

## ABMSAC Journal 2007

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## ABMSAC MEETS PROGRAMME

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Meet / Venue</i>	<i>Organiser</i>
<b>2007</b>		
9-10 June	Oread Hut, Rhyd Ddu, North Wales	Ed Bramley
30 June-7 July	Trekking in the Valais	Alasdair Andrews
7-21 July	Alps Meete – Fiesch, Upper Valais, Switzerland	Alasdair Andrews
28 July-11 August	Alps Camping Meet with AC/CC/FRCC Grandes Jorasses, Val Ferret	Mike Pinney
1-15 September	Dolomites Camping Meet with AC/CC/FRCC Camping Rochetta, Cortina	Jeff Harris
8-15 September	Alps High Tour 2007 – Karwendel Range, Austria	Ed Bramley
29-30 September	Committee Meeting Meet, George Starkey Hut	t b a
13-14 October	Maintenance Meet, George Starkey Hut	
20-21 October	Alps Reunion Meet, George Starkey Hut	Mike Pinney
27-28 October	2Beer, Devon	James Baldwin
27 Oct – 17 Nov	Nepal Trekking Meet: Everest, Cho La & Gokyo	Pamela Harris

## Editorial

Firstly I must apologise for the Journal being late this year. In September last year I took on an allotment with the intention of digging it through the autumn to be ready for this year; then it started to rain and only stopped about three weeks ago. The production of Purple Sprouting Broccoli for next year is of paramount importance, so the Journal is late. That's my story and I'm sticking to it!

Once again the Association has had a very full programme of meets during the year. Considering that we are a club with an ageing membership and that there is (justifiable) concern about lack of recruits, we are a very active club. Long may it remain so as this is a very positive factor to build on for the future.

Members attending the AGM this year will be aware that there is ongoing discussion about the future direction the Association needs to take. One thing that needs to be stated is that it is NOT the committee's intention to downgrade the "Swiss connection" but we do need to formulate a strategy to ensure our long term survival but this will be done with full consultation with members. There is a proposal to send out a questionnaire about this later this year and it is important that all members take the trouble to respond to this.

I hope that you will enjoy this year's Journal, it contains the usual eclectic mix of articles; mostly factual but also with a little whimsy thrown in for good measure. As always my thanks go to the contributors, without whom there would be not Journal. Unusually I have been overwhelmed with photographs this year and I can only apologise to those whose pictures I haven't used, as I said I've been spoilt for choice. Please keep it that way.

We are now moving closer to our Centenary in 2009 and I have agreed to stay on as Editor to produce the Centenary Journal and as it will be my last I really want to make it memorable so I am again appealing to members for articles. In particular I am looking for your memories of particular climbs or walks or expeditions that you look back on with pride or relief that you survived. There is still plenty of time but please start thinking of what you may be able to contribute, keep an eye on the Newsletter as I publish the copy deadlines.

*Richard Winter  
Honorary Editor*

## A Holy Adventure on the Ortler.

*by John Edwards*

The announcement by Laird Andrews of his usual impeccable choice of venue for the Association's 2006 Alpine Meet coincided with the roof on St. Georges Church in South Shropshire starting to leak rainwater. The Rector said "John, this is going to be expensive, have you any ideas?" Naturally, any ideas I had about fundraising involved mountains, and my mind went back a few years to when a sponsored rugby ball found its way to the summit of the Matterhorn and in the process had raised £4500 to refurbish the clubhouse at Shrewsbury Rugby Club. Alasdair's choice of Santa Caterina in the beautiful Ortler Alps revived memories of 2004 when, climbing from our base at Solda, I had seen and photographed the tremendous North Face of the Ortler (Cima Ortles) the highest mountain in the Eastern Alps.



Ortler North Face 2006

*photo: John Edwards*

So the germ of an idea was sown - we would climb the North Face to mend the Church roof! The Rector and the PCC thought it was a great idea, my eldest son, and hard climber, Simon promised a tight rope and a quick call to Sir Chris Bonington- as ever supportive and generous - confirmed he would be happy to sponsor and support the climb. The sponsor forms were quickly designed complete with a photograph of Chris together with an encouraging message. The Sunday School children constructed a lovely little wooden Cross to place on the summit and which the Rector blessed in church. Early money started to come in and we were all ready to go.

Then I opened the Guide Book! "The Ortler North Face is undoubtedly the most serious and probably the most difficult ice climb in the Eastern Alps - grade TD." "It is certainly the longest, 1400m, and the danger from falling rock and ice is unusually hazardous." "Seldom in good condition - climbed about 10 times to date." I pondered this information whilst I walked slowly to the village Post Office, with my dog Patch, to collect my State Pension. When I returned home, Simon had rang to say that RAF duties would prevent him accompanying me on the climb - so it was all coming together nicely!

The problem of finding a climbing companion at such short notice was happily resolved when my old pal Ron Hextall bravely volunteered to give it a go. After flying to Milan and hiring a small car we finally arrived at the Hotel Genzianella in the early hours of Sunday Morning 16th July having driven around Italy about three times - not a good omen for our route finding on the North Face! Anyway lots of friendly faces at breakfast confirmed we had reached the right destination so we unpacked our gear and spent a pleasant first week climbing several of the lovely mountains around Santa Caterina. Having decided that we had created the right balance between output of energy and intake of beer we drove around to Solda and the Ortler.

As we walked up to the Tabaretta Hut it was immediately clear that the North Face had changed dramatically from when we saw it in 2004. The dreaded climate change had triggered massive rock and ice falls down the Face, significantly changing the character of the route. At the Hut, the local Italian Guides advised against an attempt but having compelling reasons to proceed we discussed the prospects and decided to go for it. The following morning we made a 2.00am start and having crossed the moraine to the Marlet glacier found that the "initial difficulty" - the first bergschrund, had completely disappeared! Now on ice at about 50 degrees we found our crampons were quickly striking the underlying rock (grey lime and schist) but we made good progress until the rock and ice falls started soon after dawn. Taking cover,

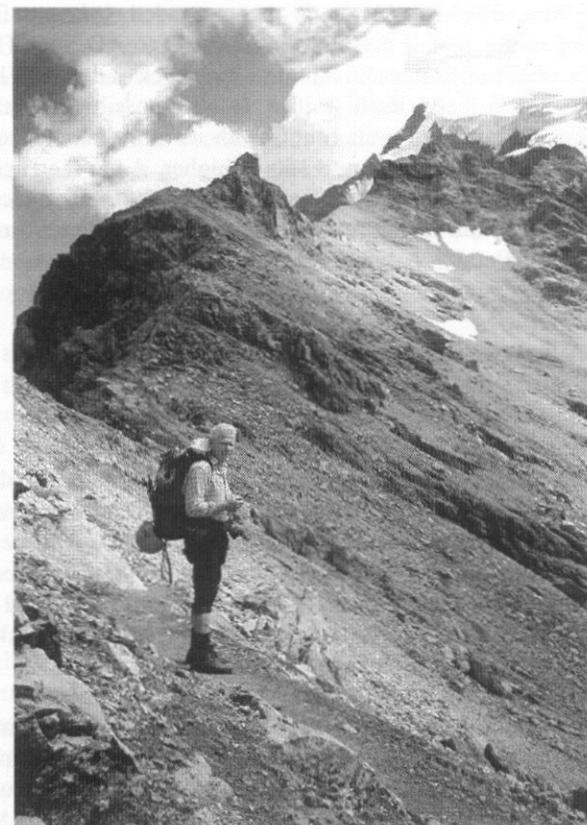
we could see that the falls were mainly channeled through the narrows about 1500ft above us, so by traversing left, off the Guide Book route, we could avoid the worst of them. At this stage, and after several further near misses, Ron - the intelligent member of the team (and, the only one carrying BMC insurance!) decided we might be running out of luck and wisely elected to go down. We split the ropes and Ron set off on what proved to be a fairly rapid and uneventful descent to the Tabaretta Hut, sacrificing not a single item of gear en-route. Meanwhile, using self protection and a couple of jumars, I was able to traverse up and left over good steep rock and eventually escape on to the nearby Rothböck (NNE) Ridge which flanks the Face. Although fairly complex and composed of poor rock, the Ridge allowed reasonable progress at about D Sup. After several hours I had climbed above the narrows and was able to traverse right onto the Face and straighten out the route on good snow at about 65 degrees, a steep ice pitch and surprising bergschrund to finish and I was at the top in time for a late lunch!

Whilst enjoying the views, a nip from my hip flask and a first pipe for twelve hours, it dawned on me that there was a major problem. Each of the Sunday School children had been promised a photo of me holding their Cross on the summit - there was no one else around and my ancient camera does not possess a delayed release button! We would have to come up again! I concealed the Cross just below the summit then crossed to the Hintergrat (NE) Ridge which is a popular rock climb and in true Italian style is adorned with fixed eye pitons which facilitated rapid, easy stage abseiling.

Reunited with a relaxed Ron at the Tabaretta Hut we enjoyed a few beers and before I had mentioned the problem over photographs he expressed a firm intention to climb the Ortler! Problem solved - we flogged up the 1500 feet or so to the Payer Hut and arrived just in time for a wonderful supper. The following morning after a leisurely breakfast we sat outside in the sun, sharpened our crampons and watched the guided parties (at 250 euros per client) disappearing up the Tabaretta (NNW) Ridge. Following on, we enjoyed what is an excellent climb in its own right, consisting of a lovely ridge, three glaciers and two steep walls of around 250/300ft only marred by fixed chains which were difficult to avoid. Meeting the guided parties on their way down, we were on top in about five hours, recovered the Cross and Ron took the vital photographs. After refreshments and attempting to identify the surrounding peaks we set off down just as dark clouds started to form. Sure enough we had to pay the penalty for our leisurely approach to the climb when halfway down we were caught in a terrific storm complete with fork lightning and ear-splitting thunder. Quickly discarding our crampons, ice-axes and metal gear we made our way to a fortuitously placed

Bivouac Hut (Lombardi) which Ron had spotted on our way up. After a comfortable night, sustained by the remains of our chocolate and oatmeal biscuits we descended to the Payer Hut next morning, an event only enlivened when I disappeared down a cleverly disguised hole in the final glacier only to be quickly held by an ever alert Ron before my pipe went out! On arrival at the Hut we were mystified to find an Italian TV crew waiting for us! They had somehow heard of our venture with the Cross and wanted to interview us for inclusion in a feature film. We agreed on the strict condition that they supplied us with beer - which they did in generous quantities!

So all ended happily - the only casualty being my wrist watch smashed by a stone fall on the North Face!



Farewell to the Ortler  
*photo: RonHextall*

No doubt due, in no small measure, to the kind support of Sir Chris Bonington, the sponsor money came rolling in and we raised some £3500 - sufficient to carry out the essential repairs to the Church roof. I am hugely indebted to the support of others (I just enjoyed myself) and would like to thank those members of tire ABMSAC Ortler Meet who kindly contributed to the cause; to Alasdair for organising a splendid Meet in a wonderful location and most of all to Ron Hexhall who volunteered to accompany me on an adventure which could have ended differently. A touching footnote was provided by the local Italian Guides who assured us that they would look after our little Cross and give it a coat of protective varnish whenever required.

#### Note.

A visit to the Ortler (3905m) is strongly recommended. It boasts five excellent Ridges providing routes for all preferences from PD to AD Sup. There are also three long Gully / Couloir routes and an interesting rock and snow Flank route. In my opinion the North Face itself - if it *is* still possible to make a direct ascent - compares favourably on all counts with its more famous counterpart on the Matterhorn but in addition is some 1500ft higher. As to the Eigerwand - I'm not qualified to say having never got beyond the Wet Cave Bivouac! Overall the Ortler is a lovely mountain which really deserves to be another 95 metres higher to join the Alpine 4000ers!

### **A Sojourn in the Far North - May/June 2006**

*by Jim Strachan*

#### **13/ 16th May 2006**

Phil Hands and I planned on increasing our Munro count by completing the six remote mountains in the Fisherfield Forest group. We based our meet on the Sail Mhor bunkhouse on the shore of Little Loch Broom. This bunkhouse was used on a previous ABMSAC meet some years ago shortly after it opened, on that occasion the main objective was An Teallach. It is ideally situated for both the above groups of mountains and is about a mile west of the Dundonnell Hotel where good bar meals are to be had, not to mention ale.

We planned to leave the cars on the main Dundonnell road and start south from Corrie Hallie carrying tent etc., climbing Beinn Chlaidheimh (916m), Sgurr Ban (989m ), Mullach Coire Mhic Fhearchair (1018m) and Beinn Tarsuinn (937m ). Then camp overnight in the coire between Tarsuinn and A'Mhaighdean and next morning climb A'Mhaighdean (967m) and Ruadh Stac Mor (918m) with a long walk of about eleven miles via the Shenavall Bothy to our starting point.

But in the words of the bard, "The best laid schemes of mice and men gang aff tae Glei" and things did not work out to plan. Although we spent the previous week in glorious sunshine, even up to and after 10pm the previous evening, as is our luck the weather broke as we started out. With thick cloud and threatening rain, we topped out on the first high point of the walk, about two miles in, and Phil announced that he did not think he could carry such a heavy pack up one Munro never mind four. I must admit I was none too happy with the weight in my sack so we diverted to Shenavall to pitch the tent by the river and dump gear. Past midday we headed off to do the mountains in the reverse order. We did manage to ford the two rivers dry shod but it was in late afternoon with darkening skies and rain that we reached the col at the foot of Ruadh Stac Mor, this we climbed as quickly as possible returning to the same point in the coll. I was not keen on walking back to the tent to overnight, as this would entail considerable hours and effort with no gain. Although there was a bivouac site in a cave here, we opted to climb A'Mhaighdean before dark then find a sheltered spot on the east side of the large coire below Beinn Tarsuinn (our original intended campsite) and bivvy overnight. We found a large overhanging boulder with a dry ledge running along under it which just about accommodated both of us lying down with a small boulder at our head which broke most of the wind that was now blowing. Being in cloud most of the time it was dark by 8pm so we slept fitfully under an aluminium sheet until about 4am when we decided, though still thickly clouded, there was enough light to continue the round.

We reached the summit of Tarsuinn before 7am and enjoyed the scramble along the crest of the ridge but were disappointed by the lack of the fine views one would expect from this mountain. We dropped east to the bealach and used the contour path below Meall Garbh to reach the next bealach before ascending Mullach Coire Mhic Fhearchair, and then on to Sgurr Ban. The descent from this mountain was appallingly slow as it very much resembled the face of a very large stone quarry that had just been blown and as there was no path and no way round, one had to pick one's way over every jagged boulder very carefully. A long way below us we saw a lone figure coming up, and when we eventually met up, it was a young lady with the largest pack you ever saw. We chatted for a few minutes and sheepishly admitted to chickening out of carry weight up these four hills. She set off unperturbed saying she would go as far as she felt able before setting camp. I did not envy her the ascent of this hill we had just come down.

On reaching the foot of the last mountain we decided to leave our sacks and recover them on our return. Leaving them on what appeared to be a prominent boulder we set off to the top. On our return the boulder did not seem to be quite as prominent as we had thought as it took us some time quartering the hillside

before we eventually found them. We then headed off down the east flank of the mountain, emerging from a slippery heather clad gully to the river. It had started to rain again as we set off on the last mile along the river to where we had pitched our tent, and although the river was rising we again managed to cross dry shod.

Reaching the tent at 4pm, just as the heavens opened, we crawled into our sleeping bags and immediately fell asleep. At 8pm we woke and forced down some food listening to the incessant rain before falling asleep again. We woke at 6am and it was still raining, but stopped before seven so we quickly rose and broke camp. Just then a figure appeared trying to find a suitable crossing point on the river, which by this time had risen several feet, and was flowing swiftly, making a dry crossing impossible. We walked the seven miles back to the car again in heavy rain. We were both very tired but elated that we had actually managed to do all six mountains in the poor conditions and that a return trip would not be necessary. We moved south with the intention of doing some further hills around Achnaschellach, however with continuing bad weather we aborted and headed home.

#### 12 / 14<sup>th</sup> June

Margaret and I returned to the Sail Mhor hostel as a base to complete the round of the Fannichs range west of the Ullapool road. We had climbed two of the nine mountains some years previously and so were hoping to do the other seven and if lucky maybe additionally climb Am Faochagach the south easterly outlier of the Beinn Dearg range east of the Ullapool road.

The first day was clear with blue skies and sunshine. It was, however, very windy as we set off from the parking spot on the A832 Braemore to Dundonnell road and headed south east up the Glen to Meall a' Chrasgaidh 934m. Carrying on south from the summit across a broad saddle and up a narrow ridge above the crags to the summit of Sgurr nan Clach Geala 1093m. The panoramic views from this spot were spectacular even though the wind by now was whipping past, almost blowing us off our feet. We moved off south to another col before ascending Sgurr nan Each 923m the last summit for the day. We were glad to descend the west flank of the mountain to gain some respite from the wind as we dropped to the valley floor and walked out at about 4pm.

Driving back to the bunkhouse we watched the Mountain Rescue Helicopter trying to take an injured person off An Teallach. In the high winds this proved to be unsuccessful as we later learned from the warden at the bunkhouse, who was a member of the Dundonnell Rescue Team, and was involved in the rescue of the casualty who had an injured ankle. They eventually brought him down at about 11pm that night.

As the following day dawned with heavy cloud and threatening rain we set off to do just one mountain, Am Faochagach 954m. We managed to cross the intervening ground and river between the A835 road and the mountain without getting wet feet thanks to the long dry spell experienced over the past few weeks. We quickly gained the summit then re-traced our steps in the rain to the car.

On the third day the weather was glorious as we set off to complete the four remaining Fannichs, Beinn Liath Mhor Fannich 954m, Sgurr Mor 1110m, Meall Gorm 949m and An Coileachan 923m. This was an excellent walk with fine views in every direction. The sting in the tail was the long walk out from An Coileachan over very broken and trackless terrain.

#### Post Script

Phil Hands has since advised me that he returned to Dundonnell for the week 9<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> September accompanied by David Ellis staying at a B&B in Camusnagaul. On the Tuesday they set off from Corrie Hallie, took the Shenavall path to its highest point then climbed Sail Liath. They took the route on the south side to emerge on to Lord Berkeley's Seat and then reversed direction to climb onto the highest point of the Corrag Bhuidhe then onto the two Munros Sgurr Fiona and Bidein a Ghlas Thuill. The weather was sunny, warm and still with good views. Later in the week they moved to Torridon and climbed Beinn Alligin and Liathach.

### Cycling The River Loire - May 20th to June 5th 2006

*by John Mercer*

#### Introduction

The Loire is one of the great rivers of France, and is over 800 miles long. Its source is high in the volcanic Massif Central, and it flows north through some fine gorges before the valley opens out. At Orleans, the river turns through a right angle, and flows west until it meets the sea at St. Nazaire.

I consider France is the best country in the world for cycle touring with great country, quiet roads, reasonable weather, excellent and reasonably priced hotels, magnificent food, a fascinating history, and a host of interesting things to see. This route had all these things in abundance.

#### Guidebook

There is an excellent guidebook "Cycling the River Loire" by John Higginson (Cicerone Press, 01539 562069, £10) which gives details of accommodation,

routes and roads, distances and things to see. The Loire is famous for its chateaux, which range from fortresses to exquisite country houses, but there are also fine cities, towns and villages, grand cathedrals, a myriad of lovely churches and some very interesting abbeys. Higginson gives notes on all these in a very convenient pocket size book.

My accounts have stimulated some friends to follow some of my routes, so I will try to provide sufficient details for those who might want to repeat this one.

### **Route Out**

I used the European Bike Bus (01642 713710). This runs buses down the M1, starting at Middlesborough, crossing the Channel at Dover and continuing on three routes across Europe. I caught the bus at Wakefield at 07.00 on Saturday May 20th, and took the Mediterranean route to Valence in the Rhone Valley, arriving at 05.30 on Sunday May 21st. There is currently one bus a day on Sundays from Valence (123 m) to St. Agreve (1050 m), leaving Valence at 09.40. Buses are more frequent on weekdays. The bus is supposed to carry two bikes. The driver was reluctant to take my bike, even though there was only one other passenger, but was ultimately persuaded to take me. I therefore got to St. Agreve at noon.

I had had some sleep on the Bike Bus, but was not in perfect shape after a 24 hr coach journey. What should I do - cycle or stay in St. Agreve? My target was Gerbier de Jonc (1400m), the source of the Loire. The weather was fine, so I decided to cycle. Higginson recommends going by St. Martin de Valamas (550m). This would involve about 1000m of climbing. Study of a detailed map suggested a route St. Agreve - Fay sur Lignon - Les Estables - Gerbier de Jonc would be better, so I took this way. It involved 700m of relatively easy climbing through glorious volcanic mountain country. I was very tired when I got to Gerbier de Jonc.

Gerbier is a strange place. The main source of the Loire is a water spout flowing into a stone trough in a cow shed. I stayed in an excellent gite d'etape there. When I woke up the next day, the place was in cloud, with rain and high winds. This was not very encouraging, so I started late.

### **The Cycling Route**

Gerbier is in the Ardeche, but almost immediately the route passes into the Auvergne. The river flows north through marvellous mountain scenery - great sweeping views of volcanic country covered with swathes of flowers. Even the dandelions looked beautiful. The hills in this area were quite demanding -

sometimes two or three miles long - but fortunately not too steep. After a series of attractive gorges, the valley opened out and became flatter. This is pastoral country: I have never seen such contented cows.

The river here flows north, then northwest, and becomes much broader. Unfortunately, I had a northwesterly wind for several days, and cycling against this was hard work. But there was always a church, chateau or abbey to visit if I wanted a rest. Accommodation was sometimes a problem, particularly on Sundays and Mondays when most of the small independent hotels had their weekly shutdown. One Sunday, I tried six hotels before I found one that was open. The food was usually good, and sometimes excellent.

The river swung west, and the wind turned to the north. It continued to be fairly cold, and I wore my rain jacket for much of the time. But there was little rain. The westerly section of the Loire is the area of the great chateaux. I had visited many of these on previous trips, and so I concentrated on churches, abbeys and cathedrals. I also varied the standard route so that I could visit various wine estates.

The route was mainly on quiet country lanes. Typically, there is a major road on one bank of the river and a minor road on the other. For most of the time, the roads do not follow the river very closely. The only real traffic problems were in the cities like Orleans and Tours. Cycling here was unpleasant, but I wanted to see the cathedrals. I avoided Nantes, as I had been there before. The only other poor section was the final twenty miles from Savenay to St. Nazaire, which went past oil refineries and dockyards. St. Nazaire was an interesting port, and I enjoyed seeing the big ships going out to sea.

### **Return Route**

From St. Nazaire, I cycled back to Savenay and caught a train from there to St. Malo via Rennes. Only the slower trains carry bikes: the fast TGVs have no room. St. Malo is a delightful walled city and port, with an interesting history and much to see. I stayed the night, and then caught the day ferry to Portsmouth (9hrs). This was a bit of a shock, as they charged me £85 for the passage. It was Pentecost (Whitsunday) and it would have cost £30 less the following day. The day ferry runs from Portsmouth to St. Malo. It might have been cheaper and quicker to take a train to Cherbourg: the ferry crossing to Portsmouth takes about three hours and there are usually two crossings a day. Details of both routes are available from Brittany Ferries (08705 360360)

I cycled 780 miles in 13 days without a rest day, averaging 60 miles and 1400 ft

of climbing per day.

### **Wine Visits: notes for wine buffs**

The Loire is one of the great wine growing regions of France, and I modified my route to visit a number of vigneron and tasting cellars. In Sancerre, I visited Vacheron, who is probably the best grower. His 2005 Sauvignon Blanc was very good, but the revelation was his 2003 Pinot Noir Special Cuvee - stunning, and better than 90% of Cotes de Nuits Pinot Noirs Premier Crus from a good year.

Other Sancerres were also good. Visits to Joguet (Chinon), Filleautreau and Chateau de Villeneuve (both Saumur Champigny) were slightly disappointing as I did not like their 2004 Cabernet Franc reds very much. Huet, in Vouvray, was excellent: a fine tasting of Chenin Blanc whites varying from dry to sweet (moelleux), with wines from a number of years. The final visit was to Baumard in Rochefort sur Loire. Here I tasted outstanding Chenin Blanc whites, including Savennieres (dry) and Coteaux du Layon and Quarts de Chaume (sweet). On each visit I was made very welcome, even though it was obvious I could not buy very much. The secret is to convince the vigneron that you are "serieux" - a combination of knowledgeable and interested. I seemed to be able to manage this.

## **Tasmanian Cycle Tour**

*by John Mercer*

### **Tasmania and Jet Lag**

Many of my readers will be familiar with the onset of senility: you are disorientated and headachy, and everything takes much longer than it used to. Jet lag is much the same, but, unlike senility, it passes away after a day or two. Since the journey to Australia takes 24 hours, with an 11 hour time change, jet lag is inevitable. The other major problem with my tour was that Tasmania is unrelentingly hilly. There is almost no flat land, and the hills are steep and long. My knee is not very good for hill climbing, particularly with loaded panniers. But there are many other factors which make cycle touring in Tasmania very attractive.

Tasmania is an island separated from mainland Australia by the two hundred mile wide Bass Strait. It is about the size of Ireland, and is in the shape of a triangular shield two hundred miles from east to west and the same from north to south. The population is only five hundred thousand, with most of the people in Hobart, the capital, and Launceston, and so traffic is very light. Winds are strong, but although the latitude is the same as that of Rome, the temperature in February

was a pleasant 20 to 25 C. Food is good and cheap. There is plenty of fish, and the steaks are excellent. The cherries are the best I have ever tasted. Accommodation is cheap and plentiful: I favoured backpackers' hostels at about £10 per night, but I also stayed in pubs at £25 per night and B and Bs at about the same price. The people are very friendly, and speak a version of English that I can understand (most of the time). I flew from Manchester to Melbourne via Dubai on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2007 and caught the overnight ferry from Melbourne to Devonport on Tasmania's north coast. I returned from Melbourne on March 4<sup>th</sup> 2007

### **Tasmanian Wine**

"Cool Climate" wine is all the vogue in Australia and Tasmanian wine is very much to the fore in this. Wine growing has only been significant in Tasmania for the last ten years, and there are many new plantings. The scene is changing very fast. Is all the hype justified? I think so. The two varieties I liked best were pinot noir (red) and riesling (white). The pinots had good acidity and excellent cherry fruit. They were more fruit driven than red burgundy, but did not have the farmyard character of some burgundy. They resembled, but were rather lighter than, Otago pinots from New Zealand. I talked to one winemaker, who said he had been to a tasting of twelve of the best Tasmanian and Otago pinots exchanged with Otago growers. The Otago growers found the Tasmanians too light, whereas the Tasmanians thought the Otago wines over extracted. This is a good example of how you come to like best what you are most familiar with, and highlights the difficulties of comparative tasting. I thought the rieslings were lovely. They had excellent honeyed fruit, with real zingy acidity. I visited about twenty wineries during my trip, and thoroughly enjoyed tasting the wines and talking to the winemakers.

### **Great Sights**

The two most popular postcards of Tasmania are of Wineglass Bay on the east coast and of Cradle Mountain in the north, and it was obvious that I had to visit both. Each was outstanding. Wineglass Bay is a glorious half circle of white sand in a clear blue sea. It is on the far side of a peninsula, there is no road, and there is stiff walk over a col to get there. The difficult access reduces both crowds and litter. Cradle Mountain is the most iconic National Park in Tasmania. It is the start of the fifty mile, five day overland trek to Lake St Clair. My knee is not good for hill walking, and the mountain is 1545 metres high. I found its ascent quite demanding: the last five hundred feet is rough scrambling. Young and fit walkers bounded up it. But the weather was excellent, the views were splendid and getting to the top was very satisfying.

### **Convict History**

From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Britain thought that criminals were evil people who should be removed from society by transporting them elsewhere. At first they were sent to America or the West Indies, and at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was decided to develop the newly discovered Australia as a penal colony. This seems bizarre to us: however, we still do not know what to do with criminals, and I am sure our present system will seem pretty stupid in two hundred years time. Convicts were sent out with the first settlers, and the problem soon arose of what to do with convicts who re-offended. The answer was to send them to Van Diemens Land, as Tasmania was then known. The first settlement, founded in 1822, was on Sarah Island in the very isolated Macquarie Harbour in the west of Tasmania. The settlement included a shipyard to exploit the Huon Pine. This provides easily worked timber, which is rot proof, and so is ideal for shipbuilding. Unfortunately, it is also extremely slow growing: trees can take hundreds of years to reach maturity. Five hundred convicts at the settlement built one hundred and thirty one ships in a little over eight years. When the settlement was closed in 1833, a two hundred ton brig was still under construction. Ten convicts were kept on to finish her. When they had done this, they commandeered the ship and sailed her ten thousand miles to Chile.

Sarah Island proved too inconvenient, and from 1830 to 1877 Port Arthur on the south eastern tip of Tasmania was the major convict settlement. This included major manufacturing, agricultural and mining activities, and accommodated up to two thousand convicts. An amazing feature was the Dog Line at Eaglehawk Neck. This is a spit of sand one hundred metres wide, which provided the only overland route to Port Arthur. Savage dogs were chained every ten metres across the spit to prevent convicts escaping. I visited both Sarah Island and Port Arthur, and found both fascinating. Most of the buildings are in ruins, both as a result of bush fires destroying the roofs, and of deliberate destruction.

### **Forests and Bush**

Most of Tasmania is covered by forest and bush. The only untouched rainforest is in the west where the rainfall is high. Elsewhere, bush fires and forestry have disturbed the original forest. The trees are largely varieties of eucalyptus. I found the forests and bush rather straggly and not very attractive. This is not a politically correct view, as much of this area is World Heritage Wilderness. Perhaps, as with wine, you like what you are used to. There is a great conflict in Tasmania between environmentalists and forestry interests. I do not have enough information to have definite opinions on this, but I do know that I preferred the countryside where some of the bush had been cleared to give views. Bush fires are a major problem. There was a particularly bad fire in 1967. An eight man fire

fighting team was completely surrounded by fire, and it seemed certain that they would all be killed. Then the fire chief dug a hole with a bulldozer, and drove the bulldozer over the hole. The team crawled in to the hole, and all were saved.

### **Wildlife**

There is plenty of wildlife in Tasmania, but since it is largely nocturnal, you only see it at dusk or as road kill. It is therefore well worth going to a wildlife park. Wildlife in Tasmania has evolved differently from that on the mainland. The predominant species is the wallaby rather than the kangaroo. The most individual species is the Tasmanian Devil, which is now extinct on the mainland. It is about the size of a small dog, and is a scavenger with very strong jaws.

Snakes are quite common, and bush walkers wear gaiters to protect against snake bite. I was standing by the side of the road in a forest area, when a three foot long black snake crossed the road. I did not interfere with it, and it did not interfere with me.

### **Coastal Activities and Cruises**

The coast is a most attractive feature in Tasmania. I took several cruises, seeing impressive cliff formations and sea stacks, over a thousand seals, sea eagles, penguins at sea, and dolphins. On a couple of occasions, a cruise boat was the most convenient and pleasant way of getting where I wanted to go. The most interesting cruise was to Macquarie harbour and the Gordon River from Strahan on the west coast. Macquarie harbour is twenty five miles long and five miles wide, but has an entrance, Hells Gates, which is only sixty metres wide. I visited Sarah Island as part of this cruise, which also included an hour's walk in the rainforest. Sea kayaking was also another enjoyable activity. I took a couple of good trips for three hours along sheltered parts of the coast. On the second trip, I capsized after ten seconds, but scrambled ashore, got back in the kayak, and did the rest of the trip without further alarms.

### **Cities**

Hobart, the capital, and Launceston, are the only two cities in Tasmania. I enjoyed a boat trip and a walk up a gorge in Launceston, and a visit to some of the older parts of Hobart and to the fine Saturday market. But a Tasmanian holiday is not about cities.

### **Cycling**

Buses will take bikes in Tasmania if booked in advance. I had known this before I left, and I used buses where the hills were too demanding. I also used buses in the west of the state where rainfall is up to three metres a year. In the event, I had very little rain in the west. My major cycling problem was that my frame cracked.

Fortunately, this was near the fishing port of St Helens on the east coast. There is a welding firm here, which maintains fishing boats: they welded the frame in an hour and charged me £8.

I met two supported cycling groups. The biggest one was organised by Cycling Victoria, and included a thousand cyclists. They were on a seven day trip from Launceston to Hobart, and slept overnight in a vast tented camp. Their hangers on mopped up all the available local accommodation. This was inconvenient for me, because I wanted to stay in Richmond the night they were there. (Richmond is the best known "historic" town in Tasmania. It has a gaol and bridge both built by convicts in 1823, as well as several attractive old houses. It is also the centre of a wine growing area). So I stayed elsewhere, and cycled in to Richmond without panniers. I cycled seventy two miles this day over relatively flat country. This was my longest day. Generally the distance cycled was determined by the availability of accommodation, and was typically about fifty miles.

There were few other independent cyclists. I had a meal with three from the US who were cycling up the east coast. I also met a couple from Melbourne. Their club has a regular Friday ride in Melbourne, and I was able to join them on the Friday before I left Melbourne. This was a very enjoyable forty five mile ride along the coast to the west of Melbourne. Melbourne is one of the most cycle friendly cities in the world. There are many cycle lanes, and a multitude of cycle paths: our ride was largely on these.

#### **Finale**

My daughter Clare works for Lonely Planet, whose headquarters are in Melbourne. By happy accident, she was in Melbourne on business, and I met her for a boat trip down the Yarra River and a good lunch on the day I got the plane home.

I was in Tasmania for five weeks and cycled nine hundred miles. My plan had been to use the bike as a means of taking me to interesting places where I could explore further. I used the Lonely Planet Tasmania guide, and found it excellent for the basic details of accommodation and tourist facilities, although I personally would have liked some more historical information. It was an excellent trip, which obviously could also be done in a car or by bus: doing it on a bike gave it an extra dimension.

## **OBITUARY**

### **John W Chapman OBE RN Retired Freeman of the City of London**

John was born into a farming family in Barlaston, Staffordshire and later in High Peak of Derbyshire in 1931. After school at the local Grammar he was awarded a Scholarship to the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth. He went on to Manadan Engineering College and after commissioning he spent his entire working life in the Royal Navy. He travelled the world and his last appointment was spent in the Ministry of Defence in Whitehall. He retired as a full Commander and was awarded the O.B.E. and made a Freeman of the City of London.

John came into mountaineering after retirement and joined ABMSAC spending many holidays with the Association at events in the UK and the Alps on a variety of meets.

His interests were many and varied; he was a man of enormous talents: model engineering, painting, clock making and music. He was an accomplished musician participating in choral work and played the organ each Sunday at the local churches in the Taddington diocese. He gave many hours to organizing the Well Dressing Fetes and ran the Retired Villagers Club, arranged visits, talks and weekly meetings in the Village Hall at Taddington. In addition to the social life of the village he became a School Governor and District Councillor and was respected as wise council in these endeavours.

In 1994 he discovered the magic of the Himalayas and its people and visited Nepal on many occasions. He organised and led several trekking expeditions to Nepal and befriended a Nepalese as a son who now has a family. He funded several Nepalese charity functions including a 'Foot Doctor' for village work, apprentice monks and community schools.

He will be remembered by all those whose life he touched, enriched and helped.

John never married but had a wide circle of friends and a rich family life with his two sisters and brother and their families who all reside in the local area.

*by David Edwards*

## OBITUARY

### **John Stuart Whyte CBE, MSc (ENG) 1923-2006**

John Whyte died at home in Winchmore Hill, Amersham on February 24, 2006 aged 82.

John was an enthusiastic and active member of the ABMSAC. He joined in 1948 and was Vice President from 1975 to 1977 and President from 1988 to 1990. He was also a member of the Alpine Club (elected 1973); the SAC (Monte Rosa Section, 1948) and the Rucksack Club (1964). He was a Life Member of our Association.

He represented the ABMSAC at many functions but one he especially enjoyed was at Zermatt, in July 1990, to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the first ascent of the Matterhorn. Together with Lord Hunt, the Earl of Limerick, Tony Streather, Stephen Venables and other distinguished guests, John marched through the streets of Zermatt in a grand procession with (at the request of the Swiss) the British delegation at the front. Edward Whympers' grand-daughter, our member, Nigella Hall was also present with her son, Edward. During the commemorative service held in the English Chapel, John presented the Chapel with a handsome new visitor's book from the ABMSAC.

In his professional life, John enjoyed a distinguished career in telecommunications. He gained his Bachelor and Masters degrees in Engineering from the University of London and spent the first years of his career at the Post Office Research Centre at Dollis Hill where, during the Second World War, he worked on disguised radio transmitters and was involved in the development of the Gee bomber navigation equipment.

Post-war, working in Cardiff, he conducted studies into microwave radio relay systems and also developed the first white noise testing system which formed the basis of the CCITT International Standard. Returning to Dollis Hill he achieved a first in the field of telecommunications with the application of digital processes to the junction network which became the standard method for multi-channel systems for the UK. It was this early involvement with the digital techniques which led to his appointment to lead a classified Anglo-American Defence project, the success of which resulted in a personal commendation by the late President J F Kennedy at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. John was awarded the CBE in 1976 for services to telecommunications. He was a Chartered Engineer and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering in 1980

and a Fellow of the Institution of Electrical Engineers also in 1980. He was appointed to the National Electronics Council in 1977 by Earl Mountbatten and was invited to join its Executive Committee by HRH The Duke of Kent, becoming the Deputy Chairman.

John retired from BT, as Engineer-in-Chief and Managing Director (Major Systems) in 1983 when he joined Plessey Telecommunications International, finally retiring from professional life in 1988.

Despite his busy professional life, John always found time to pursue his love of the mountains. He regularly attended the Association's Alpine Meets, often accompanied by his wife Joan, and remained active in the British hills well into his seventies. Although we had climbed together in the Alps on several occasions, it was on our 1979 British Hinku Expedition, Nepal that I got to know John really well. This trip turned out to be a great adventure - before leaving UK I believed we had been granted a permit to attempt the first ascent of Gonglha, a lovely peak just south of Kusum Kangura, which I had spotted on an earlier visit to the area. However on arrival in Kathmandu, Mike Cheney informed us that the permit had been withheld but that he had obtained permission for us on Kwande, in the Lumding Himal, which if successful would be a second ascent (1<sup>st</sup> British). Having planned to climb Mera and Naulekh, above the Hinku valley, as warm up climbs for Gonglha, we proceeded with this part of the plan anyway and it was while carrying a bivvi to the Mera La that we came across clear animal footprints in the snow which our Sherpas immediately proclaimed were made by the Yeti. John was hugely excited by this find taking many photographs and when we returned to U.K. he had great fun with television appearances and several magazine articles including a Basil Boothroyd article in Punch and a piece in Arthur C Clarke's book 'Mysterious World'. In pursuit of our 'official' scientific objectives, on behalf of the Natural History Department of the British Museum, we collected jumping spiders and high altitude worms during the course of which we captured two spiders on the summit of a virgin peak at 19,700ft. John Brooks caused great amusement when, forgetting to insert a filter in his pooter, he swallowed a spider straight down!

Blessed by good weather we climbed Mera Central (21,825ft) and traversed to Mera North (20,818ft), then climbed Naulekh (20,870ft) before setting our sights on the long trek West to the Lumding Himal. Crossing the Zatra La and passing through Lukla we reached Jorsale in three days. Here John was feeling rather weary after 3 weeks strenuous activity (he was 56 years old!) and opted for a visit to Namche Bazar, the Thyangboche Monastery and some nice views of Everest. John Brooks elected to accompany him leaving Dr John Allen and myself to

attempt Kwande. The problem now was porters and rupees, the Kwande team having insufficient of either to reach and stock a Base Camp for the climb. Without hesitation and although it might well endanger his own plans, John volunteered to give up one of his porters and in addition gave us some of his dwindling supply of rupees to pay the porters and make our way back to Kathmandu after the climb. Our ascent of Kwande was brilliantly enjoyable and successful but was only possible due to John's unselfishness and instinctive generosity. These were qualities which epitomized John's whole approach in the mountains and in life and it was a privilege to have known him.

He enjoyed a long and happy marriage to Joan who died in 1995 and is survived by their children, Peter and Anne, five grandchildren and a great grandchild.

*by John Edwards*

In compiling this obituary I am indebted to Nigel Cooper and to the Rucksack Club for their kind assistance.



John Whyte 1923-2006

## Santa Caterina 2006

*by Belinda Baldwin*

On arrival Santa Caterina did not look too promising. The hotel backed onto a building site in front of a gondola lift at a standstill and the village was not great on charm. We sat out on the hotel terrace in the sunshine but our behinds got stuck with resin.

After that everything got better. An ample dinner served by two delightful waitresses set us up for the fortnight. The sun shone everyday. The flora and fauna were amazing and the mountains, which are what we had come for, provided two weeks of expeditions to suiting the gentle stroller to the serious mountaineer so long as use was made of members' cars.

The lifts did work sometimes. Elizabeth Wells had a go on the gondola but had the frightening experience of being left dangling on her own for an hour and a half on day one. This was horrid for her but we had no more serious misfortunes. The area is rich in glaciers making our expeditions all the more exciting, whether viewing them from afar or crossing them to reach the peaks.

Many members of the group did so to get to Mont Ceverdale. The glacier crossing was not without mishap as two members managed to plunge into a crevasse. For many that was the acme of the trip but John Edwards and Ron Hextall, our two senior mountaineers, did the North Ridge of Corno Di Tre Signori 3560m. They took a route that has not been done in recent years because of stonewalls but were successful. They completed their day with an ascent of Pizzo di Sforzellina 3100m. They followed this up by ascending the Ortler 3905m by a route closed for three years, an achievement that led to an interview on Italian TV.

Some of the non snowy peaks above 3000m climbed were Montes Gavia, Gaviola, Confinale and Corno dei Tre Signore. Some were no more than a healthy stroll whilst others involved scrambling over scree. Other high expeditions were taken which were either long and/or historically interesting. We were fascinated by the First World War remains scattered about. The most exciting being below Pizzo Di Val Umbrina, where alongside the endless lengths of barbed wire were gun bases and lookouts high up on a ridge. Expeditions both specifically and by chance recorded a variety of wild organisms, including king of the Alps, frog, fragrant, vanilla and spotted orchids, edelweiss, chamois, marmots and golden eagles. The flowers were so rich and numerous that a complete list is impossible. I'm sure Mike Austen could supply anyone with a

list of butterflies and more that he saw.



Walking up the Dosegù valley above Santa Caterina  
*photo: Elizabeth Wells*

There were few other walkers and climbers in the area. Paths were sometimes hard to find and inaccurately placed on the map. The more popular activities were motorcycling and cycling over the passes. We hadn't brought motor bikes or bicycles with us but the ABMSAC was represented on the Gavia Pass by John Mercer. He did look a little out of place not wearing cling fit shiny clothes and riding a hired bicycle complete with kiddy's seat. He claimed to be the slowest cyclist on the mountain apart from a comfortably built middle aged lady, who had the good fortune of a strong husband, who gave her a push. John's only advantage was the child's seat as a repository for his rucksack.

We were all fitter and enriched at the end than at the beginning. No-one was hurt or poorly. Again we have to give a big thank you to Alasdair for organizing another successful trip. He is an expert at taking us to places we would not have thought of and prove to be all that we could wish for our summer meet in the Alps.

## Alpine Camping Meet Valais 22nd July to 5th August 2006

*by Mike Pinney*

The meet was based at the Atermenzen camp site and was held jointly with the Alpine Club, Climbers Club & the Fell and Rock Climbing Club with thirty four in attendance for some or all of the meet. Most arrived on the Saturday with a good forecast until the Tuesday afternoon, although it had not been freezing at night which made glacier crossing taxing even first thing in the morning. There was thus a general exodus from the campsite on the Sunday to take advantage of this window. A number went to the Bordier hut where routes included the Durrenhorn-Nadelhorn traverse (previous approaches across the Reid glacier above the hut are no longer recommended and the hut guardian has way marked a route to the north ridge from the hut approach path), Gr. Bigerhorn and Ulrichshorn-Balfrin traverses. From the Turtmann Hut the Brunegghorn was climbed and from the Rothorn hut attempts were made on the Wellen Kuppe and Rothorn.

The weather was then unsettled, but in the first week routes included the Pointe de Zinal traverse, the Kanzelgrat on the Rothorn, East ridge of the Weisshorn, North ridge of Rimpfischhorn and ascents of Weissmies, Lagginhorn and Monte Rosa. Some explored parts of the Europa way, with its tunnels protecting the user in areas of known stone fall. Others explored the sports climbs by Brig and in the Fieschertal.

At the start of week two, a good weather forecast for several days was obtained. Several teams went up to the Monte Rosa Hut as a starting point for a Monte Rosa - Breithorn traverse. Another team headed round to Coumayeur and the Monzino Hut in search of their remaining 4000m peak.

On Sunday, the Monte Rosa teams left at 3am to do Nordend, Dufourspitze, Zumsteinspitze, then got caught in heavy mist arriving at Margherita hut at 7pm – cheese and chips for dinner! The Monzino team left at first light making good time to the Eccles Bivouac. After occupying the top hut, they then went in search of the traverse line to Col Eccles, which they failed to find but did manage Pic. Eccles and views across to Col Peutrey.

continued . . . . .



Aig. Blanche from the Eccles Bivvi Hut  
*photo: Mike Pinney*

Monday, one Margherita team made a 4am start descended the Grenz glacier back to the Monte Rosa hut. The rest had a lie-in and left at 8.15am to do Parrotspitze, Ludwigshöhe, Corno Negro, Balmenhorn for lunch, then Pyramide Vincent, where they couldn't persuade one member that Punta Giordano was an insignificant pimple, rather than a separate 4k top, and spent the rest of the afternoon descending through hail and lightning on GPS to finally get to the Gnifetti at 6.30pm – just in time for dinner. The Eccles bivvy team again left at first light, descending from the hut to the upper Brouliard glacier ascending the couloir to Col Eccles which was found to be in bad condition. They finally arrived at Col Eccles meeting a Korean team who had traversed the Pic. A combination of the change of weather and not being able to see the descent to the Upper Freney Plateau dictated a retreat to the Eccles Bivouac.

Tuesday, the Monte Rosa team returned to the campsite whilst the Gnifetti team sat it out for the day, debating return via Gressonney. It had snowed overnight at the Eccles, but in spite of fears to the contrary the route across the rocks was found with two abseils down on to the glacier. By the time the Monzino Hut was reached the sun had managed to break through, though on crossing the Great

Saint Bernard back into Switzerland there was a notable depreciation in the weather again. So much for that good weather forecast!

Wednesday, those on the campsite enjoyed a rest day. In spite of a very cold wind the Gnifetti team left at 2.30am, summited on E top of Lyskamm at 6.30am, W top by 8am, Felikjoch by 9.30am, over Castor and at Zwillingsjoch by 11.30; slowed down by bad crevasse traversing to Kleine Matterhorn, arriving at 3.30pm – celebrated with beer and apfelsrudel in Zernatt!

Thursday, new snow down to 2500m so all back on the campsite with an end of meet dinner held at the campsite restaurant. We were well looked after by both the restaurant and campsite staff. On the Friday attendees either returned to the UK or headed south in search of better weather.

### **ALPTREK 2006 – Dolomites – 2<sup>nd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> September 2006**

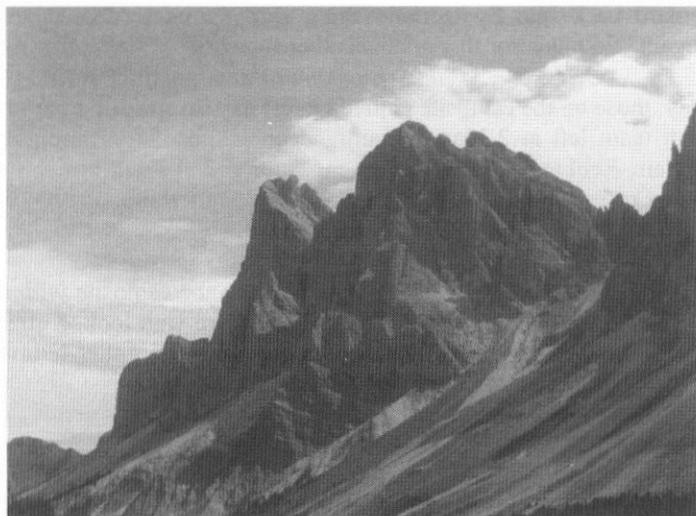
*by Ed Bramley, Andy Burton and Natasha Geere*

#### **“Out With The Boys Again”\***

*\* With deference to Mike Thompson and Mountain magazine 1976*

Saturday saw us fly in to Munich, followed by a very long, four hour, bus journey round to the delightful mountain village of Ortesei, with the top of the Sassolungo peeping over the tops of lower hills. Whether it was the fact that the Pope was arriving in Munich the following Saturday but, once again, the whole week was blessed with glorious sunny weather; if anything, too hot for prolonged strenuous walking at times.

As Alasdair has a crucial singing engagement on the Saturday evening, he and Pam are not with us for the start of the meet, but will be leap-frogging over the passes over the next couple of days, to catch up with us at the Puez Hut.



Odle Range  
*photo: Ed Bramley*

After a very comfortable overnight stop at Hotel Villa Emilia, we took the Seceda cable car to the middle station, on the flank of the Odle group. From there, gently rising green paths take us up the slopes to the Brogles Hut, a useful late morning watering hole, with a glorious view towards the Odle group. From there, we join the Adolf Munkel Weg, to cross a set of high level meadows, with a pair of huts to choose from for our late lunch. More easy walking across the upper grass slopes, before a short steep pull at the end of the day brings us up to the Schlütter (Genova) Hut. A great mountain hut, with the usual outstanding evening meal which seemed to consist of never ending courses.

However, not everybody took such a gradual introduction to the walk. Mark Davison and Dick Yorke took the cable car to the top station, and so around the south of the Odle group, to the paths leading to the Sas Rigais via ferrata. They ascended the East Ridge of Sas Rigais, and down the southwest side before turning off to gain the Mittagsscharte. They then dropped off down endless zig-zags to join the Adolf Munkel Way, arriving at the Schlütter Hut after a ten hour day, just in time for dinner.

On Monday, the path initially rose gently from the Schlütter hut, but after a few rising traverses, we were soon on a shoulder, looking towards our first serious pull, up to the Forcella della Roa. It never ceases to amaze me, how steep scree

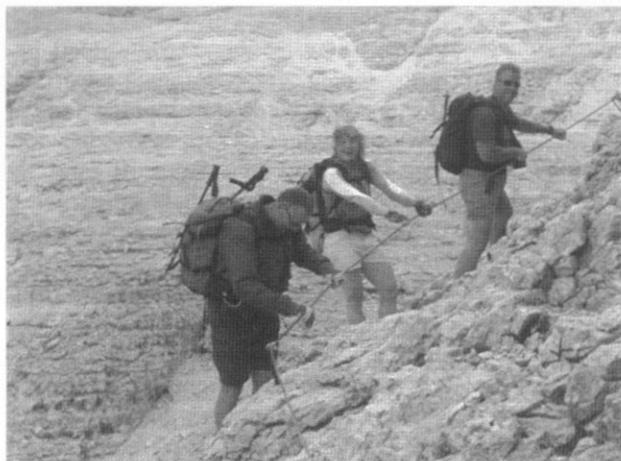
can be, and still remain stable. A relief to be in the shade as we complete the steepest part, before we all crash out at the top for a quick breather. We then take the short via ferrata, no more difficult than Jacks Rake really, up to the top of the plateau. And what a change this brings. To the south, the plateau falls away into the Langental, whilst to the east is our way towards the Puez Hut. Again, a vast barren limestone scree landscape, but beautiful at the same time. We wind our way over several terraces and along the very top edge of the Langental, before reaching the Puez Hut mid afternoon. On the terrace, we finally meet up with Alasdair and Pam, who have toiled up the Langental to join us, and the team is now complete. Chilling out on the terrace, the whole hut spots a great eagle soaring above the valley, with a wingspan more reminiscent of a sea eagle than a golden one.

As we are stopping at the hut for a second night, Tuesday gives us the opportunity for a variety of activities. Whilst the majority opt for an ascent of the Puezspitz, we head back towards Sas Rigais, to attempt the via ferrata up to the summit. It's a good two hour trek back over some of the terrain we've already covered, to the base of Sas Rigais. Then follows a steep ascent over our normal favourite scree, before the via ferrata starts.

We stop for a quick bite to eat and a much needed drink, admiring the view as we do so. Its then on with the harnesses and helmets and we make our way to the start of the first ladder which involves a scramble over some rocks, we are soon at the foot of a very steep ladder, we clip in and off we go. The route is not too busy though there are a couple of occasions where we hug the rock in order to let those descending come by. As we gain height the views start to open up and before we know it we are at the top, where once again we have a bite to eat sharing it with the cheeky choughs. The views are stunning and you can see the adjoining peaks and the snowy mountains far off in the distance. We take a couple of photos by the summit Cross and then we're off carefully picking our way down, we end our descent in a steep sided gully which we work through quickly and finally arrive in the meadow below which is full of Edelweiss.

It's now a very hot late afternoon, and we've each already got through over two litres of water, and are now dry in the tank. The walk back up to the col and across to the Puez Hut takes ages, and is only broken when we finally find water along the way. The consolation is that the early evening light really shows off the landscape to its best effect, and we are torn between pressing on to get back, and just standing and looking at the breathtaking views. We make it back by 7:30pm, and the hut staff see we are well looked after.

We head off south on Wednesday, after some running repairs to a camelback with plumbing tape from the warden, a good piece of lateral thinking. The route initially heads towards the narrow divide at the top of the Langental, before winding past the Crespina Lake, on the way to the Crespina pass. On a warm day like today, such an opportunity for a dip can't be missed, and you don't get such a backdrop at your local pool. Suitably refreshed, we head up to the top of the Crespina pass, before passing through a region of rock pinnacles on the way to the Gardena pass. For the first time since the weekend, we meet a significant number of tourists out walking, evidence of the easy accessibility of this part of the Dolomites. We descend to the Gardena pass and enjoy yet another wonderful dinner looking out towards the Sella Massif itself. The word replete is being used on a regular basis. Now we head towards the place I've been most looking forward to all week – the Sella Massif and the Pisciadu Hut. From a distance, the towering massif looks impregnable but, turning one of the corners, reveals the key. A gully, rising steeply up to the plateau, full of our favourite steep, dusty, mobile scree. At least it's shady again, and we each disappear into our own thoughts as we pull slowly upwards. And then we're at the fixed wire up the final few hundred meters of path. We must count the best part of a hundred people coming down, some of whom are clearly not relishing the experience, before we bound on upwards, pleased at last to be on some solid rock. All too soon were out on the first shelf of the plateau, and across to the hut. What a view, straight across to the Pisciadu via ferrata. In the hut that night, there's a steady stream of people emerging who've been on the route, aged from seven, to our age and more; so a real hard choice of what to do tomorrow.



Andy, Natasha and Steve  
*photo: Ed Bramley*

Thursday greets us with the sun clipping the shoulder by the hut, and small wisps of cloud gliding over the ridge. We opt to go up onto the plateau and up to Piz Boe, but Penny sets off with Mark for the Pisciadu steig. We thread our way up several defiles and eventually emerge on top of the plateau. Despite all the pictures I've seen, I'm still not prepared for the sheer scale of this elevated barren limestone plateau. My head is going round like Eli Wallach in the graveyard scene in the Good, the Bad and the Ugly. What do I look at next, there's so much to capture the imagination? We take a simple via ferrata round the side of one massive limestone boss, before gathering ourselves at the Boe hut. From there, it's only a short pull up to the top of Piz Boe, and yet more views unfold. We can't believe it. The plateau is the only place for miles around that's not covered in cloud. Back down to Rifugio Boe and one of those mountain lunches we've grown to love, before setting back towards the Pisciadu hut. On the way back, Natasha has evidently got too much energy as she almost runs to the top of Piz Pisciadu and back. At the hut, good news from Penny and Mark, as they've been successful on the Pisciadu steig, and they're on the same high that we are. Again a great evening in the hut, with plenty sampling of the various forms of local spirit.

In the evening, we are treated to an intense lightning storm, and the rain is rodding down. In the morning, it has stopped, but everywhere is still damp, and the clouds are only slowly rolling back. We descend the fixed ropes at the top of the massif carefully, as there's a lot of loose material been washed down, making some of the route like ball bearings. As we get onto the scree however, the rain has consolidated the slope, and it makes it much firmer underfoot than a couple of days previously. We make good time to the top of the Gardena pass, and press off down to Wolkenstein, for the last eat-fest of the tour. In the afternoon, we pick up the old railway track, which provides a superb easy walk, all the way back into Ortesei.

Another great week!

#### ***Participants***

*Alasdair Andrews, Penny Austin, Stuart Beare, Ed Bramley, Andy Burton, Steve Caulton, Sheila Coates, Mark Davison, John Dempster, Natasha Geere, Pamela Harris, Dinah Nichols, Terry Shaw, Jim Strachan, Margaret Strachan, Richard Winter, Dick Yorke.*

## Dolomites Meet, Cortina - September 2006

*by Jeff Harris*



Natasha and Steve descending from the Pisciadu Hutte  
*photo: Ed Bramley*

The joint Meet with the Alpine Club, Climbers' Club and the Fell and Rock Climbers Club was held at the excellent Rocchetta campsite just south of Cortina. Thirty two members of the four clubs enjoyed hot and sunny weather for almost the whole two weeks. There was a wide range of ages and abilities but the Cortina area has a good range of activities to offer, so everyone found plenty to do at the level they were looking for.

The Cinque Torri was a popular climbing venue early in the trip with both classic and sports routes available from 3+ upwards and easy access by car. There were protected paths and easy via ferrate to provide a few days warm up for those not wanting to rock climb. Longer, harder climbs were undertaken as the first week went by and often climbers returned late in the day just in time to grab a shower and start cooking before the sun set behind the hills. Some of the via ferrate tackled were quite demanding as well, both physically and mentally. Even some hardened climbers found them quite exciting. In the chilly evenings the air was full of the sound of famous names as people made their plans. Comici, Dibona, Dulfer...

The evenings deserve a mention, although the days were hot, at this time of year as soon as the sun goes down the temperature plummets! Down and fleece replaced shorts and tee shirts and fortified by the local supermarket wine a party atmosphere prevailed on the site. On a couple of really cold evenings refuge was taken in the campsite bar across the road where they also cooked delicious pizzas.

During the second week the climbing and via ferrata'ing continued unrelentingly as no one wished to waste the glorious weather by taking a rest day. Some very high grade, good quality routes were completed as well as more modest ones. There were a couple of 'epics' on abseil descents, a salutary reminder that getting down is often more dangerous than climbing up! And some via ferrata'ists had extra long days due to unexpected circumstances. The Cortina area was the scene of some savage mountain warfare in the First World War and many of the tunnels and trenches provided historical interest on the descents from climbs or were included in via ferrate. The descent inside the tunnels of the Little Lagazuoi was fascinating.

I think everyone left for home thoroughly satisfied with a good few 'ticks' in their guide books. Personally I thought it was one of the most fun meets I've been on, but then I would say that wouldn't I!

## Beer Meet, East Devon, October 2006

by Belinda Baldwin

Ten members were based in Beer, John and Dinah met us off the bus on Saturday and Mike Pinney met us along the way.

Saturday was dry and bright for our first walk along the South West coast path. The main party caught the bus to Sidford, where we met John and Dinah, and walked into Sidmouth. From there we took the coast path over high cliffs and deep river mouths with a beach picnic and tea later at beach café, the ABMSAC was having a seaside meet instead of a mountain meet. Although there was the usual amount of climbing we were not challenged by an oxygen shortage. Two had elected to avoid the steep slopes and took an alternative route in the same area and we did manage to bump into to each other. Our biggest challenge was to come after dinner, when it seemed we might be marooned at our venue. We had to make a quick exit from our somewhat prefabricated back room as we were being rained on but when we got to the front we saw the street outside transformed to a torrent. Luckily it was not to last and we did get home safely even if later than planned.

The rain was still about on Sunday morning. After much discussion we kept with our plans. The two who wished to have a gentler day parked near Golden Cap, whilst the other five kept with the coastal path east of Charmouth, until it seemed a stupid idea in the blustery winds so we took an alternative route that approached Golden Cap from inland. This is the highest point on the South Coast and we were able to stay on our feet and enjoy the views. We had a wet and slippery walk down to Seatown, where we met the others, who had bagged a table at the pub. It was good to get out of our waterproofs and enjoy an excellent lunch. Wendell and Jenny set off straight after lunch, Mike and Penny did a short route to their car, whilst John and Marge, James and I returned to the start. All in all we had had an excellent two days encompassing the South West coast path in East Devon and West Dorset. There wasn't much Alpine about it except for the weather and the steep slopes.

*Present at some point: Michael and Penny Austen, James and Belinda Baldwin, John Dempster, John and Marj Foster, Wendell and Jenny Jones, John and Rosemary Percival, Mike Pinney and Dinah Nicholls*

## Aviemore October 2006

by Bill Peebles

Again in true Scottish fashion the week prior to the meet was extremely wet with very heavy rain and strong winds. Not very nice for the coming weekend meet, especially as the burn at the bottom of the garden was in full spate and very brown. The hills were going to be very boggy and the rivers and streams would be well up and difficult to cross.

The meet was again based at Ord View House situated on the road to Loch Morlich. Ten members attended the meet and in addition Graham and Alison Daniels joined us but stayed in a nearby hut. Those who had not visited Ord House before were intrigued by it and thoroughly enjoyed its home comforts.

Bill met Terry on the Friday morning in Perth and although the weather was showery they managed to climb Schiehallion (3547 ft) on the way to Aviemore. A new path built by the John Muir Trust makes the first part of the climb very pleasant. The stags were roaring and one shot indicated that a shooting party was out on the neighboring Carn Maig range. The upper part of the mountain is just one large boulder field of varying degrees of difficulty. On this damp day care was needed because the boulders tended to be slippery, however a group of seven very tame Ptarmigan enlivened our traverse up the boulder fields. The summit was duly reached in cloudy conditions and a safe return made to the car.

All turned up at the house during the evening and food, liquid refreshment and good cheer was enjoyed at the local pub.

Various plans were afoot for the Saturday but once more the Gods were unkind and the weather was poor. A day on the high mountains would not have been enjoyable so a less strenuous day was indicated. All set off for a walk on the Speyside Way from Grantown to Nethy Bridge. I opted out because of a cold and did not wish to get wet. Surprisingly it was not raining on the Way and a pleasant dry walk was enjoyed along the old railway to Nethy Bridge which, of course, has a pub where liquid refreshment was partaken.

The evening meal was in a Taverna! The pub was fully booked but the Taverna proved to be an excellent choice providing us with good food and a liberal supply of wine. All enjoyed the evening with lots of noisy chatter and bonhomie.

The Sunday after the night before proved to be a much better day. Bill, Marj, Jim, Margaret, Terry and Buff set off walking to Ryvoan Bothy from whence they

climbed the Corbett Meall a Bhuachaille (2654 ft). The weather was nice and again a new path made the climbing easier. Lovely views were enjoyed at the top and the atmospheric effects of cloud and mountain were delightful. After a quick pint in the local pub the party split up to make their way home.

Regardless of the poor weather on this meet over the past two years there is always one feature of this area that makes the journey worthwhile, the autumn colour in the trees is always spectacular with golds, browns and yellows of every conceivable shade make for a wonderful display.

*Attending: John and Marj Foster, Jim and Margaret Strachan, Bill Peebles, Buff Dolling, Terry Shaw, Geoff Urmston, Peter Goodwin and Ursula Woodhouse.*

*Visiting: Graham and Alison Daniels*

### **Braich Goch Bunkhouse, Corris - 10 to 12 November 2006**

*by Dick Yorke*

This Mid-Wales meet was held for the second time and attendance was trebled, this was very heartening. There was a core attendance of eight with six staying at the bunkhouse and two in a local guest house, and we were joined on the Saturday evening by Roger James. The bunkhouse again proved welcoming and comfortable. We had a six bedded bunk room with en-suite facilities and some areas such as the dining room had recently been refurbished. Again good real ale was obtainable at the local hostelry near the bunkhouse and on the Saturday evening also in the bunkhouse bar. A good value, leisurely and substantial meal, in one instance perhaps too substantial, was obtained on the Saturday evening at the Railway Inn in Abergynolwyn, for which we were joined by my wife Karen, whose help with transport appreciably aided the social arrangements.

Saturday started with broken cloud above the tops but later the cloud level fell to around 2000ft and in some areas there were periods of rain. The wind was a strong and gusty westerly; this had been forecast, the rain had not. Five of us; John and Marj, Terry, John and I set off to climb Arenig Fawr approaching it from the north and via the lake, the summit was reached in cloud and rain and the wind made progress difficult, therefore, rather than continuing to traverse the ridge a more direct return was made. However, good views had been obtained on the way up including the Aran and Berwyn ridges. Phil and David went to the

Arans ascending Glasgwm from Cwm Cywarch and then making a circular exploration of the main Aran ridge. Peter wisely headed towards the coast and approached Tarrenhendre from the west starting from Brynglas station on the Talyllyn Railway. He covered a number of tops on the ridge including Trum Gelli and was rewarded by good views and no rain.

The forecast for Sunday was for low cloud down to 1000ft or less and rain later. The optimists Phil, David and Roger returned to the Arans to explore the ridge from the east from Llanuwchllyn. However, given the weather they settled for coffee in Bala... The remainder headed for Llanbedr with a view to climbing Rhinog Fach and Y Llethr. Given the conditions we opted for a more coastal walk encompassing parts of the Harlech Dome and the Artro estuary. While lunching by Hafod-y-llyn the rain had stopped and the cloud base rose somewhat to give views of the Rhinogs. Perhaps less notice should been taken of the forecast, or we should have been more committed. Rewards though, included a megalithic burial chamber, good views of ducks, waders and an egret on the estuary and an appreciation of the problems in navigating on footpaths over farmland. This was not aided by finding variations in the paths marked on maps of three different dates. The latter led to some disagreement, confusion and debate as to route, until the cause was appreciated.

General comments indicated that the bunkhouse was thought to be an appropriate and convenient place from which to explore an interesting, wild and relatively unfrequented area of the Welsh Mountains. It is certainly my intention to offer this meet again, possibly next year if a suitable date can be found which does not impact on the Everest Trek.

*Attending: David Ellis, John and Marj Foster, Peter Goodwin, Phil Hands, Roger James, John Percival; Terry Shaw, Dick Yorke.*

### **Arosa Meet - 27<sup>th</sup> January to 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2007.**

*by John Dempster*

This was the Club's first winter meet in the Alps and as such was something of an experiment. Arosa is an old fashioned ski resort, lying at 1,800m. Faced with competition from more fashionable resorts the community decided to offer a wide range of winter sports activities, including in particular sixty kilometres of cleared paths, rising as high as 2,653m. It has a spectacular rail link to the main network. Our railway expert told us that it is the steepest non-rack railway in Switzerland.

We were fortunate in two ways. First, there had been a heavy fall of snow the previous week, but we enjoyed six days of almost unbroken sunshine, with tremendous views of snow covered mountains. Second, the Hotel Cristallo proved an excellent choice – convenient, comfortable, with excellent food, and a free pass on the chairlifts thrown in.

Although the main focus of the meet was winter walking, the group took full advantage of all the various forms of activity on offer, and at different times members of the meet indulged in downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, snow shoeing, skating, tobogganing, and sleigh riding. The high paths provided wonderful views. They were quite steep and icy in places and we were glad of our instep crampons. There was also a network of lower paths, away from the skiers, which offered Christmas card scenery, and usually a good hostelry at their extremities.



The President Tobogganing  
*photo: James Baldwin*



Snowshoeing at Arosa  
*photo: Dick Murton*

We all concluded that the experiment had been a great success, and the organiser is already under pressure to arrange something similar next year. It was scarcely mountaineering in the pure sense, but for those who enjoy winter conditions in the mountains it was a highly memorable week.

*Present:- Belinda and James Baldwin, Alison and Graham Daniels, John Dempster, Marj and John Foster, Lyn and Dick Murton, Dinah Nichols, Margaret and Jim Strachan.*

## Crianlarich – 16-18 February 2007

by John Foster

This meet was based on the Crianlarich Youth Hostel, which we had used last year and had virtually to ourselves. This year, however, word had got round and the hostel was fairly busy. John and Marj Foster were staying in a nearby bed and breakfast, but a crisis there (the owners had found themselves parents unexpectedly, the previous day) meant that they were moved to another one four miles away – no doubt a relief for those members who had brought whisky with them!

The forecast was for a reasonable day on Saturday, and a better one on Sunday, so plans were laid over dinner for various ascents. Dinner was a wee bit embarrassing as John was persuaded that he had ordered a dish that he thought he hadn't, only to be told later that it belonged to a couple at the other end of the bar.

Saturday started bright, and Mike, Peter G., Ursula, Marj, and John, set off for Beinn Dubhchraig, Peter F. and Jim for Beinn nan Aighenan, and Phil for Beinn a'Chroin. The weather remained sunny with occasional rain and snow showers, and all objectives were conquered, though the group on Dubhchraig had intended to continue onto Ben Oss until they saw the gap between the summits. At that point they decided that the weather really wasn't up to it and retired instead to the pub.

Mike elaborated on his windscreen message system on this occasion by bringing three minute slips of paper to pin under a wiper saying "I'm down and I've gone to the pub – join me", "I'm down and I'm walking back to the hostel", and "I'm not down yet". This system unfortunately failed to work when a heavy shower pulped the paper and made the message unreadable! Fortunately we arrived back at the cars together.

Dinner was taken in the Rod and Reel, this time without mishap but with sufficient lubrication, before retreating to the hostel to discuss Sunday's proposals with the benefit of a map.

There was a hard frost on Saturday night, but on Sunday the weather was less bright than expected - though it remained dry all day. Groups successfully climbed Beinn Chabhair, Ben Mhanach, and Ben Challum. Under-foot conditions were strangely like walking across a large crème brulee – hard on top, but soggy after you broke through the icy crust.

The Chabhair pair (John and Marj) was anticipating a short day prior to driving home, but after taking the wrong valley were still on the way up the mountain when they had expected to be driving home. Still, the long-distance views from the top were well worth the effort.

There is a disturbing tendency for "slaggers" to develop into Munro-baggers. Phil, Mike, Jim, and Peter F, elected to stay on to finish off the whisky and attempt more summits on the Monday to assist some of them in this regard.

Underfoot conditions throughout the weekend were extremely wet, with little snow on any except the highest summits, but this was certainly one of our more successful meets in terms of successful ascents.

*Present: Peter Farrington, John and Marj Foster, Peter Goodwin, Phil Hands, Mike Scarr, Jim Strachan, Ursula Woodhouse*

## Annual Dinner Meet – 2007

by Brooke Midgeley

Very shortly after the Meet we went to Italy for a month to ski and things. My intention was to sit in the sun with a glass of the local "thingy", having a day off and write the report.

We had quite a few "days off" or "off days" and I'm writing this as it rains, sleet and snows with the cloud down onto the rooftops – I may as well be in Scunthorpe! The weather on the Dinner Meet was better than this.

Quite a few members arrived early and so were able to take advantage of Friday's sun, go onto the hills and stay dry. Saturday's weather was also pleasant and many good things were done. Probably the most notable was the expedition of John Edwards and John Brooks to Great Gable to repeat their ascent of Napes Needle forty years ago. Neither is in the "first flush of youth" (although bits are!) and John Brooks had recently had his hips repaired. In the event the hips were insufficiently run in to follow John Edwards so he soloed it. Not bad for a twenty six year old (one hundred and twenty six that is!). Joking and ruderics aside – a very impressive effort.

For various reasons the dinner attendance was lower than for many years, but at sixty seven it was a respectable turn out. Dr. Charles Clarke was unable to attend

and we were fortunate to have as our guests Bishop Ian Griggs and his wife Pat. Ian is a mountaineer and long time member of the Patterdale Mountain Rescue. He gave us an interesting and entertaining talk on the work of the mountain rescue service and a humorous account of some rescues. After dinner Ed Bramley gave a slide show of the various AlpTrek events that have been held.

Sunday is best forgotten; anyone lured out by the hint of sun through the cloud would have been about drowned and/or blown away before an early lunch. Most members departed but those who stayed for a few more days were rewarded with some pleasant weather and days on the hills.

So the weather on the meet was better than some in the Val di Aosta in early March but we did have some good weather and perfect new snow. How about having a meet in Val di Aosta in 2010??? (just kidding), so book early for the 2008 Dinner Meet and outline details for our Centenary celebrations will be published soon.

## John Edwards on the Ortler

*Photos: Ron Hextall*



John Edwards on the summit of the Ortler



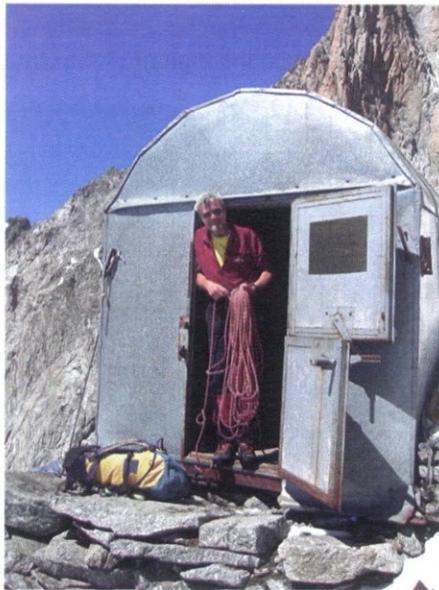
John Edwards abseiling from the Tabaretta Ridge



Jim and Margaret Strachan



Dossegù Valley above Santa Caterina  
*photo: Elizabeth Wells*



At the Eccles bivvi  
*photo: Mike Pinney*

AlpTrek 2006—Dolomites



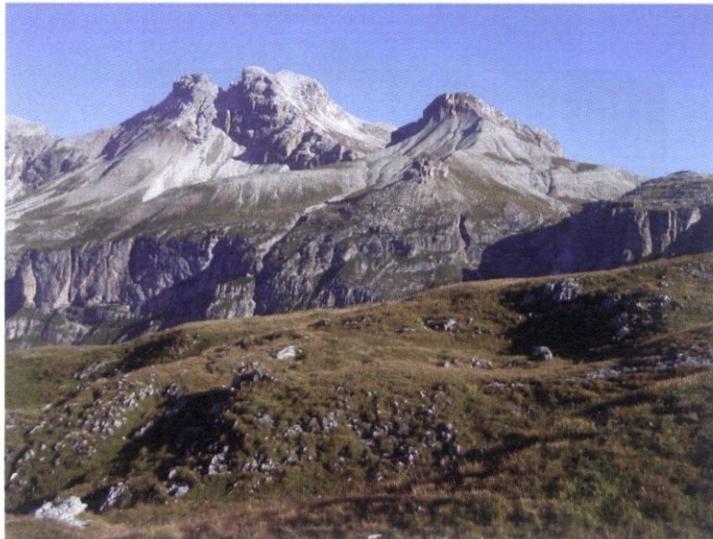
Mark and Dick—summit of Saas Rigais



AlpTrekking considering lunch  
*photo: Richard Winter*



Group on Pic Puez 2846m  
*photo: Dick Yorke*



Pic Puez  
*Photo: Richard Winter*



We've got to get over this!  
*photo: Richard Winter*



Fermada Towers  
*photo: Ed Bramley*



Supported path on the way to Piz Boe  
*photo: Dick Yorke*



Rest stop on the way to Piz Boe  
*photo: Dick Yorke*



Descent from the Pisciadu Hut  
*photo: Dick Yorke*



Arosa Meet  
*photo: Dick Murton*



Arosa Meet  
*photo: Dick Murton*

### **Mr A I Andrews Conquers Burnhope Seat**

*penned by the poet McColingall*

'Twas in the year of 1988 and on the 29<sup>th</sup> of December,  
 A date which that eminent mountaineer and Alpine Club member,  
 Mr Alasdair Andrews, of Edinburgh, will doubtless long remember,  
 That early in the morning he packed his sack and turned his feet,  
 Towards the noble summit of Burnhope Seat,

Saying –

O mighty mountain, rising proudly twixt silvery Tyne and Wear,  
 Your top will soon be conquered never fear!

Leaving Teesdale at the ruins of Ashgill Mine,

He struck out boldly on a northerly line,

Accompanied by his faithful local guides,

Messrs Lock and Armstrong, marching at his sides,

Saying -

Oh mighty mountain, rising proudly twixt the silvery Tyne and Wear,  
 The attainment of your top will soon be mine!

The weather, being somewhat inclement and dull, and wet,

Mr Andrews was in some doubt and soon began to fret,

That due to low cloud and zero visibility,

Finding the summit might be beyond his guides' ability,

Saying –

Oh mighty mountain, rising proudly twixt the silvery Tyne and Wear,  
 Your top may not is seems be won with trifling ease!

However, Mr Armstrong, exuding supreme confidence, felt compelled  
 To boast,

That there wasn't a hill from coast to coast,

With which he was more familiar and made light,

Of the fact that he could easily find his way, even in a blizzard,

At the dead of night!

Saying –

Oh mighty mountain, rising proudly twixt the silvery Tyne and Wear,  
 The route to reach your top, to me, is absolutely clear!

Blundering boldly across the plateau of morass and bog,

He journeyed on, in spite of mist and fog,

Protesting vainly that he was not lost,

And would find the summit at all cost,  
Saying –  
Oh cursed mountain rising somewhere twixt the muddy Wear and Tees,  
I wish to god your foul peat hags would freeze!

Eventually, by sheer persistence and inbred skill,  
They struggled on, mi mist and bog, until,  
The trig point finally hove in sight,  
A fact which gave them cause for much delight,  
Saying –

Oh mighty mountain, rising proudly twixt the silvery Tees and Tyne,  
The view from here is normally very fine!

But on this notable day, I fear,  
The view was nil, both far and near,  
And so, without waiting round for it to clear,  
They mutually agreed 'let's now get down from here',  
Saying –

Oh mighty mountain, rising twixt they Tyne and Tees and Wear,  
Thank god we no not need to come back here next year!

*by Colin Armstrong*  
*Inspired by the great William Topaz McGonagall*  
*1830-1902*

*My thanks go to John Lagoë for the following story. It is a translation from "... an ancient battered book, given me many years ago by Geoffrey Winthrop Young: "Contes des Cabanes et des Sommets" by Rene D Jeandre, (a pseudonym for 'un eminent medecin genevois')" published in Geneva in 1925. I am certain that it will kindle memories for anyone who has spent a night alone in a climbing hut!*  
*RBW*

### The Sneeze

During my time as a captain in the Valaisan battalion of the Army, I got to know very well my Sergeant-Major Perruchoud Tobie, a tall bony fellow with high cheekbones and a prominent jaw which reminded one of a Sudanese. He was an excellent NCO who drew the best from his company, on or off parade, provided his captain didn't interfere. His command of military equipment was unsurpassed: on demobilisation day he handed in more pickaxes, more blankets and more puttees than had been issued to him. This was a point of honour with him, and the mark of a good soldier.

Of course he knew the source of all this surplus, but cared little if other companies were missing equipment; they all did the same, honouring the army dictum that "when everyone cheats, nobody cheats". It was just that Perruchoud was a little more cunning than the rest.

Every time he returned from leave he'd have had one too many glasses of fendant, which made him aggressive, inclined to throw his boots at some subordinate's head. Apart from this fault, which one accepted as an old weekend tradition, Perruchoud was a charming fellow, combining a happy and obliging nature with great strength and daring.

One evening I joined a group of NCOs round a camp fire, who were telling each other hunting tales. What I heard unexpectedly reminded of an adventure of my own, fifteen years before.

When you are very young and passionate about mountains, there's a mistake you always make at the start of the holidays: it is to set off on the first day, out of training and loaded with food and equipment, for a distant hut which you will reach very late at night, completely exhausted and incapable of a serious climb the next day.

This time my mistake was even worse, as I had with me my cousin and her younger brother, and since I was the valiant porter in our little caravan, I'd had on

my back, for six hours, a load that a Chandolin mule would have jibbed at.

However we reached the refuge, and were pleased to find it unoccupied. I was literally drunk with fatigue; my head aching and empty, legs lifeless, neck and back curved and shoulders sore from the rucksack straps. For supper I could hardly manage to swallow a few spoonfuls of Maggi soup. But I took the mess tin to the edge of a nearby small lake and cleaned it with some grit and newspaper. It was already night. The washing up done, I started to go back in when I heard stones falling in a couloir. The noise stopped quite quickly, but I remained strangely affected by it, becoming more conscious now of the immense silence around me. I stood still and held my breath. I thought I saw rocks moving in the deepening dark; my legs shook. Wet from hours of sweat, I shivered and felt I was starting a cold. And why hadn't my two companions lit the candle in the hut? A light would have reassured me. It was time to go in. I felt seized by an indescribable fear.

At the moment when I reached the hut door, I stopped, rigid with terror: a distant cry, anguished and furious, worse than a screeching owl, came from a rocky summit; it was followed almost at once by brutish, mocking laughter and the sound of sliding scree.

I waited no longer. Mastering the paralysis, I threw myself inside, dropped the mess tin and collapsed on to a stool, trembling in a cold sweat, "Light the candle!" I said in a shaking voice. My cousin couldn't find her sac. The boy had dropped his box of matches in the wood basket and was groping for it. Now, in an inexplicable anguish, I wondered if it wouldn't be better to stay in the dark so that our presence would be ignored. Those weird, ominous calls coming in total darkness from a steep rockface, what could they be? I didn't believe that ghosts of the damned haunted the summits, but I hadn't dreamed these two sinister cries, and no climber in danger would have called for help like that. Smugglers? We were in the middle of Switzerland, in the Bernese Oberland near the Valais border.

In spite of myself, I began to imagine wild and terrible things, and although my seventeen-year-old reason told me they were foolish, I couldn't get rid of them. It seemed that at any moment the beast - or the man, the madman with his savage cry - would break into our quiet shelter. Ah! I would have been less afraid of an animal!

"What's the matter?" said my cousin, who had finally managed to light a candle. "You're as white as chalk. "White as a stork," added the boy, with his fourteen

year old wit,

I thought it useless to worry them. "I've just twisted my ankle and that's upset my stomach. Let's go to bed."

I looked in vain for a key to lock us in, so I pushed the table, two benches and the wood box against the door. These defences astounded my companions, who immediately put everything back in place in spite of my strong objections. However I got them to gather all our belongings together and take them on to the upper sleeping level, where we snuggled down on the palliasses under a pile of blankets. I kept my boots on, and close beside me the wood axe and my iceaxe. The young lad mocked me: "who's afraid of burglars?"

Five minutes after this witticism, he was asleep. My cousin, on the other side of him, was still. I kept watch. My anxiety was fuelled by many questions on what to do for the best. Should we have left the hut and hidden in some nearby hole? Shouldn't I have warned my companions of what was going to happen? But what was going to happen? Ought I to stay in ambush behind the door, with the axe raised ready to strike?

I was more and more certain that *something* was going to happen that night. The horrible cries still rang in my ears, intensifying and multiplying my imaginings.

I struck a match: only 11.15. Great heavens, what a long, enervating vigil. I began to wish that whatever it was would happen as soon as possible. But in my extreme tiredness I struggled to stay awake, and I turned backwards and forwards, half dozing with closed eyes, half listening for the slightest sound.

"Why aren't you asleep?" said my cousin quietly, her voice making me jump. I must have been sleeping and dreaming. "I'm uneasy" she added. "I feel something bad may happen. We'd better give up our plan to climb tomorrow. Besides, I'm very tired."

"We'll see in the morning" I replied, evasively, "but what are you afraid of?"

"I don't know; I just feel a menace, something bad and imminent, as if an unquiet spirit was wandering in the hut."

My cousin was inclined to believe in ghosts - and at this moment so was I. Her words increased my anguish. If I'd been able to think clearly, I'd have realised that my strange behaviour, barricading the door and arming myself with the axes,

must have had an unconscious effect on her. "It's only one o'clock," I told her. "Try to sleep, like the little one".

I stopped short. We had both heard steps. At last, I said to myself, it's happening; we'll see what it is. I gripped the axe, without daring to move. I had never been so afraid in my life, not even when I was very small and someone scared me with a horrible picture from Grimm's tales. In my head I muttered a prayer: Help us! Help us! The steps came nearer, hesitatingly; stopped; then slowly moved round the hut. We were surrounded, beleaguered, dry-mouthed, tight-chested, immobilised by our terror. The steps reached the door and stopped again. God! Help us! Save us! Then I heard a dull sound, like the fall of a lifeless body, the same sound I had heard once when a large parcel of linen had fallen from a post van on to a station platform. Then the latch clicked, the door scraped across the floor; a bit of wood jammed it for an instant, a push of a shoulder, a blast of cold air, the clatter of the door closing, the scratch of a match, a flickering light, and a huge shadow moving against the ceiling.

The man approached the stove and removed the circles of the lid. He muttered something in patois: he must be a Valaisan. I realised that he was surprised to find some embers. He took the candle and looked all round the room. The boy was sleeping so peacefully under his pile of blankets that we could hardly hear him breathing. If he moved, we were lost! As for my cousin and me, we kept a total silence, not even hearing the rapid beating of our hearts.

I began now to recover a little courage. Our man had nothing supernatural about him, and seemed himself rather fearful.

His inspection over, he went back to the stove and from the noise I gathered he was splintering a log with his knife to relight the fire.

It was at this moment that I was seized by the need to sneeze. It began with a tickle in my left nostril, which I managed to control with the knuckle of my index finger. But soon the tickle returned to the attack in my right nostril; then I felt a prickle in the eyes, in the throat, in the ears; I tried to take short jerky breaths to defuse the imminent bomb-burst, all the time repeating God! Save us! Help us! in my head. There was a terrible minute, a struggle between the reflex and the will, a struggle in which all other physiological activity was suspended. The physical me was nothing more than a pent-up sneeze, the mental me a sprung valve still resisting but ready to yield to the pressure.

Pataratatafiaoux! The reflex had won. Heuh! Patafiaux! Heuh! Patafiaux!

Atatachin! Atatachoum! And again.... and more. Without thinking what I was doing, I sat up, axe in hand, hitting my head on the beam, shouting horrible oaths and menaces.

"Calm down" my cousin said at last. "He ran off at the first sneeze. Let's go and close the door and barricade ourselves in." Her little brother had merely turned over and said to us "Be quiet, I can't sleep."

Using the splinters which had certainly not been intended for us, my cousin and I relit the stove. We felt relieved of an enormous weight. To flee from a sneeze, the good Valaisan couldn't have been dangerous. However, to keep us secure I fastened the door with several nails. We now felt quite at home. A good grog helped to improve our mood, so much so that we went happily back to our palliasses and fell quickly into a deep sleep.

At eight o'clock we were awakened abruptly, all three this time, by an appalling noise. On the other side of the door a storm of oaths in schwyizerdeutsch, rich and violent, ringing round the mountains and rolling joyously in echoes between the rock walls. The increasing vocal tempest was reinforced by a broadside of blows and kicks against the door. We slowly realised that we were ordered to open the door, 'in the name of the law' but in our clumsy haste we couldn't get the nails out. Suddenly, like a whiplash, a pistol shot. Damn! Things were getting worse, the man was losing patience and the rusty nails wouldn't budge.

I decided to climb out through a window and approach the shouts from behind. To my astonishment I saw the uniform of a Bernese gendarme. I called to the frenzied man who turned and pointed his pistol. "Don't shoot!" I cried, raising my hands. But the man had lowered the gun in a gesture both pacifying and disappointed. I saw a plump, ruddy face adorned with a shaggy, unkempt moustache, not a very soldierlike aspect. Besides, the representative of the law wore a crumpled uniform, with the drawn face and swollen eyelids of a man who had just passed a very bad night.

We got the door open at last, and in a mixture of German and French the worthy man told us his misfortunes. A young Valaisan poacher he'd been watching for a long time; he'd stalked him all day yesterday; was just about to catch him when night fell, but slipped in a nasty couloir of loose stones and thought his end had come. The 'damned Valaisan' escaped with a shout of triumphal laughter.

He had spent the night on a narrow ledge, not daring to move. As for the poacher, he'd managed to descend with his chamois on his shoulders – the chamois which

he dropped outside the hut door, where blood and hair was visible.

The sight of this brought back the gendarme's fury. He swore and cursed, shaking his fist in the direction of the Valais. He believed his poacher had barricaded himself in the refuge and was sure he'd caught him, like a rat in a trap.

In spite of his disappointment, he accepted a mug of our chocolate and quickly emptied the little flask of cognac which we'd brought in case of need. We'd not foreseen this particular emergency, but it certainly was one, for isn't a good dose of schnapps absolutely essential for a Bernese gendarme who has had a bad night?

Around the camp fire, Sergeant-Major Perruchoud Tobie was telling his hunting tale. The lurid light of the flames lit up his sunburnt, bony face with its wide and friendly smile. He spoke with a pure Chamoson accent, a little guttural, with a roll to the 'r' and a hiss to the 's' and the 'c'. "When I heard, in that empty hut, such a monstrous sneeze I was so dreadfully afraid that I ran away as if the devil himself was after me."

Ah! Perruchoud, my friend, I was just as frightened as you.

## President's Report 2006

*by John Dempster*

If the club's success is measured by the number of meets held and by the number of people attending them, 2006 was a very successful year. We held twelve meets, in addition to the regular ones in our own hut. This included five in Scotland, four in the Alps (Ortler, Valais and two in the Dolomites), two in Wales and one in Devon. Most were well attended; indeed the Alpine trekking meet is regularly over-subscribed. Looking ahead we have a similar programme for 2007 with the added spice of a trek in Nepal.

We have also continued to participate in the consortium of clubs who arrange joint lectures at the Hoop and Toy pub in London. The ABM provides one lecturer each season and this year ours was David Seddon who gave an excellent talk describing his ski-mountaineering exploits from Turkey to Greenland.

However there are some worrying clouds on the horizon. First, membership numbers are dropping and our average age is rising. Although we have a well attended meets programme, the long term outlook is not sustainable unless we can recruit new and younger blood. This is an issue to which the Committee has given, and will continue to give, considerable thought.

Second, the long term financial prospects of the George Starkey hut are uncertain. The rent was due to be reviewed in 2002 and again in 2006, but neither review has yet been settled. The PCC are pressing for very large rent increases which we cannot afford at the present rate of usage of the hut. Our Company has made what we regard as very fair counter proposals but the PCC (who have now retained a third firm of agents) have refused to negotiate. At the present time it looks as though the matter will have to go to arbitration.

On other matters, the disposal of the remaining books in the ABMSAC library is now almost complete. Of the one hundred and twenty four books in question, the most valuable twenty four will be retained in the Alpine Club library. Sixty five have been sold to Club or AC members. Most of the remainder are being sold in the trade. The small number remaining, which we are unable to sell will be placed in the hut. In all over £8,000 has been raised as a result of this exercise. We are very grateful to Alan Lyall, Jon Mellor and Myles O'Reilly for their hard work in achieving this successful result.

Another matter which has engaged the committee has been the development of a Child Protection policy for the Club. I hasten to say that child protection has

never been an issue for the Club, so far as I know, but the BMC are insisting that all clubs that have members under the age of eighteen should have such a policy, as a condition of the insurance. Steve Caulton has very kindly prepared a draft policy, which I expect the Committee to adopt shortly. He has also agreed to act as the Club's Child Protection Officer, although I earnestly hope that his services will never be required in that capacity.

The year saw the publication of James Bogle's history of the Club. I personally found it a fascinating read, and was interested to see how much the Club has changed over the past ninety eight years. The costs of printing were met from a legacy from the estate of John Bryam Grounds, a former vice-President of the Club.

On a sadder note, a number of Club members died during the year. These included two well known members of the Club, John Whyte, who was President 1988-90, and John Chapman, who was vice-President 1993-95. Obituaries will appear in the *Journal*.

2009 will be the Club's centenary year, and the Committee has been considering how the event should best be marked. Bill Peebles has kindly taken the lead and produced a number of interesting ideas. We plan that the main event will be a meet in or near Saas Fee, with (hopefully) a celebration at the Britannia Hut. We also hope to use the occasion to raise the club's profile and attract new members.

Finally I should like offer thanks to the surprisingly large number of people who have helped in the running of the club in different ways. In addition to the office holders we rely on volunteers for a range of other things, such as maintaining the website, organising the annual dinner, assisting with the running of the hut etc etc. We owe them all a big debt of gratitude.

## **Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club**

### **Annual General Meeting**

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 5.30 pm on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2007 in the Glenridding Hotel, Cumbria.

The President John Dempster was in the chair and 27 members were present.

#### **Apologies for absence:**

Apologies were received from Anne Jago, Dick Yorke, Mike Goodyer and David Harland.

#### **Minutes of the AGM held on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2006:**

The minutes were approved. Proposed by Alasdair Andrews and seconded by John Foster.

#### **Matters arising:**

There were none.

#### **General business:**

The Chairman intimated that Charles Clark, our Principal Speaker, had withdrawn at short notice because of family illness. He would have been speaking on our affiliation with the BMC. However, we had been very fortunate to get Bishop Ian Griggs a local member of the Patterdale Mountain Rescue who would talk on *mountain rescue*.

Charles Clark would have clarified the need for our affiliation to the BMC especially with regard to personal liability insurance. Questions had been raised regarding this issue and a suggestion had been made that we should get estimates for independent cover. An independent insurance agent confirmed that the BMC cover was much cheaper than any independent cover. Mike Pinney also confirmed that the BMC were the only people providing insurance cover for huts at a reasonable cost.

It was recommended and agreed that we would continue with the BMC.

#### **ABMSAC – The future – Rule changes:**

Following on from the discussions in 2006, concern was again expressed regarding club numbers and how to improve this worrying situation. From Ed Bramley's report of the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2007 the membership stands at 238 with an

average age of 64. Projections indicate that the membership will decrease and the average age will increase. The Chairman considers that this will be the biggest issue facing the club for a number of years.

One important issue facing the club is that concerning full membership and affiliate membership. At present, affiliate members comprise 62% of the club and full members 38%. The discussions during the 2006 AGM clearly indicated that there was general support for removing the distinction between affiliate membership and full membership. Considerable feeling was expressed that further discussion was required prior to any changes regarding the club name or association with the SAC.

Following on from the above, the Chairman had decided not to put forward any proposals for change at this time but instead tabled a **resolution** as follows:

*"This meeting invites the Committee to seek the views of the membership on whether the present two tier membership structure serves the best long term interests of the club, and to report back to the 2008 AGM with any resulting proposals for changes to the club rules."*

The Chairman then emphasised that no attempt was being made to weaken our links with the SAC but that we still had to face up to reality regarding club membership.

A wide ranging discussion then ensued. The fundamental difficulty centred round our relationship with the SAC and what, if anything, we obtain from membership of the SAC. A second area of worry was the effect of change on our proposed Centenary Celebrations.

There was a general feeling that we should take time to consider all the implications of change. Some members felt that any changes should be postponed until after the Centenary. A proposal was made that the Committee should report back in 2010.

The Chairman now closed the general discussion and proceeded to a vote on:

- a. Should the date on the resolution be changed from 2008 to 2010.  
A vote was taken and there were 10 for the change and 17 against the change.  
The reporting back remains at 2008 on the resolution.

- b. A vote was then taken on the resolution and this was carried by 20 for and 7 against.

The Committee will undertake the task and report back to the AGM in 2008.

#### **Election of officers and committee:**

The committee proposed Terry Shaw as Vice president in place of Bill Peebles whose term of office had expired. The committee also proposed Mike Pinney and Dick Yorke as committee members. These proposals were seconded by A Andrews and adopted.

The remaining office holders and committee had agreed to be reelected and were proposed by M Pinney and seconded by J Strachan.

J Baldwin proposed P McCulloch as Auditor and this was seconded by M Pinney. Peter McCulloch had agreed to stand as Auditor.

#### **Honorary Treasurer's Report and adoption of the accounts for the year to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2006:**

J Baldwin as Treasurer, presented the accounts which were in the main self-explanatory. Thanks were expressed to the members who had dealt with the library.

M Pinney proposed adoption of the accounts and this was seconded by M Strachan.

The accounts were duly adopted.

#### **Subscription rates:**

The subscription rates for 2008 were agreed as follows:

Single membership	£19 - £22
Joint membership	£30 - £34
Junior membership	£8 - £10

#### **President's report:**

This is reproduced below.

#### **Any other business:**

There was no further business and the Chairman closed the meeting.

W L Peebles  
Acting Secretary

**ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH MEMBERS  
OF THE  
SWISS ALPINE CLUB LTD**

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at the Glenridding Hotel, Ullswater, on Saturday March 3rd, 2007.

Present: Directors J.W.S.Dempster (Chairman), A.I.Andrews, J.A.Baldwin, D.Buckley (Treasurer), D.R.Hodge, W.L.Peebles, T.J.Shaw (Secretary), R.B.Winter and about 20 members.

**Apologies for absence.** G Davies.

**Minutes of Previous Meeting.** The minutes of the previous meeting, held on Saturday February 4th 2006 and which were circulated in the 2006 ABMSAC journal were approved on a resolution proposed by A.Andrews and seconded by J. Baldwin. There were no matters arising.

**Directors' Report and Accounts.** In explaining the accounts, the treasurer said turnover from the hut had increased from £10,290 in 2005 to £12,208 in the last financial year largely due to one whole week let to the East Devon Ramblers. Administrative expenses were down to £10,989 compared with £11,147 the previous year, giving an operating profit of £1,219 compared with loss of £857 in 2005. But he pointed out that rent increases arising from the hut rent reviews of October 2002 and October 2006 had still not been resolved and would be backdated. Income from the sale of some investments had been used to pay the remaining bills for the hut improvements and the balance paid into the company's deposit account. Mr Winter proposed and Mr Peebles seconded acceptance of the accounts that were approved without dissent.

**Rent reviews.** Referring to the outstanding rent reviews, the chairman said that after protracted negotiations with the PCC which was using its third set of agents, there was still a great difference between what the company had offered and what the PCC was demanding. Its demands would make it very difficult for the hut to be viable. At present, it looked as if the dispute was heading for arbitration.

**Reappointment of accountants.** As there were no other nominations, the accountants, Carpenter and Co, of Richmond, Surrey, were reappointed.

**Any other business.** There was none and the meeting closed shortly after 18.30.

T.J.Shaw,  
Hon. Secretary.

12.3.07