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The Editor
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DO MOUNTAINEERS LIVE LONGER?

Sir,

Casual conversations reveal a common belief that 'mountaineers live longer'. A glance through *AJ* obituaries reinforces this belief, and it stimulated W W Naismith to make a brief study (*AJ*34, 266–7, 1921). Of the 16 whose age at death was recorded, the average age on joining the Alpine Club was 37. The Institute of Actuaries was quoted as giving 29.6 years as the expectation of life of a 37-year-old healthy man. Naismith calculated that the 16 lives had had an average increment of about 3½ years beyond this expectation.

In the mid-1970s I made a more detailed study than Naismith's, because my impression was that the average prolongation of life might be significantly more. The correct way to design such a study is a prospective one, that is, to start now with a large population of mountaineers and a matched population of non-mountaineers, then wait until all members of both populations are dead before analysing the data relating to each person's life, cause of death, and age at death: hardly a practicable proposition. I therefore settled for a pseudo-prospective study by using the whole membership of the Club as listed in the 1930 list, and following each, from the Club's records, through the next 45 years.

So far as I could ascertain, virtually the whole membership then belonged to, or in a few years entered, the Registrar-General's Occupational Classes I or II. The Registrar-General's Occupational Mortality Tables in his decennial supplement of 1930–32 recorded life expectancy for men in these two categories to be very close, so, for purposes of comparison, they were averaged. This reference standard was based on data derived from the England and Wales census of 1930, and this had to be taken into account in making a comparison. I assumed that figures in these Classes for Scotland would be similar and that any small difference would be negligible, bearing in mind the small proportion of AC members living in Scotland. I decided, however, to reject from the

'population' of mountaineers those who had spent most of their Club membership life abroad. I also excluded those killed in the Second World War, as the compilers of the reference tables could not have taken into account this future hazard when calculating life expectancy. Naturally I had to exclude those whose records were incomplete, which included those who resigned (most resignations were during the first years of the Great Depression and during the War). The *only two* killed on a mountain were included. All this reduced the 'population' to 334 men ranging in age from 30 to 80+, those aged 20 to 29 being only three and hence too small a cohort to subject to statistical analysis.

The results are shown in the table:

Age (yrs) at 1930	*Average deviation from life expectancy (yrs)*	*Number in this age range*	*P*
30–39	−4.4	17	NS
40–49	+2.7	56	0.05
50–59	+2.7	109	0.005
60–69	+3.9	103	$\ll$0.001
70–79	−5.5	38	NS
80+	−0.68	11	NS

(P is the probability that the result is an example of random fluctuation, e.g., in the 50–59 age group, if 1000 similar studies were made such fluctuations would be expected to give this degree of average increase in life span in five of them, i.e. the increase is highly likely to be a real one. NS means 'not significant' and no conclusion can be drawn. The number of individuals in these age ranges was small and there was a remarkable spread of years greater, and less, than their life expectancy.)

These results confirm the general belief, but the average life increment is remarkably similar to Naismith's findings. This is not the place to analyse the results of the many published studies relating life style to longevity. During the last two decades this has been a popular topic for research and the literature is correspondingly vast. From this one factor stands pre-eminent: family history. If a person comes of a stock notable for delayed ageing and long life, then, apart from infection and accident, that person will probably follow the family pattern. Such predisposition can, of course, be overridden by unhealthy habits, particularly dietary ones. Another factor common to many studies is the favourable effect of exercise and particularly of such exercise as produces in the individual 'endurance fitness'. This is exactly the type of fitness a mountaineer has to maintain if mountaineering is to be enjoyed.

So it is almost self-evident that, on average, a life-long mountaineer can expect a longer life than the average citizen, and a study to establish this with the rigour of experimental design which would satisfy a professional epidemiologist would be a waste of time. We must not forget that the ability to be an active mountaineer for most of one's life is likely to be one of the consequences of

factors which also predispose to a longer than average life. The second is not necessarily a result of the first. 'Correlation is not causation.'

Yours faithfully,
Edward Williams

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The Editor
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GEORGE TRAILL (1792–1847)

Sir,

While recently visiting St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, I came across a marble monument prominently placed in the S transept near the entrance to the choir, to the memory of

George William Traill,
born 1792, Bengal Civil Service, died 1847,
for many years District Commissioner, Kumaon,
where his memory is of a wise and benevolent ruler.

Bells began to ring in my memory. This must be the eponymous discoverer of Traill's Pass, one of the very earliest mountaineers, as opposed to explorers or surveyors, in the Himalaya. Back home, from a rapid reference to Kenneth Mason's *Abode of Snow* and Tom Longstaff's *This My Voyage*, I elicited the following facts. During his period of service as District Commissioner in Kumaon which ended in 1835, Traill made his way from Gwaldam up the Pindari valley to cross this 5400m pass slung between Nanda Devi East, to the NW, and Nanda Kot, to the E. He then descended the Lwanl glacier and the Lawan Gad (below the pleasant camp-site of Narspan Patti, later used by Longstaff), to emerge in the Gori valley at Martoli, some 16km below Milam. This was in 1830, and it was a remarkable achievement to have crossed a pass which is still held difficult under certain conditions today.

Reports have it that the Schlagintweits crossed this pass in the 1850s, but the next recorded passage was not until 1926, this time from N to S, by Hugh Ruttledge, another District Commissioner in Kumaon (and later leader of the 1933 Everest Expedition), together with General R C Wilson, on their way back from a lengthy exploration of the Kailas area of Tibet.

Meanwhile, in 1905, Longstaff had been active in the area, reaching the rim of the Nanda Devi basin from the E, and climbing high on the NE ridge of Nanda Kot, but not actually touching Traill's Pass. A Japanese party completed Longstaff's route on Nanda Kot in 1936, returning over Traill's Pass to the Pindari valley; they were guided by Dewan Singh of Martoli, who had been over it with Ruttledge 10 years earlier.

Traill's Pass was evidently not only an interesting short cut for District Commissioners setting out from their headquarters in Almora to visit the upper Goriganga (and on to Tibet), but also a key factor in attempts to enter the Nanda Devi Sanctuary over the rim, before the classic way was forced up the Rishiganga gorge, first by Longstaff *en route* to Trisul, and then by Shipton and Tilman on their reconnaissance of Nanda Devi in 1934.

I found Traill's Orcadian ancestry less easy to trace. His ancestors came north with the Stewart Earls in the 16th century and were allotted the island of Rousay as their territory. The 18th-century Traill laird was one of the few Jacobite lairds on Orkney, who all sought refuge after the 1745 Rising in the 'Gentlemen's Cave' on the neighbouring island of Westray. The male line of Traills petered out in the mid-19th century, and a General Burroughs who had also served in India and made money there married the last Traill heiress. (I cannot ascertain whether this was George Traill's sister, daughter or niece.) George Traill himself was probably born in the modest house at Westness, which General Traill Burroughs, as he now called himself, abandoned to engage the well-known Victorian architect David Bryce to build the ungainly pile of Trumland House. Burroughs earned a reputation as an exploiter of his island, reducing crofters to labourers and in other ways incurring the censure of Orcadians, using methods of which the 'benevolent despot of Kumaon' would certainly not have approved.

Yours faithfully,
Edward Peck

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The Editor
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29 December 1989

EVEREST: THE NE RIDGE

Sir,

And so the pinnacles on the NE ridge of Mount Everest have been crossed; but the entire ridge has not yet been climbed.

I wonder how many people know that in the thirties, on Everest, we used affectionately to refer to this ridge as 'Finch's Folly', because legend had it that in 1922 George Finch, that great mountaineer, had suggested that it might be the best way to the summit. Certainly not the easiest, as we now know. But what about *the best*?

Just as the W ridge, in those days, was known as 'Hazard's Folly', for the same reason; nowadays it has fallen to the onslaught of modern mountaineering.

But now, as an old mountaineer, somehow or other I wish that Nature would occasionally triumph over Man. I don't like to think that there is nothing left for us to look for round the next corner: 'For lust of knowing what should not be known.'

I don't really want our great Past-President's ridge on Everest to be climbed.

Yours faithfully,
Charles Warren