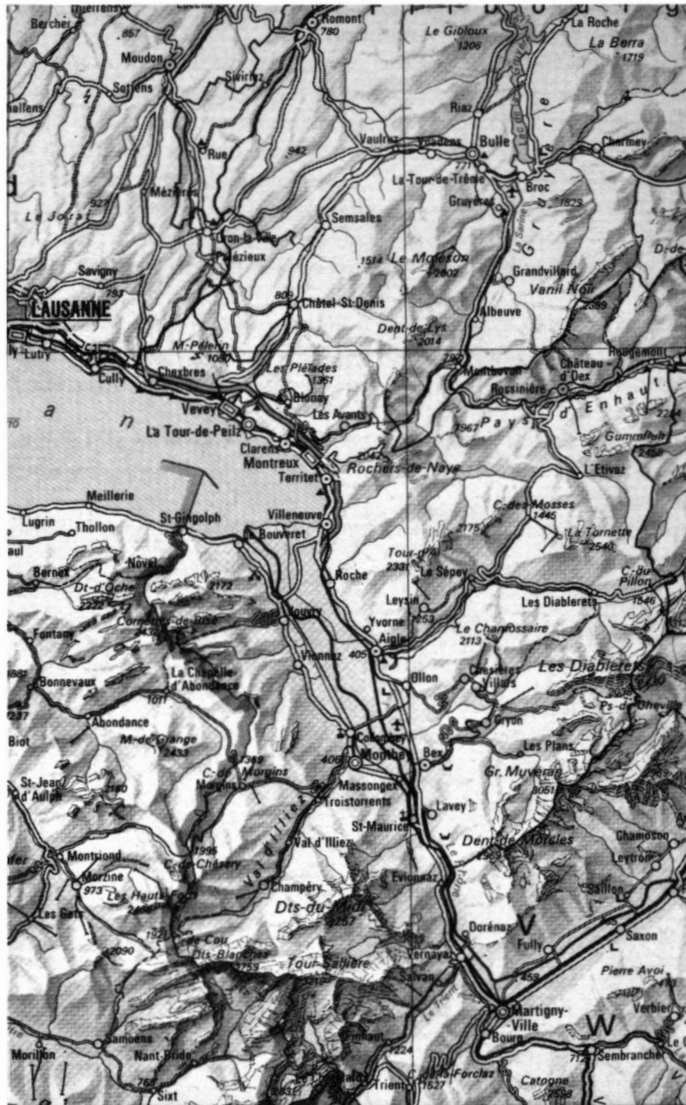


Summers in and around the Swiss Prealps

Charles Kemp

In his preface to the *CAS Guide des Alpes vaudoises* the author says, without fear of contradiction, that the Haut Lac Léman commands one of the most beautiful views which can be found on Earth. The waterfront at Vevey, a busy town of great character and charm, is an excellent viewpoint. Across the lake the shapely Grammont, the Cornettes de Bise and the Dent d'Oche rising steeply 1800–2000m above the water dominate the S shore. To the SE the Dents de Morcles and the



Dents du Midi tower 2500m and more above St Maurice in the valley of the Rhone with the pyramid of Catogne and the snows of the Grand Combin appearing between them beyond the blue grey waters of the lake.

Vevey is a gateway to the Swiss Prealps with its own very attractive hill, Les Pléiades, the summit of which (1360m) can be reached by mountain railway and nearly by road. From the top the snows of Mont Blanc appear on one side of the beautiful Dents du Midi with the Aiguilles of Argentière and Chardonnet, the Tour Noir and the Trient Glacier on the other. Close by is the first mountain range of the Prealps stretching some 14km from the Rochers de Naye, Montreux's mountain (2042m) to the Moléson which belong to Gruyères. A little further away the skyline is pierced by the limestone towers of Aï and Mayen and 1000m below the immense Lac Léman stretches beyond the horizon.

My wife and I have had the good fortune to spend the last 6 summers living in a chalet near the top of les Pléiades and we have spent many delightful days exploring its forests and pastures, the neighbouring hills of Folly and Molard (1751m) and

43 Rochers de Naye (This and next 4 photos: Swiss National Tourist Office)



further, sometimes much further, afield. In early summer many of the hillsides in this district are covered by the pale narcissi and the fields remain alight for many months with the whites, yellows, pinks, reds, blues and mauves of scores of varieties of meadow and mountain flower. In our headlights we have seen hares, foxes, hedgehogs and odd little creatures which look like martens but we are never really sure what they are. Deer are occasionally seen by day.

The hill and mountain country to the N, E and S soon began to exert its pull and I decided to get to know it as well as I could by wandering about it on foot. For a variety of reasons my excursions into the hills are limited to rambles or scrambles once or at most twice a week and I like to be back home at night. Whenever possible I enjoy happy days in the patient and competent companionship of my daughter Valerie who lives and works near Vevey and as an enthusiastic skier knows the district very well in winter. At other times I go alone.

We meet very few British climbers and we assume they mostly hurry through this part of Switzerland on their way to the grander and greater mountains beyond. However the High Alps are for one reason or another sometimes out of reach and then and always at the beginning and end of the season the Prealps and the mountains on the Alpine fringe offer very splendid consolations. For me the personal discovery of their varied attractions is a worthy pursuit in its own right. The great glacier systems and the grandeur of the greater Alpine ranges are lacking but there is an abundance of superb mountain walks, great walls of rock to satisfy the most ardent rock climber, some classic mountaineering routes and here and there a glacier. Many of the valleys are very beautiful and most of the summits are worth ascending for their view. Magnificent panoramas can be enjoyed from many of the passes and peaks. It is easy to find calm and solitude and the whole area possesses great variety and charm.

The area in which my wanderings have been concentrated in recent summers, with occasional short spells elsewhere, lies roughly within a triangle with points at or near Evian, Thun and the Col des Montets, an area of rather more than 2000 km². Almost everywhere therein is accessible for one-day excursions from Vevey, which is on the perimeter, only a fairly short time having to be spent motoring out and back and thus leaving upwards of 8 hours for the hills. Some of the highest summits require an overnight stay in a hut or high mountain inn and the remoter parts in the SW are best tackled from bases in France like Morzine, Sixt or Vallorcine. Most of this country is Prealpine but that part of it S of a line from Gsteig through Bex to the Col de Cou is more Alpine in character as it contains the NW flank of the Diablerets range, the massifs of the Grand Muveran and the Dents de Morcles, the Dents du Midi and other parts of the Hautes Alpes Calcaires and the crystalline schists and granite of the Perrons and Luisin. The present landscape is the result of vast movements starting in what is now N Italy many millions of years ago with much folding and contortion producing a series of nappes upon which the quality of the rock depends. Generally, limestone predominates with narrow bands of schists appearing at intervals clearly to be seen along the French/Swiss frontier. The quality of the rock varies from frankly rotten to very good. It is usually good in the great rock climbing areas but the limestone tends to be very slippery when wet and is then best avoided.

As the chalet on Les Pléiades is 630m above and 9km from the nearest shop a car is a virtual necessity for us on the grounds of economy as well as convenience. But for shorter holidays a car is not indispensable. Apart from the excellent Postal Bus



44 Chateau d'Oex, Télécabin de la Bray

services there are the brilliantly engineered mountain railways from the Rhone valley or the lakeside to such places as Champéry, Leysin, Les Diablerets, Villars-Bretaye, Château d'Oeux and Zweisimmen. These lines pass along routes of great scenic beauty and open up splendid walking and climbing areas. The famous Montreux/Rochers de Naye railway which climbs 1600m in 55 minutes dates back to 1892. The funicular from Territet to Glion above Montreux rises 300m at an incline of 57%—it was the first to be constructed in Switzerland and has recently been modernized. The line from Martigny to Chamonix through Finhaut is perhaps the most exciting but the palm for variety must go to the 3-part system running from Châtelard near the French frontier to the Col de la Gueula (1969m) This begins with a funicular which climbs 700m attaining in one stretch 87% which makes it the second steepest in Europe, continues with a thrilling 10 minute journey along a narrow, winding horizontal ledge above the savage gorges of the Barberine torrent and finishes with a short, steep ascent by monorail, the first of its kind in Europe and only recently opened. The monorail carriage has 5 seats and is driverless. Not surprisingly the service is suspended when the weather is intemperate.

The area contains several nature reserves where hunting and shooting are totally forbidden. The whole of the Alpes vaudoises from the Oldenhorn to the Grande Dent de Morcles and back to the Sex Rouge through Pont de Nant, La Croix and the village of Les Diablerets is a declared 'District franc fédéral'. It is said that bouquetins can be seen here but more commonly are to be seen chamois, chevreuils, marmottes, foxes and hares. SE of Château d'Oeux the nature reserve of La Pierreuse extends from the upper valley of the Gerine to the Rochers du Midi and round to the Salaires, Gummfluh and Rocher Plat. Animals and plants are totally protected here and no one may pasture animals or construct any building. The result is a great floral richness and a very real chance of seeing the bouquetin as well

as great troops of chamois. On the slopes of the range of the Vanil Noir vipers are often encountered. They should be treated with all due courtesy as they belong to a protected species there. On the other hand some districts are frequently closed to the public for military firing practices, in particular the areas NE of the Tour d'Aï to the Lac du l'Hongrin and the triangle Javerne-Morcles-Dents de Morcles. It is advisable to make enquiries before setting out for these places.

During a wet spell some years ago I listed all the summits more than 1750m high I had walked up to in the specified area and was a little surprised to find I could only muster a meagre 15 or so. I then thought that if I climbed up to 50 summits scattered pretty widely over the region I would get to know it pretty well. That some of these summits are reached very easily and are of a very secondary nature does not matter to me. On the easier routes it is good to see young families sometimes with very small children in harnesses on their parents' backs or to find large parties of schoolchildren enjoying the summit view. If they are Swiss parties as they usually are their behaviour is always impeccable. However, Valerie and I do not clamber up mountains merely to add more tops to a list; the ascent itself must be worthwhile and the summit require an appreciable amount of effort and time to attain and be rewarding on arrival. By the end of the 1978 summer the total stood at 55 and there is plenty of scope to make this up to 100, without satiation, not for the sake of a century but for the sheer enjoyment of following good routes in a splendid countryside much of which we still have to visit. Of the 55 some 15 are really secondary summits or tops, the rest are classifiable as principal summits. The routes to them have occasioned visits to 41 cols.

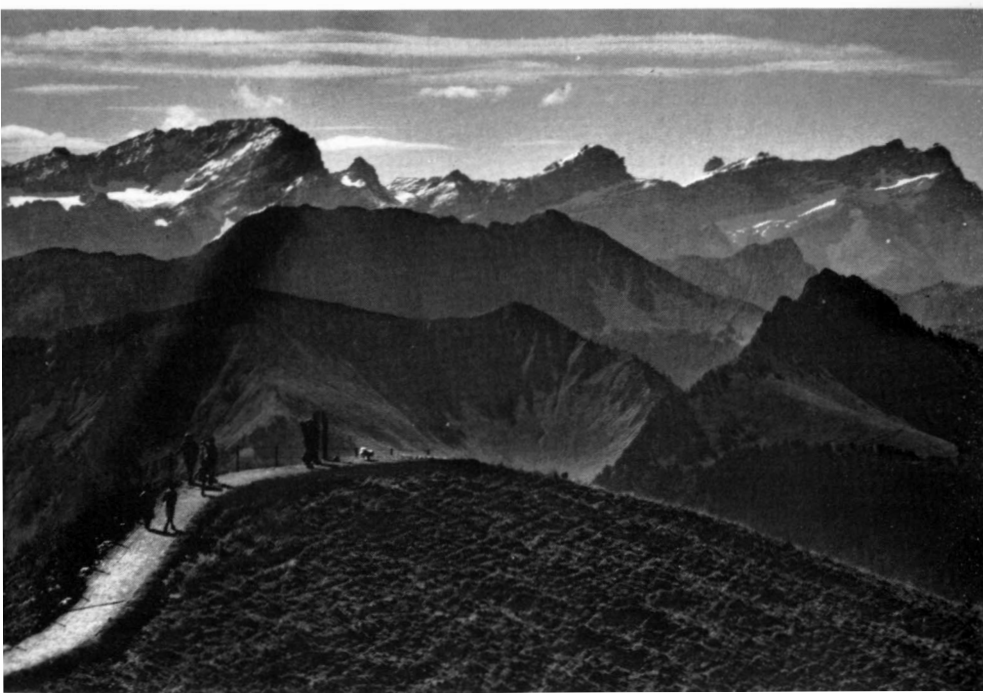
We have been to some peaks many times and several of them we would willingly go back to at least once a year. Among these are the Rochers de Naye and the Dent de Lys near Vevey; the Tour d'Aï above Leysin; the Rocher Plat and its neighbours above Rougemont; the Dents de Savigny and Ruth in the Gastlosen; Luisin to the S of the Haute Cime of the Dents du Midi; Tavaneuse and its wild little lake near Abondance; the Grammont, the Dent d'Oche and the Cornettes de Bise on the S side of Lac Léman. They can nearly all be climbed by easy or difficult routes as you please and all are thoroughly worth while.

Three wholly admirable CAS Guide-books cover the area, namely *Prealpes fribourgeoises*, *Alpes vaudoises* and *Prealpes franco-suissees* all in the French language. The first and third of these but not the second give walking as well as climbing routes dividing them into categories P and PE. The P routes are suitable for walkers relatively inexperienced in mountain travel. The PE routes are for sure-footed people with mountain experience and they often include airy and delicate passages calling for prudence and occasionally a rope for security. Very steep grass and loose and stony couloirs are often encountered and it is not difficult to imagine an ice-axe being of use in such places. Neither category is in any way to be despised. Between them the 3 guide-books give more than 1200 itineraries to over 200 passes and more than 400 principal or secondary summits. Of course some of the routes are fairly short and have a common origin with one or more others but enough of all grades from Tourist to Extremely Difficult to please everybody, are described. From the guide-books and the beautiful 1:25000 sheets of the Carte Nationale de la Suisse, from friendly advice and our own knowledge I made out a list of 150 summits which were likely to offer particularly enjoyable or even exciting possibilities. This little table may give some idea of their distribution, average altitudes and route gradings.

Area	Altitude				Classified routes			
	1750m	2000m	2500m	3000+m	P-PE	F-PD	AD-D	TD-ED
A	5	11	—	—	49	2	8	12
B	16	18	—	—	80	25	36	10
C	5	21	1	—	51	14	17	6
D	—	2	8	3	—	33	20	5
E	9	19	—	—	58	21	11	3
F	1	6	17	8	30	55	38	6
	36	77	26	11	268	150	130	42

Areas A and B are those parts of the Prealps of Fribourg and Berne which lie N and S of the Bulle/Jaunpass road respectively. Area C covers the Prealps and area D the Alps in the Canton of Vaud. Areas E and F lie W of the Rhone, straddle the French frontier from Lac Léman to the Col des Montets lying N and S of the Val d'Illeiez and the Col de Cou respectively. The classification of the routes in Area C is a rather dubious assessment of my own and the choice of the 150 summits is, of course, a purely personal one.

If some reasonably fit friend of about my own age, visiting the region for the first time, were kind enough to ask me to show him, on foot, as much of the countryside as I could in a fortnight in late mid-summer I would suggest to him the following programme. First, a day to be spent on the Rochers de Naye (2042m) as its panorama must rank among the finest in Europe, from the Eiger 80km E to a glimpse of Mont Blanc 66km S, to the Alps of Vaud, Valais and Berne, the Prealps, the Plateau and the long, wide waters of the lake. We would start at Caux where



people foregather from the 5 continents as it is the Moral Re-armament centre. On the way down there are the diversions of the Grottes de Naye, a dark, damp and narrow tunnel through the rock and a traverse of the Gais Alpains, a 1–2 hour scramble with pitches of III and the walk down the splendid Gorges de Chauderon from Les Avants to Montreux.

Next day we would take the road through Bulle to the valley of the Jogne and stroll for an hour or so through the Gorge of the Jogne near Broc. Then we would go on towards the Jaunpass turning S just beyond Charmey along a narrow road and up the zig-zags of the Escaliers du Mont to the plain of Gros Mont from where we would climb up the NW side of the Dent de Savigny, the highest point in the chain of the Gastlosen. This wonderful chain runs NE to SW for some 15km and contains some 36 principal and 25 secondary summits with over 170 classified routes of which 80 are graded D to TD, a rock climbing region par excellence. The wall is 400m high at one place on the E side and 300m on the W and there is every variety of climbing feature and fine summit traverses. The first recorded complete traverse SW to NE was accomplished in June 1944 and that from NE to SW in September 1965. Each took 18 hours of actual climbing spread over 2 days. The best places to see the range from end to end are the Hochmatt (2152m) easily reached from Gros Mont and the Hundsrügg (2047m), a 2 hour walk from the Jaunpass.

The third and fourth days would be devoted to Lac Tanay and the Chablais mountains, much less populated than the corresponding areas N of the lake, a country with vast pasturages and abrupt or vertical cliffs generally facing N. A road leads to Tanay from Le Flon (1050m) above Vouvry but it is steeper than 28% in places and is only open to authorized vehicles like jeeps or Landrovers. Tanay is a protected zone and the chalets, the tiny church and the simple inns exactly suit the scene. The little romantic lake, girdled by forests, crags and mountains is a true mountain gem. It is usual to walk up the Grammont from Tanay but we would go instead to the Cornettes de Bise (2432m), the highest summit in this Chablais region, to enjoy the magnificent view to the Valaisian Alps, Mont Blanc and the Aravis and Vanoise mountains. It takes $3\frac{1}{2}$ –4 hours to walk up from Le Flon, longer if you miss a crucial bifurcation and become involved, as Valerie and I did, in a large desert of immense boulders instead of skirting it. Anyway, extra time should be allowed as it is impossible not to linger at Lac Tanay.

After spending the night at one of the Tanay inns we would motor round to St. Gingolph, where the river divides Switzerland and France, up to Novel, with its well patronized restaurants, and on to the hamlet of La Planche (1200m). A pleasant walk of less than 3 hours ending with an easy couloir and a little chimney leads to the CAF Refuge d'Oche where it would be pleasant to spend the night to see the sun set over the lake in the evening and rise over the Alps next morning. A short and airy little route leads to the summit (2222m) which is reputed to have a splendid view but when we were there Valerie and I saw only each other, the rocks and a rather drunken summit pole as we and the mists arrived simultaneously.

A relatively easy day on the Tour d'Aï would follow. We would take the téléphérique to La Berneuse above Leysin and laze there awhile gazing at the Diablerets, the Muveran, The Morcles, the Midi, and Mont Blanc. After a short descent to the little Lac d'Aï and a close inspection of the famous cliffs of the Sphinx and Tour d'Aï with their many TD and ED routes we would walk by the pleasant and sometimes quite airy ordinary route to the summit (2331m) some



46 Lac de Bretaye with Alps of Vaud beyond

450m above the lake. Next day we would go to Rougemont in the Pays d'Enhaut and take the télécabine to La Videmanette where the restaurant terrace has a wide panorama from the Eiger to the Diablerets with the rock face of the Gummfluh and its neighbours in the foreground. There are many mountains hereabouts offering good climbing in some cases up to ED and I would leave my friend to take his pick from the Rocher à Pointes, Rocher Plat, Rubli or the Gummfluh. I hope he would select the Gummfluh (2458m) as Valerie and I have wandered over to it from time to time but have never left ourselves sufficient time to find a tolerable way on the mountain, let alone climb it.

For the seventh day we would go back into France over the Pas de Morgins to Abondance and from there by a fine steep path to the wild little Lac Tavaneuse which at 1800m looks as though it belongs to a much higher altitude. Then on to the col and summit of Tavaneuse (2156m). The ascent would take about 3 hours leaving us enough time to motor over the Col du Corbier to have a look at Morzine and the very beautiful Lac Montriond. And if we still had time and energy not too

far away is the superb Cirque du Fer à Cheval with its wonderful semi-circular wall and perhaps 15 cascades.

We would start the second week in the Alpes vaudoises at Pont de Nant (1273m) directly under the great cliffs of the Grand Muveran (3051m) which can be climbed from the Cabane Rambert (2580m) in 2 hours or so. The path from Pont de Nant to the Cabane is very interesting but is dangerous after snow, after a storm and at night. However, we would walk up the Vallon de Nant, among trees at first beside the Avancon torrent, then up into the desolate upper valley where the little Glacier des Martinets nestles by the dark rocks of the Morcles and so to the Col des Martinets (2615m) and gaze down the shattered ridges towards the Valley of the Rhone some 2200m below. In the rock face around here are bolted and locked doors which we suppose open into caves used to store Army supplies. For the descent we would use the Col des Perris Blanc and come down by one of the 2 farm chalets which seem to be the valley's only habitations. If we had sufficient strength left we would go across to the Bear's Hole, a little narrow rocky fissure crossing the ridge fairly low down. But not by an apparently direct route which Valerie and I tried once as the thin path on which we set out with confidence and faith, high on the mountainside, soon petered out into a satanic slope of rushy slippery grasses on which we slowly and safely slid to a sitting posture very frequently indeed. Well behind as usual I wasted much energy trying to subside and rise in silence partly to conceal that I was sitting down about twice to her once and partly because I was afraid she would tire herself out laughing at my futile attempt at secrecy. There is a very good Alpine Garden and a pleasant inn at Pont de Nant and the Vallon de Nant is not to be missed.

The walk up from Pont de Nant to the Cabane de Plan Neve is also a fine one. It takes about 3 hours and the Col des Chamois (2660m) is about 400m higher up. This is a good place for seeing chamois and lies between Pierre qu'Abotse (2735m) and the Tête à Pierre Grept (2904m) with good arêtes from the col to both summits. A long walk down on the other side passes the Ecuelle with its rock-face 120–140m high on which there at least 9 classified routes of TD or ED standard and not much to climb below that grading. After the Col des Essets (or Esserts) and a pleasant plod to the hamlet of Anzeinde we would seek a well earned night's repose in one of its 2 inns. Next morning we would walk through the wide almost level valley under the S flank of the Diablerets range and on by the Pas de Cheville (2038m), passing now just outside our specified region, to the beautiful little Lac de Derborence where the results of the 2 great rock-falls of 1714 and 1749 are apparent, where there is a virgin forest of white firs unique in Switzerland and perhaps in the Alps and particularly fine examples of the vertical streaks of lapiés. There are interesting exposures here of Jurassic, Cretaceous and Eocene rock and a richness of plant life which makes Derborence of special interest for the amateur botanist and geologist. To get back to our region we would have to return by the same route to Anzeinde from where we would go on down to Solalex where we would probably stop for cream (not ice-cream!) cornets and look out for climbers on the 2km long wall of the celebrated Argentine with the 2 famous slabs called the Grand Miroir and the Petit Miroir. There are at least 12 TD or ED routes and, fortunately, many less difficult routes for ordinary mortals. The traverse of the 5 summits is interesting and not particularly hard.

With only a few days left we would want to go to the Dents du Midi region and we would start by taking the first télécabine from Les Marécottes near Martigny to



47 Dents du Midi and Champéry-Planachaux ski lift

La Creusa (1780m) from where many first class walks radiate. We would choose the path to Luisin (2786m) a fine interesting route with one or two delicate pitches made easy by fixed metal ladders. The view from the summit is superb. We could come down by the easy W arête and wander through the lonely valley of the Triège past the isolated hamlet of Emaney or by the Clocher de Luisin on good gneiss, steep in places, but with excellent holds to the passage of La Golette and so back to La Creusa. Luisin is most certainly worth a visit.

For our last 2 days where else should we go but to the Dents du Midi and to the easiest and highest summit of the seven? The Haute Cime is the highest point for miles around. The walk up to the Cabane de Susanfe, where we would spend the night, is one of the finest in the whole area. From Grand Paradis (1065m) near Champéry the path goes up steeply through the forest, then in an almost horizontal arc reaches the pastures of Bonavau where there is a herd of particularly fine goats, climbs up the rocky step of the Pas d'Encel, passes along the very edge of the deep drop into the ravine of the Saufla, crosses a little bridge near a picturesque and tiny reservoir, rounds the spur of the Dent de Rossétan and climbs up to the Cabane (2102m) with its gaunt and symmetrical skyline of the Haute Cime, the Col de Susanfe and the Tour Sallière. Next day we would go up to the col and then turn N up beside scree which seems as though it would go on for ever and ever but which does end at a little shoulder called, appropriately enough, the Col des Paresseux (3050m). Rather more steeply now the route goes in a number of wide zig-zags to the summit (3257m). For some reason I have no recollection of the view. It must be outstanding for the CAS guidebook calls the summit 'a unique viewpoint which everybody should visit at least once in his lifetime.'

If we had followed this programme we would have spent 13 of our 14 days pretty strenuously in the hills, walked a goodly number of miles and ascended some 13,000m and descended about 15,000m. The other day would be reserved for the vineyards and fleshpots of the Swiss Riviera mixed with a little culture in the shape of visits to the Châteaux of Chillon and Gruyères. However we would have been exceptionally lucky to have had 14 fine clear days in a row. Clouds gather around and sometimes stay for days on the cols and above and in some years late and heavy snow lingers on long into the summer. In 1978 an avalanche cut the road (at about 1450m) below the Col de Jaman as late as June and spring and early summer avalanches are very common. From our very sketchy weather records no definite pattern emerges but, probably by coincidence, the first week in August shows the highest number of fine summer days from 1973–1977. It lost a little of its reputation in 1978 a summer generally of very variable weather. Particularly in June and July a few days of very hot weather usually bring a series of short and intense thunderstorms often in late afternoon or evening. The longest unbroken period of fine weather we have enjoyed so far is 13 days at the first half of September 1977.

The programme outlined above would take my friend and I through much of the region which Valerie and I now know quite well but there still remains much new ground for us and sizeable areas we have rarely been into in the N and on the W edges. I hope we may get to know these better in the next few years. There are many summits above or nearly at the 3000m level we would like to add to our list. Sometimes I feel attracted, as I suspect many others are, to places by the names which they have been given . . . The Portes du Soleil after the Croix de l'Hiver, the Col des Chamois and the Col des Martinets and so on. Who would not want to go

to Bout du Monde beyond the Cirque du Fer à Cheval? The Col des Paresseux and the Col des Pauvres seem appropriate halting places for such as I. But names can be misleading. I thought that Bellalué meant beautiful site but most likely it really means only rocky mountain and Bel Oiseau has no connection with any bird of bright plumage but probably signifies a high rocky passage.

Having had so much enjoyment from this delightful part of the borders of the Alps I feel I understand the sentiments of C. F. Ramuz who wrote 'Pays à moi, il faut mieux te connaître.'

Brammah—1978

Anthony Wheaton

Brammah I is a beautiful, classically shaped mountain, 6416m high, in South Kashmir, India, which the City University–Brunel University Kishtwar Himalaya Expedition 1978 had chosen as its prime objective. The expedition was merely 4 friends who had climbed together for some years, deciding to go away together again, but this time somewhere further afield.

So the Himalaya it was, and we chose a mountain that would not be badly affected by the monsoon (as we had to go in July and August during the height of the monsoon), did not necessitate oxygen, but would give some challenging rock and ice climbing. We picked Brammah because we thought it would offer these things, but I had not even seen a photograph of the mountain before we left, and from the scanty reports of previous expeditions, we believed all previous attempts had failed due to technical difficulties; it was not until a few days before leaving England that we found Chris Bonington and Nick Estcourt had climbed it. But their description spurred us on with more enthusiasm, to quote: 'as hard as anything we had encountered on the South West face of Everest'. We were soon to agree!

The members of the expedition were Anthony Wheaton, Paul Belcher, Duncan Nicholson (from the City University) and Jon Scott from Brunel. Both Universities are in London, and the Mountaineering clubs have been going away together for some years. We had all been climbing for many years in the UK and had had very successful visits to the Alps and Africa the previous year. We decided to join forces again this summer in order to make full use of our experience, both climbing and organizing, especially in finding sponsors. We only wanted a small expedition, as we planned to be an ultra-lightweight party, climbing Alpine-style; the smaller we kept it, the more cohesive the party would be. We wanted to avoid the encumbering problems of a large expedition and to enjoy the close companionship that develops through a limited number only.

We left London in early July, and began the 4-day walk-in from Kishtwar to the Base Camp after a fortnight in India. We had some trouble in arranging mules for the walk, due to a Japanese expedition having paid very high rates 2 years before. However, our Liaison officer was related to a high official in Kashmir, and his influence was such that the Tehsildar (mayor) of Kishtwar threatened the muleteers with jail! Subsequently, we had no more trouble.

We walked on a good path beside the Munab river, and then branched off up the Nanth Nullar, and positioned the Base Camp at the snout of the Brammah