

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ALPINIST

*"For a vision of the Valais with the coming of July
For the Oberland or Valais and the higher purer air
And the true delight of living, as you taste it only there."*

A.D. Godley 1913.

Geoff's alpine career started in the summer of 1957 with the ascent of the Wilder Freiger in the Stubai Alps, Austria. His companion on that memorable occasion was the redoubtable, hail fellow well met, Pip Hopkinson. They subsequently had many adventures together on the high peaks both home and abroad. Unlike many climbers, Geoff never formed a closeknit regular partnership to achieve his alpine ambitions. He preferred to climb with his many friends as and when they were available.

His keenness to reach the summit of any peak knew no bounds, but was always tempered with the right amount of discretion. One July morning in 1961 we were climbing together along with Margaret Buckland and Doreen Hodge above the shoulder of the majestic Matterhorn, storm clouds appeared as if from nowhere and large snowflakes started to obliterate our steps. Although only four hundred feet from that much coveted rocky eminence, Geoff decided we must turn back. The memory of that desperate descent in tricky conditions lives with me still and I am always thankful that he made the right decision.

Every summer he visited the Alps and looked forward to it as a child looks forward to Christmas, even in a bad season he always seemed to come up with some good ascents. Whilst climbing these peaks Geoff shared countless hours of enjoyment and triumph with his many friends; a lifetime's memories for all who count themselves lucky to have been his friends.

PEAKS CLIMBED BY GEOFF ABROAD

			With
1957	Wilder Freiger	3418m	Pip Hopkinson
1960	Romsdalphorn	1555m	Eric Wallis
1961	Matterhorn	4477m	Margaret Buckland, Doreen Hodge,
1961	Piz Pahu	3905m	
1961	Piz Cambrena	3603m	Mike and Celia Berry
1962	Weissmies	4023m	Margaret Buckland, Doreen Hodge,
1962	Strahlhorn	4190m	
1962	Allalinhorn	4027m	Margaret Buckland Doreen Hodge

1963	Ortler		3905m	}		
1963	Königspitze		3856m			
1963	Butzenspitze		3302m			Anne Hayes
1963	Madritschspitze		3265m			Colin Hobday
1963	Suldenspitze		3376m			Uschi Hobday
1963	Schrotterhorn		3363m			
1963	Cevedale		3778m	}		
1965	Zsigmondyspitze		3087m			Bill Kirk
1965	Hornspitze		3253m		Mike Berry	
1965	Olperer		3476m		Anne Hayes	
1966	Piz Roseg		3943m		Lloyd Caris	
					Gordon Gadsby,	
					George Reynolds	
					Mick Stone	
1966	Piz Bernina		4049m		Bill Kirk	
					Dave Williams	
1966	Il Chaputschin		3386m	}	Gordon Gadsby	
						Bill Kirk
1966	La Muongia		3415m		John Welbourn	
1966	Piz Morteratsch		3754m		Bill Kirk	
					Mick Stone	
1967	Mont Blanc		4810m	}		
1967	Grande Jorasses		4206m			Lloyd Caris
1968	Mönch		4099m			John Crosse
1968	Strahlegghorn		3462m		Howard Johnson	
					Mike Berry, John Crosse,	
					Rosie Grayson,	
					Wendy Bottomley	
					Tom Green	
1969	Weisshorn		4505m			
1969	Fletschhorn		3996m	}		
	Lagginhorn	Traverse	4010m			Howard Johnson
1969	Rimpfischhorn		4198m			
1969	Mittaghorn		3143m		Anne Hayes	
					Janet Ashcroft	
					Jack Ashcroft	
1969	Ulrichshorn		3935m	}		
	Nadelhorn	Traverse	4327m			
1970	Chardonnet					Howard Johnson
	Forbes Arête	Traverse	3751m			
	Les Courtes					
1971	Zinal Rothorn		4221m	}		
1971	Obergabelhorn		4062m			
	Wellenkuppe	Traverse	3903m			
	Mont Durand		3713m			Pete Badcock

1971	Lenzspitze		4294m	}	Pete Badcock
	Nadelhorn		4327m		
	Stecknadelhorn	Traverse	4242m		
	Hohberghorn		4219m		
1971	Alphubel		4206m		Jack Ashcroft Pete Badcock Gordon Gadsby

Geoff's First Alpine Holiday

Pip Hopkinson

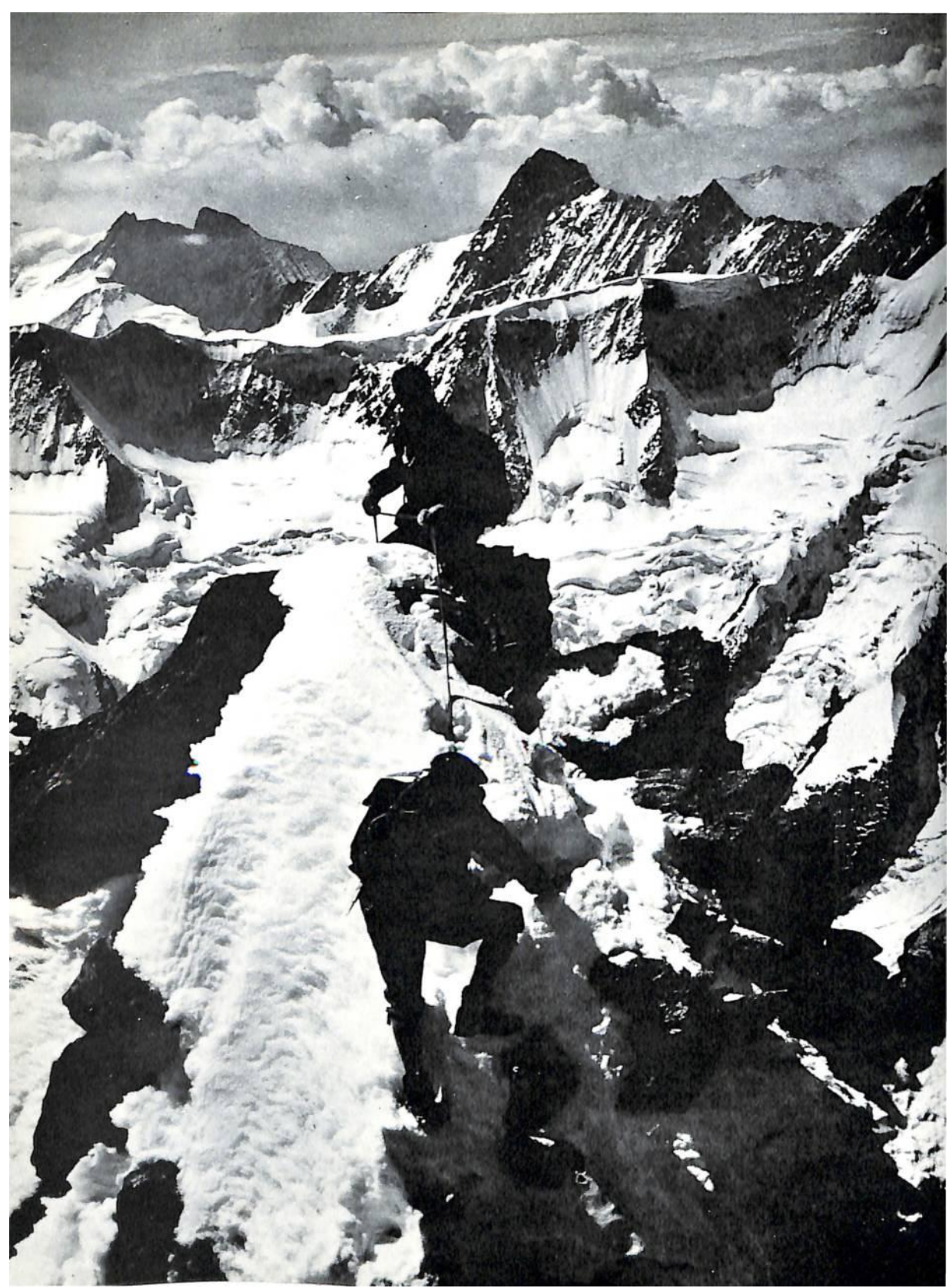
Like most young climbers Geoff and I wanted to climb in the Alps. Austria seemed a good place, the climbs were not too hard and access was easy. Geoff had made all the arrangements. Ten of us, six boys and four girls, were to travel out from Nottingham. We were to take a train to Paris and hitchhike from Paris to Innsbruck in pairs and meet in Innsbruck. We reached Paris at six in the morning and breakfasted on coffee and rolls, the more worldly of the party took wine with their breakfast.

On the second day Pauline (the girl I was hitchhiking with) and I met Geoff and Jacqui outside Basel and got on the back of a lorry with them. That night the four of us slept in a field in Lichtenstein and were woken by the noise of cowbells all around us. We reached Innsbruck that afternoon.

The following day we spent in Innsbruck buying crampons and trying to get an ice axe for Geoff. The rest of our party had still not arrived and eventually a shopkeeper told us we would have to go to Fulpmes to the Stubai Factory for the ice axe. We set off next morning to go to Fulpmes to buy Geoff an ice axe. In the Stubai works a gnarled old man made it specially for him, the prices we noticed were no cheaper than those in Innsbruck. From Fulpmes we went by bus and jeep to Ranalt where we had a meal before walking up to the Nuremberger Hut.

The walk to the Hut was short (about 2½ hours) and like most hut walks in the Eastern Alps started off in pinewoods and finished on high pasture land. The hut was full and noisy. We wanted to wake up early in the morning and our idea of an alpine start was 1.00 or 2.00 a.m., whilst the hut guardians was 4.00 or 5.00 a.m. We compromised, and by 3.00 a.m. were stumbling around making so much noise that we woke up the hut and the hut guardian. We may have been able to get up but we didn't know that in the Alps you pack the night before. It took us a further one and a half hours to get out.

The ordinary route to the top of the Wilder Freiger is described in Walter Pause's "100 Best Walks in the Alps*." It is a walk assisted by wire railings at the first sign of any difficulty. We had no guide book and no idea of the route. Consequently we didn't follow the path and our route took us instead up the East Wilder Freiger glacier up a rock ridge leading to the summit; far better than following an iron rail. We reached the summit at 10.30 a.m. and glissaded down towards the Mueller Hut (Refugio Cima Liberre). We had always understood



from the copious illustrations in climbing books that glissading was a very important part of alpine technique. The Austrians were amused by our technique and general appearance. We had been fitted out by Millets, Tailors of quality, and having no “labiosan” had followed Kirkus’s dictum and used lipstick instead. At the Refugio Cima Liberre a kindly Austrian bought the two ‘Elegant Englishers’ lunch and we sat and slept on the terrace that afternoon. I remember watching a young Austrian girl go through the agonies of snow blindness.

We stayed in the Liberre Hut overnight and the following day wanted to climb another peak and traversing from there to the Wilderspitze. People in the Hut said that the traverse was not often done because the rock was rotten. However this did not put us off. We left the Hut at 5.00 a.m. and were on the summit by 7.00 a.m., an easy climb. We continued our traverse down on the rotten rock by going down a gully. Geoff proposed a glissade, shot off on the ice and stopped after 30’. It was a very long way to the glacier over broken ground and he was lucky not to have come to any harm. We regained the ridge, large boulders falling off as we passed them. When we reached the col between the two peaks we abandoned the traverse and with our tail between our legs went back to the Liberre Hut and then to Innsbruck where we spent several frustrating days waiting for the rest of our party.

The Matterhorn 1961

Margaret Buckland

It was almost a shame to leave the idyllic campsite at Winkelmaten even if it were to set out for the Hornli Hut. A group of old chalets, the tents nestling between them, the rich green of the valley, the deeper green of the fir trees, the Matterhorn itself, unbelievably lofty, dominating them all. What more could anyone want in an Alpine campsite? Doreen had obtained it for us by negotiating with the chalet owner in French, translated by the woman’s husband into German, the result being that we could pitch our tents on the grass directly in front of one of the small chalets used as bams. The surrounding land however belonged to other chalets and we had not to let our guy lines or any equipment stray on to someone else’s grass. There were no fences; they just ‘knew’ where their boundaries were. Camping in true ‘Oread’ style it was not long before our clutter got rather widely spread and a certain harassed lady appeared from time to time with waving arms to remind us where her boundaries were.

To anyone, like myself, who had never been to the Zermatt Valley before, the whole approach to the place was just as unreal as the campsite. First there had been the ride on the old Zermatt Valley railway, ‘civilisation’ left behind with the horse-drawn carriage, our rucksacks and tents piled up in the middle and we four sitting genteelly with our hands resting on our ice axes and nodding to and fro like royalty for the benefit of tourists with cine cameras who had never seen anything quite like it before.



The lure of Winkelmatten was threefold. The campsite in Zermatt had looked crowded; we didn't like big campsites anyway, and of course you could not see the Matterhorn from there so it had been out of the question. So there we were, Geoff, Gordon, Doreen and I, the 'B' team setting out for the Hornli Hut. The others, Roger and Beryl Turner, Eric Wallis and Wally Smith, we had called the 'A' team because they had gone to look at the much harder route from the Zmutt Glacier.

The path down to and over the little bridge at the head of the valley was extremely picturesque. We were glad when the uphill path began to wind up through the fir trees as the sky was cloudless and the afternoon hot. Higher up little gaps in the trees afforded lovely views across the Gorner Glacier and towards Monte Rosa. Photography provided a good excuse to stop for a breather.

At Schwarzsee, with a soaking blouse sticking to my back under the rucksack, I looked enviously at the tourists stepping out cool and fresh from the chair lift. But still, that was the furthest they would go. We had come to climb the mountain and were supposed to be getting used to the altitude gradually. Geoff said we would get headaches if we came up fast on that thing and then started climbing. Too bad I had a headache and anyway Geoff was always a 'purist'.

I was most disappointed in the Hornli Hut when we finally reached it. The Britannia Hut which we had been to the week before was solid stone, with its gay shuttered windows overlooking the glacier; the Weissmies Hut was perched on the moraine — cosy little rooms, matratzen lagers and newly varnished wood. All the other mountain huts on Swiss calendars came into mind, and the Matterhorn, surely the most romantic, most photographed peak of them all deserved a better hut, I thought.

Inside it was packed; no hope of a mattress. We would have done better to have set out at the crack of dawn, claimed a bed and stayed on it for the afternoon! There was a minor uproar when Doreen asked the warden if we could sleep on the floor. We could not understand at first what was so ridiculous about it, but it appeared that Doreen's French had for once failed her and she had actually asked if we could sleep on the ceiling. We did manage to coax a blanket or two from the warden and the remark "What did you have to do to get those?" was heard. One character had stretched himself out on a table and was determined to keep his claim on his sleeping quarters despite the spreading of bread and jam, and the chattering and chewing that was going on all round him. More people arrived. Some had just climbed the mountain by one of the other ridges and were descending rather late. A few more like us, poked expectant faces round the door and then resigned themselves to the floor. I am convinced there is nothing more uncomfortable than concrete on which to spend the night. Rocks and stones have bumps and hollows in which to wriggle and change position from time to time, but concrete is the same however many times you shift round on it. We spent the next few hours half propped up against the wall trying to doze but without much success, until it was time to set out.

We had gone to have a quick look at the start of the climb before settling down in the hut, and having found black ice on some northfacing ledges, and rather a

lot of loose rock, we decided it was best to wait for a bit of light before setting off. However, many of the guided parties got away ahead of us so we hurried to catch them up.

Almost immediately we were confronted by an overhanging sheer wall. It was most demoralising to realise that we were off route so soon. Peering round in the semi-darkness we heard voices not far away and traced them to a gully the bottom of which we had passed while traversing what had seemed to be a reasonable ledge. So we set off on the right route this time. At first it was reasonable. Just scrambling with patches of loose rock to keep your eye on and a solid pitch here and there. Nothing remarkable, nothing technically difficult, just a steep shattered ridge going up and up and up.

After 11 years I can picture just a few situations on the climb as though I were still on them, though as to whereabouts on the ridge, or in what sequence of events I have no idea. About the rest I am extremely vague. Possibly I was almost completely preoccupied with gasping for breath and keeping the pace. Coming down I was just plain terrified. There is nothing technically difficult on the Hornli; in fact it was a relief to find a rock pitch to climb neatly, as a change from sheer slog and the worry of loose rock. On one of these pitches I was just beginning to enjoy myself when a guide went flashing past, tore off Geoff's belay, and embarked on a tirade about "you English and your belays". Geoff answered back with language I never heard him use either before or after. Another guide literally shoving me from below, insisted that "English lady would climb like fairy. I felt more like a sack of coal. On this mountain where the summit is such a long way from the hut, one has to keep going at a rather faster rate than the 'Alpine Pace' we had found so reasonable on other mountains. There is no time for belays even on the odd rock pitch where it seemed reasonable to use one. The guides seemed to regard it as their mountain and resented anyone not as efficient as themselves getting in the way. I suppose it was inevitable when they climbed the mountain so often and earned their living on it. Further on we spoke to an old guide who was making his 300th ascent. Obviously he did not share my growing distaste for the mountain. The trouble was I climbed for pleasure and hated having to climb in this fast moving queue. It made me feel far more unfit than I really was. I thought of sunny days, of beautiful routes on Gimmer and Pillar, with all the time to stand and stare, and wondered what on earth I was doing here.

We met Gordon Mansell from Whitehall, with his wife, and Harold Drasdo making their second ascent. Gordon said there was far more snow than usual this year and in very bad condition and we started to notice the poor snow now we were higher up and nearing the Solvay Hut. Doreen went a little to one side saying she was on a better route on firmer snow. Putting her hand out for a hold over a ledge she found to her disgust that she had discovered the Solvay Hut bog!

It pays to stay on route in such places

Above the Solvay, which is really only an emergency shelter, we kept going steadily, crossing couloirs and ribs of rock until we reached the snowfield above the shoulder before the last 400' to the summit. At this point after all the effort of getting this far we were forced to stop. The summit block previously hidden by the angle of the ridge was now fast becoming hidden by cloud and flurries of snow

which seemed to have blown up from nowhere. The weather began to look very rough up there and it was not long before stones started clattering down the mountain side all around us. We did not have to wonder for long at the sudden onslaught, it soon became obvious that everyone higher up was turning back, whether they had reached the top or not. Guides with their clients on the ends of very short ropes, reminiscent of dog leads, were making their way down again. Stones kept on flying in all directions. I suppose it is unavoidable when so many people are on a ridge which has so much loose rock on it. Geoff and Gordon vowed that if they ever climbed the ridge again it would have to be on a Sunday when the guided parties were not out.

We waited while the majority of them got past before deciding our skulls were reasonably safe from further bombardment, and set off ourselves. As far as I was concerned going down was just a nightmare. The snow couloirs, which we had hardly noticed on the way up suddenly became death traps. The soft snow constantly gave way beneath the feet, below which there was nothing but more snow sweeping down at an alarming angle for several thousand feet. Facing the mountain going up, one had not really been aware of this. Between each couloir on the rock ribs loose rock suddenly seemed incredibly solid after the snow, until you put your foot on some that wasn't!

On the snow I seemed to be going slower and slower and the tension was giving me cramp in the muscles above the knees. The whole of my thighs seemed to be knotting up and I didn't seem able to do anything about it. On one snow pitch I felt the rope tighten and a very quiet voice behind me said, "It's all right Mags, keep going, I've got you." Knowing that the belay he had got wouldn't hold a fly, I realised this was just moral support. I also knew that usually when I made a fool of myself on easy scrambles, I didn't get quiet encouragement, I got shouted at in no uncertain terms. This time, Geoff was obviously well aware of the dangers and was feeling fairly tense himself.

Below the Solvay Hut there was less snow and only the loose rock to worry about, but my cramp was no better and I was feeling far from happy. This mountain was beyond me I was thinking, I had no right to be here if I couldn't do better than this. Then Doreen turned round and said that if we got back to the campsite and found the van and tents gone, it wouldn't matter all that much would it? Not compared with being alive and altogether. Being in this sort of situation certainly puts possessions into perspective. Doreen, usually so much more confident than me on this sort of climb, had obviously been finding the going rather frightening too, so I felt much better after that.

When we arrived back at the Hornli Hut we went in for a very welcome mug of tea and soup. It was not until trying to stagger out of the Hut after half an hour, and failing miserably that I realised I should probably not have sat down at all. My legs had completely stiffened up and every step was absolute agony. The others couldn't help laughing at my efforts to stagger down the track and assured me that the stiffness wears off after a while. However, it did not wear off. It took about four hours to get back to the campsite where I was subjected to a pummelling with olive oil. We all decided that being able to clean your teeth was a real luxury.

The storm which had blown up over the Matterhorn disappeared as fast as it had come, and the next day was fine and hot. We sat outside the tents and sunbathed and I sketched the mountain which had so narrowly defeated us. The only consolation was the fact that the Zmutt Ridge team had got no further than the glacier, having seen the storm brewing round the back of the mountain.

In the afternoon we paid a visit to the Zermatt Cemetery where it seemed that half of all the mountain casualties in the area had been on the Matterhorn, and practically all of those had been while descending. We were not in the least surprised. It had been an experience not to be missed, but as far as I was concerned, not to be repeated.

The Ortler

Colin Hobday

It must have been late in March 1963 when I put forward the suggestion to Geoff about an Alpine holiday. "How about the Ortler Alps in Northern Italy?" questioned Geoff and I replied "Yes, a good idea," not really knowing where they were or very much about the peaks themselves. However guide books and maps were purchased and a plan of action drawn up. The middle of July saw me in Beeston picking up Geoff, who appeared as usual with his weekend rucksack and so off we went to Dover to spend the night in a 'bivvy' in the grounds of Dover Castle, much to the annoyance of the park keeper.

We picked Anne up in Aachen and Uschi in Munich and then pushed on to the Alps. It was wonderful driving to Garmish looking at the Zugspitze and the massive rock faces of the Wetterstein. We crossed the border and let the car struggle up the Fernpass, rather slowly due to lots of lorries. On we went via Innsbruck into Italy to the beautiful little town of Meran, where we treated ourselves to our First delicious Italian ice cream which in no time at all was melting down our fingers. It did not take us long to get to the small village of Sulden, where the last rays of the setting sun were just catching the peaks and turning them fire-red. Only in the village did we at last glimpse the Ortler, a magnificent mountain.

We camped amongst the pine trees and the next day set off up the valley under cloudless skies for the Mailander Hut. We could leave our tents in the campsites in those days for long periods without fear of having anything stolen. Once up at the hut we settled for a 'Erbsensuppe mit Wurstl' (pea soup and sausage), but soon we were outside again exploring the surrounding minor peaks. It was great to be walking without rucksacks for a change.

Within an hour we had reached the Butzen Spitze (3302m) and the Madritsch Spitze, both climbed solo with ease. The views from the top were magnificent and we were able to plan our route for the next day to the Casati hut. We were away by 5.00 a.m. after a quick breakfast (cheese sandwich and coffee) and by 6.00 in the first light of the morning we were on our way up the moraine to the Sulden ferner.

At the start of the glacier, ropes were uncoiled, crampons fitted to the boots and ice axes got ready. Geoff took the lead with the two girls tied on in the centre



and myself at the back. A steady pace developed as we slowly climbed up the glacier which was not in a very good condition. Large numbers of crevasses were visible and later on in the morning Geoff disappeared down one of them, luckily held fast by his sack. We soon rescued him, however, and carried on even more carefully than before, brushing up our rope handling techniques on the way. The slope was fairly steady but steepened as we came to the Eisse-Pass on the ridge at 3141m where we were now as high as our peaks of the previous day. A quick snack on the col before going up the upper snow field, passing the old burnt down Casati hut and up to the new Casati hut which is perched on the ridge at 3267m. It brought us our first surprise and disappointment for instead of it being a small mountain hut it was a big summer ski centre full of dolly birds. We also found out that there was an easy way up there from a different valley, using a landrover for most of the way and for the rest a luggage transport lift brought up all the suitcases and skis for the visitors.

In the afternoon, having gathered some new energy from a lunchtime bottle of Chianti, we set off to do two small peaks behind the hut. They were called the Suldenspitze (3376m) and the Schrotterhorn (3363m) and climbing these involved a traverse along a pleasant snow ridge. We had just reached this point on the ascent when we had to retreat in a great hurry as a thunderstorm was brewing up. No sooner had we reached the hut than the heavens opened and we were pleased to be safely inside.

Our hopes for good weather were realised the next morning. We were the first ready at about 4.30 a.m. and we left for the Konigspitze (3856m) in the dark, stumbling over almost every stone. The first part of the route involves a descent of approximately 300m onto the Gran Zebur Glacier, through loose boulders and screes. Upon reaching the glacier we got ready for the crossing in snow which was still quite firm from the overnight frost. Geoff led as usual developing a good alpine pace. The glacier rose before us as a 25-30° slope then formed into a couloir which steepened in the upper quarter to about 50°. As we progressed we kept a lookout for falling stones, which occasionally hurtled past. This couloir brought us to the ridge of the Konigspitze. With crampons we all climbed together, the snow being in perfect condition as the sun had not yet reached us. Towards the top where it steepened considerably I belayed Geoff, while he made his way up onto the ridge. Anne and Uschi followed quickly and finally we all were on the ridge in the warm sunshine, the time being 7.00 a.m. Down below the Casati Hut was still asleep and in shadow, while further on, the summit of the Cevedale was catching the first sun. To our left the ridge swooped up to a snowface which led onto the Konigspitze. It seemed a good place to stop for a second breakfast, which comprised ice cold tea, diluted with snow and lemonade powder, chocolate, nuts and raisins. In spite of the sun, it was still rather chilly and it didn't do good to linger about longer than necessary. A quick application of glacier cream which turned us a ghastly white, and we were ready for the summit. Soon after leaving the resting place we left the ridge and traversed out onto the snow face. The slope was about 50° but with our crampons we made good progress although we had to be careful as the face was quite exposed, the snow sweeping away for 300m below. Everyone was climbing well. Near the

summit a traverse to the right was forced upon us by an outcrop of rocks. After this we made a big traverse round the summit cornice, and finally we reached the summit. Lots of photographs were taken of the magnificent views all round while Anne and Uschi made sardine “butties” to an old recipe invented by Geoff. The descent presented no problems, the only trouble was passing all the parties coming up.

Back in the valley it was good to have a wash and clean up and Uschi and Anne produced a delicious meal in the evening. We were even too tired to go out for a drink. The following day we decided that we had deserved a rest day and it was spent sunbathing and planning the rest of our holiday. It was then that Geoff made the decision of his life, whether it was the hot weather; the success of the peaks; the good meal Anne had cooked, or just the love of his life, but that day he proposed to Anne, and Anne of course said yes without any delay. In the evening we just had to go out for a big meal and celebration befitting the occasion.

As our final objective we wanted to climb the Ortler (3905m). The following day, feeling fresh and fit again we set off for the Payer Hut. On the way we reached the Tarbaretta Hut where we stopped for lunch. It was boiling hot again, and from here we got the first real glimpse of the Hut perched, airily on a rock ridge, but we didn't realise then how long it would take us to reach that point. A steep scree followed and the path zig-zagging round outcrops of rocks, eventually brought us out onto the ridge giving us a good view of the Ortler. When we reached the Payer Hut we found it delightfully tourist free with a young handsome warden and two pretty young girls as his assistants. Even though it was a weekend, the hut was fairly empty.

As Geoff was suffering from a stomach upset the next day, we stayed at the hut. On the following morning Uschi and I got up early, took a look at the weather and at Geoff, who was still fast asleep, and decided to leave him in the good hands of Anne at the hut. No sooner had we got dressed, however, than Geoff seemed to sense something was happening without him. He woke up, asked where we were going and in spite of protests was up like a flash, feeling fit and raring to go. He insisted on coming so the three of us set off for the Ortler, approaching the steep snowfield with great care, where the previous day a guided party had fallen off, luckily with no injury. We had no difficulties, much to our relief. Crossing further patches of snow and broken rock, we reached an 80m rock face which provided us with some delightful rock climbing. Once we were on the top of the rock buttress the route led us into the upper ice fall, this section proving to be the most serious part of the climb. We wound our way through gigantic blocks of ice, crossing snow bridges and crevasses with Geoff leading, showing no signs of any weakness whilst I acted as rear guard.

Once out of the ice fall the angle of snow eased, and a plod up the ridge brought us onto the summit, the highest peak in the area with views towards the Engadine in Switzerland and the Dolomites. Our ascent of the Ortler ended a perfect holiday with good climbing and good weather in one of the less frequented areas of the Alps.

It was mid-summer 1960, Geoff and I were in our second week of climbing in Norway, having climbed Vergatind, Romsdalthorn and another lesser peak. Our guide book description went on "...steep and narrow and sometimes impossible owing to the recession of the glacier."

The route we had chosen was an ice gully on the north side of the Store Trolltind. The approach walk had been tiring with the lower slopes covered in stunted silver birch trees, so typical of the area around Andalsnes, and we now found ourselves at the apex of an avalanche funnel leading up into the twisting gully. The route, as far as we could see, did not look too difficult and despite the threat of a break in the weather — for the past two days we had experienced morning cloud and thunder but it had not come to anything — we set off up the initial one hundred foot high rocky section giving access to the main gully. Why we had not brought our crampons I shall never know, and instead of the crisp snow we expected, we found only hard ice with a fragile masking of snow. The 45° slope seemed terribly steep without crampons and I worked diagonally rightwards to the edge of the ice in order to find a rock belay, since we were also lacking in ice pegs! The rock provided a couple of reasonable belays and Geoff soon joined me. He led through up the bed of the gully at a slightly greater angle — or it just seemed steeper now that we were over the precipice — and now that we were committed we pressed on for several rope lengths, accompanied by occasional rumbles of thunder.

Our main fear was that of being knocked from our precarious stances by the occasional stones sliding down the chute, and so with a sense of urgency we worked up the left hand side of the ice which, although steeper, offered a safer route. I came up to Geoff, passed him a little, stopped and momentarily glanced at the 'belay' — a sling over a rounded knob of ice — and then back down to Geoff. Each of us knew the thoughts racing through the other's mind and we realised our lives were now entirely dependent on each other. There would be no saving us if either had slipped since we would whistle out over the 100' drop at the bottom. I pressed on precariously and after a while the angle eased and we came out onto sound rock. With a sigh of relief we had a brief halt and considered the weather which had by now deteriorated with the addition of lightning — in fact the storm was directly overhead — and we had given up all thoughts of reaching the summit. Our only escape route lay along a rock ridge and I was all in favour of leaving our axes and ironmongery for fear of being struck by lightning. For some reason we didn't and we hurried along the ridge, luckily not difficult, and soon, with one short abseil we were off the storm's playground and back amongst friendly surroundings. We could relax and sit down. I think we were both glad to be still alive and I for one had been quite prepared to sacrifice all my gear providing we reached safety. The thunder had disappeared and was replaced by heavy rain, though we were sodden we were completely happy, safe in the knowledge, not that we had beaten the mountain, but that we had been allowed to escape.



A Connoisseur's Climb

Gordon Gadsby

A cold wind rustled our anoraks as we cramponned steadily across the upper neves of the Tschierva glacier. Dawn was still far off, but the twinkling lights of a myriad stars filled the heavens and tried in vain to light this vast amphitheatre beneath the Bernina Alps.

There were four of us on the rope, Geoff Hayes, with whom I had climbed many Alpine Peaks, was in the lead; next came Mick Stone, a Sutton in Ashfield man, this was to be his first alpine peak; George Reynolds, a tough Nottingham bricklayer was third; and myself last. We had chosen as our objective the North Ridge (Eselsgrat) of the Piz Roseg, described in the Swiss guidebook as the classic route on the mountain, aesthetically fine and commanding splendid scenery, one of the best climbs of its class in the Alps. A connoisseur's ice climb PD Sup./AD*. Geoff and I had long nursed an ambition to achieve this fine peak.

The ice crackled beneath our crampons as we ascended towards a rock buttress in the centre of the glacial flow, Geoff's head torch lighting the way in a series of rhythmic flashes across the ice. Suddenly on our left we heard a call, "What about a water bottle Biddle," it was Derrick Burgess and Ray Handley with the Oread call sign. Even as we watched they swung away from us and set a course towards the great ice buttress of the Piz Scerscen (The Scerscen Nose) one of the hardest ice climbs in the Alps. We wished them well and under my breath I said, "Rather them than me." Geoff then led us in a great arc across the glacier keeping abreast of the crevasses, and within the hour we came beneath the towering North Face of the Roseg.

We looked upwards in awe as tier upon tier of cold blue ice cliffs swept our gaze towards the summit snows. The sky above our peak was already a delicate shade of pink with a few streamers of reddish cloud stretched across the eastern horizon. On our right the North Ridge with its jagged buttress of dark rock curved up to meet the lower summit. In this direction was the first real obstacle of the day, a steep slope of snow ice, capped by a fearsome looking bergschrund, our gateway to the Eselsgrat. Fifteen minutes careful cramponning found us at the lower lip of the schrund. Whilst we belayed, Geoff lowered himself into the crevasse, balanced across a snow bridge and with some well aimed blows with his axe fashioned some good holds on the far wall. A terse, "Have you got me?" and he delicately climbed the impasse to emerge grinning on the upper lip, his short beard covered in ice crystals, his eyes sparkling with the fun of it.

With some difficulty we joined him on the stance and then together we moved up broken rocks to an ample space beneath the 700' buttress of the North Ridge proper, the 'breakfast place.' The time was 5.00 a.m. Within minutes we were joined by three more members of the Oread, an excited, gaunt looking Jack

◆Alpine grading of climb, equivalent to "fair amount of difficult climbing requiring experience."

Ashcroft, an equally ebullient Dave Williams and the Joker in the pack, Pete Janes. A friendly guide and his girl client came next and already our seemingly roomy resting place was crowded. Geoff, between munching his Mars bar, pointed upwards and said, "How about it then Dave?" Halting in the midst of biting a hugh topiato, Williams glanced up at the impressive sweeps of the dark red granite slabs, "Looks bloody desperate," he said and meant it.

A sharp crack, like a pistol shot from far across the glacier took our attention, seconds later came the deep rumble of an avalanche followed by an eerie silence as a cloud of powder snow rose from the glacier below the Scerscen Nase. "God, I hope it missed them," said Janes. We all said a silent prayer for Ray and Derrick whom we knew would be somewhere near the area swept by the avalanche (we heard later that the fall passed about 50' to the right of them as they prepared to tackle the ice nose).

Geoff was by now on his feet and in characteristic fashion urging us to do likewise. "Let's get on the rock before there's a queue," he said. George, Mick and I quickly packed our rucksacks and together with Geoff moved to the foot of a steep chimney, which looked an obvious start to the climb. The chimney was easy at first but with an awkward bulge about 30' up. Mick belayed on a good granite spike and Geoff climbed the fissure with comparative ease. "Great big jygs" he cried and within twenty minutes we were all esconced on a large rock platform about 100' above the breakfast place.

The next six hundred feet of rock climbing were the most delectable I've ever known, rough red granite at a steep angle, several exposed traverses to the left on wonderful holds and none of it harder than grade II Sup. We were able to move together, using the rope over a rock bollard here and there as a safety precaution. The sun had already warmed the rocks and this made an extra pleasure. We emerged one by one onto a small snow col high on the ridge. Ahead of us the ridge was impassable due to overhanging rock so we followed a short line of steps cut in the snow which led down on the east side, and then traversed across below the overhanging gendarme to reach a great slab of smooth looking granite, the crux of the climb.

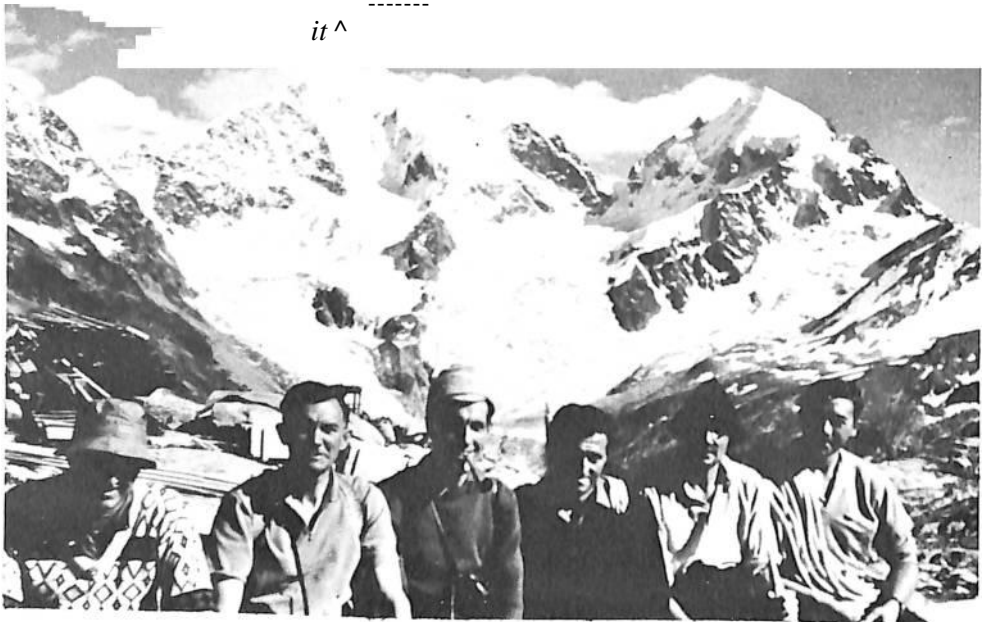
Mick belayed whilst Geoff carefully balanced across the slab on small holds. He was able to fix a protective runner about halfway across on a rusty ring-type piton that had been there some years. The traverse was very exposed and the view beneath one's feet of the abyss sweeping down the Italian side of the mountain was very impressive. None of us had any real difficulty crossing the slab although none of us managed it as easily as Geoff had done. "Your turn for the sharp end, Gordon," said Geoff as he adjusted his stance and belay, and I was soon at grips with a steep little snow couloir reminiscent of many winter climbs in Scotland.

The couloir opened out onto a broad ridge after a hundred feet and this in turn to a great wide snow slope leading up to a symmetrical summit set against an azure sky. As we plodded up the snow we were at around the 12,000' mark, the sun was already blazing down, although it was only 7.00 a.m. After about fifteen minutes the snow slope became very icy so we replaced our crampons which we had removed for the rock climbing. With a firm grip on the snow-ice a lot of the effort was taken out of the climb and at 7.30 a.m. we reached the superb North



North Ridge of Piz Roseg, Bernina Alps. Climbers on the West Summit 3930m. (From Left) Geoff Hayes, Mick Stone and George Reynolds.

Photo — Gordon Gadsby



Bernina Group — Piz Bernina, Piz Scerscen and Piz Roseg. Oread Alpinists — From Left — Bill Kirk, Dave Williams, John Welbourn, Gordon Gadsby, Geoff Hayes and Mick Stone.

Photo — Geoff Hayes

West snow summit of the Piz Roseg at 3,930 metres and named Schneekuppe on the carte national.

The panorama, one of the finest I have ever seen, was breathtaking. "Why do men climb?", that often asked question would never be made if the questioners could see what we could see. The multitude of peaks around us were dominated on the North side by the monarch of the Bernina Alps, the Piz Bernina 4049 metres, and on the South by the magnificent Monte-Della-Disgrazia 3678 metres rising from a sea of cloud above the Italian valleys away to our right.

The Tschierva Hut from where we had started the climb at 2.00 a.m. was clearly seen on the edge of the glacial moraine thousands of feet below us. A cry of astonishment from Geoff made us turn and follow his gaze. There ahead of us was the sharpest snow arete any of us had ever seen. I gulped as I realised that this was the way we had to go, a real razor's edge of a ridge so narrow in places that it was pierced by holes where the weather had worn through the icy veneer. The ridge plunged down steeply beneath our feet and then reared up again twice more before culminating in a final steep rocky arete to the highest point of the Piz Roseg, a real dragon's back with several huge cornices overhanging the Italian side of the mountain. I set off tentatively at first and then with renewed confidence as my crampons bit firmly into the good snow ice. Now and again my ice axe would burst through and protrude on the other side* but by keeping down on the north side it was possible to counteract this and we made good progress along the ridge.

The sense of exposure was fantastic, the whole North Face was visible beneath our feet and such was the seriousness of the traverse that we hardly spoke a word for three quarters of an hour, a slip here would have been fatal. (In the Swiss Alpine Club Guidebook it warns that the ridge is dangerous in high wind or stormy conditions).

A final steep arete to the slender snow cone of the South East summit provided delicate and interesting climbing on rock and snow, until at 9.05 a.m. on 31st July 1966 we emerged delighted and triumphant onto the summit snows at an altitude of 3937m (12,934') — A Connoisseur's Climb indeed!

Bill Kirk

St. Moritz 1966

Arrangements for the holidays had been made on one of the Oread Meets I had in the year and on a Friday evening in the summer Mick Stone and I met at Geoff's house loaded with gear for a two week holiday in the Alps. Loading was done quickly and Geoff said goodbye to Anne and the three of us set off for Davos. Once there all the equipment had to be repacked into what now seemed to be an even smaller Volkswagen Beetle. The main trouble was that the fourth member of our team, Dave Williams (Digger) seemed to have brought everything including the kitchen sink, but Geoff was an expert and soon had his car loaded and we set off for the Alps. Geoff had us singing almost at once and this was to continue for the rest of the journey.

lot of loose rock, we decided it was best to wait for a bit of light before setting off. However, many of the guided parties got away ahead of us so we hurried to catch them up.

Almost immediately we were confronted by an overhanging sheer wall. It was most demoralising to realise that we were off route so soon. Peering round in the semi-darkness we heard voices not far away and traced them to a gully the bottom of which we had passed while traversing what had seemed to be a reasonable ledge. So we set off on the right route this time. At first it was reasonable. Just scrambling with patches of loose rock to keep your eye on and a solid pitch here and there. Nothing remarkable, nothing technically difficult, just ^a steep shattered ridge going up and up and up.

After 11 years I can picture just a few situations on the climb as though I were still on them, though as to whereabouts on the ridge, or in what sequence of events I have no idea. About the rest I am extremely vague. Possibly I was almost completely preoccupied with gasping for breath and keeping the pace. Coming down I was just plain terrified. There is nothing technically difficult on the Hornli; in fact it was a relief to find a rock pitch to climb neatly, as a change from sheer slog and the worry of loose rock. On one of these pitches I was just beginning to enjoy myself when a guide went flashing past, tore off Geoff's belay, and embarked on a tirade about "you English and your belays". Geoff answered back with language I never heard him use either before or after. Another guide literally shoving me from below, insisted that "English lady would climb like fairy. I felt more like a sack of coal. On this mountain where the summit is such a long way from the hut, one has to keep going at a rather faster rate than the 'Alpine Pace' we had found so reasonable on other mountains. There is no time for belays even on the odd rock pitch where it seemed reasonable to use one. The guides seemed to regard it as their mountain and resented anyone not as efficient as themselves getting in the way. I suppose it was inevitable when they climbed the mountain so often and earned their living on it. Further on we spoke to an old guide who was making his 300th ascent. Obviously he did not share my growing distaste for the mountain. The trouble was I climbed for pleasure and hated having to climb in this fast moving queue. It made me feel far more unfit than I really was. I thought of sunny days, of beautiful routes on Gimmer and Pillar, with all the time to stand and stare, and wondered what on earth I was doing here.

We met Gordon Mansell from Whitehall, with his wife, and Harold Drasdo making their second ascent. Gordon said there was far more snow than usual this year and in very bad condition and we started to notice the poor snow now we were higher up and nearing the Solvay Hut. Doreen went a little to one side saying she was on a better route on firmer snow. Putting her hand out for a hold over a ledge she found to her disgust that she had discovered the Solvay Hut bog!

It pays to stay on route in such places

Above the Solvay, which is really only an emergency shelter, we kept going steadily, crossing couloirs and ribs of rock until we reached the snowfield above the shoulder before the last 400' to the summit. At this point after all the effort of getting this far we were forced to stop. The summit block previously hidden by the angle of the ridge was now fast becoming hidden by cloud and flurries of snow

Geoff gave him a few wise words on climbing alone and we set off down into the valley.

The descent was steep and we kept together, but as the route changed from a climb to a track, Geoff in his usual way hotted up the pace. By the time Digger arrived at the Boval Hut, Geoff and I were well established. Mick was even farther behind, he arrived completely shattered having learnt the lesson of rushing the first part of the day's climb.

From the Boval Hut we now had a marvellous view of the surrounding peaks and glaciers; Geoff pointed the peaks out and also the traverse of the Piz Palu, a route he had done on a previous alpine trip in 1961. Geoff already had tomorrow's route planned and told us that it would be a short day, ten hours or more; the aim was to climb the Piz Bernina 4049m. Geoff pointed out the first part of the route which lay over a huge glacier. It was a clear night and we got a very early start, but we still did not beat Derrick and Ray on to the glacier. The glacier was never ending and if it had not been for Digger calling for a rest every so often, I think Geoff would have plodded to the top without a stop.

At one point Digger nearly collapsed when an old woman in a party of climbers passed him. At the head of the glacier and below the rock ridge we had a good rest. From there the route steepened and as we emerged from a snow gully on to the ridge we were forced to stop. Mick and Digger were both suffering from the altitude. We gave them time to recover, but as they did not, although Geoff and I wanted to continue because we were practically at the top, in the end we decided to go back down with them. We made a slow descent with many stops for photographs, and it was late in the afternoon when we arrived back at the hut. It had been a long day for the second day in the mountains and Digger had done well. We spent the night at the hut and the following day took an easy stroll down the valley and back to the campsite.

We arrived back at the camp sunburnt and in good spirits, but this did not seem true for those who had been left behind; they were moaning about the cold and rain they had had, and Janet Burgess was ill with some bug that seemed to be going around the campsite. The next day was spent resting and being persuaded by Gordon Gadsby to join his football team to play the Germans. During one game a stray ball from Gordon hit the side of Jack Ashcroft's tent and knocked his youngster out of his cot!

Another expedition to the peaks was planned and this led Geoff, Gordon, John Welbourn and myself up the Val Roseg again, but this time up the opposite side to the Coax Hut. Geoff assured us that it was only a short walk. It was, or would have been if the hut had been where it was shown on the map. A new hut had been built farther up the valley so on we went. The extra distance meant that it was late evening when we arrived at this new hut built in a circular form. Plimsols were provided to wear in the hut and to ensure that everyone got a pair that would fit, they were all size twelve!

Geoff led the next day and we slowly ascended the II Chaputtschin. The route led on to a steep snow slope high on the mountain and the snow was in such poor condition that part of it avalanched about 50 yards to the left of us. At the mention of the word avalanche, John Welbourn stepped up his pace and tried to

Push us all faster. Then a rare thing happened, Geoff admitted that he was tired and Gordon took over the job of kicking steps. On the summit we had a good rest in glorious sunshine and decided to traverse over to the next peak in the range. La Muongia. Geoff again led and we were soon in an airy position on the North Face of the main peak. Geoff had several attempts to reach the final rocks from a very steep snow slope, but again the snow was in terrible condition and he wisely decided to retreat, although only 200' from the summit.

On the way down Gordon pretended to fall in a crevasse and Geoff and I took photographs of John trying to hold him, not realising that Gordon was just fooling about.

Over soup back 't the hut it was decided that we would return to camp. Geoff had wanted to attempt the Piz Bernina but we had very little food left — though it ^was generally Geoff who ate most of it in any case.

We returned to the campsite by crossing the ridge at the Fuorcla Surlej and there we met up with Digger and Mick who were out on a walk. Mick, Digger and I followed a footpath which led down to St. Moritz and cut down through the woods to the campsite using the ski jump, which was behind the campsite, as a landmark. Suddenly shots rang out, the area was used as a clay pigeon shoot in the summer and we had arrived in the line of fire. We retreated hastily.

With only a few days of the holiday left, it was decided to drive into Italy and visit the Brenta Group in the Dolomites. Most people would have dismissed the idea because of the distance, but with Geoff everything became possible and this brought our holiday to a pleasant conclusion.

Traverse of the Nadelgrat

Pete Badcock

The dawn swept inexorably into the deep and sombre Mattertal valley, quickly filling it with ever increasing light and heat. Soon it was too oppressive to remain in one's sleeping bag or for that matter, in the tent, so sloth and inertia were reluctantly overcome by sliding out of the sleeping bag, tottering drunkenly in an effort to get dressed in the asphyxiating atmosphere of the tent and then a quick pull on the zip door and a grateful gasp of pure mountain air. It was a marvellous sunrise, the great golden disc of the sun was playing hide and seek behind the Dom and Taschhorn, but eventually revealing itself in dazzling radiance. Today promised to be very hot, the weather looked settled and anticipation and excitement seemed rife, for today Geoff and myself would be leaving the pleasant and verdant pastures of Tasch on our way up to the Dom hut in order to traverse the Nadelgrat.

As is usual on the day of undertaking an alpine climb, I felt a little tense, uncertain, nervous and melancholy at leaving Brenda and Jean in the valley whilst I went climbing. But this ambivalence of feeling was tempered by the sheer exaltation and promise of a fine climb. Marriage and alpine climbing is often a delicate balance, an uncertain compromise, something which demands understanding and unselfishness on the part of husband and wife. In this respect both Geoff and myself were extremely fortunate in having very understanding wives who really shared in our solitary enjoyment, who would never stop us going



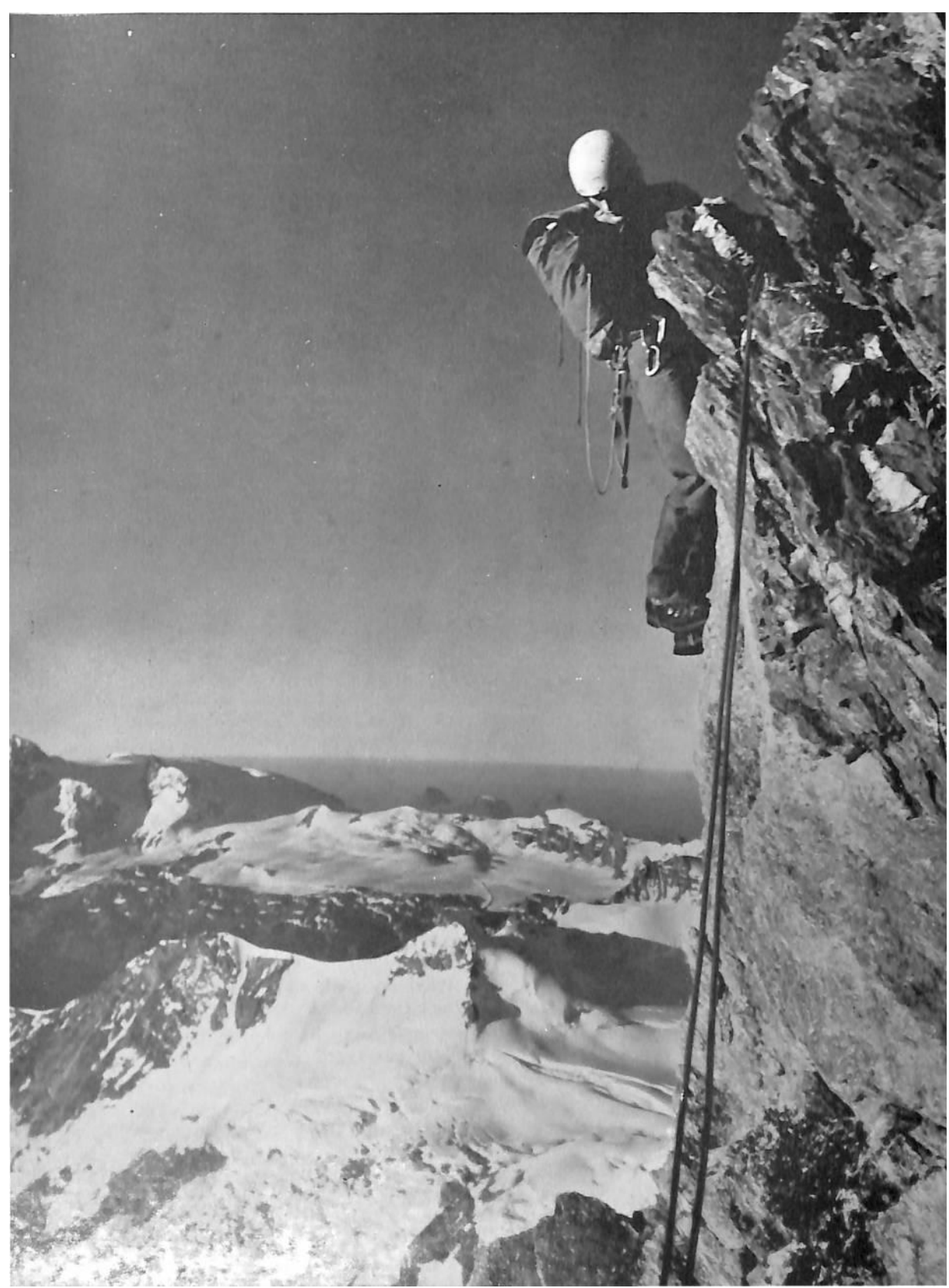
through purely egotistical reasons and always welcomed us back like warriors returning from some distant fray. The daily routine of camp life filled the slow tick of hours before our scheduled departure at 2.30 p.m.

On that Thursday afternoon, 29th July, 1971, we walked briskly down the narrow road from Tasch to Randa beneath a hot afternoon sun and a cloudless blue sky. It is a very steep though short hut walk, height gained rather than distance covered seems to characterise this hut approach. The surroundings were magnificent, for behind us through the trees the mighty Weissshorn* stood aloft whilst the Obergabelhorn, the Zinalrothorn and the Matterhorn gave us tantalising glimpses of themselves as we gained height. All too soon we left the cool shade of the trees and reluctantly followed the twisting path through the open hillside, starting to sweat freely in the still, oven-warm air. Walking in single file is never very conducive to conversation because speaker and listener can't see each other's face so one has to keep turning around and in consequence losing balance and rhythm. This element of eye to eye contact and facial expression is a phenomenon which is taken for granted, but is soon perceived when one is forced to talk to the back of someone's head. Nevertheless, Geoff and I managed a fairly coherent conversation as a means of lightening our loads and unburdening our soul. As one is near the valley one tends to talk of family matters, recount little trivial problems, and incidents, but as one nears the hut the conversation almost inevitably turns to climbing and the mountains.

Once arrived at the hut we quickly got formalities over with the guardian, food was organised, bed space reserved and our planned route explained. We relaxed outside, sitting in the evening sun soaking up the grandeur, isolation and silence of the alpine world. Suddenly this pristine silence was shattered by a monstrous explosion which made everyone outside the hut start with surprise and stare open-mouthed as a huge ice avalanche crashed down from the terminal lip of the Festigletscher and plunged hundreds of feet over vertical rock before spreading in a terrifying wave of destruction as it rolled down the ravine of the Dorf stream. On the way up to the hut I had read with curiosity the warning notices along the charming trickle of the Dorf Stream, which told the tourist that the level of the stream would rise dramatically and without warning. Indeed, on the way down the next day we could see that the water level had risen about 6' or 7' and huge boulders, mud and freshly broken branches were strewn over its banks. It would be all too easy for a picnicing tourist to tarry around such a stream, unaware that it could suddenly change into a murderous torrent on account of an ice fall out of sight high above.

I always find it extremely difficult to sleep in a dortoir, the stifling atmosphere, rustling, muttering, snoring, coughing, dreaming and sheer crush of sardine-like fellow sleepers are not conducive to sound sleep. I suppose that I go along with Shakespeare when he said, "Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows." Seconds ticked by like hours yet all too soon it was time to be up and away. In a

That same day the Shaligrat on the Weisshorn was climbed by Chris Radcliffe and Pete Scott.



befuddled and dazed state we made our uncertain way down steep dark stairs to 'enjoy' a rather unappetizing though traditional alpine breakfast at the unearthly hour of 2.00 a.m. Our minds gradually started focusing coherently as equipment was checked, boots and gaiters put on, rope uncoiled. After a few hasty checks had been made, nerves steeled and resolution strengthened by a last gulp of weak tea, we were ready. This was it.

We left the hut in complete darkness around 3.00 a.m. making quick though unenjoyable progress until our blind stumblings in the chill morning air were checked by increasing night vision and warmed up muscles. We had not been the first to start out, but soon overtook everyone as Geoff settled down into his usual longlegged uphill lope which seemed to drag me along in its wake. We climbed up the broken right bank of the Festigletscher, avoiding yawning crevasses until we branched left and climbed up the easy and broken rocks of the Festijoch, a long rib which separates the Festigletscher from the Hohberggletscher. We made a rather tricky descent over a dubious snow bridge on the other side of the Festijoch before making a rising eastwards traverse on the Hohberggletscher towards the rocky western flanks of the Lenzspitze. We had been advised to traverse from a direct line up the Lenzspitze rather than from the Lenzsjoch to the south on the Hohberghorn to the northern end of the ridge. Geoff led briskly up crisp hard frozen snow, our boots crunching the frozen granules and barely making an impression in the gently undulating surface of the glacier. Half an hour of walking brought us beneath the immense northern snow slope of the Dom, making us feel like ants beneath its giant bulk. The sun was now high in the eastern sky, painting the mountain tops a golden hue whilst far below the glacier retained night's sombre blue haze. It was going to be an absolutely fantastic day! Still trudging rhythmically up the steepening glacier we arrived at a small berg- schrund separating us from the slabby grey rocks of the Lenzspitze which were in deep shadow and would not get any sun until after 9.00 a.m. The transition from glacier to mountain flank was significant because it characterised a change in attitude, we now felt as if we were climbing a peak. Geoff led off smoothly and deceptively quickly up the slabby rocks which were coated in verglas whilst I owed behind a little hampered by coils of rope in one hand. We weaved in and out of the verglas but sometimes had to climb gingerly over sections, so moving together with quiet caution we gained height whilst accepting the fact that the rock was really cold and numbed our fingers.

After this initial contact with the cold icy flanks of the Lenzspitze it was exhilarating to gain the ridge just below the summit and look down into the Saas valley on one hand and down into the Matternal valley on the other. Ridges offer so much to the climber, he has an ever changing panorama all around him which really does add something valuable to the intrinsic merit of the climbing. We waited upwards towards the summit and the incredibly clear blue sky, and with our hearts soaring like eagles the mountain was soon at our feet. We spent several minutes gazing around us in silent wonder but this feeling of euphoria was soon tempered by a more rational attitude towards the climb as we surveyed the snow ridge running down in a saw tooth pattern towards the Nadeljoch and the rocky

ridge of the Nadelhorn. The ridge looked really impressive. Quickly putting on crampons we soon got to grips with the delicate charm of the wafer thin ridge, our crampons biting into the razor sharp crest of hard frozen snow with a comforting and incisive crunch. This section of the ridge was incredibly impressive, on the left the mountain fell steeply away to the Hohberggletscher, whilst to the right a huge and uniform snow/ice slope plunged in one fell swoop to the Hohbalngletscher above Saas Fee.

Geoff was moving easily and confidently, bubbling over with enthusiasm and sheer elan whilst I was dazzled by the stupendous natural architecture of the ridge. It has often been compared with the Forbes Arete on the Aiguilles du Chardonnet, and from my own experience it seemed superior in quality and atmosphere, a great 'classic' ridge. Unfortunately our almost religious reverie was shattered when I caught my crampon on a flaky rock near the Nadeljoch which dislodged several hideously loose boulders which seemed to spring to life and go whistling murderously down the Dreieselwand face of the Lenzspitze towards a party far far below. We gave out a blood curdling yell of "below, attention, achtung" which made me feel almost dizzy, so sudden had been the savage transition from perfect tranquility to sudden tension. The rocks bounced down with fearful speed straight towards the unheeding party whilst we fervently willed the doomed climbers to look up and take defensive action. After what seemed like a lifetime full of horrible visions of tiny bodies flying downwards to destruction, they reacted by diving into the slope in a vain attempt at selfpreservation whilst the rocks hit a projection in the face and bounced harmlessly wide of them. With adrenalin pumping furiously we sank back weak-kneed on the rocks, drained of energy and shocked by this sudden almost fatal change of fortune, realising all too well that the happiness of a lifetime can be ruined by a moment's carelessness.

With great care and conscious effort we traversed the Nadeljoch and started the rock scramble up the south east ridge of the Nadelhorn. The rock was incredibly bad, friable and broken, the gendarmes were nothing but huge tottering statues which we traversed or climbed with great care though always moving together and threading the rope through blocks and flakes so as to fashion direct running belays. It was at this stage that I started to be troubled by a splitting headache which I attributed to altitude but which was probably due to my crash hat being pulled down too tightly on my head. With my head feeling as if it was expanding and contracting in time with my heart beat, I climbed on up the ridge, feeling listless and lethargic, suffering in a very personal kind of purgatory. Geoff on the other hand was climbing like an express train! He gave me some very real encouragement to keep going and set a jolly good example himself by not stopping! This section of the traverse was hell for me although I tried hard in a jaundiced way to appreciate the magnificent surroundings. Geoff was climbing with cool, unrestrained ease, for if I was leading he seemed to float effortlessly behind me, whilst if he was leading he seemed to glide away from me with the controlled grace of a chamois. In spite of the contrast between his effortless climbing and my panting struggle, we eventually reached the summit of the Nadelhorn at 4,327m.

The summit of the Nadelhorn is peculiar in that a huge hole, big enough to drive a bus through, pierces right through the mountain. The summit block forms a giant wedge which acts as a roof for this great 'trou de canon'. With some trepidation at literally walking on air, we traversed the summit and ensconced ourselves in a comfortable cranny which overlooked the stupendously steep summit cliffs of the Nadelhorn as they cascaded vertically into the void below. We both agreed that it would be decidedly unhealthy to be on the summit block if it was to lose its long standing struggle against gravity! We put such thoughts out of our minds and tucked into some food and lemonade laced with glucose and basked in the hot sun and still air. Whilst enjoying our elevated snack and sunbathe we watched a couple of parties descending the icy top section of the North East ridge and also spied several parties who had come up from the Mischabel hut who were following our tracks across the ridge. With climbers on it, the serrated knife edge ridge of the Lenzspitze looked even more impressive.

With typical decision, Geoff brought things back to reality by suggesting a move towards the snowy ridge of the Stecknadelhorn and so we set off refreshed and rested, down the icy rocks of the Nadelhorn. The snow ridge was straightforward and easy but very satisfying amidst the noble surroundings and we soon came to grips with the moderate rocks leading up to the Stecknadelhorn at 4,242m. From the top we descended over a spiky ridge to the snowy col between the Stecknadelhorn and the Hohberghorn. Once firmly established at the col we enjoyed a long rest and ate some more food as the ridge had proved fairly long and tiring, being at a constant altitude of well over 4,000m. We felt reluctant to quit the ridge because of the idyllic weather, this reluctance to descend and our very leisurely snack allowed the other parties to catch us up. They were a mixed bunch of Swiss and two English chaps, and they all confessed to having been completely overcome by the charm of the traverse. Just before they left however, we asked them if they were going to climb the Hohberghorn and so complete the traverse and bag another 4,000m peak bringing their daily tally to four. "Not likely" was their emphatic reply, "we're too bloody whacked." Feeling a little superior and with typical British understatement, Geoff said that we were going to climb the Hohberghorn and so 'round the day off nicely.'

Feeling like masochists, we flogged ourselves painfully up the thigh deep, bodiless wet snow, gaining two feet and slipping back one until we eventually floundered on to the summit like shipwrecked sailors, heaving, panting, and eyes popping out with effort, and sank down in an ecstasy of relief. We had done it! The Nadelgrat stretched southwards before us in a superbly crenellated ridge of rock, snow and ice. When the ritual of summit photographs had been duly observed we slid quickly back down to the col, arriving with wet bottoms and a shaking sensation of achievement. The descent from the col was extremely unpleasant, the slope was a mass of sugary snow in which we sank up to the crutch, whilst the rocks were frighteningly loose. In spite of this miserable end to the traverse we made solid progress towards the glacier, and began to feel the oppressive heat wafting upwards to envelope us. The bergschrund was no problem and we soon had our feet firmly on the molten glacier, even if we did sink nearly up to the knees in the slushy snow. The crossing of the Hohbergletscher was a nightmare

because I was feeling very tired and overheated and even Geoff was beginning to flag. He forced us on like a sergeant major bullying weak-willed privates, saying, "Come on, the sooner we get across the glacier the better, I'm being burnt to a cinder by this heat." He was right of course, the heat was incredible, the sun was burning into our faces, and the longer we took the more sunburnt we would be. I felt totally indolent and befuddled with tiredness, and even Geoff was becoming lethargic as the effects of a long day at high altitude and the listlessness of the afternoon glacier descent began to create havoc with determination and self-discipline. If it had not been for Geoff spurring us on I would have curled up for a quiet nap, but he kept doggedly on and pulling me along behind, him. We thankfully reached the bergschrund below the Festijoch, made a precarious crossing and painfully crawled up to the col where we laid ourselves like lizards on the sun-warmed rocks. Just then Don Cowan and Derrick Burgess came by after having traversed the Taschhorn and the Dorn, and shared a few moments with us before plunging down to the hut.

After what seemed an eternity spent jolting down soft snow and bare ice, dodging crevasses and negotiating moraine, we too at last arrived back at the hut.

Traversal of the Rotgrat-Alphubel 4206m — 27th July 1971 Gordon Gadsby

It had been a hard drive to the sleepy village of Tasch, then the frantic rush to get the tent up and organise the gear and food. A quick goodbye to my wife, Margaret, and now barely two hours after arrival, here I was back on the old familiar hut grind. I must be mad! A pint of Splügen Brau at Tasch Alp Inn helped me along, but it was still 9.15 p.m. as I staggered out of the impending darkness across the threshold of the Tasch Hutte — three quarters of an hour over guidebook time. Three bowls of soup revived me and I was soon listening intently to the plans for tomorrow from the rest of our climbing party who had been at the hut most of the afternoon. Our party consisted of — lifelong climbing mate Geoff Hayes, Brian Cooke from Northumberland, Pete Badcock from Barnstaple and Jack Ashcroft from Sheffield, all, except Pete, fellow members of the Oread Mountaineering Club.

Our chatter about doing the Rotgrat brought us the attentions of the Hut Warden who declared that the route was out of the question in the prevailing conditions — verglassed rocks and it was drizzling outside even now. We retired at 9.45 p.m. resigned to the Ordinary Route by the South East Ridge. At 2.30 a.m. we were awakened by the Warden who brought two large candlebra in our room and banged them on the shelf at our feet. He muttered something about the weather being good and the Rotgrat being difficult but possible, and was gone to the kitchen to heat the teewasser.

Thirty minutes later the five of us were making steady progress round the flank of the Weissgrat on a superb path. Much to our surprise the rest of the climbers at the hut had left for the South East Ridge route. We gained the crest of the Weissgrat and enjoyed some pleasant scrambling in the semi-darkness, rather like Crib Goch ridge with three times the exposure. A rock knoll, point 3636m,



Above the Couloir on the Rotgrat. Gordon Gads

, Jack Ashcroft and Pete Badcock climbing.

Photo — Geoff Hayes



Snow Arete on West Ridge (Rotgrat) of the Alphabet 4206m in the Pennine Alps. Jack Ashcroft and Pete Badcock climbing.

Photo — Gordon Gads by

was attained in well under guidebook time and as we looked back along the ridge the mighty Weisshorn was just catching the first rays of the rising sun. At this juncture Brian said he was feeling unwell and unfit so would retrace his steps back to the Hut. We were sorry to see him go at the time, but in the light of later events, it was certainly a wise decision.

The four of us roped up on reaching the snow arete of the lower Rotgrat. It was very icy and our crampons were soon put to good use. Ahead and above us we could see the gaunt red rocks rising to the Alphubel snow crest. We could also pick out the great shadowy cleft of the large couloir which is the crux of the climb. It looked much steeper than we had imagined from the guidebook description. On our right the Monte Rosa massive was shaking off some ominous looking clouds and emerging into the glory of a perfect alpine morning. It was just at this moment as we were moving well along the final steep slope beneath the rocks, that our first delay of the day occurred. The ring holding the riveted strap on my crampons snapped with a sharp ping and I all but lost the whole assembly. A temporary repair was effected by Geoff stripping down a nylon sling and fixing it under my boot. This took quite a time due to our awkward position on the slope and by the time we moved off the four of us were chilled to the bone. On reaching the rocks we breakfasted (nuts and raisins), read the route description and then made several futile attempts to find the correct traverse line around the arete and into the couloir. The obvious ledges mentioned in the guidebook were probably blocked off by a tremendous cornice about 100' below us which overhung the lower part of the couloir. It appeared this may break off at any time and so open up an easier way into the couloir.

Time was slipping by, the sun was now searing onto the rocks. The likelihood of severe stonefall in the couloir decided us to make one last attempt to break the deadlock. Geoff carefully descended a steep friable 20' wall whilst I belayed him from the upper snow slope with an axe belay. Then some precarious movements to the right over some tottering blocks and Geoff had reached the arete and a good belay. He settled comfortably on the stance, his lean frame belying the tremendous strength and determination contained within. "Come on Gordon, there's nothing to it" he said, as a cheeky grin spread across his bespectacled face. With difficulty I joined him on the ledge and then in turn brought Jack and Pete across. The exposure here was fantastic and Jack chuntered, "I hope you've picked the right bloody route Hayes, we're not on Bleaklow now you know!" Geoff countered with "You've seen nothing yet Ashcroft, wait until you see round this corner!"

We were not disappointed — between us and the far side of the couloir was a very steep wall of good rock. We traversed this with difficulty, the last 15' being at least severe with an awkward landing on an icy ledge on the opposite wall. The climbing was easier now but very exposed. We kept on the right hand side of the couloir moving together, passing the delicate section mentioned in the guidebook like cats on hot bricks. The rock in many places was very loose and called for the utmost care in placing one's leet, a mistake here by any one of us would have been disastrous. Geoff led it beautifully, but it was a relief to reach the ridge crest without any serious stonefall.

From here to the summit was pleasant climbing, first traverse to the right, up a staircase of dark rock overhanging the couloir, and then up a steep snow slope onto the almost level summit ridge at an altitude of 4206m. The time was 1.50 p.m., our ascent had taken an unbelievable eleven hours. The summit view was superb and dominated by our near neighbour the Tashchorn, ominous clouds were just massing on its final rock tower. Well below this on the snow arSte near the shoulder we observed two climbers making slow progress upwards — we thanked God it wasn't us at this late hour, as they had the crux still to come.

At 2.10 p.m. we left the Alphubel summit for what we thought would be an uneventful easy descent — how wrong could we be! The first obstacle was the descent of the steep shoulder above the East Ridge. The snow was very good for the first 100' or so and then the steps started to slide away from a base of solid ice, each step had to be cut, but this proved so difficult and time consuming that we descended on ice screws, the last man bringing them down and this proved a much quicker and safer way.

On easier ground once more, we moved quickly along a seemingly easy and innocent looking ridge with a cornice on the right hand side. Suddenly with a breathtaking swish the slope below Pete, who was in the lead, avalanched. We held our breath, spellbound, as the increasing waves of snow swept down and over the ice fall to spread in a spectacular fan across the Fee glacier thousands of feet below. The break line was exactly level with Pete's line of steps! The next two hours seemed endless as we slowly inched our way down the snow ridge. Geoff and I prepared to jump over the ridge if Pete and Jack were carried away. In all, five avalanches broke away before we reached' the comparative safety of the glacier and the short trudge to the Tasch Hut.

It was 6.30 p.m. as we clattered through the Hut door. The Warden (who we heard later had followed our progress with binoculars), seemed not at all surprised that we had taken so long. After all, he had warned us it would be difficult!

Recollections

John Crosse

From where did Geoff's energy come? He was not blessed with excessive height, nor did he look particularly robust, but a rather spindly, sinewy lean looking fellow. His glasses did not add to his appearance, but suggested an academic and rather fragile type of man. A day on the hills or on the crags would leave him, sometimes, looking a little wan. Nevertheless he could outwalk most members of the Oread. His clockwork legs were continually wound to a pitch which resulted in one pace only — fast. He very rarely varied his speed as a walker, and left his companions at the end of the day in a state of almost collapse. This boundless vigour was not just apparent in the hills, but was the essence of his whole life. Not only could he outwalk, but outride his fellows as well. Apart from petrol stops, he would drive non-stop to Wales, the Lakes, Scotland and even the Alps. To stop whilst driving was time wasted which could be spent on the crags and hills. Geoff never seemed to tire, until his object was complete.

I first met Geoff at one of his night classes at Ilkeston College of Further Education, and we had, at the very beginning, a great deal in common. We had both been to the same school, and had a common love of the mountain air. Although I was somewhat older, and never as fit, this did not deter Geoff from including me and others not up to his standards in any mountain activity, either climbing, mountain rescue, walking or skiing. He always maintained that if he could do it, you could also.

Geoff was not a big eater, and drank alcohol just to be sociable, but he always carried enough food in his sack, and was ever ready to share with others. He needed small quantities of food frequently, and this coupled with his very strong will and determination, and continual high peak of fitness, was I believe his source of energy. Sleep was important, and Geoff made the most of resting. After a long drive to the Cairngorms, arriving in the early hours of Saturday morning, he would be ski-ing by 11.00 a.m. with only a few hours sleep in between. On a club meet he was more often than not the last out of bed in the morning, but always the first ready for the hills. His sack, a tatty old Joe Brown was always packed, and included anything from a spare bootlace to a bottle of Daddy's sauce. This brown spicy sauce never left his sack, and always appeared whenever a meal was snatched on the hills or crags. This may have been the source of his prodigious energy. He cooked and ate his breakfast from his sleeping bag. I remember a Bullstones meet one December, when a small party of us including Geoff started the meet a day late, we met in the Nag's Head at Edale Saturday evening and stayed until closing time. Geoff had only drunk, at the most, two half pints of shandy, and the rest of us had rather more than sufficient to quench our thirst which we had not yet created; outside the Nag's Head a good Derbyshire blizzard was in full force, but with swinging ice axes, and Geoff in the lead, we cut our way up Grindsbrook, and over Kinderscout. We were meeting the main party at the Oyster Clough shooting cabin on Bleaklow and arrived there about 3.00 a.m. Sunday morning.

We opened the cabin door longing for the little comfort it had to offer, but the floor was strewn with sleeping bodies, packed closer than sardines in a tin, boots, gaiters and oaths flew through, the air commanding us to close the door to keep out the cold. We closed the door and remained on the outside. There was simply no room. Geoff suggested we bivvied outside. I was too exhausted to do anything but sleep in my tracks. The others would not hear of it, and returned to the Snake road and eventually found a bam in which to sleep for the night. We did not see them again that weekend. Geoff and I huddled down in the snow outside the hut, and slept in bursts, waking to a cold but sunny dawn. Our boots and socks were frozen stiff and had to be thawed out over the primus.

Breakfast was cooked from our sleeping bags, and slowly, one by one the main party emerged from the shooting cabin, like toothpaste squeezed from a tube. What a horrible sight they looked! Clearly Geoff and I had spent the better night.

We returned to the Nag's Head after a very pleasant day's walk, but as it was still early afternoon, Geoff dragged me over to Stanage Edge to finish off the day by climbing a few routes there until darkness came and made climbing impossible. The weekend for Geoff was not complete until each hour had been

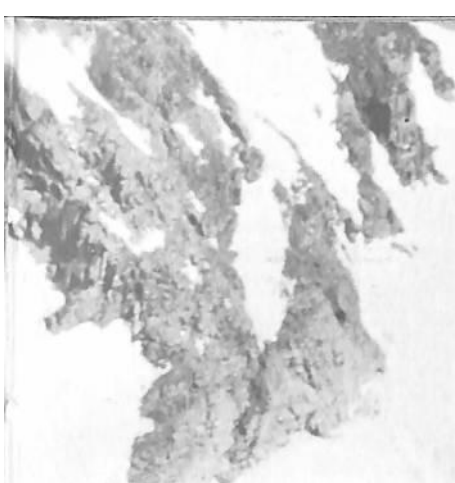
used to the best possible advantage. He had packed into those twenty four hours what most of us would achieve in two or three days, and he was never happier when faced with these sort of conditions. Geoff very rarely lost his temper and never lost control of a situation. He was a born leader and was the obvious choice for team leader for a mountain rescue team. Under extreme conditions, whether climatic, or situations on a rockface, he was always calm and in control.

We had spent the day climbing various routes on the Napes Ridges in Wasdale, and to end the day we decided to climb Tophet Wall, a 290' severe. The weather had deteriorated to rain and a cold wind. Geoff led the route and I followed through to the next pitch. I was so cold and exhausted that I dropped two slings and a karabiner. Geoff was not pleased, but said nothing, and we continued. About one third of the way up the weather became even worse, but we decided to carry on, rather than reverse the climb. Our situation had become quite desperate, and each move and hold had to be taken with great care. At a point where you traverse to the right across the rock face with no protection, I slipped on the wet rock trying to retrieve a belay that Geoff had used, and again I dropped a karabiner. Geoff held me tight, but his anger at my second lapse of carelessness was very apparent, but only momentarily. Words of encouragement followed, and the smile on his bespectacled face inspired me to overcome the desperate situation in which I found myself. After this incident the climb was much easier, and we soon reached the top.

Geoff was a safe climber, and never exceeded what he considered his limitations. He would only climb if he knew he could reverse his moves. One of his great assets as a rock climber was his unselfishness. On one occasion during a Bank Holiday meet at Eskdale, three of us, including Geoff, went off for a day's climb. It was my ambition that day to climb Esk Buttress, 300', very exposed, mild severe. To climb this route with three on a rope was not at all practical, so Geoff climbed first, and immediately after this first climb he rejoined me for his second successful ascent of the same route. His greatest asset was his patience, especially with those not up to his own standards. Geoff would wait, belayed to a rock face for as long as it took you to make a move. He would never hurry you, and would advise and inspire you to confidently make the right move. His patience when teaching children to climb was prodigious.

My most memorable days with Geoff have been in the Alps; the hectic drives through Europe with our families — even when driving Geoff was always in the lead, sensing his way towards the right direction; pulling in at a wayside cafe, where we munched fresh baked bread and quenched our thirsts with the local wine, and in the hot daytime sun, jumping naked into rivers and lakes to cool off. Then in the cool of the evening, spending the night in a thickly wooded forest to sounds of wild pig chasing deer, or pitching tents beneath snow capped mountains.

Geoff could determine Alpine weather fairly accurately, and would never venture on to a mountain if climatic conditions were questionable. One occasion in the Mont Blanc area, we attempted the Peuterey Ridge, after spending the night in the hut at the foot of the Aiguille de la Peuterey. The sky was not too clear, and the sun was fighting to break through the clouds. The ridges were all



visible, and the day looked pleasant enough, but fortunately we did not venture far. By midday the area had one of the most violent storms for years, which lasted well into the night. We thanked God we were not on that ridge. Another incident of a similar nature was an attempt to climb the Jungfrau but the weather once again was questioned by Geoff, although at Jungfraujoch the sun was shining and the skiers were out in their shirt sleeves. The North Wall of the Eiger looked grim and threatening and maybe this had some influence on Geoff's decision. We decided to climb the Monch instead, which would only take half the time. We left Jungfraujoch in a blaze of sun. It was a slow plod across the snow field to the foot of the mountain, and as we carefully made our way towards the summit along a knife edge of snow, cramponing just below the cornice, Geoff casually remarked that a storm was brewing up, and we must move at twice the speed to reach the summit and make a safe return. The summit was reached, and we quickly retreated along the same route. We reached the arete when the heavens opened. Driving wind, snow and cloud made progress hazardous. We arrived safely at the foot of the massif and once again plodded over the snow field in a complete white-out, the wind and snow tearing at our anorak-covered bodies. We soon reached the comfort of Jungfraujoch and were very thankful we were not on the Jungfrau.

Why did Geoff climb? Not because mountains are there to be climbed. His motives were much deeper. He loved the beauty of the hillsides and the open country; the solitude and dignity of the mountains, and the magnificence of the snow-capped Alps and the thrill of exploring new ground. All these he loved and wished to share with others. He was well aware of the danger, staking his life on his own judgement and taking calculated risks. This does not mean he was impetuous, or sought danger for its own sake. Through his skill and experience he overcame difficult situations and rendered them safe.

He was not the 'hard man' type of climber, but certainly a mountaineer who was able to handle almost any situation in the hills or on the crag. A man who enjoyed every minute of his very short life time, and who made a valuable contribution to mountaineering and the quality of life.

A HAZY PORTRAIT OF A MOUNTAINEER

He's a funny sort of fellow
With a funny sort of face,
The kind that makes you wonder
If he's in his rightful place.
I'm not really suggesting
That he might be from the zoo,
But when he wears that ratter
I begin to think it's true.
And under it there's all that stuff
That some folks say is hair,
I call it 'Bristly Ridge' myself
I think I'm nearer there.
The state of it is awful
And that tuft is quite absurd
Reminds you of a plover but
that's an insult to the bird.
You think that's pretty awful
Till you've seen him grow a beard
And there's no way of describing
The sight that then appeared.

His clothes are most peculiar
All this ex-army stuff
Creates quite an impression
Which is just one massive bluff.

He's supposed to be a driver
Since he somehow passed his test
But once he's on the highway
He's just a thorough pest.
He's driven coppers crazy
From the Trent Vale to the Spey
And he's just a racing madman
On the Preston Motorway.

He confesses he's no camper
The understatement of the year!
His tent is worse than useless
But you want to see his gear.
His temperamental primus
Which will hardly ever light
Can become a raging fury
And give you such a fright.
There's no scope for decent cooking,
And you must be pretty neat
To salvage all the contents

When it collapses at your feet!
There's no reason then to wonder
Why his pans are in such states
For he's never heard of washing
And black grease accumulates.

But now we must give credit
Where credit's rightly due
For there's not a cook can match him
When it comes to curried stew.
The contents are a secret
Far better not to know;
But there's nothing like this curry
For giving you the 'go'!
It's the secret of his fitness
His amazing mountain speed,
For he knows that when he gets back
He'll have curry in his feed!

He calls himself a mountaineer,
With that we must agree
For there's not a crag defeats him
And he's lightning on a scree.
When he can't get out on gritstone
He'll traverse his bedroom wall
Or climb the embossed pattern
That's papering the hall.
Wherever there are mountains
You will often find him there,
For well we know to our dismay
That Hayes gets everywhere
You get up in the morning
And the sun is shining bright,
You climb a special mountain
And you marvel at the sight.
You want to take a photo
To prove you've really been,
And once again it happens —
That 'Hayes' obscures the scene!
But it isn't fair to blame him
As he cannot help his name
You can moan about these Hazes
But it's not spelt quite the same.

His reputation's pretty black
Among the Oread,
For judging by the tales we hear

This Hayes is quite a cad.
If you talk to Harry Pretty
He will tell you quite a tale
Of Hayes and all his exploits
Which will send you rather pale.

But when I think it over,
He doesn't seem so bad
Even though his camping's chaos
And his driving raving mad;
Though his clothes are most peculiar
And his hair's a tufty mess,
Though his beard gets rough and bristly
And I like that even less;
Though he flogs across the mountains
At a pace no-one can keep
And drags me up the rock face
When I ought to be asleep;
I still can't help admitting
One thing that's very plain
Though why on earth it is so
I really can't explain,
But I like his hectic camping
And I thrive on curried stew,
I don't moan about his driving
Even if others do.
I don't really mind him moaning
When I can't get up the climb;
I still like it in the mountains
When they're 'hazy' all the time.
His Bristly Ridge quite suits him
His beard adds the final touch;
I can tolerate his trousers
Though they are a bit too much!
In short he's quite 'extinguished',
'Emanculate' and tall,
And Hayes without these items
Would not be Hayes at all.

Margaret V. Lowe 1960
(now Buckland)

Footnote:- 'Emanculate' --- Paul Gardiner's latest addition to the Oread dictionary.

THE OREAD

An Historical Commentary 1949-1973

By

Jack Ashcroft and Paul Gardiner

When we set out to write this commentary on the life of the Oread over the past 25 years we were only too conscious that a complete history would be a very difficult task in the time available and indeed that 'history' was hardly the right word to use for a club only a quarter of a century old. What has been written is therefore a connected series of notes and extracts from club committee minutes and newsletters. Many are the names and activities not related. Very often those most active in mountaineering do not write of their exploits though the balance may have been redressed a little in recent years. We hope all who read this commentary will bear this in mind. We hope 'too much has not been written about too little' and that our many friends in and out of the Oread will find little to offend in the impression produced.

J. Ashcroft, Sheffield.
P. Gardiner, Derby.



CHAPTER NINE

'THE BEGINNINGS' 1949-57

*"High mountains are a feeling, but the hum of human cities torture."
Byron 'Childe Harold Carlo (iii)'*>

The formation in 1949 of what is now known as the Oread Mountaineering Club was not particularly significant to other than those involved in the event. The meeting together of half a dozen persons in such places as the Burton on Trent Technical College Students Union, then housed in a church hall, and at local bus stops gradually produced some ground which was both common to the participants and concurrent with what must have been going on in many towns and cities during the post war years.

Ex-servicemen, demobbed and looking for some continuity of the comradeship, they missed, part-time students searching for an outlet for their energies in a period of considerable austerity. These were the type of people who ultimately met in Guild Street School, Burton on Trent on the night of 21st April, 1949 to discuss the formation of a local climbing club.

The driving force behind the idea was ex-serviceman, George Sutton, then working for British Railways, and a visionary in mountain and arctic exploration. Present at the meeting in addition to Sutton were Keith Axon, Paul Gardiner, George Hobbs. Dave Penlington, Harry and Molly Pretty, Eddie Say and Nan Smith.

This meeting drew up provisional rules and a ballot for officers and a committee resulted as follows:-

Chairman — H. Pretty; Hon. Secretary — G. Sutton, Hon. Treasurer — K. Axon, Committee — D. Penlington, E. Say, Nan Smith.

The first meet the club held was to Black Rocks at Cromford, the members who had any gear packed it in a rucksack (if they had one), Army equipment was the standard garb and camping was performed in ex-W.D. tents sitting on ex- W.D. groundsheets and cooking in ex-W.D. pans.

The party was completely green at rock climbing and gazed in some awe at the antics of the more experienced performing on the rocks, notably members of the Derby based Valkyrie Mountaineering Club, which numbered amongst its ranks such names as Wilf White, Ernie and Ronnie Phillips and Nat Allen.

Following the inaugural meeting indoor gatherings were held at monthly intervals. On the 5th May 1949 a local mountaineer of considerable experience, Mr. Summersgill, was present and was offered the club Presidency which he declined saying that a younger man who was still active should be sought. At this meeting arrangements were discussed with regard to tents and other gear for the second meet at Brassington.

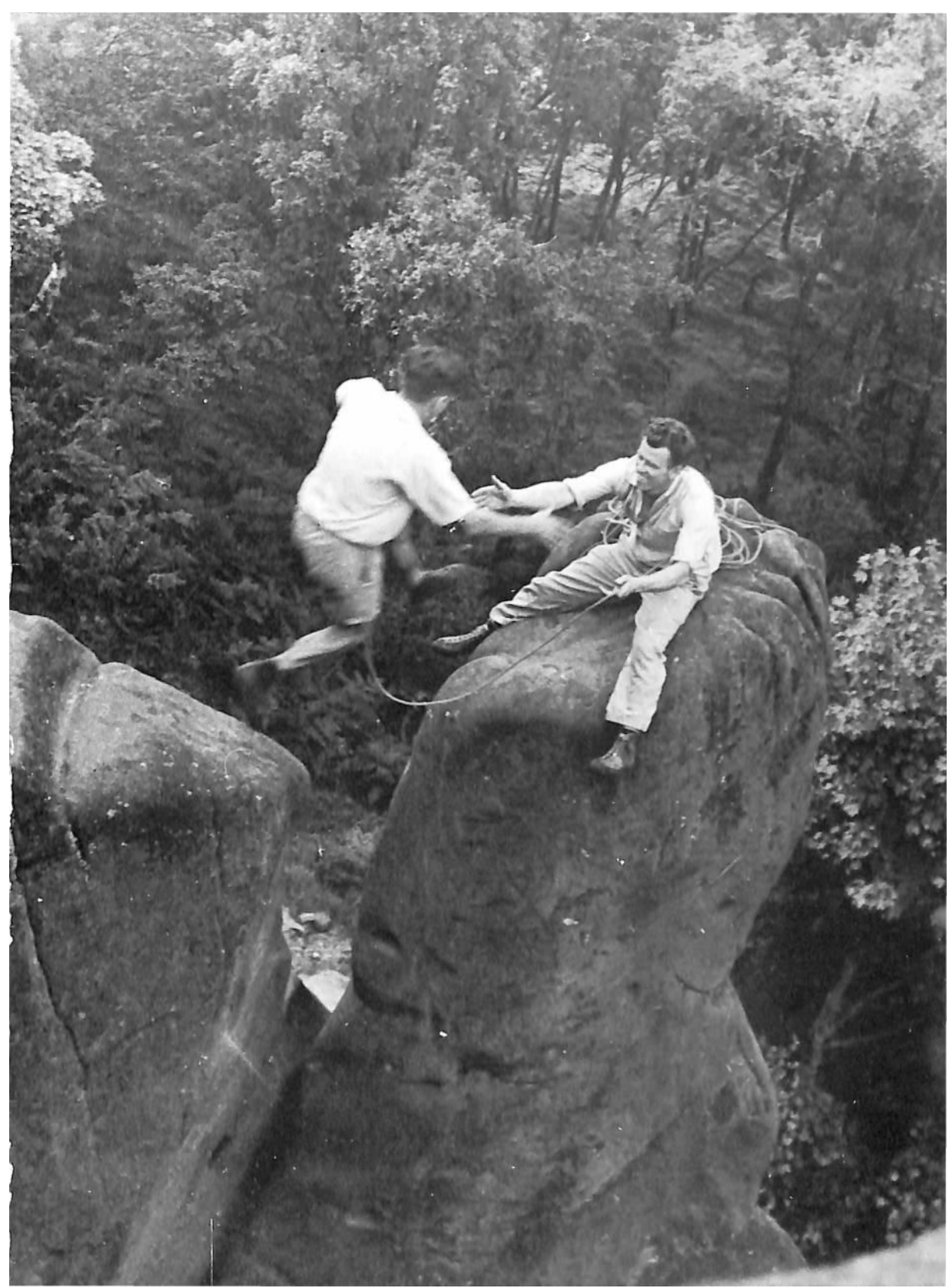
The following two monthly meetings took the form of lectures, one by George Sutton entitled 'Chamonix Holiday', and the other by Harry Pretty called 'Climbing in Skye', this being an account of a visit he had made in company with a party from the Midland Association of Mountaineers (M.A.M.).

It is interesting to compare the situation prevailing at this time with that of today. New equipment was almost unobtainable, not everyone had a tent or cooking stove, no-one had a vehicle and in consequence it was necessary to spend much time discussing the organisation of camping, cooking and transport. Bus and train timetables were a pre-requisite when planning any meet. In August there was considerable discussion on the merits of cooking in small syndicates as opposed to the en-masse (or m[^]ss) method which had been used to date. The adequacy of gear in view of the approaching winter was investigated at some length. It was at this time that the possibility of the first Scottish Easter Meet was suggested.

In September of 1949 the club was given something to get its teeth into something which had a great effect on the shaping of its future. George Sutton had attended a meeting of the Gritstone Guide Committee at the invitation of Eric Byne, and as a result the Club became involved in some of the work which resulted in the publication in 1951 of Volume 2 of 'Climbs on Gritstone'.

Working from handwritten notes produced some years earlier by Byne and Clifford Moyer, the Oread were to be found every weekend camping or barning in the Baslow area, re-checking previously recorded routes and putting up many new ones on Baslow, Gardoms, Birchens and Chatsworth Edges. In fact, such was the activity that, according to club records, on one particular weekend of work on Chatsworth certain climbs were allocated to certain people.

It should be remembered here that footwear in use at the time was either nailed boots or rubbers, the latter being invariably gym shoes and a note was made that, for the sake of posterity (of the routes) rubbers should become exclusive



footwear on grit.

In October George Sutton visited Birmingham to enquire about acquiring additional ex-W.D. mountain tents and subsequently most members became proud owners of either a sleeve entrance mountain tent or an ex-U.S. Army two piece, press stud together bivouac, both types normally heavy and excessively so when wet.

Christmas 1949 was spent camping by Llyn Llydaw in such foul conditions that the party eventually retreated in disorder to the relative dryness of a barn in Nant Peris.

Work on the Gritstone Guide continued throughout the winter of 1949/50. On the 13th March 1950 the monthly meeting was held at the 'Punch Bowl' Inn, Bond End, Burton on Trent. To quote the official minute book:-

“This meeting was called at the end of a period during which the club seemed to be passing through a time of indecision which, in itself, gave rise to feelings of depression amongst leading members. There had been little sign of the Club increasing its membership, and possible ‘recruits’, who showed signs of early promise, seemed to flag in interest after a very short period of time. Self criticism was rampant at official and unofficial committee meetings, and many were the suggestions that we had bound ourselves into a highly select clique, the walls of which were such that potential members found themselves repelled by our attitude. We realised all these things, but found it difficult to find a practicable solution — for within our small circle was a spirit of aggressive disregard for things conventional and ordinary. We were tending to lose ‘the common touch’ and rather regard the Club as almost a law unto itself. The spirit, amongst us, was magnificent inasmuch that it had made possible our rise from complete obscurity into a place where we became known in many parts of the mountaineering world. We had achieved high standards of climbing that had loosed the bonds of inferiority complex when put alongside other clubs of long standing and some reputation. We had become quite an efficient body with our own character and already established traditional ways of ‘coping’. It was, however, this drawing together of a few fanatics, (who I am sure were capable of really great things when working together as a team), that seemed to frighten away new members, and we knew that if the club was to grow, and become something to boast about in years to come, then we had to broaden our outlook and adopt more of the outlook of missionaries rather than that of God Almighty Himself.”

Thus stated the record after the club had been in existence for less than twelve months, highly emotive stuff, certainly true and, in retrospect, a taste of what was to come and is still coming to a lesser degree after a period of over twenty years. The upshot of this was that George Sutton resigned from his position as Secretary, much discussion on the health of the club followed and the meeting ended with table tennis....

The Second Annual General Meeting (i.e. after the club had been in existence for one year) was held at the ‘Robin Hood’, Baslow. What feelings of nostalgia this must evoke in those who knew the old pub as it was in those days. Two low ceilinged rooms lit by oil lamps and beer served from the wood in the cellar down



a flight of blue brick steps. Amongst others at this meeting were John Adderley, Eric Byne and Lorna Peake.

Cyril Machin was elected President, Edwin Say took on the job of Secretary, Keith Axon, the Treasurer, and the Committee comprised Dave Penlington, Molly Pretty and Paul Gardiner. The club balance stood at £8 18s 9d. By unanimous assent a half tumblerful of 'Rum and Pep' was passed round and round — a tradition still carried on, though the Pep has since changed to orange.

At Easter in 1950 the first Ben Nevis meet took place. The Midland Association of Mountaineers was there in some strength including Oliver Jones and the late Dr. Norman Cochran. The Oread team consisted of Harry and Molly Pretty, who were able to afford hotel accommodation, and George Sutton and Paul Gardiner who camped in the Allt a'Mhuillinn. The outstanding achievement of this meet was the ascent in poor snow conditions of No. 2 gully by Pretty, Sutton and Gardiner who were so green that they were under the impression that they were in No. 3.

The remainder of 1950 saw little increase in membership, meets continued at the rate of one per month and were generally 'local' though ventures were made to the Lakes at Whitsuntide and Wales at Christmas. The first Annual Dinner was held at 'Fox House Inn' Sheffield. The meets list for 1951 contained trips to areas not previously visited and through co-operation with the Stonnis, Polaris and Innominate Clubs coaches were filled to the Lakes and Wales. Many will look back with pleasure at the spirit which prevailed on these trips, something which has disappeared with the increasing growth in car ownership.

There was strong Oread representation at the inaugural meeting in Derby to hear about the scope and organisation of the proposed 'Whitehall' Open Air Pursuits Centre. The Club records report that Mr. Jack Longland and Mr. Peter Mosedale (Warden) were bombarded with questions, offers of support and much advice. Alf Bridge was present and spoke strongly in favour of the scheme.

The third Annual General Meeting was held at the 'Prince of Wales', Baslow on 17th March 1951. Membership had risen to 24. Eric Byne was elected President and Cyril Machin, on his retirement from office, was unanimously elected the Clubs First Honorary Member, 'on account of his eminence in advancing the objects of the club.'

It was at that meeting that 'Burton on Trent' was unanimously removed from the official Club title, the publication of Volume 2 of 'Climbs on Gritstone' was commented on with satisfaction and Ken Griffiths, to this day a hut trustee, appeared for the first time on the Committee.

The proposed Arctic Venture, to be led by George Sutton, was discussed at length with particular regard to whether the expedition was to bear the name of the 'Oread M.C.' Ultimately a proposal was made and carried to the effect that

"the Club shall support to the hilt the idea and principles of the Expedition, including lending any equipment, and giving financial support as may be found possible or as required."

The basis of the expedition was outlined in a circular produced by George Sutton in the spring of 1951 and it is of interest to note the feelings of the leader as recorded. ^



Stan Moore at Brassington.
Photo - Harry Pretty



Dick Brown on Try fan.
Photo ~ Harry Pretty

“For some time it has been my opinion that the crystallisation of all we have ever learnt on rock, snow and ice, of the shape and structure of mountains, of finding our way in the hills, and of camping under difficult conditions, is only to be found in mountain exploration. This is the ultimate test of skill, endurance and courage.”

The difficulties of raising an expedition at this time were formidable and the restrictions many.

Time and money were limited, there were geographical and political access problems to be overcome but, following many hours of deliberation, a decision was reached for a nine man team to visit the Lyngen Peninsula of Northern Norway with the purpose of surveying, glacier research and mountain exploration. The cost per man for a venture lasting ten weeks was estimated at £50 and the trip was in fact accomplished for this figure. This included all travel, food and sundry expenses. Oread members participating in addition to Sutton were:- Harry Pretty, Stan Moore, Ken Clarke and Bob Pettigrew. Phil Falkner was also on the expedition, though not a member of the club at the time.

The equipment used was basically that used by the members in Alpine and British Winter conditions; tents were still ex-W.D. Food was considered very carefully and based on a daily ration of 32oz bearing in mind the financial constraint and the fitness required for the planned work. The food was bought in this country, crated and transported with the party by sea to Tromsø and then lorry to base hut at Lyngseidet.

The achievements of the expedition were formidable, particularly when related to time and cost. Parties left base for various objectives, staying out for at least five days followed by regrouping at base for two or three days before embarking on the next task.

The achievements can be divided into three phases:-

Phase 1 — General Reconnaissance

This phase occupied the first three to four weeks. Note that future reference to the Southern part of the peninsula refers to that area South of Kjosens Fjord, whilst the Northern part of the peninsula extends from the North shore of Kjosens Fjord to the very northern most tip called Lyngstuen.

The following is a brief list of reconnaissance operations in the Southern part of the peninsula:-

(1) Ascent and traverse of Goalsevarre-Rornestind-Jertinden ridge behind Lyngseidet.

(2) Ascent of Dalvfjeld to view South Eastern Jekkevarre approaches.

(3) Traverse of Kvalvikdal and Romes Skar through to Kjosens Fjord.

(4) Advanced camp at Holmbukt on West coast of Peninsula (Sorffjord) reconnaissance of South Western approaches to Jekkevarre, Andersdal and completed by West-East traverse of Peninsula from mouth of Andersdal via Andersdal Skar, Lyngsdal and back to Base along Arctic Highway. Believed to be first recorded complete crossing of Peninsula at this point.

(5) Advanced camp at mouth of Fornesdal, (West end of Kjosens Fjord) —

reconnaissance of Fornes glacier, Fugledal Skar, Fugledal glacier and complete traverse of same through to Sorfjord on West Coast of Peninsula — reconnaissance of North Western approaches to Jekkevarre.

The following concerns reconnaissance operations in the Northern part of the Peninsula:-

(1) Advanced camp beside Kopang river, near Fastdal on East Coast of Peninsula — reconnaissance of glaciers, snowfields and peaks.

(2) Advanced camp beside Jegervatnet Lake on West side of Peninsula — reconnaissance of glaciers, peaks and passes of Jegervasstind group.

The completion of Phase I resulted in a decision that the glaciers of the Jekkevarre massif should provide our main area of concentration with regard to combined glaciology/survey work.

Phase 2 — Exploratory Survey and Detailed Reconnaissance of Eastern End of Jekkevarre Massif

(1) Advanced camp in upper Kvalvikdal. Traverse of Goalsevagegaissa group of peaks — discovery of valley unmarked on maps. Closed compass traverse around Ruksisvagegaissa to determine relationship of valleys and glaciers about North-Eastern end of Jekkevarre.

(2) Advanced camp in Lyngsdal. Exploration of Lyngsdal glacier — discovery of serious error in existing map which is distorted so that the branch valley connecting Andersdal Skar to Lyngsdal is quite wrongly laid down. In its present state the map leaves no room for the full extent of the Lyngsdal glacier, (the biggest of all the Jekkevarre glaciers), and the peaks and connecting ridges forming the Southern boundary to this glacier are quite unmarked.

The completion of Phase 2 resulted in a decision that the Lyngsdal glacier, running along the South East face of Jekkevarre, would be ideal for concentration by survey and glaciology team.

Phase 3 — Survey, Glaciological and Geological Study of Lyngsdal Glacier and Further Work on Peaks, Passes and Glaciers in Northern part of Peninsula

(1) Advanced camp in Lyngsdal.. First recorded complete West-East high level traverse of Jekkevarre Massif. Identification of highest point different to that indicated on existing maps. Commencement of glacier plane-table survey, setting out base-line etc. Attempted measurement of glacier movement. Climbing exploration of unmarked ridge and peaks forming Southern watershed of Lyngsdal glacier system.

(2) Two man exploratory trek from Base to Northern tip of Peninsula — exploratory search for North /South passes and experimental in the way of light weight food and equipment taken.

(3) Two man climbing exploration of Isskartind group of peaks in the SouthWest corner of the Northern part of Peninsula.

(4) Two man climbing exploration of Tytterboetind — Kjostind ridges and glaciers.

(5) Advanced camp North of Jegervatnet Lake on West side, Northern part of Peninsula. Exploratory climbing and glacier search amongst Northern peaks (Vaggastind, Reindalstind). Second investigation of Jegervasstind — Stortindal glacier peaks.

(6) Final advanced camp in Lyngsdal. Completion of plane-tabling, carrying out of contouring, glacial photography, investigation into banding and shear planes. Attempted crust measurements defeated by warm glacier winds and bad weather.

(7) Second advanced camp at mouth of Andersdal (Holmbukt-Sorfjord), on West coast of Southern part of Peninsula. Climbing exploration of Western flanking Jekkevarre peaks and of Lakselvind group.

Several smaller Lyngen expeditions were made in the early 1950s. On three of these, led by the well known writer-mountaineer Showell Styles, the Oread figured prominently in the person of John H. Welbourn. John, a typical Oread character, was selected for his snow and ice climbing ability and knowledge of the Norwegian language.

In 1952 they made the first ascent of the Spisshorn 1233m, a Matterhorn-like peak overlooking Reindal Skar. The following year they were the first to reach the summit of a fine looking peak on the 'Great Wall' area of Lyngen Fjord — this is now called Ruthtind after John's German born wife.

Details of these and other ascents can be found in the Norwegian Tourist Board publication 'Mountain Holidays.'*

John is still active on the mountain scene, tall, gangling and likeable, he runs the Oread Welsh Hut from his home in Flintshire where he lives with his wife, Ruth, and two fast growing daughters Lisa and Helga.

The 1951 Annual Dinner was held at the 'Scotsman's Pack', Hathersage, with Jack Longland and George Bower as the principal guests and Christmas was spent at 'Tyn-y-Shanty' in the Ogwen Valley.

At the 1952 Annual General Meeting at the 'Prince of Wales', Baslow, Geoff Gibson took over as Secretary, Dave Penlington as Meets Secretary and amongst others elected to the Committee were Bob Pettigrew and Mike Moore.

Membership stood at 35 and practically the whole of the meeting was devoted to alterations to rules. For the first time a meets list/membership card was produced and meets were increased to two per month. Visits were made to Llanberis, Coniston, Fort William, Laddow, Cader Idris and Ogwen. Amongst highlights of this year were the Annual Dinner costing 10/- at the 'Scotsman's Pack and another meet at 'Tyn-y-Shanty' at Christmas led by Ken and Betty Wright and including dining out at Cobdens in Capel Curig. This was the year that John Fisher joined the Oread.

* 'Mountain Holidays in Norway' compiled by Per Prag. Published by Norway Travel Association.

By 1953 the club membership had risen to 59 and of these 33 attended the Annual General Meeting at Baslow. During the evening George Sutton was elected to the Presidency and it is interesting to look at the list of names of those involved in the running of the club, names still spoken of with nostalgia, although the bearers of some are now no longer with us:

Vice President	Eric Byne
Honorary Secretary	Geoff Gibson
Honorary Treasurer	Ken Griffiths
Meets Secretary	Dave Penlington
Committee	Harry Pretty, Mike Moore, Bob Pettigrew, Phil Falkner, Mary Cullum

This was the meeting at which the traditional drink changed from Rum and Pep to Rum and Orange, though it has not been possible to establish why. The committee, in their search for areas of new interest, produced a meets card which included a joint meet with the Midland Association of Mountaineers at Gian Dena — had the Oread ‘arrived’ amongst the so-called senior clubs?

Cwm Cowarch was visited and the first of the celebrated Marsden-Rowsley walks took place.

During this year the Newsletter, up to now a somewhat irregular publication, was placed under the editorship of Charlie Cullum who proceeded to pull it up by the boot straps and knock it into a greatly improved format, a job which he shouldered for the next five years.

The year also saw the arrival on the scene of Derrick Burgess, Ray and Judy Handley and Geoff Thompson.

The Annual Dinner, venue moved to the ‘Devonshire Arms’ at Baslow where the guests included Alf Bridge and Prof. T. Graham Brown.

On the 19th December, 1953, the President, George Sutton, launched an appeal for a hut fund and an initial target of £50 was set. Bob Parslow ran the Christmas Meet, again at ‘Tyn-y-Shanty’ with Christmas Dinner at Cobdens.

At the Annual General Meeting of 1954 the membership was 77 and amongst others standing for office were Clive Webb, who was elected Honorary Secretary and John Welbourn, who was voted onto the Committee. It is worth recording that there were no fewer than 15 nominations for Committee including:- Doug Cullum, John Fisher, John Welbourn, Roger Turner, Brian Cooke, Ken Wright, Jim Winfield, Mary Cullum, Malcolm Padley, Keith Axon, Marion Cooke, Betty Wright, Ron Dearden, Pete Cole, Bob Parslow.

The question of the club badge was raised and a motion proposing the adoption of one was defeated.

It may be said that by now the Oread meets had settled into some pattern with return visits to Ogwen. Coniston, Froggatt and Marsden-Rowsley again appearing on the card.

Names such as Ruth Bottger (now Welbourn), Peter Janes, Jack Ashcroft, Mike Turner and Jim Kershaw appeared on applications for membership. Unrest appeared in the ranks towards the end of the year and a Special General

Meeting was called prior to the Dinner. The conspirators in the event were Messrs. Dearden, Gibson, Parslow, Johnson and Hayhurst, who considered that 'the sitting committee is not representative of the club'. During the year resignations had been received from Phil Falkner (Meets Secretary), Clive Webb (Hon. Secretary) and Ron Dearden himself (Committee). Personal accusations were thrown about, heated discussion centred on these resignations, co-options to committee etc., the whole occupying some seven pages of the minute book and resulting in the motion being defeated by 13 votes to 6 with the officers and committee not taking part in the voting.

This meeting did not however affect the subsequent Dinner which was such a success that the club eventually paid an account of £3 13s Od. to the local plumber for repairs to the wash basin and fittings in the gents toilet!

By December the President's Hut Fund appeal was within £5 10s Od. of its target and the search for a hut in Wales was being actively pursued. The search went on throughout the winter but by the time the A.G.M. came round again on 19th March, 1955, a suitable place had not yet been found. At the meeting Harry Pretty took over as President and others elected were:-

Honorary Secretary	Brian Cooke
Honorary Meets Secretary	Mike Harby
Honorary Treasurer	Paul Morris
Committee	Marion Cooke, Dave Penlington, Mike Moore, Bob Pettigrew and John Welbourn

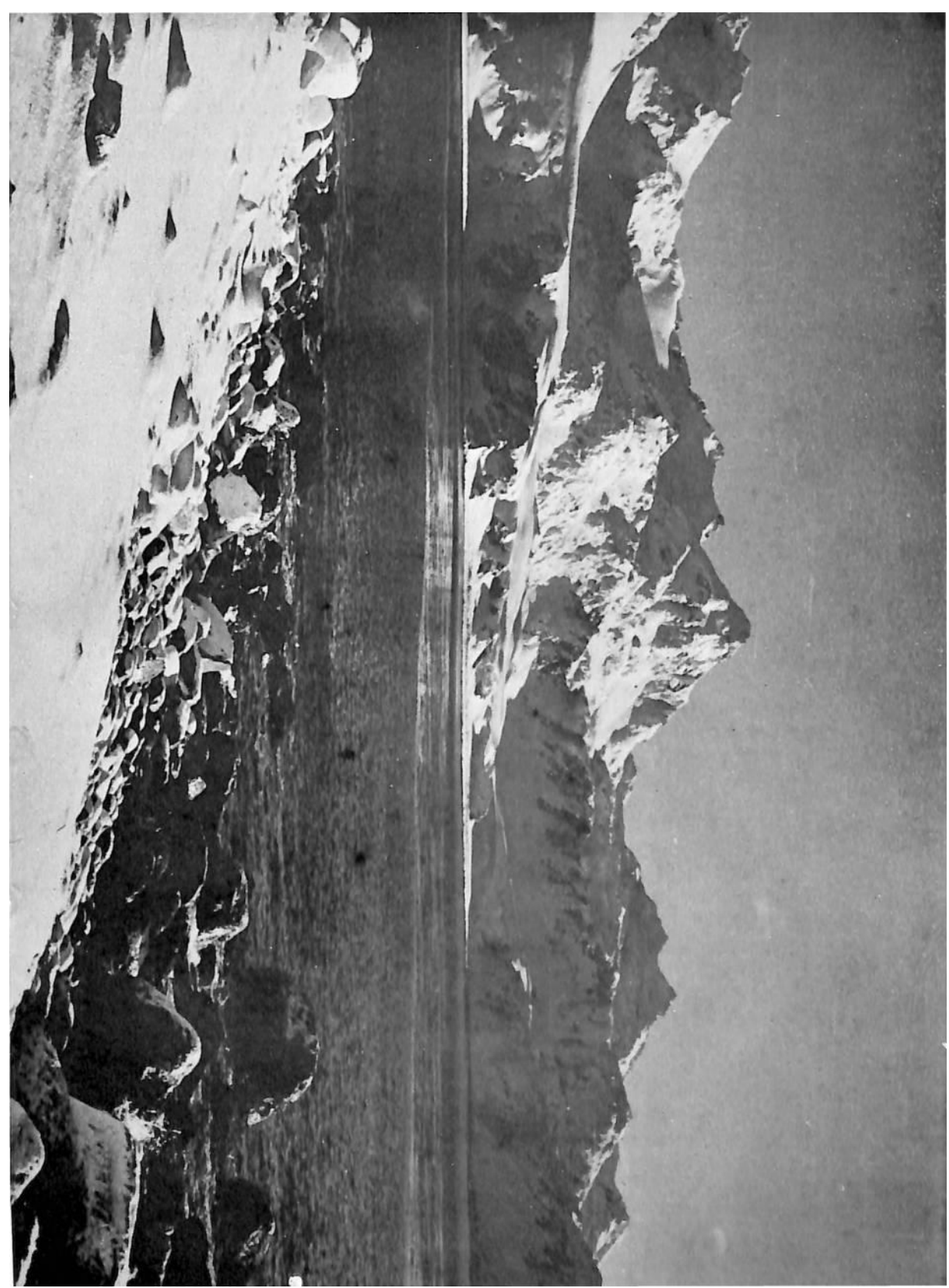
During Any Other Business there was a lot of discussion on the subject of the proposed hut, some members were for one in the Peak District, whilst others favoured Wales and Trevor Panther's idea was to construct a 'road menders' type hut from corrugated iron in the Llanberis Pass.

Since this discussion took place in March, at which time a hut had not been found, it is surprising to record that by April not only had one been secured, but work on it had started. 'Bryn-y-Wern' in the Pennant Valley was obtained on lease. This 'hut' was in fact a large detached, stone built house in a magnificent setting overlooking Cwm Pennant and comprised lounge, dining room, two kitchens, drying and bathrooms and five bedrooms together with extensive grounds.

An appeal for carpets, furniture, stoves, pots and pans was made and immediately after Whitsuntide an all out effort commenced to convert the place into a climbing club hut.

Dave Penlington, who had spearheaded the search for a Welsh hut, became the first Oread hut warden and it was on his shoulders that the co-ordination of the work to set up the conversion fell. Not only did he see this task through to completion, but went on in his capacity as warden until, regretfully, the Club's lease terminated and the property was sold.

Tales of the effort put into 'Bryn-y-Wern' are legion; replacing 11" x 3" beams became almost a common place job and many an Oread took his or her first hesitant steps at plumbing and bricklaying, fireplace building and bog fitting during the following year.



The whole place was transformed and many must be the happy memories of delightful days spent exploring the valley, bathing and fishing in the river below, 'gardening' out new routes on the local crags and trips to Black Rock sands via the 'Golden Fleece'.

During 1955 Betty Bird (now Gardiner), Len Hatchett and Ronnie and Les Langworthy became Oread members. Many annual favourites appeared in the list of meets but Ardour, Eskdale, Cwm Silin and Brecon Beacons were also included.

The Annual Dinner was the final one at the Devonshire Arms and was attended by Alf Bridge and Showell Styles.

Running in parallel with the domestic activities in 1954/55, George Sutton led the British South Georgia Expedition. The team comprised three staunch Oread members, George Sutton, Harry Pretty and Clive Webb and also included were R.A. (Dick) Brown (of gritstone fame in his Sheffield University days) and a Scots Doctor, Ian Brooker. They were to grips with the rigours of the Antarctic for more than six months during which time, their efforts were more than a little frustrated by relentless bad weather. In spite of all, much was achieved penetrating the hitherto unclimbed and ice bound mountains of the Alladyce Range and establishing a basic survey triangulation. Secondary objectives of the expedition were glaciology and observation of penguins, seals and birds. Brooker and Webb made the first major ascent of a mountain in South Georgia by attaining *Mount Brooker 6171' at that time the highest to be climbed. The **book written by George Sutton published in 1956 records an expedition on mountains Himalayan in character requiring great perseverance and fortitude to attain success. All load hauling was done by the team themselves with sledges and the book records dangerous passages and narrow escapes. There is much that could be reproduced but for interest the description of the climb onto the summit of Mount Brooker is presented here.

"A rather watery yellow sunrise greeted them at six o'clock next morning when they skied along to the Buttress. An hour later they had dumped the skis and were scrambling up the Second Buttress. Both men felt in poor shape, for they had found it difficult to sleep during the recent nights. They had first to cut steps up an ice-slope and cross an awkward bergschrund to gain the rock buttress, after which they climbed easily up sound rock for about five hundred feet before coming on to scree. Scrambling up the loose scree gave them a further thousand feet of altitude, but meanwhile, although there were about twenty degrees of frost, a light rain unloosed a number of small avalanches from the rock buttresses above, and chunks of ice, whining viscerously, came whizzing past them. At about three thousand feet the scree gave way to steep boiler plates of slippery green ice and numerous crevasses. Donning claws-, they followed the ice up to about four

* The highest mountain in South Georgia, Mount Paget 9625', was eventually climbed by a Combined Services Expedition in 1964-5 led by Lieut. Commander Burley R.N.

**'Glacier Island' published by Chatto and Windus Ltd.

thousand feet. Visibility was still good, giving fine views of the Salvesen Range, despite frequent showers and clouding over from the Ross Pass.

They were now coming on to a big snowfield which narrowed to a point between the main summit and a lower top. The snowfield was flanked on one side by a rock and ice ridge, and on the other by a rock precipice with an ice-fall running along its edge, spilling over in avalanches to the glacier below. The snowfield lifted in a steep surge up to what appeared to be a ridge between the summit and lower peak, two thousand feet above. The upper slopes were guarded by gigantic blocks of ice which caused some trepidation, but Ian and Clive were picking their way up between crevasses, cutting steps in places but making fairly rapid progress, and their hopes of reaching the summit were running high.

Visibility was deteriorating and the weather tried in rapid succession a variety of its tricks, gusts of wind, rain, clouds, but the two men forged on, until it was seen that they could skirt the ice-blocks without great difficulty and gain the final snow slope between the two summits. They were now little more than three hundred feet from the main summit and approaching the last obstacle, a large bergschrund spanned in one place only by an ethereal and seemingly totally inadequate snow-bridge. That this last difficulty might prove insurmountable was the fear that hammered at their spirits now — was this last, single crevasse to deprive them of the first major ascent in South Georgia? As a final gesture of battle the weather brought out its last resource, and in the space of minutes shrouded everything completely in mist, so that all Ian could see of Clive was an indistinct shadow seventy feet away.

They hoped the mist would clear soon, if only for a minute or two to give them a chance to reach the crevasse bridge, but after sitting in the snow for nearly two hours there was no sign of a break. They decided to carry on anyway, probing through the murk towards the open bergschrund.

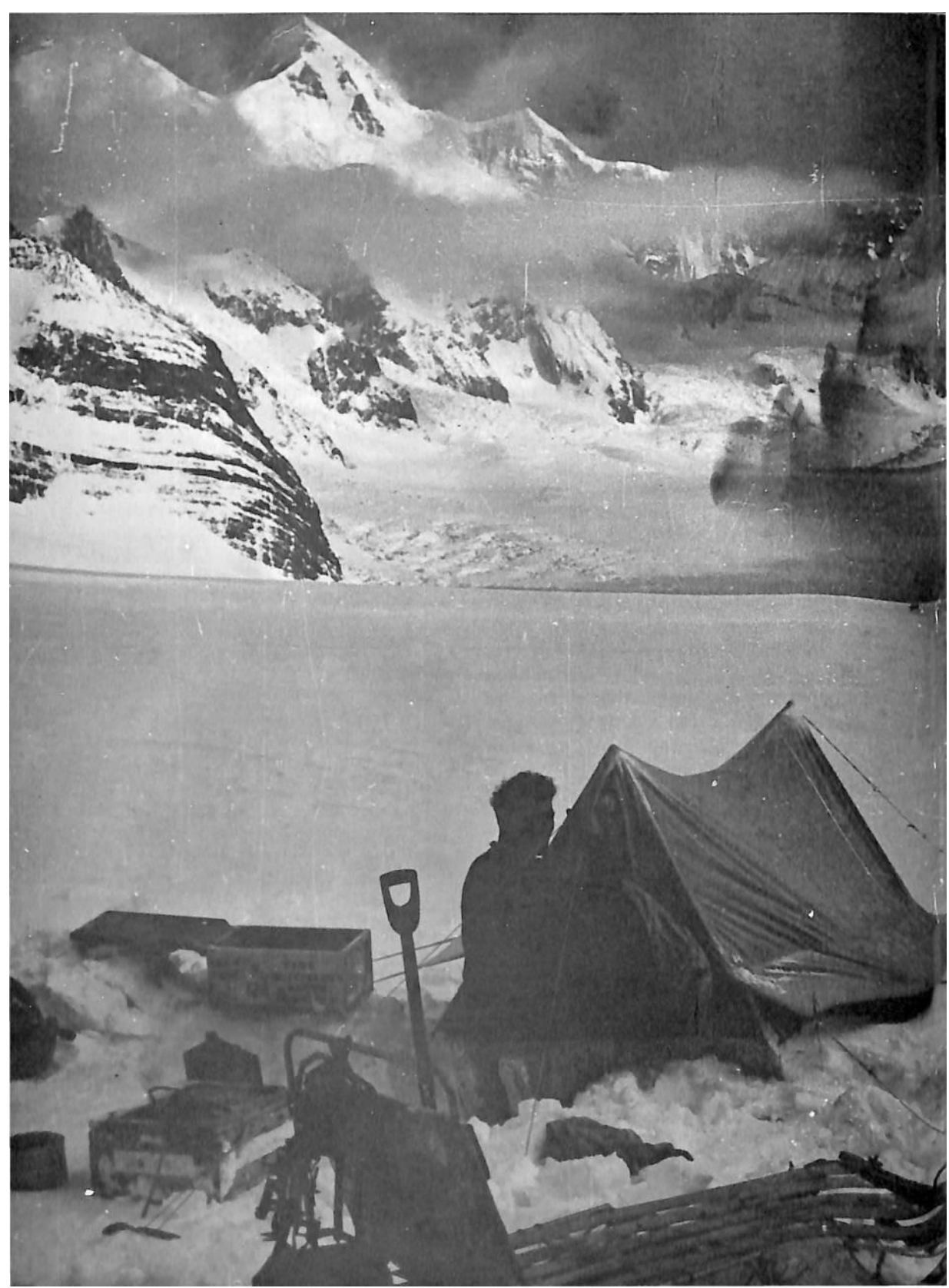
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‘Progressing like Agag’ Ian records, ‘we eventually reached this obstacle bang on the fragile bridge across, and gingerly cut steps over it and headed upwards through the gloom, seeing nothing at all. Followed a small horseshoe ridge, making very obvious tracks for our return, and then came to an ice tower of fifty feet.’ This gave little difficulty, and at the top they found they were on a crest about fifteen square feet, and could go no higher — it was the summit!

By tradition they should have built a cairn or waved a flag, at least, but there were no rocks at the summit, our flags had long since been used as handkerchiefs, and Ian and Clive had been on too many summits to indulge in histrionics. At the same time a deep emotion stirred the hearts of both men, for they had not failed the Expedition. This was no ordinary ascent to them. Our four months of frustration had driven us to such despair that to reach the summit of any one of the higher peaks seemed synonymous to our minds with success, while failure conjured up a picture of all those people who had helped and encouraged, and who must be disappointed. The climbing of a high mountain had become no longer a pleasure, but a duty. As a result the Expedition had adopted the most outrageous plan, with every man taking greater risks, so that now this success, so hard won by Clive and Ian, yet belonged to all of us and to all those patient friends at home. Many Himalayan peaks of far greater stature had offered less



resistance than this fine mountain; few have been climbed by so small a unit.

Although he did not know it at the time, Ian's share of happiness for this day was not yet complete. Even as he sat on this lonely summit waiting for the mist to clear, many thousands of miles away his second son, Gregor, first saw the light of day and stressed his views complainingly about a harsh and unsympathetic world. Since both events are so linked it seems an inevitable consequence that both mountain and man should share the same name, and Sunset Peak was renamed accordingly, but for the Expedition, Mount Gregor* will always remain as a memory of a beautiful ice-peak catching the last red rays of the setting sun."

In 1956 it was decided to appoint an Assistant Secretary to help cope with some of the additional work; the Welsh hut had increased the Club's responsibility considerably and involved more correspondence. Ronnie Phillips took on this job with Ernie Phillips sitting on the Committee together with, amongst others, Laurie Burns. Mike Gadd took over as Meets Secretary.

Another joint meet was held with the Midland Association of Mountaineers. Glencoe was the venue for Easter, a visit was made to the Trough of Bowland and there was some rummaging around Charnwood Forest, Leicestershire, during summer evenings.

This was the year during which Geoff Hayes was elected to membership of the Club. Messrs. Alf Bridge and Jack Longland were made Honorary Members, Norman Millward and Janet Hughes (now Penlington) joined the members list.

For the Annual Dinner the scene moved to the splendid dining room of the Rutland Arms at Bakewell; it can only be assumed that the finances were healthy as three principal guests were entertained, namely Robin Hodgkin. Jack Longland and Alf Bridge.

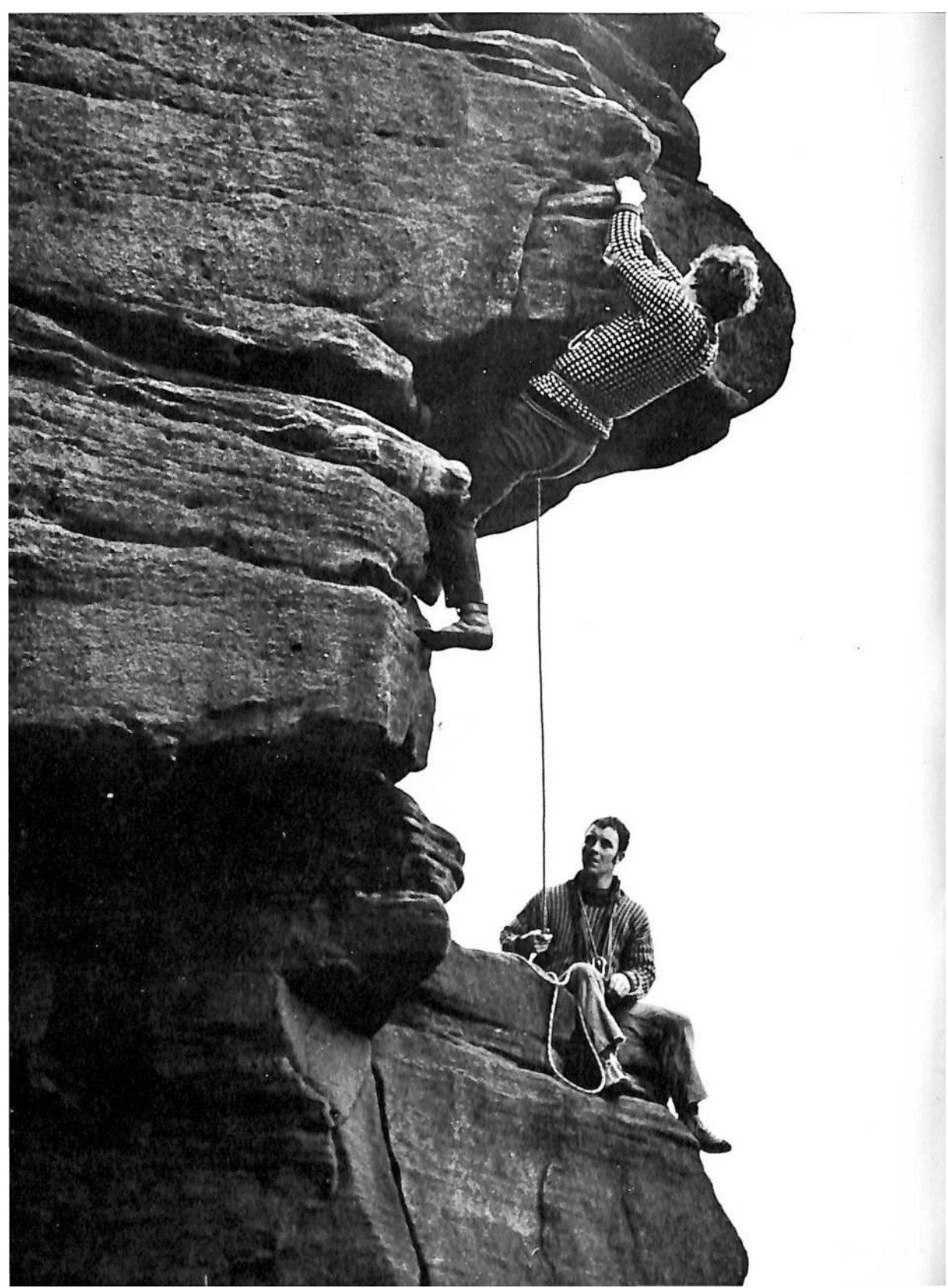
Christmas was spent at 'Bryn-y-Wern' and, due to the country's involvement in the Suez crisis with the consequent rationing of petrol, a coach was run.

The 1957 Meets List is interesting in that the first item on it appeared as 'Pot Holing - Bagshaw Cavern.' However, research by the leader designate, Ernie Phillips (no doubt abetted by those new arrivals Chuck and Margaret Hooley), revealed that the cave would not be fit to descend even with a frogman's outfit and the venue was changed to a 'Bleaklow Bash' or 'Kinder Crossing'.

Penlington slipped in one of his so-called Welsh Training Walks and the less said about this the better. Laurie Burns led a meet to the Radnor Forest. The October meet to 'Bryn-y-Wern' is recorded as having been led by A.N. Other (whose previous association had normally been with football and cricket teams), whilst the Photo Meet was organised by One More.

There were considerable changes amongst the officers and committee with Phil Falkner becoming President. Len Hatchett, Secretary assisted by Bob Parslow and Jim Bury was the Meets Secretary. It was at the 1957 Annual General Meeting that Laurie Burns took over as Treasurer, a post he has held continuously to this day.

***Renamed later Mount Brooker.**



Charlie Cullum embarked on his fifth year of newsletter editorship. The Annual Dinner moved again, this time to the 'White Lion' at Great Longstone. Tony Moulam and Alan Hargreaves were present, but it was the well known broadcaster, Wynford Vaughan-Thomas, delivering his after dinner speech which had the customers rolling around on their chairs and holding their sides with laughter.

1957 seems to mark the end of the formative years of the club. Nothing has been mentioned of alpine meets — Geoff Gibson giving a lead in this direction, or of the particular rock fen our on Welsh granite and Derbyshire gritstone by individuals like Ernie Marshall, Dave Penlington, Derrick Burgess and Ray Handley, but little doubt a club of wide interest in mountain activity had been born.