Sandy Allan, Topping Out

ANDREW GREIG

From Base Camp to the stream there is a path now
and the grass is yellow at the centre of the path.

So began to lead the last of the Tower
Quite hard more bold than difficult
tough ice loose snow but soon my brain
began to play the game My points investigated
stabbed good placements to be had
among loose choss Crucified by altitude
I bridged a steepish rockwall Good
value that I remember everything
like ice-slivers in my windsuit's creases Camp 4
a thousand feet beneath my heels Climbing
into my shadow the sun
flashed off my axe
Jon he was somewhere
giving good rope and no advice the ideal second
but me I was gone

Nice work when you can get it
the hardest the best hours passed
till I wanted a think and a rest
so thumped in an ice-screw and hung out awhile –

Like I cannot spell, speak porter-talk
but who does not who's lived like me
with oil roughnecks and a French girl?
One look in her eyes, I know.
One straight hit, I find good ice.
Climbing's not so much, my life's more in
the way I eat my food, the man I rise above,
the roads I drive to friends,
these suit –

Re-engaged myself and winkled on
with patient pickers unlocked the crux
set my axes well and at full stretch
pulled over the top and saw into China

head was mute

felt ok felt well
à cheval across the summit
K2 in the distance looking good
suspicion of moisture behind my shades

Made a belay and took in the ropes
as Jon came up. So how's it going?

Oh, wasted youth . . .