic is irresistible, it is truly a mountain amongst mountains.

Beyond the Kings House, I pulled over for a closer look. I could just make out the line of Curved Ridge rising above the waterslide slab and ending just below the Crowberry Tower. The previous summer I had climbed it for the first time, in preparation for a winter ascent.

It was late afternoon when we arrived in Onich. Steve and his wife were already there, the newlyweds comfortably settled in the cottage. Always up for an early start, Steve had begun the long drive up from the Midlands at 7a.m. In later times, when I reflected on the day, it seemed ironic that an individual always so keen to begin any adventure as early as possible in the morning should fail to do so when it really mattered.

I rose early that morning; keen to get to the set off point by 6 a.m. Steve had not yet risen despite the arrangements we had made the previous evening. Several calls were necessary before he finally rose. Although he had been climbing well recently, he was a less fit than either of us had realised.

It was 8 a.m. when we arrived at Altnafeadh. "It's going to be a busy day", I thought to myself, looking at the number of vehicles already parked there. We set off and quickly arrived at the waterslide slab, scrambling above it to join other parties already gearing up. We were the last to start, having to wait our turn as each party set off. The first moves up through the slabby, right hand corner had little snow covering left when our turn came. Above the corner, though, there was good banked up snow cover so I ran out a rope length and set up an ice axe belay. Steve quickly joined me. It was still busy above us, parties under instruction for the most part. Initially, we made good progress up the ridge, enjoying the views across Rannoch Moor to the distant Schiehallion. As we climbed the sky gradually became overcast and large snowflakes began to fall.

After some time I became aware that I could no longer see, nor hear, any of the parties above us. This was the first real indication to me that our progress had become much slower. I was waiting long times at stances before Steve joined me. Each time it took more and more effort on his part. Eventually we arrived at the last flattish shoulder before the steep final sections. Steve was very tired., it was 4 p.m. and still snowing heavily.

I arranged Steve's belay whilst he rested and then set off up the ridge. Some way up and a little off to my right I saw what looked like a narrow and very shallow chimney banked up with steep snow. Given the time and the situation it looked like an easier alternative for finishing the route more quickly. My mind made up I traversed across and entered the chimney lower down. I was able to make upward progress more rapidly now, until I reached a steep bulge of ice. After surmounting the bulge I ran out of rope, enough rope to finish that is. I hurriedly dug out a stance from the hard snow on top of the ice bulge and belayed myself to an axe thrust into snow at the back of the stance. Tied to one axe and hanging on the other in a placement above me I felt secure enough to consider my situation. Between my boots almost a hundred feet below me I could see Steve, hunched over his belay, oblivious to my predicament. "No help there", I thought. I turned my attention to the shallow chimney. The walls were barely a metre apart and covered in ice. Carefully I removed the axe from the placement and began to scrape ice from the right wall. To my relief, I uncovered a crack in the wall and quickly cleaned it out. A friend went in and furnished me with a very welcome second belay.

Feeling a little more secure now, I turned my attention to the left-hand wall. Again, to my relief, I found a suitable crack that would also take a friend, now I felt a lot happier! I had been reluctant to bring Steve up on my two belays because I knew now that he would need some direct assistance from the rope. I set up the belay, looked down at Steve and gave the rope several sharp tugs. Steve turned to look up at me and I signalled him to begin. His progress was very, very slow. He was barely able to lift his arm to place his axe and he frequently needed direct help from the rope. When he arrived at the stance he was exhausted. I quickly tied him into the belay on the left hand wall and, for good measure, to the axe at the back of the stance too. I wasted no time in moving off and after a further thirty feet of climbing I reached the top of the ridge.

It was 6.00pm when we finished Curved Ridge and Steve was totally exhausted. I looked up at the final slopes leading to the summit of Stob Dearg. There were two exits to the summit of the mountain. The right exit would lead us to the gap between the mountain and the Crowberry Tower and then back leftwards up the short gully to the summit cairn. Normally, I would have chosen this way, but not today! The slope leading up to the gap behind the tower was initially very steep snow covering thin brittle ice and loose rock. The left-hand exit would allow us to traverse and gain height more gradually. It looked easier and less frightening.

It didn't take me long to realise that this exit route wasn't going to go to plan either. Soft, deep snow, in places overlying hard ice, made upward progress laborious and difficult, particularly for Steve as the heavier of us. In his exhausted state

every physical exertion had to be followed by a prolonged period of rest. There were several sections where I had to heave him out of the drifts by using my whole body as a counterweight. Constant repetition of this extreme physical exertion was now taking its toll on me too. Nevertheless, little by little, in the rapidly fading light, we struggled upwards towards the summit, finally reaching the cairn in darkness at 8.00 pm.

All was calm on the summit. The storm had passed by, unnoticed by us on our struggles below. With a huge sigh of relief Steve slumped down and rolled on to his back. Away to the east, through the mist, I could just make out the blurred lights of the Kings House and imagined myself drinking a pint at the bar. It was a brief moment of comfort seeing civilisation so tantalisingly close, yet all the time knowing that we would have to go a little further still into the mountain's stronghold before we could begin to descend in relative safety. A little closer and further west, I could see a myriad of flashing orange and blue lights in the vicinity of Altnafeadh. "Were they for us?" I wondered.

Compass in hand we set off in a southwesterly direction for Coire na Tulaich. We had a minor error in our navigation with regard to counting steps, as a result of which we overshot the westerly turn to the col above the headwall of Coire na Tulaich. This first became clear to me when the ground in front began to slope off at a steeper angle than I had expected, presumably into Coire Cloiche Finne. After a minute or so I could see the outline of the lesser 902m, satellite summit immediately above the col. Retracing our steps we quickly arrived at the col.

With some trepidation I stepped over the brink and descended ten feet. Everything seemed fine, so I instructed him to step very carefully into my steps and join me. With Steve in front and ten feet of tight rope between us we descended the corrie headwall very slowly, my senses on full alert. Although the snow was deeper we stayed near the middle, anxious to avoid walking over the little outcrops that occur towards the top, middle right of the corrie. As we slowly descended the initial steep section I switched my head torch off, the beam from Steve's torch provided sufficient light for both of us. Suddenly, a flash of light caught my eye! At first I thought Steve had turned to speak to me, but it happened again. It came from the north, from Altnafeadh and then again, a third time! Someone was signalling us!

Back in Onich, some panic had set in, as by now we were long overdue. Steve's wife, unaccustomed to the uncertain nature of winter mountaineering, had raised the alarm. My wife, a seasoned campaigner at the waiting game, had tried to reassure her, but to no avail. The authorities had been alerted! High up in the corrie, this fact had now become evident to me. Someone was observing our progress. But, they could see the light of only one head torch? What message were they relaying? I hurriedly switched my own torch on to confirm the presence of a

second climber.

As we slowly descended the headwall I was grateful for the snow cover on the tedious sections of loose scree below the final steepening. As the angle decreased we were able to progress faster. Arriving at the middle section, large mounds of deep snow confronted us. Being the much lighter of the two of us I was able to walk across the mounds as though walking on water. Steve, on the other hand, crashed through the crust with almost every step, sometimes sinking up to his waist and frequently wedging himself firmly in the boulders beneath. Each time this happened it took a supreme effort on the part of both of us to extract him from the hole. After some consideration of the physics involved I thought that since we were still roped together, why not just pull him along behind me thereby reducing both pressure and friction? Well, the theory was sound, but from a practical viewpoint it didn't work too well. Steve's rucksack and the occasional large, snow covered boulder hampered any significant progress. Nevertheless, it was a useful procedure for short sections. So, by a combination of wading, sliding and hauling, we finally emerged from the confines of Coire na Tulaich at 10.30 p.m..

Standing by the stream, we drank slushy orange juice as we unroped and removed our harnesses and crampons. In the light of my head torch Steve's shredded waterproofs bore testimony to his struggles. "My gear's trashed!" he said, finally managing a smile. We packed away our gear and set off on the short walk back to the car at Altnafeadh. As we crossed the bridge over the River Coupall, our flashing policeman came to meet us, greeting us by name. He had radioed through to Onich to say that we had descended safely. I was relieved to hear from him that the orange and blue lights I had seen earlier from the summit were not for us, but for an accident, which had blocked the A82 for a short time. We thanked him for his vigil and bid him goodnight.

In silence we drove back to Onich, both of us lost in thought. Steve, no doubt thinking of both his own and his wife's relief at his safe return. He had been taken to the limit of his physical endurance by his ordeal. For a while the mountain had held him in its icy grip, it had shaken him to the core. He has never climbed again.

Four years have passed since that day and I have returned several times to Curved Ridge and the Buachaille. Strangely though, it never looks to me the same as it did that day. Perhaps the mental solitude I experienced had distorted my perspective too.

Every October half term, Steve and his wife return to the Highlands. As he drives across Rannoch Moor to where the A82 swings west towards Glencoe I am sure that like me, just beyond the Kings House, he pulls over to look up at the moun-

tain's shapely summit and to look back on that long day on the Buachaille.

Tony Emms

Earlier Oetztals

A hand went up and motioned me to stop – came a short explanation, followed by “Geht Schnell!” Schnell I gehted and, after a moment or so, turned to the sound of boulders bouncing across the track. Health and Safety would not have approved. Yet, it had taken four hours to ascend the twenty miles from Lagenfeld to Vent; who was I to complain about highway improvements?

Nearly fifty years elapsed before my next visit to the Oetztal, with many things changed; better roads, much development and many lifts. My personal transport had suffered reincarnation, gone the three-speed bicycle with only one gear operational, replaced by a vehicle that cost five thousand times as much. On the distaff side age had increased two hundred percent and performance – mine not the car's – had deteriorated by a third.



Wendell at 25, Silvretta

Vent, little more than a hamlet, consisted of a few chalets, the church and the Gasthof Post, in which I was rapidly installed. Like Obergurgl it was high at 1900 metres.

A Good night's sleep and a fine morning saw me on the grassy track that led up

the left bank of the Niederjochbach towards the Similaunhaus. In the Silvretta I had ascended to the Wiesbadner Hut with a rucksack on my back and a cycle pannier on each shoulder. My diary entry for the twentieth of September records the decision to take on of the panniers to Similaunhaus, but it is in evidence in neither subsequent entries nor photographs.

A brief stop at the Martin Busch Hut, in those days Neue Samoar, the latter rather rapidly re-christened from Hermann Goering, brought a meeting with a German family who accompanied me across the glacier to Similaunhaus. Over lunch I met Eric, on leave from National Service with the RAF in Germany; I was introduced to his Guide Willi and a deal was done. Willi's daily tariff was one hundred schillings (£1.50) and I could be included for one hundred and fifty, making my share a fraction over one pound. But that was for the morrow.

For the moment Eric and I wandered up the snow towards Similaun in mist and gentle snowfall; Eric had been there already and soon desisted. After eighty minutes of steady snow-plod I topped a rise and decided that if this were not the summit, then it ought to be.

Back in the Hut I spoke to some German speaking 'Italians'. 'Italy' they declared "Was the mother as son of a pig and they spat upon her". At Versailles, the politicians, operating at rather a lower intelligence than usual, had decided that the Austro-Italian border should follow the watershed and the Teutonic majority in South Tyrol expressed dissent with the occasional bomb.

On the morrow a brief storm held us back until 7.45 am, when we left for Finielspitze 3514m, a sharp little cone. It included a brief snow arete and an unwitting passage over the preserved body of Otzi, the hunter, who had already spent five thousand years under the ice. Neither he nor we knew that in another forty years glacier melt would deliver him to the scientists who would lift him out, prod him, examine him and install him in Bolzano (Bozen) adding a little to the ongoing border dispute.

A long slog across the glacier brought us down to the Hochjoch Valley and, ultimately back to Vent soon after 1.00 pm. The Breslauer Hut was shut and the lifts had yet to be invented. Off by 5.00 am we reached the hut (950 m) by 6.50 am and ate breakfast outside. Willi felt that the Oetzaler Urkund Ridge was the best route to the Wildespitze and we scrambled up the rocks for a few hundred feet; once on the crest things became a little harder and the rock a little looser so we roped up. By 10.10 (five hours for eighteen hundred metres) we were on the South and marginally lower summit, separated from the main top by one hundred yards of easy neve. After a brief snack we crossed the main summit and left-hooked down the ridge to the Mitterkarjoch, descended a steep snow slope and slid down the glacier

unroped. Back at the Breslauer Hut by 12.10, and were in Vent by 1.30 pm (about eight hours going) to complete a most delightful day in glorious weather with fine views. A quick drink and I saw Eric and Willi off on the Postbus to Solden.

Alone again, apart from an occasional tea stop in the German family's chalet, I dedicated the next two days to the ridges behind the Talleitspitze, which hangs over Vent to the Southwest, and divides the two valleys. Four hours saw me up the Kreuz Spitze (3457 m) with the neighbouring Kreuzkogel thrown in as an optional extra. An attack on the Talleitspitze from the rear was less successful.

On the third day, branching off from the Ramolhaus – I made a meal of getting there in 2003 – I trotted up the Hintere Spiegelkogel (3424 m) with a view down to an Obergurgl, not yet Disneyfied. Next day the mist was down and a brief venture towards the Diemkogel was brought to a halt by low cloud and rain.



Wendell's bike by the Rhine - 1955

Comparisons with 2003 are of course difficult. In '55, I suspect the mountains were easier, more snow, less ice and loose rock. We bounced round the glaciers with gay abandon (even language was different then) without thought of a crevasse – well, not much. I was certainly a lot fitter – eight hundred miles on a bike in a week in the Silvretta translated into six thousand feet up and down in about eight hours, day after day. It was not quite like that at Obergurgl.

On the twenty eighth of September I packed the panniers and pedalled off home,

rather surprising some Dutch girls who hadn't expected to see me in Amsterdam – but that's another story.

Diabtrek 2003

At the inaugural international "Diabetes & Mountains" conference MADIDEA 2003 that I had organised at Plas Y Brenin in March 2003 (www.mountainmad.org), I had the privilege of being invited by members of the Italian diabetic alpine group "ADIQ" (Sara & Marco Peruffo, and Vittorio Cassiraghi www.adiq.org) onto "Diabtrek 2003", a traverse of the Brenta Dolomites arranged for teenagers with diabetes.

My first experience of the exhilarating Brenta Dolomites had been with Esther Dryland in 2001, when we drove from Saas Fee in Switzerland to join up with the ABMSAC meet in Madonna di Campiglio. The Brenta Dolomites extend north from Lake Garda and west from Trento, and was apparently only discovered fairly late in mountaineering history – in 1864 by a visit from a John Ball who visited Bocca di Brenta.

It is a very popular area, and the central mountain hut bases at weekends are heavily visited by what can only be called 'tourists', many of whom are not mountaineers or rock climbers, but general members of the public who seek the relative safe exhilaration that the *via ferratas* provide.

However, the area must not be taken lightly; a slight change in weather conditions can produce traverses of alpine seriousness – as highlighted in my previous Brenta report in the ABMSAC journal in 2002 entitled "Bocchette Way", and as also found on www.idea2000.org.

There was a total 16 in the Diabtrek group ["with insulin dependant diabetes" abbreviated to (+d)]:- 11 'leaders' (Marco Peruffo (+d), Sara Peruffo, Paolo, Marianne Mirolo; Daniele Mirolo (+d); Vittorio Cassiraghi (+d), Mauro Sormani (+d), Elena plus myself), and 5 teenagers with diabetes – these were Pietro, Giulia, Simone, Ulysses and Angelo. Pietro and Giulia had been out with Vittorio over the summer climbing and mountaineering, but the others had minimal experience, and it was essential to assess how they were managing their diabetes in a supportive, non-confrontational manner – they were young rebellious youngsters after all! A young man called Mattia (+d), who was hopefully one day going to become a mountain guide, rapidly joined up with us during the route on day 2 thus taking the group to 17.

Also present were two diabetic doctors Dr Mark Strazzabosco and Dr Massimo

Orrasch, who were there to provide backup if needed and also to provide general diabetic medical advice to the youngsters on any issues that arose. Marianne Mirolo quite handily also happened to be an emergency medic, who had been the expedition doctor on Cho Oyu during the Italian Diabetic Expedition in 2002.

The route taken was as follows, and which can be visualised from the attached overview map scale 1:50,000.

Day 1

Starting in S. Lorenzo in Banale (758 m), we travelled through along Sent. Del-lago #325, through the beautiful Val D'Ambiez, passing Rif Cacciatore finishing at Rif. Agostini at an altitude of 2410 m. This first day provided a good start in assessing the strengths of individual members of the group and in total took about 5hrs. Rif Agostini was a superb mountain hut, although as usual could not really be called a hut and was more of a mountain hotel. Sara had indicated a row of hut slippers that could be used by visitors, and having selected a nice pair of worn leather sandals, we proceeded on our four-course dinner.

Later on during the meal, a big burly German mountaineer came over, looking confused and lost, and it wasn't until, after he had been to all the dinner tables, he pointed at my feet and shouted "*Das is meine Schuhe!*" – that he then realised that he had put his sandals on the wrong shelf, and I had unknowingly been wearing not the hut sandals, but this poor man's for the past four hours! By the laughs which erupted, the Italians had obviously thought this was highly amusing especially when my usually cool manner erupted into red face apologies all round!

Day 2

Leaving Rif. Agostini via the Bocchetta dei Due Denti (2859 m) early the next morning we traversed the via ferrata *Castiglioni* route number #321, to Bochette dei Due Bochette.

This was the first time that many of the Diabtrek members including the two diabetic doctors, had worn the specialist *via ferrata* climbing equipment, which consist of shock absorbing lanyards attached to a climbing harness and self locking karabiners to ease the repetitive "clip; clip; unclip; unclip; clip" routine.

After stopping for a break and lunch at Rif. Dodici Apostoli, we continued and followed route number #304 to the Bocca Comosci at 2784m. A careful descent was made to the glacier Vedr dei Camosci, and Sent. D Martinazzi was then followed traversing under Cima Tosa to our second mountain hut, Rif. Brentei (Mario Alberti) snugly located at an altitude of 2182 m.

Day 3

Now being on familiar ground, I was expecting to be retracing my steps back from 2001. We however took an alternative route to the route Esther and I had taken in the other direction in 2001, climbing up to the Bocca di Brenta thus avoiding the exciting Scala Degli Dei (Ladder of the Gods) ladder system rising up from the glacier Vedr di Brentei.

Traversing round Cima Brenta alta and Spallone di Massodi using the via ferrates Sentiero dei Brentei route number #318, and #305 Bochette Alte. It was interesting to note the difference in conditions – a complete lack of snow compared to 2001.



*Traversing the couloir around Spallone di Massodi
Photo: Nikki Wallis*

However as the temperature had dropped quite considerably, and the pressure was also slowly dropping this was adding a fair degree of urgency to our traverse which was the longest, most physically demanding and most serious section of our route so far. The youngsters however, were all managing to vary their insulin management techniques remarkably well and all were able to maintain a constant pace throughout the incredible amount of ascent and descent that was required during the day whilst carrying fairly large rucksacks. The glacier Vedr di Brenta did not seem to exist this year (see below photographs), making the descent relatively easy via route #303 to the final mountain hut - Rif Tuckett – a welcome

sight for weary aching limbs.

Day 4

Our final day saw us descending through cool, light rain showers from the Rif di Tuckett to Rif. Vallesinella, where we concluded with another superb four course typical Italian meal. With pre-arranged transport, we returned round to S. Lorenzo in Banale to collect the remainder of the cars, and say our farewells.



Bocca di Tuckett
Photo: Nikki Wallis

Despite me not being able to speak Italian and many of them not being able to speak English, we all seemed to integrate and communicate remarkably well together despite our spoken language differences. The unwritten language of the mountains being the unspoken common thread amongst us all.

Having succeeded with this initial trip, I now have the privilege of being invited onto another all Italian trip, this time a 7 week expedition to the Greater Karakorum, and "Broad Peak" an 8047m mountain in Northern Pakistan.

But that will no doubt be another story

Nikki Wallis



A Good Day Walk In New Zealand

In March 2004, Ian and I went on our first trip to New Zealand (NZ) and Australia. We were away for four weeks that broadly worked out as one week of travel, including stopovers in Singapore and Hong Kong, two weeks in New Zealand, and one week in the Melbourne area and Sydney. The stopovers, largely disappointing because of heavy traffic and pollution in both places, had the compensations of interesting food and the botanic gardens in Singapore where the orchids are superb. Later, these gardens pointed us to equivalent places in Melbourne and Sydney offering similar relief from traffic, relaxation, birds, and other wildlife. None-the-less, five vultures or kites circling below and above the skyscrapers in Hong Kong were quite a sight. Given a return visit, we would probably avoid stopovers with hotel and airport transfer expenses, minor immigration and luggage problems, and just tough it out on the long haul plane journeys. The extra time in final destinations is also worth bearing in mind.

Our travel itineraries included: nine flights; three return ferries (with one choppy crossing over the Cook Strait between North and South Islands in NZ); one scenic coastal train journey between Picton and Christchurch; over 2,200km by car and three wine tours. While it would be indulgent to report on the wine tours,

one of the highlights was achieving the summit of Avalanche Peak in South Island, NZ.

Preliminary reading, the internet (www.doc.govt.nz) and the NZ tourist bureau provided us with the country's system of grading walks in four stages: *paths* which are easy and well formed suitable even for wheelchairs; *walking tracks*, also easy and appropriate for shoes; *tramping tracks* which are marked and suitable for people of average fitness wearing boots, and *routes* which may require a high degree of skill, longer distances, can be very steep, and may involve unbridged waterways (DuFresne, 2002). In practice, this grading is hard to come to grips with and it is further complicated by 'easy', 'moderate' and 'demanding' tramping tracks. We also ascertained that the more famous routes such as the Abel Tasman, Routeburn, Kepler, and Milford Tracks, all in South Island and involving hut stays and approximately three days to complete, require to be booked to comply with NZ conservation policy which limits the number of people on the walks. In some cases, it is not possible to turn back on the walk. Because of other commitments, we knew that booking was inadvisable in our circumstances but in any case bad weather can ruin plans. This has indeed been the case for many people in the recent summer that has seen consistently bad weather without precedent in NZ.

Avalanche Peak, graded a 6-8 hour moderate route, lies in the Arthur Pass National Park. Created in 1929, the Park embraces 100,000 hectares of mountainous terrain and lies on both sides, but mainly the eastern side, of the Southern Alps in South Island. By car, it is approximately two hours from Christchurch but it is also accessible by bus and the Trans-Alpine scenic train journey connecting Christchurch on the east, and Greymouth on the west, coasts. The mountains are not high by European Alpine standards, generally below 2,000m, but they are exceptionally steep with glaciated and hanging valleys and unique in the three vegetation zones, bush, alpine tussock, and crumbly schist experienced as one moves upwards. Rocks are 'primarily greywacke and argillite' (www.natureandco.nz). Arthur's Pass village (737m) is an undeveloped settlement with several hostels, limited hotel and restaurant accommodation, one store and an excellent visitor centre selling walking leaflets and maps. It is recommended that walking intentions be logged at the centre but one must sign out on return.

Avalanche Peak 1833m, towers above Arthur's Pass village but is hidden from sight. There are two approaches to the mountain: Avalanche Creek Track and the easier Scott's Track which was our choice. Thus the climb was approximately 1100m, uniformly steep through the bush with views over 'The Devil's Punchbowl' a spectacular waterfall and the village, before an easier section of grassland with tall white gentians and a prickly shrub 'matagouri'. The two approaches meet 200m before the last section, a knife-edge ridge with a few bad

steps over loose, crumbly rock to the small summit. We were blessed with a wonderful sunny day, no wind and magnificent views towards Mt. Rolleston (2271m) and its glacier and over the Southern Alps as far as the eye could see. The walk is exceptionally well marked all the way with flags on trees in the forest and higher up with poles because of dangerous ravines in fog and snow in winter. On the ascent we saw yellow and black tomtits, robins, and tuis. Descending, an inquisitive kea stayed to be photographed and have a conversation with us. Keas should not be fed to encourage their wild status and because they can do considerable damage to cars if lured into the village.



Ian and the Kea – photo: Morag Macdonald

We could have stayed longer in this area where there are numerous opportunities for other day walks and hut-to-hut trips but we went further south to the Te Anau Fiordland area to walk part of the Routeburn track to 'Key Summit' from the Divide and the very different, almost tropical forest walks, which mark the start of the Kepler Track. This three-day walk is relatively new and was constructed to take pressure from the Milford Track. We were not alone to find the renowned Milford Sound area disappointing although the drive through the mountains to the sea is memorable.

Driving in New Zealand was easy with roads very similar to those in Scotland but

with much less traffic. Distances are large with vast areas of countryside devoid of habitation. In isolated areas children are educated via distance learning. The vast sheep farms are all fenced, as are the many deer farms. We were distressed to see hundreds of dead possums on the road although, with millions in the country, they are said to cause considerable damage to vegetation and trees. The many harriers find ready food on the carnage. Other more unusual bird life seen included bell birds, North Island kakas, zosterops, tahake, fantails and rock wren. In Australia, we saw sulphur-crested cockatoos, rainbow lorikeets, cranes, spoonbills, ibis, and noisy roseate parakeets. But that is another story.

Reference:

DuFresne, J. (2002) Tramping in New Zealand. Lonely Planet Publications, Melbourne, (Fifth Edition).

Touching The Void—Scottish Style

Watching the splendid film of Joe Simpson's exploits in the Andes put me in mind of an incident a few years ago which, although far less dramatic than Joe's, had some similarities.

We were having a week in Glen Lyon in early spring. There was a lot of snow but the weather was indifferent. One day we decided to do Stuchd an Lochain, which from the map looked like a typical rounded Perthshire Munro. The only problem was that I was using an old 1" map from the "Popular" series that I had inherited from my father.

We parked the car by the head of Loch an Daimh, climbed over Creag an Fheadain then up the ridge to the summit. We were in thick mist with flurries of snow but we found the top without difficulty. A cold wind was whipping across the summit so I said "Lets find shelter for a bite to eat" and walked off down wind from the summit cairn.

I had walked about 10 yards when my foot sank in deeply and I thought I had hit a snowdrift. Then, in slow motion, I went right through the cornice and found myself in free fall. I then hit a steep cliff and carried on down completely out of control. The whole fall probably lasted less than a minute, but I had time to reflect that I was certainly going to be killed.

Mercifully, soft snow started to accumulate in front of me and I came to a gentle halt on a small ledge. Looking back up I saw the cornice with a neat hole in it, in which a face eventually appeared. I shouted but communication was impossible. I then considered my predicament. It was clearly impossible to climb back up and it looked equally impossible to get down. However the ledge on which I had come

to rest appeared to continue across the face so I gingerly worked my way along it and eventually got to easier ground. (The ledge is in fact clearly visible at about half height on the cliff, as I observed when I returned a few years later on an ABMSAC meet.). I had no idea what the rest of the party would do so I returned to the car.

Meanwhile, back on the summit, it was clear what had happened but they had no idea where I was or what state I was in. With great courage John Percival lay face down on the cornice, and while the rest of the party held on to his boots he wormed his way to the hole through which I had fallen. He peered through and saw a wave of my arm but had no idea if I was injured. They tried to reach me but found that was hopeless. So they decided that the sensible thing to do was to return to the car and call out the mountain rescue if need be. In the event my route down was faster than theirs. When they saw me sitting in the driving seat the look of relief on their faces was all too evident. All I had suffered was a lot of bruises and a twisted thumb that had got caught on my axe.

No cutting of ropes, no broken legs and no climbing out of crevasses. So not really a parallel with the Andes, but a reminder that even Perthshire Munros can spring some surprises. And I bought a decent map the next day.

John Dempster

Obergurgling or the ABMSAC Summer Alpine Meet

Alasdair's 2003 Meet was again a two-headed monster, the first week spent at Mayrhofen, the second at Obergurgl.

Mayrhofen lies at 600m, and its top lifts shut at 4.00, as some discovered to their cost whilst indulging in a long traverse to the Rastkogel (2,761m); only Providence in the form of the only car on a remote mountain track saved dinner and potential benightment

The ABM was installed in a comfortable hotel in mid village and was well looked after; barbecues were interposed with thunderstorms. The only snag, the combination of unseasonably hot weather and low altitude made for restless nights. Several Alpine valleys converge on the village, although these necessitated the use of cars and buses if major summits were to be attempted. One valley the Stilluptal seemed well named.

Most parties ascended the local peak the Ahornspitz (2,976m), a fine looking summit marred by its final 200m of detachable rock. A 1,200m lift helped a bit; the Edel Hut beer a bit more.

The Musketeers pursued their usual independent ways, but met unusual hazards on their ascent of the Olperer (3,476m) via the lifts of Hintertux. Neither avalanche nor rock-fall worries them, but a human variety of both, hordes of skiers, snowboarders etc. descending uncontrollably in every direction, did. An experience to make a mountaineer shudder.

One evening was brightened by impromptu recitations. The BBC recently regaled us with a repeat of the Singing Detective; now the ABM was able to celebrate the premiere of its Singing President.

On the Saturday, most of the participants sped down the valley to the Motorway, surged up the Inn, and turned left up the long Oetzal to Obergurgl, where they were joined by further contingents from GB which took the headcount to over 30. Fortified by lunch most set off for the Schonwies Hut in a temperature of 80F, nothing had changed!

Our Hotel, the Regina, up a steep ramp, proved to be an odd affair of turrets, battlements and embrasures, located in an outbreak of Alpine Disneyland; all the hotels had employed the same architect, who had had initial coaching from Micky Mouse.

The Gurgler valley is narrow and steep-sided, the river filling the notch at the bottom. Whilst a summer ration of lifts was in operation, the need for these was less, because the village perched a little precariously on the slope at 1900 metres. In consequence some of the less exacting 3000 metre peaks were climbed on day trips. Towards the end of the week separate parties climbed both the Wildspitz (3772m) and the Similaun (3600m) from huts in the Ventertal and Oetzal.

Don Hardy and Keith Dillon, another strong team, last seen in Pontresina, ascended the Lieberspitze (3469m) from the Hohe Mut lift and numerous others went up the Hangerer which hung over Obergurgl. On the Monday most of the ABM were caught in an impressive storm and many were the stories of hair standing on end, iceaxes thrumming and members making themselves scarce under boulders. Yet all returned. Some took advantage of the next storm to forgather in the depths of the gorgeously named Edelweiss and Gurgle Hotel and consumed an excellent lunch while the world was put to rights. This apart, the weather was a great tribute to our worthy Meet Leader Alasdair who kept it generally fine and warm.

In 2002 the Meet was distinguished, not perhaps the correct term, by the varied disasters that befell individual members and contributed to the Leader's problems. In 2003 life was different. No one suffered heart palpitations, had violent encoun-

ters with chained dogs or fell face downward in rivers, giving Alasdair, to whom all thanks were due, an easy run.

Aviemore October 2003

The meet was again based at Ord View House situated on the road to Loch Morlich. Nine members attended namely John and Marj Foster, Jim and Margaret Strachan, Alasdair Andrews, John Dempster, Terry Shaw, Geoff Bone and Bill Peebles. Those of us who had not attended last year's meet found the house very well appointed with its three showers, one bathroom and a separate loo. They were also quite taken with the decoration of stags heads and fish. The house was also *made very comfortable because it was always heated and was provided with adequate hot water.*

The usual discussions took place on Friday about where to go on Saturday. Since failure was the outcome of last year's attempt on Braeriach this became the first choice but with a much earlier start. However some favoured tackling it from Glen Feshie while others preferred an approach from the ski road through the Chalamain gap into the Lairig Ghru.

The Glen Feshie party of John, Marj, Terry and Bill set out at 08.00hrs from the car park and climbed Carn Ban Mor, a climb of 2000ft up the stalkers path which has been vastly improved in recent years. Unfortunately the lovely weather which had prevailed in Scotland during the autumn decided to deteriorate and become nasty. Visibility was poor, cold with high winds and heavy rain showers. A suggestion was made that we persist and continue over the moss but common sense prevailed and we decided to settle for the Feshie hills. Carn Ban Mor and Sgur Gaoith were duly climbed in miserable conditions. It must be said that wandering over the Feshies in the prevailing conditions is excellent training in navigation because they are featureless. It proved a shorter day than expected since we returned to the cars about 14.30hrs rather wet and bedraggled. All, however, enjoyed the day bad weather or no and felt adequately exercised

The second group Jim, Margaret and John duly drove to the appropriate car park on the ski road but like the Feshie group opted for a lower mountain namely Bynack Mor, one of Jim's unclimbed Munros. They had chosen a route different from the more normal easy route using the Lairig An Laoigh for access. Instead they approached from the Coire na Ciste ski road over the North East ridge of Cairn Gorm into Strath Nethy and hence up the mountain over Bynack Beg a pathless route all the way. They enjoyed their day and were delighted to have claimed another Munro but they also suffered from the poor weather.

The third party of Geoff and Alasdair were probably the most sensible party because they opted for a delightful Corbett called Meall a' Bhuachaille above Ryvoan bothy. They had a delightful day suffering less from the prevailing bad weather at the higher altitudes, Geoff in particular was very pleased to be climbing again after a spell of illness. One glorious feature of the Spey Valley in October is the marvellous autumn colouring. It was at its best and was enjoyed by all especially the photographers. Dinner in the Old Bridge Inn completed a very successful day and needless to say after good food and wine the weather was not really all that bad high up on the hill.

On the Sunday the weather on Spey side was just the same as Saturday so the whole party left for Pitlochry intent on climbing Ben Vrackie. The weather at Pitlochry was much better and the whole party duly set off. Ben Vrackie is the sharp peak overlooking Pitlochry and provides a delightful short day's climbing. As we climbed up a comprehensive panorama opened up ranging from Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh to Nevis in the North with numerous Munros between. The colouring in the trees delighted everyone and much time was spent naming the hills. The mountain was very busy since it is obviously the Sunday afternoon walk for locals and visitors alike. The route up the mountain is in the process of being totally rebuilt and the final steep slopes are being made into a giant's staircase which is easy to climb but hard on weak knees coming down. A final pint in the Moulin Hotel completed an excellent day after which the party departed homeward by various routes.

Bill Peebles

Meet Reports for Galloway meet – 14-16th November 2003

Only five people attended the meet at Galloway Sailing Centre on 14th November – the rest of you missed a treat. The entertainment started with two attendees misunderstanding instructions and searching the proprietor's house looking for their bedroom. Fortunately they retreated before the home-owner returned and discovered them.

The bunkhouse was very comfortable, and we were pointed in the direction of a hostelry about six miles away for what turned out to be excellent meals. The beer was also distinctly superior, though on Friday evening a quantity of this was taken externally by accident!

The weather had been terrible on Friday, but Saturday dawned fine and bright and we drove to Forrest Lodge. After meeting a large and colourful highlander, formerly a figurehead on one of Fred Olsen's pre-war ferries, we walked over Corserine and the Rhinns of Kells (Millfire, Milldown, and Meikle Millyea) - one of

the joys of this area is the placenames. Initially good views from the top of Corserine, of the Awful Hand range, Curlywee, and the Rig of Jarkness, deteriorated during the afternoon as squalls blew across from the West, but surprisingly a pocket of good weather surrounded us throughout the afternoon. The descent was not without incident, with one member falling flat on his face, one attempting a swim in the bog, and two climbing carefully through a seven-strand barbed wire fence about 100 yards from a stile.

On Sunday four of us elected to climb Cairnsmore of Carsphairn (is this the longest hill name in SW Scotland?) and "Piz" Beninner, from the wonderfully-named Green Well of Scotland. There had been a hard frost overnight, which resulted in crystal clear visibility and almost unbroken sun. Ailsa Craig, Arran, Kintyre, Southern uplands, Criffel, and the Northern Lake District summits were all clearly visible as well as the Rhinns of Kells, the Minnigaff hills, the Merrick and the range of the Awful Hand closer to us.

Since the weather clamped down again on the following day, we all feel extremely fortunate to have seen the area in good weather.

Attendees: Geoff Urmston, Marj Foster, John Foster, Ursula Woodhouse, Peter Goodwin

John Foster

Kingussie – 20-22nd February 2004

This meet was attended by ten participants – four in the Lairds Bothy bunkhouse and six in bed and breakfast accommodation. We assembled in the Topsy Laird on Friday night in still, freezing, weather, and after welcoming John and Jennie as new recruits formed groups to climb Mullach Clach a’Bhlair, Monadh Mor (a bit hopeful, this one!), and Sgor Gaoith, all from Glen Feshie.

Saturday proved to be distinctly draughty, with snow and cloud above about 700 metres, and on reaching the ridge above Glen Feshie the Monadh Mor group rapidly chose to expand the Mullach group instead. In spite of expressions of disbelief and general heckling, some superbly accurate GPS work (by your reporter) found the summit of Mullach Clach a’Bhlair – summit being something of a misnomer on this hill. Even after locating the summit cairn there was considerable discussion over whether it was the right hill. In fact, the route back to the cars alongside the River Feshie proved to be the most challenging navigational problem of the day.

The third grouping of Geoff and Alasdair, meanwhile, successfully climbed Sgor Gaoith, but to quote from the Lancashire monologue “Three Ha’pence a Foot” Alasdair finished the day “determined but moist”, having had a plunge bath in the river en route. N.B. Any comments about Scots and paying for either baths or laundry should not be made in his presence.

We had a cheerful meal in the Topsy Laird on Saturday evening after Alasdair had warmed up, but unfortunately the bad luck struck again and Alasdair and Geoff mislaid the key to their bed & breakfast (run by a pair of musicians). They had to sit in the car until 2:30 when the owners came home from a gig. Understandably they decided not to join the rest of us on Sunday morning for a second day on the hills.

On Sunday most of the group climbed Geal Charn (Drumochter) before departing for home, Peter conquering the neighbouring peaks of Beinn Udlamain and Sgairneach Mhor instead. The weather was similar to Saturday, and Geal Charn was an uncharacteristically simple ascent because all of its surrounding bogs were frozen hard. Arctic hares, and red and roe deer, were encountered en route by the Geal Charn party.

Attendees: Alasdair Andrews, Geoff Bone, Graham Daniels, Peter Farrington, John Foster, Marj Foster, Jennie Holland, John Holland, Jim Strachan, Margaret Strachan

John Foster



Annual Dinner 2004
Franz Staempfli, Nigella Hall & Alasdair Andrews
Photo: Merle Gartside



Alasdair Andrews -
Alps Meet 2003.

Does he know there's
an exotic bird roosting
on his head?

Diabtrek 2003



Marco Peruffo climbing Via Ferrata ladders
Photo: Nikki Wallis



Descending from Vedr dei Camosci
Photo: Nikki Wallis



"ÖTZI" - der Öztaler Eismann,
5200 Jahre alter Gletscherfund am
Tisenjoch in 3200 m Seehöhe.

"Otzi"



Ahornspitze Zillertal—2976m
A.N.O., Sheila Coates, Antonia Barlen, Edward Coales,
Alasdair Andrews, Bill Beebles, Wendell Jones



Mount Rolleston from Avalnche Peak
Photo: Ian Brebner



Mike Scarr on Beinn Sgulaird, Appin
Photo: Peter Farrington

Bridge of Orchy Meet—March 2004

This meet was well attended having 11 participants. Alasdair Andrews, John and Marj Foster, Peter Goodwin and Ursula, John Percival, Mike Scarr, Terry Shaw, Jim and Margaret Strachan and Philip Hands.

Accommodation was at the west Highland Way Sleeper, a new bunkhouse converted from the Bridge of Orchy railway station buildings. The accommodation was clean and comfortable but to say that space was limited would certainly be an understatement!

The weather forecast for the weekend had not been too promising. The Saturday dawned grey with the threat of rain. However, everyone was enthusiastic for a day on the hill and by 9.30 a.m. we had all departed for our various objectives.

Jim and Margaret Strachan with John Percival climbed in the northern Blackmount. They took the chairlift from White Corries to the plateau on the north side of Meall a' Bhuiridh, climbed Meall a' Bhuiridh and then on to Creize, returning back over Meall a' Bhuiridh just in time to catch the last chairlift down, by John getting a lift by snowmobile.

Alasdair Andrews climbed a Corbett on the south side of Glen Orchy. His worrying moment came not on the hill but when he saw in the distance a farmer burning vegetation close to his parked car and fearing that it would go up in flames.

Mike Scarr climbed Stob Ghabhar in the southern Blackmount, ascending by the south-east ridge, making a circuit of the summit ridge and descending by the east ridge to join the West Highland Way.

John and Marj Foster, Peter Goodwin and Ursula, Terry Shaw and I also climbed Stob Ghabhar by the south-east ridge but took the easier option of descending by the same route. Our climb was not without incident, I think that everyone at some stage had a slip. Some members of the party more than once! Although these were minor incidents, Marj Foster succeeded in self-inflicting a bloody nose with her ski stick and in a later accident, demolishing it!

Conditions on the summits were wintry with snow and ice necessitating ice axe and crampons. The summits were in cloud so depriving us of any views. Sunday dawned very wet and windy. Everyone was of the same unspoken mind – not to climb, so we all made our way home.

Despite the weekend being curtailed we enjoyed the meet, the added ingredients being the socialising including the superb dinner at the Bridge of Orchy Hotel on the Saturday evening.

Altguish—April 2004

Cognoscenti of the North West Highlands knew of the reputation of the Aultguish Inn for the “policeman’s-tea” colour of its water and we were not to be disappointed. First impressions of this isolated and run-down roadside inn on bleak moorland below the Glascarnoch dam are hardly uplifting. But the friendly welcome from the young couple who had recently taken it over and who are slowly trying to improve its facilities, was encouraging and set the tone for an enjoyable and successful meet.

Two of the eventual party of ten, Dick Yorke and I, had arrived a day early and on Friday we walked up Cul Mor in thick cloud. The conditions and a misleading forecast led to us abandoning plans for a traverse across to take in Cul Beag. But once down, the weather markedly improved to give a glorious late afternoon and evening with memorable views out to sea and of Suilven and the other northern hills.

On Saturday all ten drove to Inverlael and climbed Beinn Dearg by its long north-west ridge. Cutting up to the ridge after the forest on a John Foster “rough terrain special”, one member, who perhaps should remain anonymous, disappeared into what might be described as a heather crevasse, leaving only his head on show above the vegetation. Once the mirth had subsided and he had been relieved of his sack, he was able to extricate himself unharmed and to continue the ascent. Another member, not entirely divorced from navigating the group up this interesting hillside, sustained, in somewhat greater privacy, an upset that left him with a minor injury on a sensitive part of his anatomy. He later described it as a resembling a fried egg but declined to unveil it for a public viewing.

Conditions at the top were not conducive to lingering but the views were rewarding. Jim Strachen and Phil Hands, who throughout the weekend displayed acute Munro-bagging symptoms, went on to climb Cona Mheal while two others found amusement on some gentle snow patches going up and down Meall nan Ceapraichean. After the long walk back to the cars, we gathered later at the Aultguish Inn for the traditional Saturday evening meet dinner.

On Sunday the group split into three parties. Jim and Phil returned to Inverlael Forest to traverse Meall nan Ceapraichean, Ceann Garbh and Eididh nan Clach Geala, while John Foster, Peter Goodwin, Geoff Urmston and the ladies visited the Fannichs to climb Meall a’ Chrasgaidh from the Dundonnell road. Dick Yorke

and I, in our quest for aesthetic hills, chose Ben More Coigach and were suitably rewarded, like the others, with fine views from the top despite passing hail showers and a bracing wind. Eight of us dined well that evening at the Ceilidh Place in Ullapool.

Snow fell to the road that night and the plans by seven of the eight remaining to tick off more Monros by traversing Sgur Mor in the Fannichs on the Monday were soon abandoned. After a soaking during the first hour of the walk in and only the prospect of gloomy and freezing conditions on the tops, we returned to Ullapool for a leisurely lunch and the rest of the day was spent visiting waterfalls, sampling local beers and reading.

The weather for the meet could have been kinder and if we had a slight tan when we left for home on the Tuesday, it was more attributable to the Aultguish Inn water than any surfeit of spring sunshine.

Attendees: Jim and Margaret Strachan, John and Marj Foster, Peter Goodwin, Ursula Woodhouse, Phil Hands, Geoff Urmston, Dick Yorke, Terry Shaw.

Terry Shaw

Dartmoor—April 2004 or, Navigationally Challenged on Dartmoor

I was somewhat surprised by how few people were tempted by the prospect of a weekend’s bog snorkelling on Dartmoor. Perhaps they had been put off by rumours of wild hounds at large, or the risk of spending twenty years behind bars for breaking the 40mph speed limit across the moor. Nevertheless, a merry band of eight members made it to the Plume of Feathers in time for last orders on Friday night, apart from poor Natasha who drove for 6 hours and arrived just in time for cocoa.

Saturday dawned. Well I suppose it must have dawned at some stage but it was effectively concealed behind a curtain of mist and drizzle which, I hate to admit, is all too common on Dartmoor. Undaunted, groups set off right, left and centre for various adventures. I suddenly remembered that I needed to buy Easter eggs and that it was a while since I had visited one of my favourite tea shops in Tavistock (this sort of feeling is becoming increasingly common since my fortieth birthday).

Rick and Natasha opted for mountain biking and cycled over the moor, arriving exhausted, mud spattered and drenched to meet me for lunch in Tavistock. On enquiring why they were 40 minutes late (it isn’t that far) Rick sheepishly admitted that he had made a slight navigational mistake, which had them carrying their bikes for about a mile up an impossibly steep rocky path in the direction of home.

Finally Natasha's astute observations about wind direction and farmhouses which weren't shown on the map revealed the error of their way.

It later turned out that Penny and Michael had experienced a similar episode of disorientation. Their circular walk from Princetown across the moor to Merrivale and back via the Walkham Valley turned out to be more of a 'loop the loop' walk as they passed the same point three times before making it to Merrivale. Michael had set off with the intention of photographing ancient earthworks and standing stones at Merrivale but had lost his enthusiasm by the time they finally arrived there.

Mike, Richard and David headed for Cranmere Pool on the wild northern moors and returned without mishap (well, not that they would own up to). At about 4pm the lure of the moor was too much for me and I disappeared into the stinging rain for a run, feeling that I had to do something to earn my supper that night.

We were joined in the evening by Gerry from Yeovil Mountaineering Club, and passed a pleasant evening in the bar, recounting the day's adventures and drinking Jailhouse Ale. If you ever go to the Plume of Feathers, ask for the Toffee and Banana Sponge - it's fantastic.

Sunday promised better weather and our numbers swelled further with the arrival of Belinda and James Baldwin. It was still too wet for rock climbing so we all donned our walking boots with the exception of David, who is training for the London Marathon, and set off at high speed across the moor in skimpy shorts and trainers. An hour or so later, whilst I was hunched up and cowering during a painfully violent hailstorm, I really felt for him. Rick and I managed to do Penny and David's circular walk without the loops and arrived back at the pub in time for a late plate of roast beef. *I have no idea what happened to anyone else that day as I haven't seen or heard from them since. Unless their navigation was better than the previous day they may still be wandering the moor for all I know.*

Alison Henry

Members' Activities—Alasdair Andrews

The year began and by coincidence ended where the Alps drop down to the French and Italian Rivas. Ascents included Grand Mont 1380m and Monte Bignone. Mont Razet was attempted from Sospel but dense maquis and snow ensured a turn around 10 minutes from the summit. In March a visit to Languedoc and the Cevennes enabled the ascent of Pic d'Anjou and other interesting but more modest tops. At Easter in Catalonia we investigated the Garroxta Park volcanoes and climbed Mont Gri and Puig d'Arques in Spain, and Pic Puig 1268m close to the Canigou above Vernet les Bains.

Summer in the Alps brought ascents of the Ahornspitze above Mayrhofen with a large ABMSAC party, where we met Steve Goodwin, our substitute guest at the 2004 annual dinner, on the summit. The weather being variable I contented myself with day trips to huts and interesting cols. Probably the most satisfactory ascent, on the last day of the meet, was the Similaun 3606m from the hut of the same name, with the cordeles Davison/Yorke and Dillon/Hardy; a wonderful day of glorious sunshine and spectacular views.

In September with other kindred souls from the ABM we toured the mountains surrounding the Trient Valley; an interesting area with outstanding scenery, remarkably quiet considering its proximity to Chamonix.

Throughout the year there were several enjoyable excursions to the Welsh and Scottish hills, the Jura mountains and the pre-alps in Haut Savoie; and last but not least the familiar Lakeland summits on five weekends at our hut.

Members' Activities—Peter Farrington

In February, my wife Pat and I joined an organised trek in the Anti-Atlas taking in Jebel Aklm, 2531m and several isolated villages amongst a wild and rocky landscape. As anticipated no other Europeans were encountered during the week. Apart from a 36 hour spell of strong winds, culminating in heavy overnight rain and collapsed tents, we enjoyed fine sunny weather with splendid visibility.

Knee surgery at the start of March preceded a week in Turkey with Pat, walking from a base at Karaagac on the Lycian Way. As previously reported by Peter Goodwin in '02, route finding with Turkish maps is definitely a challenge.

The rest of the year was filled with walks over the Welsh Arans, Irish McGillicuddy's Reeks and Brandon and Munro snatching with various friends and solo. And of course the usual stravaiging around Islay and Jura.

Association Of British Members Of The Swiss Alpine Club - Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 6.00pm on Saturday 31st January 2004 in the Glenridding Hotel Cumbria.

The President Alasdair Andrews was in the chair. Franz Stampfli President of the Central Committee of the Swiss Alpine Club attended by invitation. 51 members were present.

Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Antonia Barlen, Heather and Mark Eddowes, Peter Goodwin, Don Hodge, Jon Mellor, Dave Radmore, Renate Romer, George Watkins and John Murray.

Minutes of the AGM held on 1st February 2003

The minutes were approved.

Matters arising

There were none.

George Starkey Hut

Terry Shaw (secretary of ABMSAC Ltd) reported that last July the agents for the Church had indicated that they might be prepared to sell the freehold of the hut. They had been reluctant to indicate a price, so our agent had advised that ABMSAC Ltd should make an offer. However the Directors of the Company had been reluctant to make the offer until the wishes of the clubs were known and it was clear that the necessary finance would be available. Regrettably he had just been informed that the Church was no longer interested in disposing of the freehold, and now wished to progress the rent review which was outstanding from October 2002. The Directors had considered the situation the previous evening and had resolved to submit an offer notwithstanding, although it seemed unlikely that it would be accepted. They had also decided to authorise Phases 1 and 2 of the improvements programme, using Smiths Gore as our managing agents for this purpose, subject to receipt of satisfactory tenders for the work. If all went well the work would be done in the late Spring and would be completed by the end of June.

In discussion disappointment was expressed that the opportunity to acquire the freehold had yet again been missed: the question then arose whether it was sensible to invest in improving the property when it was held on a comparatively short lease. It might be preferable to look for an alternative freehold property in the neighbourhood. Against this it was argued that it was very unlikely that a suitable property could be found that was within the clubs' resources. The present hut had a lot of attractive features, and with the improvements could be a real asset to the club, despite the comparative shortness of the lease.

Summing up the President said that the committee would consider the points raised. They would also try to probe the reason for the Church's change of heart.

Election of Officers and Committee

The following were elected:-

Vice-President	Bill Peebles
Hon Membership Secretary(acting)	Ed Bramley
Hon Meets Secretary	John Foster
Committee Members	Sheila Coates
	Jon Mellor
	Myles O'Reilly
	Terry Shaw

The President thanked the outgoing officers and committee members for their work during their period of office.

The remaining office holders were re-elected.

Hon Treasurer's Report and accounts for the year to 30th September 2003

The accounts were circulated. A surplus of £2,590 had been achieved, thanks largely to a legacy of £2,000 from the estate of John Bryam Grounds. There was a loss on exchange transfer of £698 because of an unforeseen strengthening of the Swiss Franc following the issue of the subscription notices. It was hoped to avoid this in future by settling the assumed exchange rate as late as possible.

A question was raised whether the subscription to the BMC represented value for money. The President explained that the rising cost of BMC membership had been a source of concern to a number of clubs leading to an Extraordinary General Meeting at which we had been represented by Ed Bramley. The problem centred round the rising cost of insurance. Following the EGM the BMC had introduced new subscription arrangements whereby clubs and their members enjoyed only civil liability cover: club members were free to pay a "top-up" subscription which entitled them to wider benefits including personal accident disability insurance. Members who belonged to more than one club were entitled to apply to the BMC

for a refund. The club itself had to meet the subscriptions in respect of life members.

The accounts were approved.

Subscription rates for 2005

The treasurer said that had the purchase of the freehold gone ahead it would probably have been necessary to increase subscriptions to make up for the loss of investment income arising from the disposal of the club's reserves. However in view of the latest news he proposed no change in the subscription bands for 2005, although this might have to be reviewed should the situation regarding the freehold change. This was agreed.

President's Report

This is reproduced below.

Any other business

There was none, and the meeting closed at 18.44 hrs.

John Dempster

President's Report

Once again events relating to the hut involved a disproportionate amount of time and effort from the office bearers and other members. In late January 2003 the Hut Improvements Committee produced draft proposals for improvements to the hut. The final version, issued in April, was discussed at the June committee meeting, and it was agreed that phase 1, viz the upgrading of the washrooms and the kitchen, should be implemented as soon as possible and that the remaining two phases should be postponed until a later date. In early July 2003 we received the surprising but welcome news that the agent representing the Patterdale Church Council had invited the ABMSAC Ltd to make an offer to purchase the freehold of the property. Equally surprising was the PCC's decision not to give any indication of the price sought.

Following receipt of the offer to sell the freehold, planning for the implementation of the improvements paused for a period of reflection but at the September committee meeting it was agreed that we should try to acquire the freehold, subject to price etc, and also proceed with the implementation of phase 1 of the improvements. I understand that these improvements will be implemented in May/June 2004.

Two days before the 2004 AGM we were advised by the PCC's agent that the offer to sell the freehold was withdrawn. Your committee will consider this unexpected decision and try to have it reversed.

Also introduced in 2003 was an occasional newssheet covering activity on or about the hut. The intention was that all members who have some responsibility for the hut should have equal access to the same data. To date two issues have been produced and issued to the members of the Committee and to the ABMSAC representatives on the Board of Directors, the Hut Management Committee and the Hut Improvements Committee.

Our Secretary met with representatives of the TCC to review the current Agreement between the TCC and the ABMSAC. Proposals have been produced which have been discussed by the Committee who have requested several changes. The discussions were suspended until the negotiations to acquire the freehold of the hut had been completed. They will resume soon.

Although the ABMSAC is a very friendly club several members hold strong views on the hut across a wide spectrum of opinion, which occasionally clash. However I am not convinced that differing visions need collide in such a way that one must consume the other. In a lively club there is room for both.

In 2003 there were 273 members; a slight increase on 2002. Our finances are sound.

Most Association activities have been well supported. There was a large enthusiastic audience for the ABMSAC lectures presented at the Hoop and Toy in London by Kev Reynolds and Mike Westmacott. Attendance at several UK meets was less than expected but the Alpine Meets to Courmayeur, Mayrhofen and Obergurgl were all well attended and the alpine trekking meet to the Trient Valley was oversubscribed.

Following the issue of the hut questionnaire last October several members suggested that the residue of our library, stored in the Alpine Club Library, and rarely accessed by our members, should be sold and the proceeds used towards the purchase of the hut freehold. I have been in contact with Jerry Lovatt, the ACL Hon Librarian, and he will inspect the books, provide an estimate of their value, and bring forward proposals for their sale.

A legacy of £2000 was received from the estate of John Byam-Grounds. Part of this generous bequest has been used to provide our editor with the appropriate computer software for the production of our publications.

James Bogle is working on the Association history; I have had sight of a preliminary draft and I am impressed. Bill Peebles is compiling an inventory of our archives and artefacts.

With a change in personnel the BMC appear to have taken on board many of the points raised by the senior UK climbing clubs including the ABMSAC. Proposals to increase the BMC subscriptions for club members were abandoned and a review of BMC procedures and functions has been announced.

Finally may I take this opportunity to thank all those members who give freely of their time and talents in the service of the Association.

*Alasdair Andrews
January 2004*

Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club Limited

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at the Glenridding Hotel, Ullswater, on Saturday January 31st, 2004.

Present: Directors R.W.Jones (Chairman & Treasurer), Prof.P.S.Boulter, A.Burton, J.W.S.Dempster, W.L.Peebles, T.J.Shaw and more than 30 members.

1. Apologies for absence.

Apologies had been received from G.Davies and D.R.Hodge. .

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting.

The minutes of the previous meeting held on Saturday 1st February, 2003, were read out and were approved. There were no matter arising.

3. New Directors.

The chairman welcomed the new directors appointed by the clubs -Messrs Peebles and Dempster replacing Messrs M.Goodyer and M. Pinney as ABMSAC directors and Messrs Davies and D.Buckley replacing Messrs J.Bolton and A.Jackson as TCC directors. He told the meeting that on the board of nine directors, the ABMSAC directors had a two to one majority.

4. Directors' report and accounts to June 30th 2003.

The chairman, in presenting his report and the accounts as treasurer, spoke of the difficulties in obtaining income from mid-week bookings of the hut and estimated that the club was unlikely to make more than £8,000 from booking income

in the 2003-2004 financial year. Responding to one questioner, he told the meeting that the Board had decided that any further increase in hut fees should be postponed until completion of the proposed improvements. These were now scheduled to be carried out in May and June 2004 and the Board had resolved to appoint Smiths Gore as agents to manage and supervise the work, subject to the overall control of the Board and the Hut Improvements Committee.

Responding to another questioner, the former treasurer, Mr Pinney, reminded the meeting that he had produced a detailed assessment of the company's future finances before he resigned as treasurer in May 2003.

Mr R. Winter proposed and Mr Peebles seconded acceptance of the accounts. They were approved without dissent.

5. Appointment of Accountants.

The accountants, Messrs Keen Philips, were re-appointed.

6. Any other business.

Responding to a question about how a purchase of the hut freehold might be funded after the planned expenditure on the improvements; the chairman said a report he had prepared on the pros and cons of the freehold purchase and how it might be funded. The Board at its meeting the previous day had considered this. Although the company's agent had been told earlier in the week that the Patterdale PCC no longer wished to sell, the board had decided, nonetheless, that its agent should be instructed to make an offer.

The meeting closed at 7.13pm.

*T.J.Shaw,
Secretary
17.2.04*