A Grindelwald Centenary

ROSEMARY GREENWOOD

(*Plate 56*)

In January 1891 my uncle Gerald Fox and his cousin Thomas Fox brought the first skis to Grindelwald from Norway where they had learned to use them. Although not the first skis seen in Switzerland, we believe they were the first in the Bernese Oberland. For some years the old Baer Hotel had had winter visitors who skated, curled and tobogganed. The Foxes were regarded as slightly mad as they demonstrated their skis. They put them on indoors and skied out of the hotel entrance, using a single long pole. Neither the guests nor the local inhabitants saw a future for this dangerous sport, though they conceded that it was quite a good way of getting about compared with snow shoes. However, some of the local youths were prevailed upon to learn the rudiments and, though the sport did not catch on immediately, there was thus a nucleus of keen local inhabitants available to teach the visitors who came in increasing numbers as the years went by.

The Foxes have long had associations with Grindelwald. In 1853 my grandfather Joseph Hoyland Fox made his first visit while on a mountain walking tour with his cousin and future brother-in-law Frank Fox Tuckett. In subsequent years they frequently went on mountaineering holidays together, with Frank's sisters and other friends, delightfully described and illustrated by Lizzie Tuckett, my great-aunt, in *Voyage en Zigzag*[1] and other books. In 1859 my grandfather and great-uncle Frank Tuckett were elected to the Alpine Club.

Frank Tuckett made over 160 ascents, of which 54 were first ascents or first crossings of Alpine passes. He used to carry an apparatus for boiling water into which he put his thermometer, and from the temperature of the water at boiling point he was able to calculate the altitude with a fair degree of accuracy. In 1859 he made the first ascent of the Aletschhorn[2] with the famous guide J J Bennen and Peter Bohren of Grindelwald. In 1871 he made an attempt on the Eiger with my grandfather and Christian and Ulrich Lauener of Lauterbrunnen; they were almost overcome by a gigantic avalanche, but by a superhuman sprint to the side managed to escape being carried away.[3]

Another member of the Alpine Club was Harry Fox who, with W F Donkin, was lost in the Caucasus in 1888.[4] One of his sisters married Frank Tuckett and another married my uncle Hugh Fox. Harry climbed a lot in the Alps and we know he visited Grindelwald with his sisters in 1884.

The Fox family had frequent holidays in the Alps, and Grindelwald was a favourite haunt. Many of my cousins, uncles and aunts and all my siblings did some climbing. My mother first went with her parents, Joseph Fox and Mariana Fox Tuckett, in 1902. They were both now elderly and my grandmother, who was rather stout, used to be carried on excursions in a *chaise-à-porteurs*. They



55. The Eiger: Mittellegi Ridge photographed during the first post-war AC alpine meet, 1948. (*Charles Warren*) (p189)



56. Grindelwald Ski Centenary, Jan 1991. The Fox guests (Rosemary Greenwood front row, centre) with the original skis used by Gerald and Thomas Fox. (p198)

wore masks or veils for protection against sunburn. Even as late as the 1920s my mother had a climbing suit made of Grenfell cloth by Aquascutum, consisting of a safari-type jacket, breeches, and a wraparound skirt which could be taken off once the villages were passed.

I was first taken in a family party to Grindelwald in 1927. There is a photograph of me, dwarfed by an enormous school hat, emerging from the ice grotto in the Upper Grindelwald glacier, at that time level with the valley floor. We had yearly Alpine holidays after 1927, usually finishing at Grindelwald after a walking tour. We stayed at the little hotel at Alpiglen, half-way up to Kleine Scheidegg, for seven francs pension a day (and there were 20 francs to the pound in those days). It was from there that my sister Jean made the first descent by a woman of the Mittellegi Ridge and down to Alpiglen. In 1934 my parents leased a chalet in Grindelwald from the Bernet family and we took to skiing as well as climbing.

In January 1991 the centenary of the first skis in Grindelwald was celebrated by the Stettler family of the Schoenegg Hotel where the Foxes have often stayed over the years. As a niece of Gerald Fox I was invited with ten other cousins, descendants of Thomas and Gerald, to a week of skiing and entertainments. We were given free ski passes for the whole area, including Jungfraujoch and Mürren with the Schilthorn, though I nearly had mine confiscated by unknowingly straying into a nature reserve in search of powder snow. At the final dinner, at which many of the guests wore period costume, I presented to the museum, on behalf of the Fox clan, an ice-axe of the 1850s that had been made for Frank Tuckett to his specifications by a Bristol smith.

REFERENCES

1 Elizabeth Tuckett, *Voyage en Zigzag*. London, Longman & Co, 1864.
2 F F Tuckett, 'Ascent of the Aletschhorn', *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers, Second series, Vol II*. London, Longman & Co, 52–70, 1862.
3 F F Tuckett, 'A Race for Life'. *AJ5*, 337–349, 1872.
4 *AJ14*, 311–314, 432–436, 1888.