

Miscellaneous and Editor's Notes

The Alpine Club Library The members of the Council of the ACL remain happily and industriously unchanged since the last report in *AJ* 83 255. Work on checking the card index has continued. This is laborious but it is essential that our catalogue when published should meet the highest standards of accuracy. Meanwhile the Library is in use by visitors and by correspondents from all over the world who are supplied with photocopies of material required.

The cost of printing the 2 volumes of the catalogue will be very heavy. The ACL is most grateful for donations received and for the support of members of the AC in the form of covenants. Some of these are now reaching the end of their 7-year term and the Library is appealing to donors to renew them. The Library also hopes for new donations by members of the AC and ACG, particularly by those who use it for planning expeditions. As soon as the first 2 catalogue volumes have been published, work will begin on the cataloguing of the second half of the Library, as described in the note in *AJ* 83.

Douglas Busk

A non-alpine note Disappointment awaits the researcher into the minor mysteries of the Climber's Art. He digs into the literature, brushes away dust from forgotten shelves in the London Library, examines pictures, writes to nonagenarians, produces a script. At once all those who have remained silent through the years seize pens or telephones to demolish the work. Two instances come to mind.

Who is, 'the Man in the Hat', in that well-known photograph (so often reproduced in the rock-climbing books, eg see *AJ* 77 Plate 40c), 'A Climbing Party at Pen-y-Pass'? There are all the great faces, all the great names, and among them this slightly foreign-looking, blatantly non-climbing poetical misfit. Where his name should be there is that mark of mediocrity, as well as of anonymity, The Dash.

For years I struggled with this minor problem and at last considered it solved. Geoffrey Young had a violin-playing Old Etonian and Cambridge friend who 'often went to Pen-y-Pass'. I knew such a man. I wrote to one of his oldest surviving friends, 'Could this be F. C. O. Speyer?' I asked. 'Yes' came the answer back. For the first 2 months of 1978 I was a changed man, smilingly replying to the abusive letters about my mistakes in the *Alpine Journals* of 1975/6/7 (it takes real climbers a long time to read the *Alpine Journal*, but they never allow matters to rest), and mocking at my years and my sciatica. And then came Eleanor Young's letter, 'No, Kevin, the "Man in the Hat" is *not* dear Ferdie Speyer; indeed Geoffrey often wondered who he could possibly be.' So now I must start again, with only a passing reference to the second minor mystery. Maurice Guinness was NOT the first man into Helyg for the Climbers' Club. First through the window of the locked cottage was S. A. Marples, followed by Maurice, and then Raymond Greene. All used the same window but entirely different techniques. Guinness was the first man to SLEEP in Helyg, months later on the night before the official opening.

How right Ferdie Speyer was to shout at me over a telephone, centuries ago, 'Who are you to write "Not Interested" across one of the most important letters about sulphate of ammonia ever to reach this office'. Who indeed?

K. FitzGerald

The Karakoram Highway uniting Pakistan with China was opened in June 1978. It is 542 miles long and runs from Rawalpindi and Abbottabad to Gilgit and thence over the Khunjerab Pass to Yarkand. The *Daily Telegraph* seems undecided whether the construction casualties were 400 or 4000; both sound pretty fearful. This road should improve access to some great mountains, if indeed climbers are allowed anywhere near it.

Palais de Cristal on the Jungfrauoch *Les Alpes* (July 1978) illustrates and deplores a monstrous erection ('construction de verre aux dimensions gigantesques') which may one day rise on this well-trodden corner of the Alps. Letters of protest from this side of the Channel might well contribute to the CAS campaign against this and other environmental attacks.



125 *The Hinchliff Memorial*

The Hinchliff Memorial on the Riffelalp This was inspected on 9/8/1978, 95 years after its erection, and found to be in good order, but obviously needing some re-pointing. To quote T. G. Bonney: 'Thomas Woodbine Hinchliff was one of the founders of the AC; to him indeed we owe more perhaps than to any single man, for he was the first Honorary Secretary and it was in his chambers that the club used to meet until it had a local habitation of its own.' He was the author of *Summer Months Among the Alps* of which A. L. Mumm remarked, in the Alpine Club Register, 'One of the books which helped most largely to stimulate the interest in mountaineering that led to the foundation of the Club.' Hinchliff was President 1875-77.

F. P. French

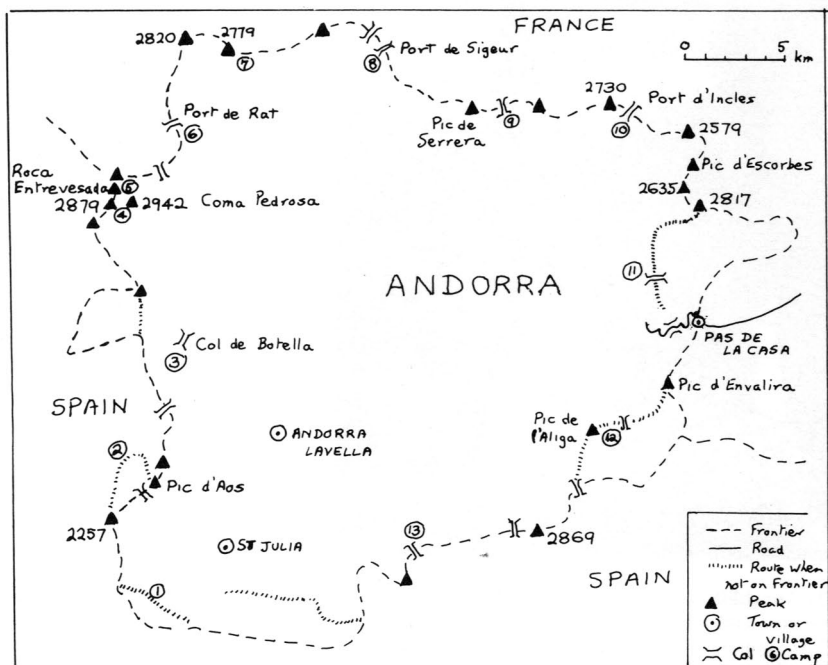
Spy devices on Nanda Devi The Indian Prime Minister told a stunned Parliament in April that the previous government had collaborated with the CIA in 1965 to place a 'plutonium powered spy pack' at 25,000ft on the slopes of Nanda Devi to track Chinese missiles and nuclear explosions. An Indian mountaineering expedition had led the way followed by an Indian/American scientific expedition carrying the device. Upon the onset of a blizzard, the equipment had had to be abandoned; subsequent attempts to locate it had been completely unsuccessful, the searchers concluding that it had either been buried in snow or carried away by an avalanche. Presumably it is still there; plutonium is a particularly deadly poison. Until 1970 the water of the Ganges had to be monitored continuously to check for possible radioactive contamination.

In 1967 a similar device was successfully installed on a neighbouring peak and functioned there until it was removed the following year.

North Pole Naomi Uemura, who had already climbed to the highest points of the 5 continents in recent years, reached the N Pole solo during May 1978; in spite of having had support from an aeroplane this seems a quite remarkable record.

Alps 'being wrecked by tourists' Under this heading the *Daily Telegraph* picked up the main points of an article in *Les Alpes* by Dr F. H. Schwarzenbach. It is unusual to find anti-tourism receiving such wide national publicity. Access roads and ski tracks are overloaded and further tourist development would 'reduce the recreational value of the Alpine landscape'. The local people have to shoulder 'increasing living costs' to pay for the development of tourism. The 'affluence of the tourist world contrasts with that of the Alpine farmer . . . which leads to social tensions', while 'local youth, torn between two worlds, is moving away from the Alps'. There are 'political, economic and social tensions which will bear no further strain'.

Meanwhile by mid-August 1978 the death toll in the Alps had already reached 60.



126 Andorra (to illustrate article in AJ 83 160)

Additional note on Andorra These mountains and valleys are the home of a great number of wild animals, including eagles, vultures, buzzard, woodcock, ptarmigan, squirrels, wild boar, otters, foxes, wild cats, hares, izard, chamois and marmots. The chamois and izard have been much reduced by hunting, but this has now been forbidden so we hope for an increase. Eighty years ago bear were common. Now there are a few in the French reserves and the occasional bear strays over the border. I have seen the spoor of a bear in the snow (not an Abominable Snowman!). The wild flowers are superb. In the spring the fields are white with narcissi and daffodils abound. Gentians carpet the upper slopes and many other species are to be found. It is a botanist's paradise.

T. A. J. Peacocke

Yeti During April 1978 the Sikkim Government sent out some small expeditions in search of the elusive Abominable Snowman, after a report that several yaks had been killed off and their bodies hurled up to 200 yards. A sighting has been reported—'a man-animal full of brown hair on the body, just like a go-go boy with some hair on his head spilling over to cover his forehead. He had a red face and red lips'.

Competition Readers interested in competition in mountaineering (if indeed there are any!) should note an article 'Un Grand Match' in *Alpinisme* (1st quarter, 1930) written by Etienne Bruhl and illustrated by Samivel. It describes an international climbing contest, a race for the summit, between French and Italian alpinists on the N face of the Grandes Jorasses, taking place 24 years ahead (1954).

The spectators travel by a new railway on the left bank of the Mer de Glace to Trélaporte Station and cross the Glacier du Géant by tracked vehicle to the Aiguille du Tacul téléphérique. The Hotel on the summit is 'absolument comble'. Others come by tracked vehicle by way of the Glacier du Mont Mallet, then climb on foot to the Plateau des Periades, where stands and hutments have been built. Others less favoured view from the Mer de Glace or the Couvercle.

After various mishaps the 2 sides join forces on the second day; the spectators lose interest and a descent is made from a point 100m below the top in order to keep alive the interest for a further contest the following year.

However by then it has been climbed by amateurs.

Legless climb in Peru Norman Croucher, who lost both legs in a railway accident at the age of 19, has added Huascarán, the highest point of the Cordillera Blanca of Peru, to his long list of mountain climbs.

Longevity and mountain activity During the autumn of 1977 Rear-Admiral Keith Lawder of Okehampton, Devon, made an ascent of the Black Slab climb on the face of Bosigran Head, Cornwall. This outstanding British rock-climber, not unfortunately a member of this Club, was aged 84 at the time.

An American, H. L. Thackwell, came to England in 1971 at the age of 83 and climbed Snowdon, Scafell Pike and Ben Nevis inside a week. As a result of a challenge, he returned in 1978 and repeated the feat at the age of 90.

The achievements of our member, Walter Kirstein, in this particular field are well known to readers of this Journal.

Building climbing in England Two incidents received national press coverage during 1978. In October 2 climbers ascended Nelson's Column, London, with a banner obscurely relating Barclays Bank to certain S African troubles. A week or 2 later came the turn of the Post Office tower in Birmingham. A GPO spokesman is said to have said—'Pitons used by mountaineers could grip the stone of Nelson's Column but would have no grip on the tower's sheer walls'.

'Deliverance' A film of this title, shown on ITV during 10/1978, was described as follows: 'Four city men decide to spend a weekend on canoes down a wild, unexplored (sic) river in the Appalachians. When they pull in for a rest, they are threatened by 2 disreputable mountaineers. ...' One wonders who, but staying up late to find out seemed to be hardly worth it.

Whither mountaineering? Readers will not have failed to notice how depressing is the picture of the modern Alpine mountaineering scene presented in the Events and Trends article on p 211. These are no longer the 'wild and lonely places' or the 'truly delectable places' of the past, for even the steeper and harder parts of the terrain are crawling with folks of all nationalities and standards of ability, while objective dangers multiply in all sorts of unlikely ways.

The original basis of attraction to mountains is being eroded away by these thoughtless numbers. Now succeeding generations will accept what they find, while the old order steadily disappears. Now they will climb for quite different reasons in the company of large numbers of their fellows, in competition arising from madly elevated standards of competence and undertaking all manner of foolish and unjustifiable risks because of the proximity of fellow climbers and of rescue services.

A writer to *Mountain Gazette* recently makes a related point: 'The quest for true wilderness is becoming ever more difficult. So-called "wilderness" areas are set aside to become tent cities. Visiting a National Park is like taking a trip to the zoo, though you're never sure if you are looking in or out through the bars. The only true wilderness left are those tiny islands of "wasteland" that nobody can figure out quite what to do with. I'm going to enjoy them while I can.'

The mysterious ways of PR For some reasons, which he has not yet been able to fathom, the Editor of this Journal occasionally receives invitations to trade shows aimed at promotion of goods which might conceivably have an interest to mountaineers. Presumably he is expected to feature these products in these pages. Here are some of the more curious incidents:

a) *A new material for sunglasses* Everyone at the show was most helpful and the entertainment was lavish. Free samples were promised to all visitors, but the supply ran out before the Editor reached the front of the queue. However, not to worry, they will be sent on next week! They never were, nor did letters to the organizers of the show, or to the manufacturers, produce any replies. A report on the use of the material on a mountaineering expedition was promised but never received. An offer to carry an advertisement was ignored. Therefore the material is ignored here.

b) *A new supplier of sports goods* The show was fine though it was surprising to find that they did not include mountaineering equipment, nor did they contemplate so doing. A letter suggesting a line they might take up in our field of interest was ignored, as was an offer to carry an advertisement for them. Therefore they too are ignored here.

c) *A new leisure centre in London* Another fine show and this time they did include mountaineering equipment, but on such a small scale that they are unlikely ever to be noted for it. An offer to advertise was ignored; they are ignored.

Why waste all this money and time? If these people feel that the AJ might be of help to them, why do they not react when we try to be helpful?

It is because these shows are arranged by PR firms who are only concerned with the numbers attending. Once the heads have been counted no one cares any more. The food and drinks are offered without purpose and can be enjoyed without obligation.

Coasteering Having been personally concerned in the introduction of the word 'coasteering' to encompass the activities of the climber on our coastlines, I was highly interested to note in a TV programme the use of a new word 'oceaneeing' to describe a range of activities carried out at the bottom of the sea in diving equipment.

The suffix 'eer', says the OED, signifies 'one who is concerned with'. Thus 'mountaineer', one who is concerned with mountains, can be applied to a dweller therein as well as to the more limited case of one who seeks recreation therein. An oceaneer is one concerned with oceans, a coasteer—one concerned with coasts. Coasteering implies the same specialization of meaning as does mountaineering and there seems no reason why it should not be accepted as such, particularly when the sport of coasteering includes distinctive features of its own alongside many others which it shares with mountaineering.

The suffix 'eer' in some words has 'a contemptuous implication' (OED) eg 'profiteer', but there is no hint of this so far in those words which are our concern.

The Face of Battle Attention is drawn to an article by Kevin FitzGerald in *Mountain* No 63, a commentary on a recent book *The Face of Battle* by John Keegan. This compares the 'emotions, hardships, danger and "exposure" experienced by the individual soldier in battle with those of a climber on a great N face'. 'Extreme climbing in our time', writes John Keegan, 'has become a sort of military operation in which sport imitates war, and war of the dreariest, deadliest and most long-drawn-out sort. . . Indeed, the hard men of the "Winter Eiger Direct" crouched shivering day after day in their tiny, filthy, smelly ice-holes, hacked with infinite labour out of the face, depressed by the death of comrades, short of food, and expecting from moment to moment to be swept out of existence by the explosion of avalanche, recall none so vividly as the soldiers of Paulus's Sixth Army freezing to death in identical snow-holes among the ruins of Stalingrad.'

'There is a remarkable conclusion drawn in this section of John Keegan's book', says FitzGerald, 'namely that the death rate in modern climbing of extreme severity exceeds that of one of the bloodiest battles of this century. More precisely, the very unit from which Hinterstoisser and Kurz were on leave when they met their deaths on the Eiger, the 100th Gebirgsjäger, was chosen, in May 1941, for one of the most reckless single operations of the whole Second War, the crash landing at Meleme, on Crete. Of the 800 men involved, 150 were killed, while of the first 70 men on the Eigerwand, 17 died by falling or exposure. In other words, a battle of the most extreme kind, fought out by a body of picked men, proved slightly less dangerous than the chosen diversion of 2 of that unit's bravest spirits.'

In this situation it is pertinent to ask—'Are extreme climbers suffering from a special form of madness' and the answer in today's context cannot be other than—'Yes'. Traditional mountaineers, accepting a reasonable degree of risk and displaying reasonable competence, who climb for themselves and not to impress others, must sooner or later dissociate themselves from this lunatic fringe. The integrating philosophy, which looked on all mountain activities as part of a large whole, is being too widely stretched. It cannot possibly embrace people of diametrically opposite views—preservers of the countryside as well as despoilers, competitors and non-competitors, those with a life wish and those with a death wish.

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