



Oliver
C. B. Mackin

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C O N T E N T S

MIDLAND SPITSBERGEN EXPEDITION 1960	J. Kershaw
CYRIL MACHIN - AN APPRECIATION	H. Pretty
MOUNTAIN PEOPLE	R. Turner
LOW LEVEL ROUTE	T. Frost
MIDLAND VATNAJOKULL EXPEDITION 1963	J. Kershaw

MIDLAND SPITSBERGEN EXPEDITION 1960

(BARSETSHIRE SPITSBERGEN EXPEDITION)

Spitsbergen is a large group of islands covering an area of 24,000 square miles, and situated in the Arctic Ocean about 600 miles from the North Pole. It was discovered in 1494, and came under Norwegian administration in 1920. Both Norwegian and Russian mining settlements are found there. It has been the starting point of many Arctic expeditions. Among these of note are the following :-

1897 ANDRES ill-fated balloon flight to the Pole.

1926 BYRD and AMUNDSEN made flights to the Pole by plane, and the airship NORGE.

1928 NOBILE attempted to reach the Pole by airship.

Minor expeditions now go to Spitsbergen every year. Although the rock in many parts of the island is sedimentary, areas like the northwest contain much that is suitable for rock-climbing. The pink granite of the STAXRUD PLATEAU is some of the best available. The peaks which are accessible from MAGDALENA BAY are not higher than 4,000 ft and vary between mere heaps of rubble, and fine pinnacled ridges and summits. At the time of our own expedition, many of them had not been climbed. Transport is available on the S.S. LINGEN from TROMSO at moderate rates. 23 peaks were climbed during the seven weeks of the expedition, and 19 were probably first ascents. Summit cairns were found on all peaks which we knew to have been climbed previously. The routes we climbed ourselves ranged from pleasant scrambles to v. diff. standard. Names were given to summits and pinnacles of which a first ascent was made, but have not necessarily been accepted by the Norwegian Polar Institute. The following account is partly written from memory, and may therefore be in-accurate in some particulars.

The expedition was landed at MAGDALENA BAY, N.W. SPITSBERGEN on July 5th by the S.S. LINGEN after a journey of 2,000 miles from Newcastle via Bergen and Tromso.

The following were members of the party.

T. DAFFERN	CEUNANT M.C.
G. HAWORTH	
J. KERSHAW	OREAD M.C.
H. MANISON	BIRMINGHAM A.C.
J. PORTER	
M. T. PLIN	CAVE AND CRAG

5th - 14th July

A base camp was set up at TRINITY HARBOUR. This is a sandpit which projects across the mouth of MAGDALENA BAY and shelters an excellent sandy beach. A clear stream provides a good supply of fresh water, and there are innumerable campsites. The bay has been visited by shipping since the early seventeenth century, mainly by whalers, and there is a seamen's graveyard at the end of TRINITY point. The deathrate from scurvy must have been high in those days. Hungry polar bears have disturbed many of the graves in the winter months and the Norwegian authorities have reburied the scattered bones, and erected a monument to SPITSBERGEN PIONEERS 1600-1750. However there are no signs of bears in Summer. The chief enemy is man. The reserve food dump which we left here during our trip to the interior was unfortunately pilfered. In spite of this I have pleasant memories of MAGDALENA BAY with its surrounding wall of peaks and glaciers. There is a regular thunder from the WAGGONWAY GLACIER falling into the bay, and an interval before the rhythmic beat of waves on the beach follows. Fragments of ice are stranded there and melt into the shapes of strange birds and animals. The weather on a fine day is very similar to Spring in England. The duration of the sunshine makes up for its lack of intensity, but the wind is always cold and symbolises for me the menace which lies beneath the glitter and elegance of the Arctic landscape.

Our first task at the base camp was the construction of sledges for which we had brought laminated plastic runners. The sledges which we had ordered in Norway and expected to collect at TROMSO had not arrived in time, so we had to do the best we could with drift wood and pieces of packing case. Although the finished sledges were rather heavy they served their purpose well enough. A reconnaissance was made up the FRANKLIN GLACIER as far as SET. DU. CAPE. Four peaks were climbed in the neighbour-hood of MAGDALENA BAY.

1. POINT 750 metres - East of the col. at the head of the FRANKLIN GLACIER First Ascent.
2. PINNACLE PEAK 836 Metres - Between the WAGGONWAY GLACIER and the FRANKLIN GLACIER - First Ascent.
3. SNOWDON - Peak at the head of GULLY GLACIER - First Ascent.
4. RIPS AW 780 metres - Between FRANKLIN GLACIER and GULLY GLACIER - First Ascent.

Three of us set out from the base camp at 12 noon following the margin of the bay, then ascending the FRANKLIN GLACIER for a mile, turning west to climb the long serrated ridge of RIPS AW. The rock at the eastern end proved difficult so we descended, and followed the base of the ridge until we could climb a snow gully. We gained the ridge after 800 ft, near a large poised block. Two small buttresses and a chimney (diff) led to the summit. Descent was made down another gully and a direct route taken to Trinity Harbour 1-30 am.

34 days food and equipment were moved to the snowline about half a mile up the FRANKLIN GLACIER by manpacking.

14th - 19th July

The whole party moved 3 miles to the col at the head of the FRANKLIN GLACIER with 34 days food and fuel, and two sledges. Four peaks were climbed.

5. MOLAR 806 Metres - At the head of No.4 Glacier - First ascent.
6. REINDEER 778 metres - Immediately to the north of MOLAR - First ascent
7. REINDEER PINNACLE - To the north of REINDEER (Diff) - First Ascent.
8. POINT. 748 Metres - To the west of the col at the head of the FRANKLIN GLACIER - First Ascent.

20th - 29th July

A move of three miles was made from the col to the Southern Cwm of the LOSVIK mountains. A camp was set up at the base of POINT 372 metres. This entailed crossing the WAGGONWAY GLACIER which is badly crevassed in the lower areas. The sledges were eased down a steep snow gradient with ropes, and a route found parallel to the line of the crevasses. The crevasses on the WAGGONWAY are some of the biggest I have yet seen. In view of the accident which occurred later on, I sincerely recommend avoiding them if at all possible.

Six peaks were climbed.

9. LUCIFER - This highest point on a small ridge immediately to the north of MOUNT DOLORES and not marked on the map. Height about 800 metres.

The summit consists of two adjacent pinnacles (diff. + v.diff) First ascent.
10. TAURUS 887 metres - An easy approach was made up a snow gully in the northeast corner of the SOUTHERN CWM. The ridge was followed to the base of a split pinnacle and we passed through the cleft on large jammed boulders. The loose right hand branch of the pinnacle was climbed (5 ft), and a long step taken across to the sound left hand spire. A v.diff. climb of 6 ft. led to the top, a sharp summit in an exposed position. First ascent.
11. ARIES c.a. 800 metres not marked on the map. The ridge is followed to the west from TAURUS. A small col is negotiated, and the summit reached by a diagonal climb across steep slabs and a loose ridge (Diff). A return was made to the SOUTHERN CWM down the same route. - First ascent.
12. AVALANCHE PEAK 736 or 868 metres - At the head of the NORTHERN CWM First ascent.

13. MOUNT DOLORES 1090 metres - First climbed in the 1920's by an Austrian party. Ascended from the south side up a snow gully leading to the base of the summit rocks. Round on the east side to the main pinnacle, 100 ft. of slabs, 100 ft. of scrambling, 40 ft. wall to summit (Diff) A tin box containing records of ascents was found on a ledge on the North side.

29th July - 4th August

The camp was moved five miles south to SET. DU CAFE. The two parties became separated.

One was completely engulfed in a large crevasse on the WAGGONWAY, but got themselves out with most of their food, leaving the sledge behind.

14. POINT 768 METRES - Two miles northwest from SET. DU. CAFE - Ascended up a snow gully on the southeast side - First ascent - Not named.

5th - 11th August

Owing to the loss of a sledge the expedition divided into two groups. The first of which I was a member, manpacked 13 days food to SUILVEN and the CHAINE DE LAPPARENT to climb additional peaks. The second used the remaining sledge to travel down the BECQUEREL GLACIER, across the LILLIEHOOK GLACIER, to the east of the CHAINE DE LAPPARENT and north of the SET DE SEVE back to SET DU. CAFE.

15. SUILVEN 884 metres - On the ridge between the DARBOUX and BECQUEREL GLACIERS. A pleasant ascent up a snowslope, and a narrow snow ridge. A diff. chimney (120 ft) to summit. First Ascent.
16. SWITHLAND 969 Metres - Two miles west of SUILVEN across the BECQUEREL Glacier. Ascent up a snow gully on the east side finishing in short iced up chimney. (v. diff). Descent down the ridge on the north side - First Ascent.

12 - 16th August

The camp was moved three miles across the DARBOUX GLACIER and the LILLIEHOOK to CASTLE RIDGE. 904 Metres in the CHAINE DE LAPPARENT.

Seven peaks were climbed.

CHAINE DE LAPPARENT

17. RAZORBACK 1000 metres - First ascent. The first peaks south of the gap to the west of the LOVET GLACIER. One of the attractions of the Arctic is the continuous daylight. There are no worries about being benighted. Indeed climbing in the midnight hours has a charm of its own. The low angled light throws long shadows, and the landscape stands out in sharp relief. I remember looking out from the tent at CASTLE RIDGE the evening after we arrived and seeing the superb curve of a snowridge rise into the clouds. An hour or so later we were ascending the knife edge in delicate balance between the shadows on one hand and the subdued

light of the midnight sun on the other. Eventually we gained a small summit plateau, and as far as we could see in every direction, range on range of miniature peaks spread under scattered cloud in a complex pattern of light and shade. We had come 2000 miles to stand in this place and for a moment there was a brief vision that made it worthwhile.

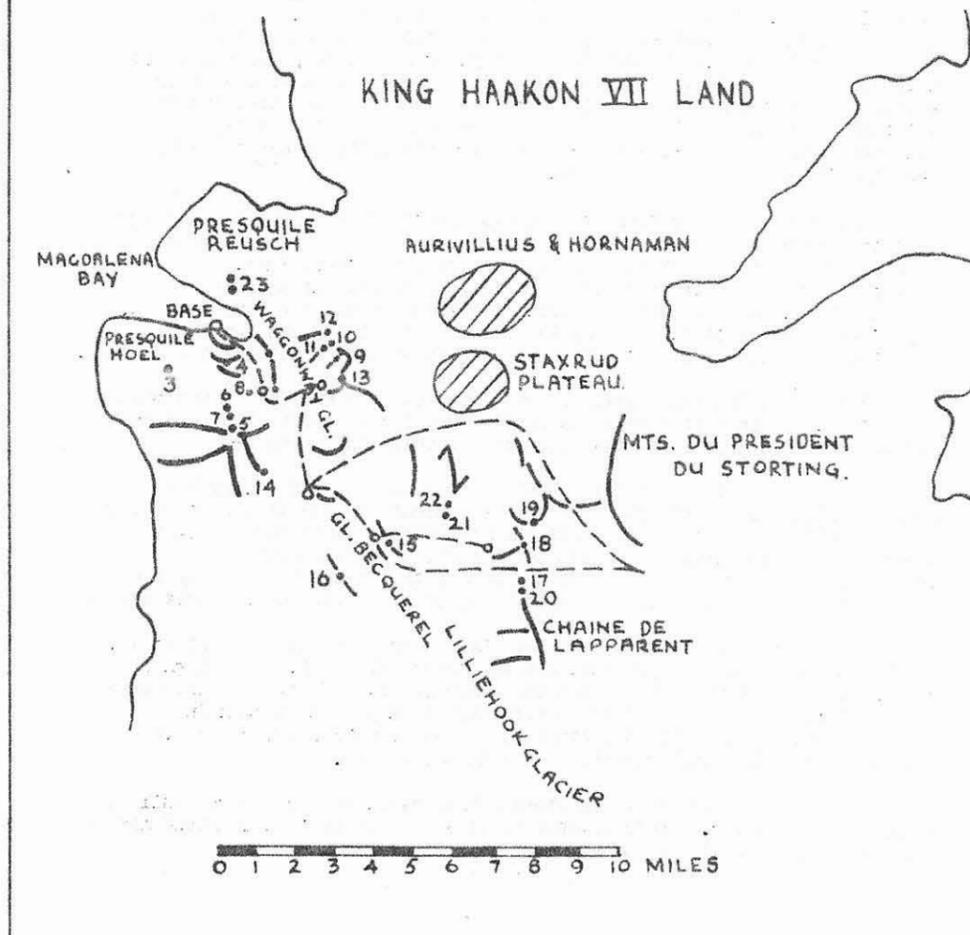
18. RED PIKE 1140 metres- Next summit south of LE MOINE - First ascent.
19. LE MOINE 1222 metres - Previously climbed by a French Expedition - Large summit cairns.
20. The section of ridge south of RAZORBACK. Three summits 1030, 1028, 1000 metres - First ascent.
21. SET DE SEVE
Long Life 908 Metres - First ascent.
22. DILEMMA ca. 900 metres - First ascent of southern pinnacle, LONG LIFE is the southernmost peak in the SET DE SEVE. We climbed it in an attempt to complete the whole ridge of which it is part. $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile to the north there are two pinnacles separated by a short section of ridge (DILEMMA) We reached this via a snow gully on the east side. The ridge narrows to a knife edge as it approaches the southern pinnacle (40 ft). There is then a short wall (5 ft) below a large flat block on a ledge, and 60 ft of scrambling to the top of the pinnacle. (v. diff). Return to glacier by the same route. Northern pinnacle not climbed.

We rejoined the other half of the expedition at SET DU CAFE, and all returned to MAGDALENA BAY via SET. PETERSON and the FRANKLIN GLACIER. We found that a Swiss Expedition from the University of Geneva had arrived in our absence and were based on the cemetery. They had wisely brought a small boat with them and were able to cross the bay to its Northeast corner and gain direct access to the AURIVILLIUS and HORNAMAN mountains.

23. POINTS 715 and 643 Metres near MOUNT ROTGES were climbed. First ascent doubtful.

The Swiss were extremely hospitable and invited us over for a celebration, so the time passed pleasantly enough until the arrival of the LYNGEN and our departure for home on AUGUST 22nd.

WEST SPITSBERGEN KING HAAKON VII LAND



(EXTRACT)

Cyril Machin died in Beddgelert on Saturday 14th September whilst attending the M.A.M. Anniversary Dinner. For those of us who came under the influence of this remarkable man in the very earliest days of the Oread it may seem characteristic that he departed suddenly and without fuss - in the company of many of his oldest friends, and close to the mountains which had been at the very core of his life.

The first anniversary number of the Oread Newsletter, June 1954, carried the news of Cyril's serious fall from Castle Naze. Only his determination and unquenchable spirit brought him through. He never climbed again. To walk at all, his limbs artificially supported, often extended him to the limit, but few, if any, of his closest friends would have dared to express vocal sympathy. Independent and wilful as ever, gentle and courteous despite all the pain and stress, self effacing to the point of embarrassment when his friends kind heartedly invaded his amazingly self sufficient world - he devoted his latter years to working and organising on behalf of others.

Not only did he continue to organise meets in the Dolomites and Skye with that same efficiency and attention to detail which always gave his parties a very special atmosphere, he continued to attend them. Ubiquitous in his little motorised chariot, (as M.A.M. Hut Warden), he commuted to N. Wales in all weathers, living on his own for long periods, organising work parties, climbing ladders into the loft, and lending to committees far and wide that very special gift he had of getting things done.

I do not think that Cyril was ever subject to a Profile in the Oread Newsletter, but in that same first Anniversary issue of June 1954, he was referred to in a Profile of the Oread in the following words :-

"In some way or other Cyril Machin was acquired, and he, by his singular example, unwittingly did more to indicate a general direction than was apparent at the time - but then of course, Cyril was the most unorthodox of them all. His name and strange accomplishments were legendary, and no man in the short history of the Oread has been regarded with quite the same affection as that accorded to C.B.M. in the early days".

In 1949 he was old enough to have been a grand father to most of us, but he climbed with more panache, greater technical skill, and a higher determination than many of us even dared aspire to. He climbed and caved with what at times seemed almost a ferocity of purpose as though in regretting his relatively late start as a climber he was determined to compensate for the "lost years". This he surely did.

He never understood our inveterate bawdiness, nor our brash ebullience in pubs and on buses. Retrospectively it is difficult to understand how he tolerated our uninhibited ways.

To Cyril, our youthful exuberance must often, have seemed nothing less than discourtesy. Only once, as far as I know, did we ever seriously offend him. This was immediately prior to the first Oread Annual Dinner at the "Fox House" when he, as our first President, was informed by the committee (who represented 80% of the total membership) that we did not intend proposing the Loyal Toast, or any other toast that was not in line with our savagely left-wing-Republican - anti-Apline Club - anti-climbing establishment views. I know now that we upset him very badly and in the event with some reluctance we eventually gave way to his outraged feelings. This may now appear as a strange incident, but early Oreads were, politically and socially, very sensitive indeed.

For my own part I shall always remember him for the way he unaffectedly welcomed Molly and myself, complete strangers, to his 1949 Skye Meet. Anyone who had the good fortune to join one of Cyril's legendary parties to Skye, Fort William or, more latterly, in the Dolomites, is never likely to forget the warmth, humour and excitement of the occasion - for the atmosphere of his parties was invariably an extension of his own unique personality.

Only Cyril could smash a wash basin in the process of having a standing bath, and only Cyril, at his whimsical best, could have informed Mrs. Macrae of the disaster by seriously enquiring as to the immediate availability of sanitary fittings in Portree.

In company with all his friends I remember his determination and courage through the years since 1954. His gentleness and patience will be remembered by hundreds of White Hall youngsters who tied themselves to his rope. At an age when most men have taken to carpet slippers and the melancholy of remembering only the past, Cyril lived vividly and urgently in the present.

When the Founder Members of the Oread made him their first President, and subsequently their first Honorary Member, Cyril was at the very height of his powers. These were the days of C.B.M. in his prime - the period during which so much of the legend had its origin in fact.

Cyril going out for a solitary walk from Glenbrittle House and going on to complete the entire Cuillin Ridge Traverse in well under twenty four hours. "I had a pair of plimsolls with me for the harder bits" was his only significant comment.

Cyril patiently tunnelling his way through a massive Nevis cornice - a task that occupied him all of a long night and which will never be forgotten by those of his companions who were normal men.

Cyril abroad on the Terrace Wall with a frightened plumber who had merely called at Glan Dena on business, and was unfortunate enough to find C.B.M. alone and raring to go.

Cyril wandering solo across steep Welsh rock - he probably lost count of the times he'd solo'd Pinnacle Wall, which was one of his favourites. I don't know just how much solo climbing Cyril indulged in - he always talked of it with the same deprecating nonchalance that enlightened most of his climbing stories. But I suspect that during the long periods he spent on his own at Glan Dena he enjoyed more than he admitted to.

On one occasion he fell down No.3 Gully accompanied by a large cornice. "I knew it was safe by then..... so I went back up and it was easy". He was climbing solo of course, and I remember that others, who met him on the plateau and had no idea of the toughness of this apparently frail balding old man, showed signs of being outraged by such flagrant non-observance of the rules.

Cyril clawing his way up President's Wall barefooted on a raw, foggy, winter morning, these were special years for some of us and much of the fun, the discovery, and the excitement was the gift of Cyril Machin.

Not long ago I came down from Tryfan to find Cyril in sole occupation of Glan Dena. I was returning to Rhyd Dhu, but for a while we sat outside and talked of this and that. Desultory gossip about nothing in particular, and about which I remember very little. He said that he'd been in the loft and was a little tired, but he emphatically insisted on making tea and bringing it out. I do remember that we talked about Derbyshire and, among one thing and another, I remember chaffing him, as I'd done a dozen times in the past, about the time he got lost in a Derbyshire cave with a mutual acquaintance - and how he'd sat all night leaning against the small hole that eventually got him out. And I remember thinking that he did look tired, and that I didn't possess one decent photograph of him. So I took several - and he sat very still and asked several times whether I wanted him to move - Cyril always seemed to get what I can only describe as a young person's enjoyment out of being photographed. Eventually when Tryfan was a dark wedge against the evening sky I drove away and it never crossed my mind that I would not see him again.

MOUNTAIN PEOPLE (EXTRACT)

R. Turner

"The guide is more than a mere machine for climbing rocks and ice slopes, for knowing the weather and the way. He does not climb for himself, he throws open the gates of his mountains as a gardener opens the gates of his garden - "Gaston Rebuffat"

Some of the most delightful and memorable recollections of mountaineering concern the people that one meets in the hills.

My first acquaintance with Ronald MacDonald, the Soay boatman, was on a visit to the island of Skye. At that time Ronald used to go "shopping" in Mallaig on Saturday mornings, and he never failed to meet the train from Fort William whenever he knew there were visitors expected in Glen Brittle.

For considerably less than the combined cost of a ferry to Armadale and two buses to Glen Brittle he would ferry you direct to Loch Brittle.

In good weather this approach has a great deal to recommend it because some of the finest views of the Cullin Hills are from the sea.

On this trip Ronald brewed some tea which was gladly accepted by the better sailors on the boat, and he spun many exciting and fascinating tales of shark fishing. It was not until I had been at Glen Brittle Lodge for some days that I discovered that Ronald's Partner - Tex, had for sometime worked with Gavin Maxwell, whom you may know wrote a very good book "Harpoon at a Venture" which is all about shark fishing - and so the stories which Ronald had told us were not as I thought, "something for the Visitors" but very true and all the better for it".

The people of Skye have a most generous nature as I quickly discovered when I first visited the island. I took the early morning bus to Sligachan one day, and made for Sgurr Nan Gilleann by the Pinnacle Ridge. It was very misty to begin with, which made the going a little slower than I had anticipated. Later when it cleared, the views from Gilleann and Am Basteir were so magnificent that I lingered on the tops and left very little time to get back for the return bus.

At the time the bus was due to leave I reckoned that it would take me over an hour to Sligachan so I slackened the pace in order to enjoy the view.

The Road outside the Hotel at Sligachan is hidden by a bank, and when I reached the top of the bank, the bus was there waiting. The driver said that he knew I would be wanting to ride back and no one on the bus was in any particular hurry - They had waited patiently for one and a half hours.

A similar temperament to the Scot's is found in the Norwegians. Oddly enough another bus incident in Norway will illustrate this. My wife and I had obtained tickets in advance for a journey along the Sognfjell Road from Sogndal to Roysheim. Unfortunately we found that the bus was unable to get over the pass as it was still blocked with winter's snow. We decided to walk over. We previously enquired how many miles it was to Roysheim but we overlooked that Norwegian miles are longer than English ones and it took us two days instead of the expected half a day.

Calling at TURTAGRIS Hotel on our return, we were talking to the proprietor about our walk over the pass. He asked us whether we had bus tickets for the journey. When we told him that we had, he took us in his car to the bus depot and the bus company gave us 36 Kroner refund. They merely asked us how far we had walked, and said that we were not expected to pay for a ride we had not taken.

During several visits to Romsdal in Norway I have got to know the local guide Arne Heen quite well. He was a member of the Norwegian expedition to TIRICH MIR. A tailor by profession and I imagine that he works pretty hard at this during the Winter, because in the Summer he spends

~~most of his~~ time in the mountains. - 11 -

He is a good photographer, an expert marksman and an athlete (he has dozens of trophies). He is very interested in local history, amongst other things in this field he has located and mapped old reindeer traps. He seems to be an expert in a variety of fields.

Heen maintains log books which are kept on every major summit in Romsdaal, he is very willing to give information on climbs and routes in the area, and he is an amiable companion. Anyone visiting Andalsnes in Romsdaal to climb would quickly make a friend in Arne Heen.

Another Norwegian, who is always the perfect host is K. Dahl the proprietor of the Hotel Union at Oye in the Sunnmore. Herr Dahl knows well how to cater for the climbers needs - a lover of mountaineering he keeps the perfect mountaineers hotel. Even should a climber not be staying at the Hotel, he is pleased to give what information he can on routes in the area. But one should not miss the opportunity of staying for a few days at the Hotel and sampling the good food and hospitality.

I am particularly fond of Scotland and Norway, but in every range of mountains that I have visited I have always found friendly, helpful, interesting people.

The Chamonix Guides have sometimes been criticised, often by people who have never even met one of them. I have an acquaintance with some of the Guides and one of these is Fontaine of Chamonix. He is tall and powerful, a great fellow to have on the rope, a professional guide in the best tradition, as perhaps this incident shows. He was hired for a climb on Mont Blanc by two gentlemen from Iran, one of whom claimed to be brother to the President of the Iranian Alpine Club. I had not heard of this club.

Unfortunately I followed this party up to the hut - the Iranians were very adept at dislodging stones. I was reminded of a phrase I had heard many times in Chamonix. "The stones fall down the mountains all the time, but they do not climb up again".

The following day one of the Iranians went the way of the stones. On the descent he slipped on easy ground. The guide could not be blamed for the accident, fortunately the Iranian was only bruised and shocked. The guides carried him down to a doctor in Chamonix. When heard that a camera had been lost by these climbers, he went back up the mountain, found the camera, returned it to his client in Chamonix, and then climbed back up to the AGUILLE DU MIDI. A good bit of voluntary unpaid overtime.

Even if you are usually a "Sans Guide" it would be worth your while to climb with a guide some time. The guides spend a lot of their time taking non climbers up the peaks, but they are quick to recognise a kindred spirit and you will find that their friendship is a great reward.

With all mountain people there is something in common; a love of the hills and a belief that an experience is greater when it is shared.

There is a wealth of legend in the mountains and perhaps I might end with a reference to one of the legends of Torrison which is not perhaps generally known. It was told to me by an old Scot in Torrison. Apparently the old "See" said that one day the mountains will fall down on Torrison and everyone will be killed, except a woman with a red petticoat - and the women of Torrison all keep red petticoats.

LOW LEVEL ROUTE

T. Frost

Recommended for climbers stranded in Zermatt by bad weather with wives, cars etc, in Arolla :-

A Low Level Traverse over Snowless cols on well marked paths involving approx. 16,000 feet of ascent and 13,000 feet of descent and a distance of 35 miles, being a fair two days flog from St. Niklaus to Arolla.

The route is as follows :-

St. Niklaus (Mattertal)

Augstbord Pass

Gruben Pass (TURTMANN TAL)

Meiden Pass

a. Ayer and GRIMENTZ (Val D'Annivers)

Col de Torrent

or

b. Zinal (Val de Zinal)

Col de Sorrebois

Lac de Moiry (Val de Moiry)

Col de Torrent

Les Mauderes (Val D.'Herens)

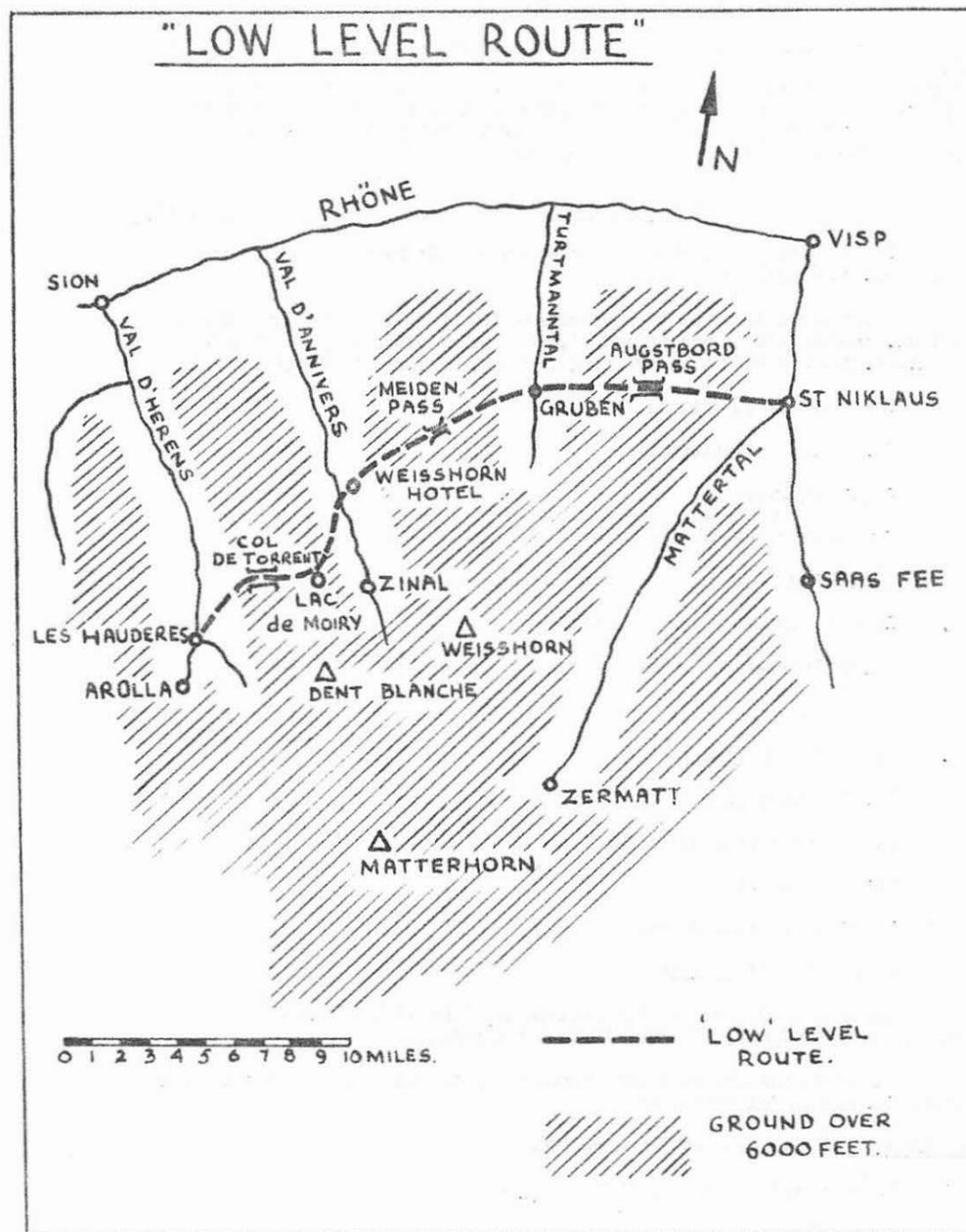
Arolla (Val D' Arolla)

The necessary maps are Landeskarte der Schweiz 1 : 50,000 numbers 273 (Montana), 274 (Visp) and 283 (Arolla)

The first night's stay can conveniently be passed at the Hotel Weisshorn above St. Luc in Val D'Annivers.

Oread Quote (Langdale Meet February 1964)

"Your'e just a Coventry YOB"



R. HUGHES) Birmingham Athletic Club (Mountaineering Section)
H. MANISON)

J. KERSHAW Oread Mountaineering Club.

The purpose of the expedition was to cross the VATNAJOKULL Glacier from south to north via BREIDA, GRIMSVOTN and KISTUFELL with enough food supplies to enable us to visit areas of interest which were accessible from this route, and across the volcanic desert which lies immediately to the north and reach the inhabited areas beyond.

Travel on the glacier was by sledge when we had reached the snowline. The approaches to this point had to be made by the slow method of manpacking. We hoped to cross the lava desert with a wheeled cart, constructed from the sledge and a pair of pramwheels. The latter was a gamble whether the ground would be level enough to make their use worthwhile. As it turned out we found that a number of rough tracks have been developed in recent years for the Land-Rover type of vehicle, and indeed much of the open country is now accessible to them.

However June 25th saw our party of three with $\frac{1}{2}$ ton of supplies and equipment at the southern edge of the VATNAJOKULL Glacier near BREIDA, having travelled to HOFN from REYKJAVIK by boat, and from there by jeep on the rudimentary road which is passable only in Summer and involves ferrying across the JOKULSA, "the shortest river in the world".

The BREIDAMERKAJOKULL provides a reasonable route of access to the interior of the VATNAJOKULL, as well as the ORAFAJOKULL (where the highest peak in Iceland HVANNADALSHNOKUR 6,900 ft is found), the MIDFELL group to the west, the ESJUFJOLL nunatak to the north, and the KALAFAPPELL area in the east. The large moraine which run down the glacier furnish a distinctive guide in bad weather and lead directly to the snowline without crossing any badly crevassed areas.

It took us eleven days and four camps to carry all our supplies over the fourteen miles to the snowline at an altitude of 3,000 ft. We dumped most of our food and equipment near the MAFABYGGDIR nunatak, and travelled seven miles eastward by sledge to ESJUFJOLL where the Icelandic Glaciological Society have erected a Nissen hut. A horseshoe of volcanic rock protrudes from the ice facing the south, and is of interest for the curious rock formations which are found there, many of them highly coloured in ochres and crimsons, and the plant life which has taken hold as the ice has retreated. Most of these plants are of an alpine variety, but the common dandelion flourishes in a sheltered site near a spring, its leaves providing a welcome addition to our diet. A solitary pair of skuas had nested here at a point which is separated from the coast by fifteen miles of ice.

We journeyed seven miles further east to the KALFAFEL mountains, and established a camp from which we would explore the region. We climbed peaks such as PVERARTINDEGG 5,197 ft. which were accessible by a snowroute, but most of the rock was unsafe owing to its volcanic nature, or its extremely fractured condition. In spite of this, fantastic towers of the harder material survive in unusual shapes, the KARL OG KERLING (Giant and Giantess) being the most prominent. The view from the top of PVERARTINDEGG is very impressive as the land falls away 5,000 ft. to the deeply cut valley of KALFAFELSDALUR two miles away.

A return was made to the main food dump at M.F.BYGGDIR thirteen miles distant, and we had our first experience of bad weather. Snow, followed by heavy rain snapped one of the tentpoles in half, but this was fortunately repaired with two ice-pitons and sticking-plaster, and in fact lasted the remainder of the expedition. As a preparation for climbing HVANNADALSHNURUR and the northward crossing of VATNAJOKULL, the food dump was moved to HERMANNASKARD a col at (4,400 ft). At this point we had begun to move heavy sledge loads by night to take advantage of the firmer snow conditions which prevailed then. There is no real darkness in the middle of the Icelandic summer. From HERMANNASKARD we set out with seven days food along the plateau south to HVANNADALSHNURUR, and set up camp on a col TJALDASKARD (6,000 ft) after a distance of six miles. This was the last fine weather we were to see for the next ten days. The position here was rather exposed so we constructed a wall of snow blocks six feet high to protect the tent from the wind - we estimate that two feet of snow fell in a four day period. As a sequel to snow, rain froze on the tent flysheet to a thickness of one inch, and the whole was frozen to the ground in a rigid mass. This no doubt saved a complete collapse, but had to be removed as it was shaped like a broken-backed horse and didn't leave much room inside. However with only two days food left we had to give up any idea of climbing HVANNADALSHNURUR, and were obliged to set out for our food dump despite the bad visibility, and the fact that our tracks of four days ago had been obliterated by the snowfall. We travelled on a compass course in stages of fifty to one hundred yards, and were fortunate enough for the mist to lift a little when we were about a mile away from our object.

The long journey across VATNAJOKULL now began, although progress was slow for several days as we had to continue by compass in mist and rain. Six miles of absolute distance were made in four days. However on August 5th an excellent clear night began the fine spell which was to last with only brief interruptions until the expedition was over. For the first time we were able to move everything in one sledload and make rapid progress. In two nights we were at GRIMSVOTN twenty three miles away. This is nearly in the centre of VATNAJOKULL and the site of volcanic activity. It consists of a shallow depression flanked on two sides by rockcliffs. It was first discovered by two Swedes about forty years ago. I'm afraid nobody believed them at the time, perhaps they were being confused with a Scotsman who was earlier reported to have gone on the glacier equipped with a pony and a supply of whisky. Now-adays a hut of the Icelandic Glaciological Society is to be found there on the highest crag overlooking the area.

Thermal activity has formed a series of deep pools of water along the base of the rock. They are covered with ice-floes and gas bubbles rise through a scum of sulphur on the surface. A trace of steam issuing from the cliffs contrasts strongly with the overhanging ice above.

We continued northward after a welcome rest in the hut, and encountered the coldest night conditions we had yet experienced. This was sledging at its most pleasant. The three of us were able to move at three or four miles an hour down the slight gradient to KVERKFJOLL twentyfour miles away. The slow infusion of light and colour into a night sky, and the glitter of the early rays of the sun on the carpet of snow-crystals before us was a sight which compensated somewhat for the discomfort of glacial travel.

I was told in Reykjavik that hell lies beneath Iceland, and it could easily be believed at KVERKFJOLL. A rocky valley splits the face of the ice covered mountain. A pall of steam rises from the innumerable vents, mudpools, and geysers which are found there. It is a place of contrast, where warm streams flow in the shadow of the ice and banks of green moss flourish on the barren earth. A fountain issues from a fragment of quartz beside a boiling mudpool. The drab soil crumbles beneath the feet to reveal rich purple and crimson.

We left this area with some regret and sledged twentyfour miles to KISTUFELL where we could get off the glacier without having to cross a melt stream in flood. The last mile or two led us through a maze of dirty ice, drainage channels and hills of loose stone onto the flat plain which runs between the glacier snout and the desert. The sledge was abandoned as it had fulfilled its purpose, and the runners had been badly splintered by the bare ice. Surplus equipment was thrown away, and the remainder loaded on to our backs, and the small handcart which had been made from a ration box and the pram wheels. Two of us pulled on a rope harness, and one pushed behind. Progress was rapid on a surface of damp glacial sand running alongside a stream flowing from the ice. The water spreads out rapidly on a sunny day when the ice is melting and recedes in the shadows of the evening. Our first sign of civilisation was the track of an overland bus which makes an annual journey along this route. However the old-fashioned method of travel on foot still requires a walk of twenty miles to the next water at DYNGJUVATN. We carried a gallon can of water for the two day journey across the dusty brown flats which run beside barren hills as far as the volcano Askja. A cold wind was still blowing off the glacier and sweeping dust spirals across our path. We avoided a tongue of ancient lava which had spill out of Askja onto the plain. The mirages which we had been seeing for some time became reality in the form of lake DYNGJUVATN. The area is full of interest from the general point of view and has now been made accessible to tourists by the use of the Jeep and Land-Rover. There are pleasant green oases on the streams which flow from ASKJA into Lake DYNGJUVATN. The site of the 1960 eruption is now merely a heap of steaming cinders but the miles of lava which flowed at that time are worth seeing. Heated "bivvys" are available in the caves formed beneath the thin crust where the conditions were favourable.

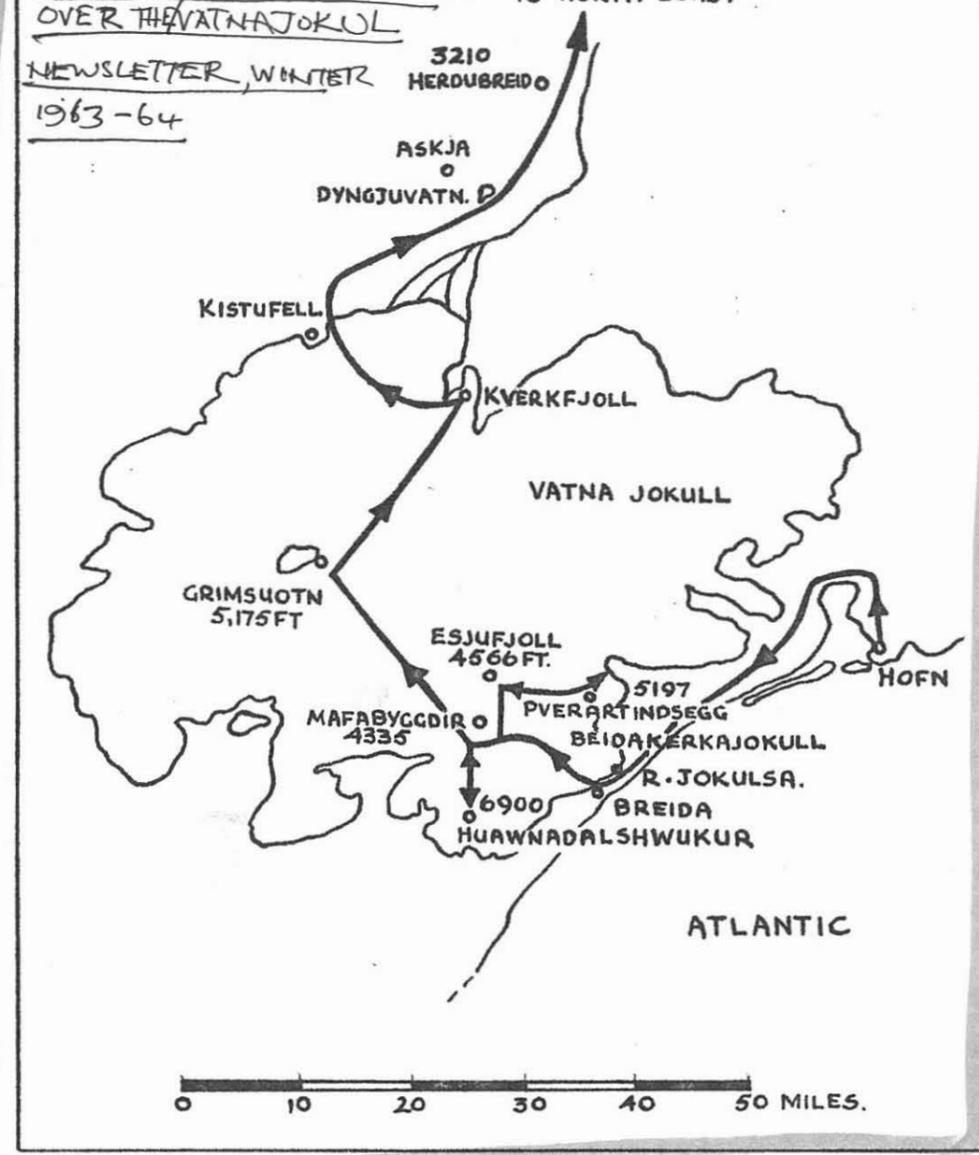
The crater lake OSKJUVATN has a beach of pumice sand, and makes a good camp site

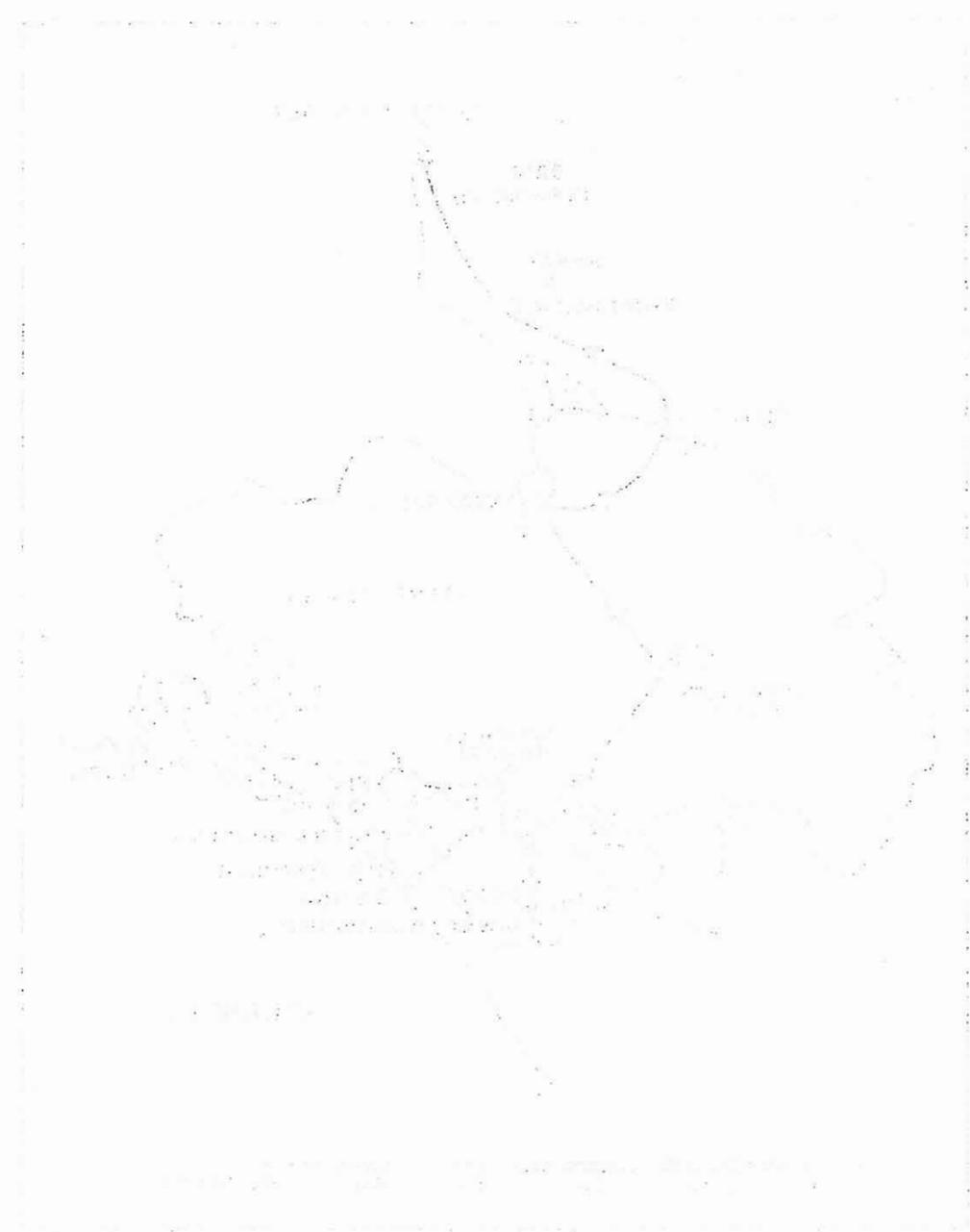
The expedition was now virtually over. Although we had a long distance to travel to get to the north coast it only remained for us to follow vehicle tracks onto the rough roads which lead to LAKE MYVATN, AKUREYRI, and so to REYKJAVIK where we caught the boat to England on September 10th.

MIDLAND VATNAJOKULL EXPEDITION 1963

JIM KERSAW'S SLEDGE ROUTE TO NORTH COAST OVER THE VATNAJOKULL

NEWSLETTER, WINTER 1963-64





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