Valedictory Address

GEORGE BAND

(Read before the Alpine Club on 4 December 1989)

(Plates 1–8)

Oreion

Oreion – my theme is of mountains and is drawn from the Greek title of James Wood's orchestral work which received its world premiere at the BBC Promenade Concert on 9 August 1989.

James Wood was born in 1953, a Cambridge man though regrettably never in the CUMC. 'Imagine yourself in a valley,' he said. 'You look up and see one outline of one mountain – one simple wind rhythm. Climb up the side of the valley and you see more. Gradually you get to the top, and you have this intoxicating view – a whole set of wind rhythms. The idea was to see how many layers of multiple rhythmic canons I could build up, yet still retain control.'

Reverting from music to mountaineering, the opening paragraphs of Chris Bonington's first book, *I Chose to Climb*, quoted a letter he received when he was a young management trainee with Van den Berghs. He had asked for six months off to join an expedition to the Towers of Paine in Southern Patagonia. He quotes from the letter;

> We regret we cannot accede to your suggestion. If you still want to pursue mountaineering to the point of long-term expeditions in distant parts of the world, then you must see it not as something which can be combined with your business career but as something which is incompatible with it. It was very much in our minds when you joined us after returning from an expedition to the Himalaya that it was your intention to settle down uninterruptedly to a business career, particularly as you were a few years older than most people who join us as management trainees. Put as plainly as possible, the time has come for you to make up your mind whether to leave mountaineering or Van den Berghs.

We all know the decision that Chris Bonington took!

Ironically, I received an almost identical letter after I had been working for Shell for some months in the small town of Midland in the plains of West Texas. This cattle and oil town was surrounded by 200 miles of semi-desert. It had great civic pride and a main business highway called Wall Street with a skyscraper 20 storeys high. I had met a friendly millionaire, William B Blakemore II who, out of the blue, had offered to help finance my next expedition. The opportunity came with permission to visit the Russian Pamir in

1962. When I wrote to Shell asking for time off I received a similar ultimatum in reply; the letter also suggested that my next oil-field assignment would be in Venezuela where, as far as my career was concerned, I most wanted to go. Like Chris, I had to resolve the conflict between a love of climbing and the need to find a worthwhile career. Unlike him, I chose to stay with Shell, so that the title of this address could well have been 'I Chose to Work'. However, that was rather dull, so I chose the more intriguing Greek word *oreion*: 'of mountains'.

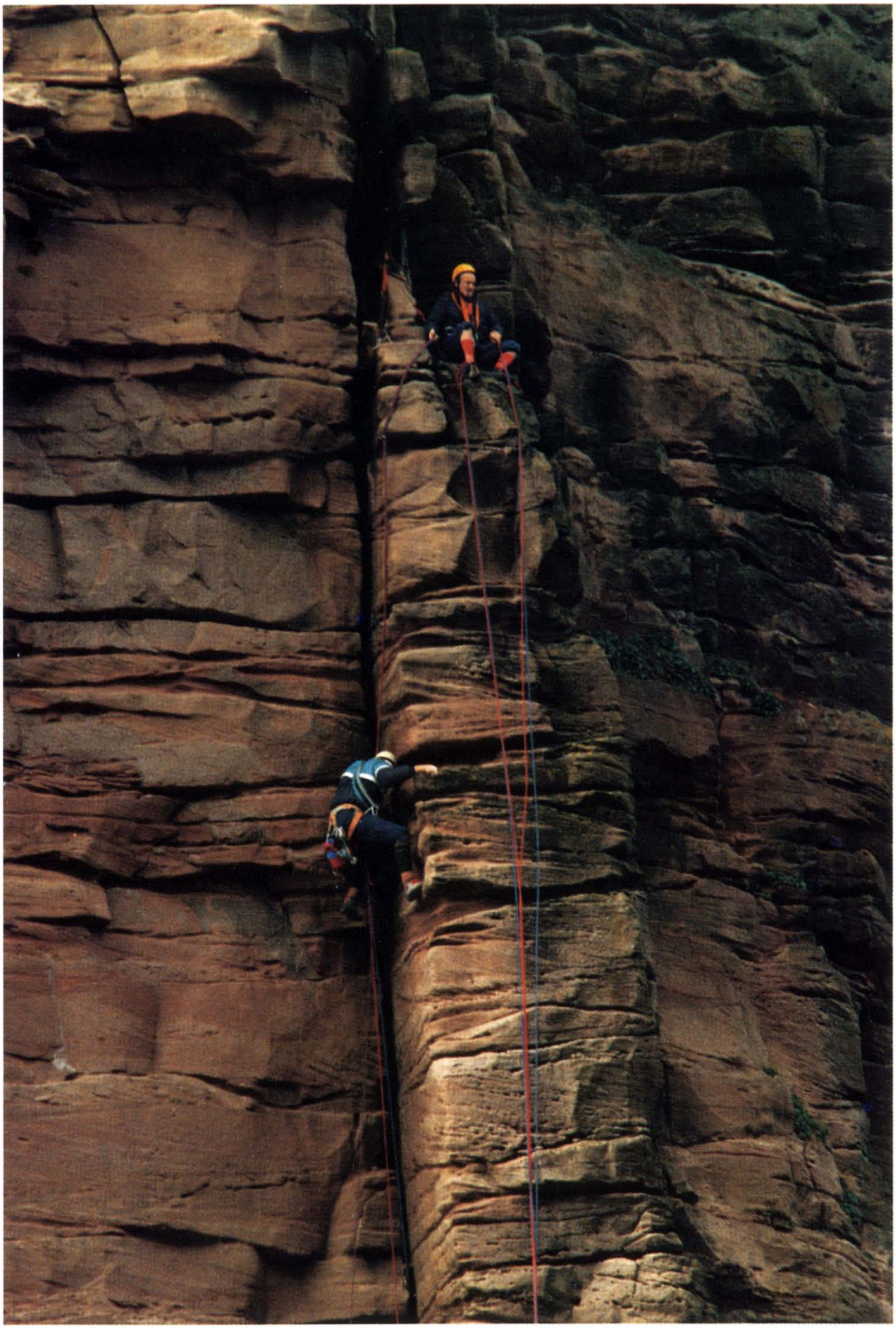
Although I chose to work, it has not exactly been a humdrum life, as I hope you will appreciate from the personal exhibition of photographs which I have enjoyed assembling in the annexe with the assistance of Bob Lawford and Peter Ledeboer, for which I am grateful. The photos serve to illustrate the first part of my talk where I indulge in a series of reminiscences, as I believe did the irrepressible Tom Longstaff in his 1949 Valedictory Address. In the second part I wish to outline some of the important developments in the Club over the last three years, and in the third and final part I give some consideration to the future role of the Club.

Returning to my Texan benefactor, when I informed him of my withdrawal from the Pamir expedition I naturally expected him to withdraw his financial support from a team whose members, apart from myself, he had never even met. However, to his eternal credit he did not, as you will see confirmed on page 35 of Malcolm Slesser's book *Red Peak*. The Russians required a merger of the potentially separate Scottish Mountaineering Club party led by Slesser and the Alpine Club/Climbers' Club group led by John Hunt. With hindsight, it was perhaps an expedition to miss, as there was some difficulty in melding it all together and, sadly, there was the tragic accident when Wilfrid Noyce and Robin Smith fell 4000 feet to their deaths on Garmo on 24 July 1962.

Life in West Texas was more predictable, although I did very nearly tread on a rattlesnake while negotiating the rockfall forming the narrows of the Santa Elena canyon of the Rio Grande in the Big Bend country between Texas and Mexico. It was exciting to spin uncontrollably through the rapids in a little rubber dinghy, with the rock-walls of the canyon rising up at least 500 feet on either side. On another occasion, passing by the Tetons in Wyoming I was able to make the first ascent of the year of the Grand Teton under the leadership of Jake Breitenbach, who sadly came to grief in the Everest ice-fall the following year.

Venezuela in November 1961, after a brief leave in England, had its compensations. Our honorary member, Sir Douglas Busk, was British Ambassador in Caracas at the time, and our Shell personnel director was bemused when he received a request from the embassy for me – a young and very junior petroleum engineer – to dine with the Ambassador my first evening. Had I caught my connection for Maracibo as planned, I would have been on the first plane to be hijacked by dissidents from Castro's Cuba.

Sir Edwin Herbert (later Lord Tangley), who was the AC President during our Everest years, was passing through Caracas on business, and we had an impromptu AC Dinner hosted by the Ambassador. I was therefore summoned back again the following evening to discuss plans for a week in the Venezuelan Andes which Busk was busy organizing; it seemed my presence



1. *Old Man of Hoy, Orkney, 1985. Second pitch. Al Alvarez (top) and George Band.* (Chris Mikami) (From the President's Valedictory Exhibition) (p 1) Frontispiece

would be essential. I was delighted to fall in with his plans which he later recorded in the *Alpine Journal* (*AJ*67, 280–290, 1962). We managed several climbs including a first ascent of El Vertigo, a sharp subsidiary summit of Pico Bolivar and a delightful SW face route up El Abanico.

On a later occasion Busk managed to persuade Eric Shipton to stop over on his way to Patagonia. We immediately lured Shipton into an impromptu winter ascent of Pico Bolivar with a party of my fellow-engineers, some of whom had done very little climbing. I described this weekend dash from sea-level to nearly 5000m under the title 'A Physiological Experiment' in the *Climbers' Club Journal* of 1964. There is an exposed chimney near the top with a fixed rope. On the descent we were all rather cold and wet. I was anchorman lowering the others down. The heaviest, who is now the respected Inspector-General of the Dutch State Mines, was the last to be lowered – bouncing down the fixed rope in fine style – when suddenly its tired strands snapped. He jerked to a stop as the safety rope bit into my waist and took my breath away. I was thankful it broke with him because a moment later, with no protection from above, I would have been trusting the fixed rope myself.

From Venezuela we moved to what is now Bangladesh, as laconically described in a Shell telex: 'for the further development of Band'. In those days (1968) the country was called East Pakistan and we had to report to the Ministry of Natural Resources in Islamabad, West Pakistan, 1500 miles away. We were based in Chittagong, described in the latest 1953 edition of the *Bay of Bengal Pilot* as 'a pleasant coastal town consisting of low hills on which the Europeans live. In the hollows between there are native huts and fruit trees.' A fairly accurate description. Our company had found and were in the process of developing several gasfields, some of them in the tea-gardens of Sylhet. We also drilled the first offshore well in the Bay of Bengal with a rather ancient rig called the Sidewinder. It had to be completed in a hurry, in the interval between the two cyclone seasons.

The redeeming feature of our life was the Chittagong Hill Tracts where the Karnaphuli river had been dammed for a power project which had flooded the river system to create an extensive lake, bigger than Windermere, whose tentacles reached out to the borders with Assam and Burma. Whole villages had been flooded, but in the low-water season the top of the spire of the Chakma Rajah's palace at Rangamati still appeared above the water. The surrounding hills were sparsely populated by peaceful tribal people of Burmese extraction, a few wild elephants and the very occasional tiger. One was not allowed to penetrate far without a special permit which I eventually obtained for the purpose of oil exploration. At weekends we relaxed on simple houseboats on the lake and learned how to waterski.

On one short holiday we flew to Kathmandu, during the preparations for the wedding of the Crown Prince of Nepal. In the thronging crowds around the palace, two pairs of eyes suddenly met in instant recognition: it was Tashi, my personal Sherpa on Kangchenjunga 15 years earlier. As we embraced with joy, I remembered how he had carried to the last camp at 8200m, climbing one section with his oxygen inadvertently turned off so that, when I had exhausted my own supply and was trying to hack a small platform out of the 45 degree

ice-slope for our tent, it was his remaining oxygen which had given me the strength to complete the job.

My next assignment was in the Sultanate of Oman, where we arrived at the end of 1970 just six months after the young Sandhurst-trained Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id had ousted his father. Much to Wilfrid Thesiger's dismay, the Company had recently discovered oil on the edge of the Rub al Khali, where he and his two companions bin Khabina and bin Ghabaisha had nearly died of thirst in their epic first crossing of the Empty Quarter so vividly described in his book *Arabian Sands*. At a farewell party for my predecessor in much the same location, 20 years later, I felt rather ashamed to be tucking into sliced turkey and ham and French wines in our air-conditioned desert oilfield quarters.

One tends to think of the Middle East as sandy or gravel desert, but Oman was different. In the north the mountain range of the Jebel Akhdar rose to over 2400m and was seamed by immense gorges of Himalayan dimensions. In one of these, the Wadi Mayadin, the whole geological sequence through which we were drilling in the desert further south was exposed perfectly for examination and study. On the summit plateau there were scattered settlements, with cottage roses and terraces of grain and lucerne benefiting from the occasional rainfall which was denied to the desert below. Over one New Year weekend I made a memorable journey across the range in the company of Colonel John Cooper, who had been Stirling's first recruit to the SAS and was then in charge of the Sultan's officer-cadet training academy. It was his first return to the Jebel since 1958 when he had been in the SAS team, homeward bound from Malaya, who had responded to a call from the Sultan to oust the rebel Imam of Oman from his mountain-top hide-out. Although the SAS had surprised the rebels by scaling the Jebel at night, the enemy were able to escape by a secret route down to the desert where an escort of fast-riding camels was waiting to hurry them across the border to asylum in Saudi Arabia.

At the end of 1972, it was back to Europe and The Hague by way of Kenya, where we spent Christmas and I managed a quick jaunt up to Point Lenana of Mount Kenya with an Italian pharmacist.

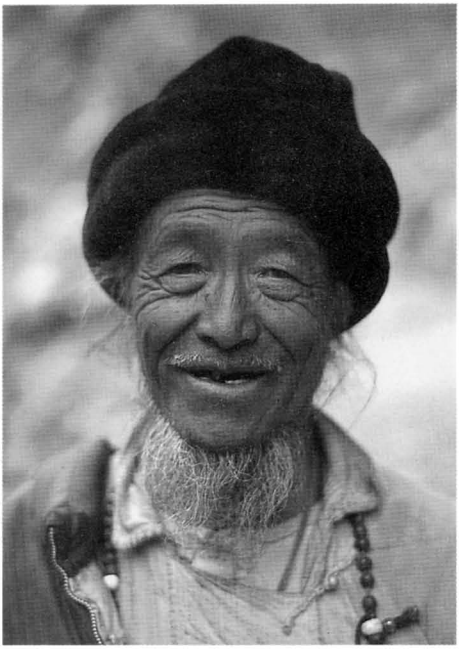
The Netherlands are rather flat in many respects, so at weekends we sped to the Ardennes in Belgium where we wrestled up the tilted limestone slabs of Freyre beside the river Meuse. From the opposite bank, tourists gazed up at us in wonderment as they strolled around the formal gardens and fountains of the Château de Freyre. Susan took a soft-focus snap of me struggling with slings and karabiners on the overhanging *Toit du Monde*. Coming back an hour later she found me still in much the same position. At the superb Belgian Alpine Club campsite overlooking the river we fed well. For breakfast it was *pistolets*, the local crisp bread-rolls fresh from the baker, with smoked Ardennes ham, and in the evenings *truite almandine* with draughts of exceedingly strong Trappist beer.

The Dutch climbers were most friendly. One hard winter they introduced us and our house-guests, Mike and Sally Westmacott, to skating on the frozen canals. A photograph, 'The AC on ice', was the result!

In the long hot summer of 1976 we had our first taste, or should I say smell, of the maquis in Corsica before moving to London to help with the



2. *Sherpa Tashi, who carried to Camp 6 (8200m) on Kangchenjunga in 1955.* (George Band) (From the President's Valedictory Exhibition) (p 1)



3. *Dawa Tenzing, Sherpa sirdar on Kangchenjunga in 1955, photographed in 1978 below Namche Bazar.* (George Band) (From the President's Valedictory Exhibition) (p 1)



4. *'Alpine Club on Ice', Reeuwijk, Netherlands, 1976. From L: Sally and Mike Westmacott, Jan Saltet, Rob Leopold, George Band.* (From the President's Valedictory Exhibition) (p 1)

burgeoning Northern North Sea oil developments. During this period, in 1978, a dozen of us celebrated the 25th anniversary of Everest by trekking from Darjeeling, parallel to the Himalayan chain, past Kangchenjunga, to the Everest area; a journey I had always wanted to make. The first part had changed very little since the 1950s. It was only when one arrived at Lukhla, the airport below Namche Bazar, that one learnt that over 5000 trekkers per year were now making the journey up to the Everest Base Camp. Twenty miles from the mountain there was a little turf and stone croft which could have been in Ireland, with a sign proudly proclaiming 'Ama Dablam Hotel *and* Gourmet Restaurant'. Most of its stocks of Knäckebrot, saucisson and Tiger Rum were abandoned expedition stores brought down by Sherpas through the icefall from the Western Cwm.

My final overseas assignment was in Malaysia, 1980–83, looking after Shell's operations on the north-west coast of Borneo in Sabah and Sarawak; land of pirates, headhunters, orang-utans and hornbills, made famous by the nineteenth-century exploits of Rajah Sir James Brooke. One project I still have to complete is a climbing guide to the summit rocks of Mount Kinabalu, which is capped by a very recent granite. It is an intriguing area where the flora and fauna of Asia overlap with that from Australasia. The chestnut blackbird is unique and the *Nepenthes*, or pitcher plants, occurring at around 3000m on the mountain have their counterparts in Madagascar, Sri Lanka, New Guinea and the northern tip of Australia, providing botanical evidence for continental drift.

In the coastal town of Miri we worked with Malay Muslims, Christian Kelabits and Dayaks, Indian Hindus and the ubiquitous Chinese. Whenever their numerous feast days coincided to make an extra long weekend, I would take off for the Kelabit Highlands which form the border between Sarawak and Indonesian Kalimantan: thick jungle-covered hills mostly up to 900m, with the occasional peak of 2000m. Halfway there, behind Brunei, lies Mt Mulu, scene of the Royal Geographical Society's expedition in 1978. The caves there proved a magnet for Yorkshire potholers and led to the discovery in 1981 by Andy Eavis' and Ben Lyon's expedition of the world's biggest cave chamber. In the rain-forest lived the elusive Punans who exist on jungle fruits, fish and wild pig and the smaller animals they could kill with their blowpipes. One youngster showed us how to shin easily up a climbing rope by locking it between his prehensile toes.

The leading race in the Highlands was the very intelligent Kelabits, centred on the village of Bario. It used to take them up to three weeks on foot and by river to get down to the coast, but now they have a grass airstrip built by the British during the Second World War and so, when weather permits, light planes can make the journey in an hour. In many of their longhouses, skulls are stacked under the rafters; they are the cobweb-covered relics from head-hunting days.

One of the early British residents serving under the British Rajah – I think it was Charles Hose – encouraged the Kelabits to give up head-hunting and compete on the rivers instead. I am sure he must have been a Henley rowing man! So out of this 'Great Peacemaking' was born the Baram Regatta, held subsequently every few years. In 1982, after a long gap, it was an extra-special

occasion. The Regatta coincided with the centenary of the river town of Marudi and was attended by the King of Malaysia. There were races for crews of five, ten and unlimited numbers in their longboats, carved from a single tree-trunk. The tribal people – Kelabits, Kayans, Kenyans and Ibans – came by river out of the jungle and down from the hills for several days of 'jollification' and feasting, providing me with a feast of photography.

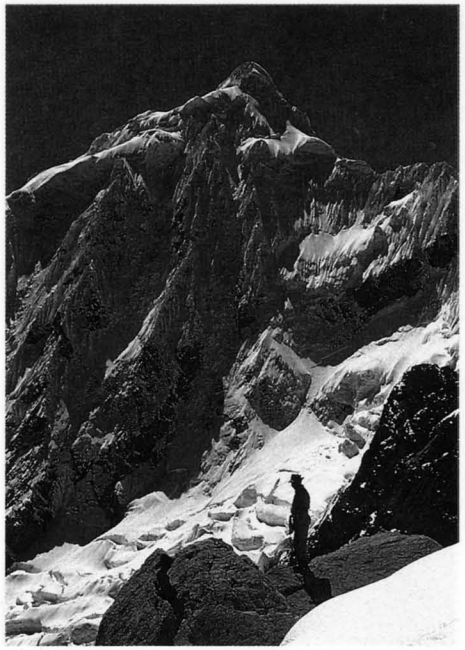
Finally, back to the United Kingdom to enjoy a regular week each June in the far north-west of Scotland; occasional diversions like the Old Man of Hoy and Mt Aiguille in the Vercors; an initiation to ski-touring; joining in the activities of the Club; and serving on the British Mountaineering Council and the Mount Everest Foundation. Then, in 1986 you did me the great honour of electing me your President.

I suppose I took over formally from Denise Evans at midnight on New Year's Eve. I was actually staying at Brackenclose in Wasdale. A few hours earlier there had been a timid knock on the door and an attractive red-haired girl came in. Her husband Kevin had not returned from Scafell. It was a filthy night; he had no torch; what should she do? I guessed from her slight accent that she came from the Netherlands, so I felt I had to assume charge. The Lakeland mountain rescue were alerted. One member of the team had just been sitting down to Chicken à la King for his New Year's Eve dinner, but they all came willingly and with powerful pre-charged torches were off up the mountainside. They found Kevin soon after midnight. He had lost his way and had sensibly bedded down for the night, but was totally soaked through and chilled. Luckily he was a survivor, and I was impressed by the quiet efficiency of the rescue team.

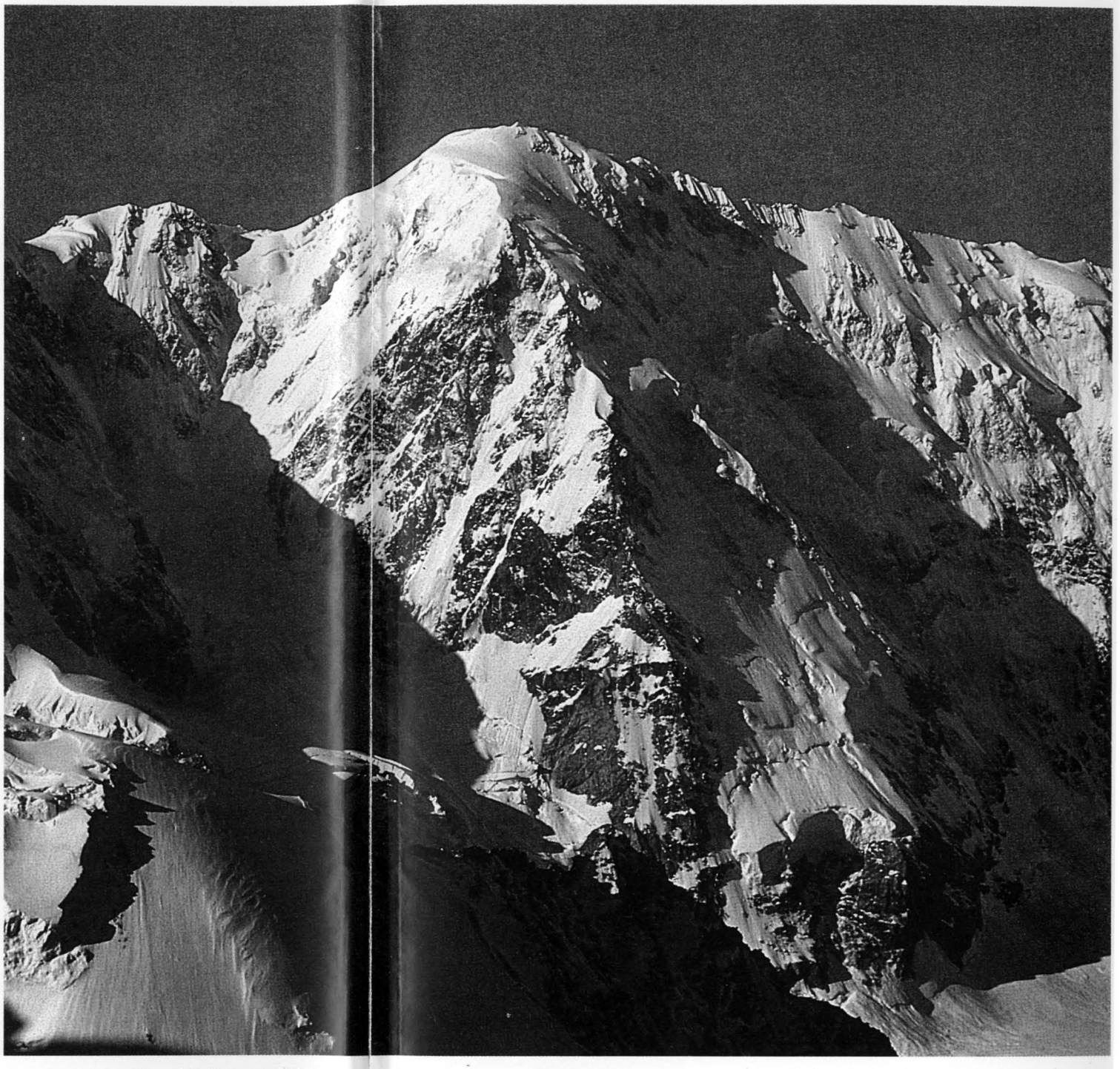
I now turn to review briefly the highlights of the last three years of the Club. By far the most important event was the Committee's decision, endorsed by members in the special General Meeting on 20 September 1988, to surrender the lease here at South Audley Street which still had over 20 years to run until 2010. Then, if we had taken no further action, the Club would have been homeless and out in the cold. The deal was timed fortuitously close to the top of the recent London property boom, so we obtained a good price.

This sum, plus the appropriation set aside each year, together with a prudent proportion of the Club's carefully managed investments, would allow us to acquire premises on a much longer lease to house the assets of the Club and safeguard its future. Previous Committees had always assumed that premises would remain in the London area, preferably within the boundaries of London Transport's Inner Circle. However, there was a groundswell of opinion which noted that the centre of gravity for most British climbers was further north and that a case could be developed for premises closer to that centre, possibly in a mountain area. Accepting that the Committee members could have a natural bias towards London, I was keen that the debate should be opened to all members of the Club so that we could reach a clear majority decision which we would not ever regret. This was done first with a questionnaire and then with special notice at the General Meeting on 20 September 1988, followed by another informal meeting on 27 September in the Lake District.

The questionnaire generated a 60 per cent response in which a 77 per cent



5. *The South Face of Huagaruncho (5730m), Peru, 1956.* (George Band) (From the President's Valedictory Exhibition) (p 1)



6. *The North Ridge of Shkhara (5200m), Bezingi, Caucasus, 1958. Third ascent with Mike Harris, Derek Bull and Anatoli Kustovski.* (George Band) (From the President's Valedictory Exhibition) (p 1)

majority expressed a wish to remain in London; the same general conclusion was evident from the two meetings.

At the same time, the unique opportunity had arisen, if planning permission was forthcoming, to acquire a 125-year lease on a new building to our own specification in the garden of the Royal Geographical Society. If we could afford it, this seemed very much the preferred option. Our strong historical links with the RGS could be reinforced with a physical interconnection for our mutual advantage, but we would retain our independence. After several months of frustration, created by the usual interminable local authority delays, formal planning consent has at last been granted and negotiations with the developer on the form and detail of the construction and the associated price are well advanced. Before the end of the year I had certainly hoped to be able to deliver a firm contract to my successor, Tony Streather, with a view to actual occupation in 1992 towards the end of his three-year term. Efforts leading to a firm and prudent commitment may now take a little longer. There is no doubt that, thanks largely to the brilliant negotiations in 1956 by the then Honorary Secretary, Emlyn Jones, the Club has been living at South Audley Street since 1937 in a dream world, with the landlord paying rates and the art gallery providing a significant extra rental income. Wherever we might seek permanent premises in London, we would now have to pay substantial rates; gallery income is likely to be much less. These two factors alone will require us to fund an extra £20,000–£30,000 a year. However, after a careful look at the Club's finances and with the expectation of a tight construction budget and prudent subsequent housekeeping, your Committee felt that the opportunity to build new premises at the RGS should be pursued most strongly.

Meanwhile, for the interim period after we vacate South Audley Street (formally by 31 March 1990), the Club is concluding arrangements for temporary accommodation at the Ski Club of Great Britain in Eaton Square, with the use of the Council Room of the Royal Institute of Naval Architects just across the road for our General Meetings. In particular the Ski Club, with its attractive bar, should provide an excellent social base during this interim period, and I hope members will make full use of it. An enormous debt of thanks is due to all those who have worked on these arrangements, in particular our retiring Honorary Secretary, Steve Town, the retiring Vice-President, Sir Alan Pullinger who has led (and will, we hope, continue to lead) the Work Group on the future premises, Emlyn Jones for his financial negotiations, Stuart Beare for legal advice and the indefatigable Bob Lawford, amongst others, for his detailed planning of the move backed up by tiny scale models.

When we all 'chose to climb' we probably never envisaged getting quite so involved in administration, high finance and real-estate management in the name of mountaineering! However, we have to see all this through in order to preserve and build on all that is best for the Club and its present and future members.

Our other activities have been more in keeping with the traditional role of the Club; I mention but a few.

Mike Baker assisted in the updating and simplification of the Club rules, which at the same time brought Alpine Climbing Group members into full

membership of the AC while remaining a distinguished group within it – an aspiration to which Emlyn Jones alluded in his Valedictory Address in 1982, and which is now achieved.

The *Alpine Journal* is maintaining its quality and steadily increasing in size under its editor, Ernst Sondheimer. Under a new agreement negotiated with Century Hutchinson, it is now published under their imprint Frederick Muller, in association with the Club, and marketed by Century Hutchinson worldwide. The Club benefits financially.

Two new guidebooks have also seen the light of day: the *Ecrins Massif* by John Brailsford and the *Dolomites* by Ron James. I was asked to take 30 copies of the former when I went out to the Dauphiné in the summer of 1988. Unfortunately on our first climb, owing to a misunderstanding, we didn't have a single copy with us!

Another success is the bringing on-stream of the computerized Himalayan Index comprising references to the *Alpine Journal*, *American Alpine Journal*, *Himalayan Journal* and *Mountain World* from the beginnings to 1987 for all expeditions to peaks between 6000m and 7000m in the Himalaya, Karakoram and China. This has been very much a personal contribution by Michael Westmacott, assisted by Anne Andrews, and has been in addition to Mike's major responsibility as Chairman of the AC Library. I am most grateful to him for continuing as Chairman during the critical period of the move. As Emlyn also mentioned in 1982, the importance of the library cannot be overemphasized. Its future is inextricably linked to the future of the Club.

Our meetings and lectures have been well attended and have generally kept a high standard. The annual symposia at Plas y Brenin are perhaps our most worthwhile indoor activity, stimulating the imagination of those present to visit the Greater Ranges, and providing a fertile recruiting ground. Subjects have been China, North America and the Indian Himalaya. The presentations have been given almost entirely by our own members, which illustrates the quality and extent of their mountaineering. However, like Colonel Strutt, AC President in the 1930s, I must express my astonishment at some of the modern trends of what I might term 'casual climbing'. I remember Andy Fanshawe describing the outstandingly successful traverse of Chogolisa, but showing one slide of his companions strung out individually and unroped along the heavily corniced ridge where Hermann Buhl had fallen alone to his death 30 years earlier. I recall my own experience on Rakaposhi in 1954 when a huge cornice broke. If we had not been roped up then, Ted Wrangham and Ali Dad would have gone the same way as Hermann Buhl.

At the other extreme there was an example of what one might call 'cold calculated climbing'. Alan Hinkes graphically described how he and Rick Allen, roped together, were teetering on thin ice high on Makalu. When Rick fell past him, Alan had the presence of mind quickly to unclip the rope from his own climbing harness as there was no possibility of holding him. Rick had a hard skull and survived, but, had there not been other parties on the mountain, Alan would probably never have been able to get Rick down alive.

I now turn to the third and final part of my address. Although the recent debate over the location of the Club's premises resulted in a clear preference for



7. *Dave Atchinson and Hamish Nicol on the West Buttress of Coire Mhic Fhearchair, Beinn Eighe, Torridon, 1988.* (George Band) (From the President's Valedictory Exhibition) (p 1)



8. *George and Susan Band above Schladming, Austria. Christmas 1988.* (Rupert Band) (From the President's Valedictory Exhibition) (p 1)

London, it left many wider issues unresolved. Many of those who spoke or wrote in on both sides of the debate showed their genuine concern for the standing of the Club, the services and facilities it provides, and the continuing need to maintain the strength and quality of its membership.

I was particularly keen to make the Club more attractive to those members and prospective members living outside London. In January the Committee therefore agreed to appoint a small Study Group to examine the future role of the Club, looking ahead for the next 10–20 years. The last occasion of such a review was indeed 20 years ago, in 1969, under Charles Evans's presidency. I am most grateful to Mike Baker, our Vice-President Paul Nunn and Charles Clarke for agreeing to constitute this group under Mike Baker's chairmanship. They reported in October, and I wish to draw liberally from their conclusions and recommendations which have generated spirited discussion in our last two committee meetings. Since decisions about the move were in progress, it was necessary to assume these would result in the Club having a London base throughout the period under consideration.

The Club is not without its critics both from within and without. Indeed, for many of us within it seems an inevitable topic of conversation on the long walk up to Alpine huts or along Himalayan trails. The Alpine Club is seen by some to be exclusive in a bad sense, unknown in its own country and out of touch with the vast majority of young British climbers. The group's response was to state three matters of principle and make seven recommendations.

The first matter of principle was that, if the Club is to speak with authority and influence in the mountaineering world, then it must regain a membership which represents the best in British mountaineering.

Secondly, the Club should maintain its conscious shift of concentration from the Alpine to the Greater Ranges of the world (whose greater accessibility was a main theme of Roger Chorley's Valedictory Address in 1985).

Thirdly, the unique scientific, literary and historical role of the Club should be nurtured and widened.

I have no difficulty in accepting these principles myself and, after some tangential discussions, the Committee has also endorsed them. We must build on those strengths which distinguish us from other clubs.

The seven recommendations cover a fair range.

First, membership: while resisting any reduction in entrance qualification, the group recommends a conscious decision to double the numbers by the year 2000, ie a net increase of 100 members per year.

Second, the availability of cheap 'bunkhouse'-style accommodation in London could do more than anything to make the Club attractive to regional members. At the least, a register of London members willing to offer bed or floor space would be a start, and could be included in the next circular.

Third, a case is made for three public AC lectures each year, two outside London.

Fourth, the Committee could improve its efficiency – a fair criticism – and hold half its meetings outside London.

Fifth, the Club should strengthen its links with the British Mountaineering Council and with the UIAA, not to further the interests of the AC but for the benefit of British mountaineering.

Sixth, meets are recognized as playing an important part in a healthy Club and they merit greater support and encouragement.

Seventh, the Editor of the newly invigorated *Alpine Journal* is invited to consider commissioning articles grouped round the great issues of the day.

The Committee has not yet had time to give Mike Baker's report the full consideration it deserves. I would like to congratulate Tony Streather on his election as President and invite him, together with our hardworking new Secretary Mike Esten and the Committee, to continue the discussion next year and bring whatever they decide to fruition. Meanwhile, I have asked Mike to prepare a version of the report which can be mailed to all members together with the next circular, to invite their views and comments. On the vital question of membership, increased recruitment is essential to support the higher running costs that any new London base will incur. The Committee has agreed to the formation of a special task force to consider, taking expert advice, on how this can be achieved.

The Club lives or dies by its members. I would like in closing to pay tribute to all those who give their services freely and who have helped me during my term of office. I should also record the passing of two of our more memorable members who between them combined 140 years' membership of the Club. Last July died Wing-Commander Eric Bentley Beauman at the age of 98. He had climbed with Frank Smythe on Kamet and was also one of the country's early aviators, having trained under Louis Blériot. At the outbreak of the First World War, in a Caudron biplane with an unreliable 70hp Gnome engine, he was told that he was solely responsible for the air defence of London. Protesting mildly that his aircraft had neither observer nor armament, Beauman asked his commanding officer what tactics he was to employ, should a Zeppelin intrude into London's airspace. 'That I leave to you,' came the imperturbable reply.

The other was Professor Noel Odell, the last person to see Mallory and Irvine alive, who died in February 1987, aged 96. 'While his fame rests on his achievements on Everest and Nanda Devi in 1924 and 1936,' said Peter Lloyd in a letter to me, 'I believe that the AC will particularly honour and cherish his memory for his devotion and loyalty to the Club.' Only three days before he died, I had sat next to Odell at the Royal Geographical Society for the remarkable suite of lectures by Joe Brown, Nat Allen, Doug Scott and Chris Bonington in memory of Don Whillans.

I began this address in Greek; let me finish with a favourite quotation of Odell's expressing briefly and succinctly the credo of a mountaineer – the simple words of a Swiss savant of the Middle Ages which were found engraved on the summit of the Stockhorn:

δ τῶν σρῶν ερωζ αριστοζ

The love of the mountains is best