Alpine Club Notes

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE FOR 1992

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LECTURES	S M W Venables
INFORMAL EVENINGS	S A Jones
MEETS	Dr C R A Clarke
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HONORARY SOLICITOR	S N Beare
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ALPINE CLIMBING GROUP

PRESIDENT	D Wilkinson
HONORARY SECRETARY	R A Ruddle
HONORARY EDITOR (*ACG Annual Bulletin*)	A E Penning

GENERAL MEETINGS OF THE ALPINE CLUB 1991

15 January	Nick Crane, *High Altitude Bicycling*
12 February	Dr Michael Plint, *The Bullock Workmans*
12 March	André Roch, *Adventure in the Himalaya* (extra meeting, jointly with ABMSAC)
16 March	General Meeting and North Wales Meet at Plas y Brenin Jerry Gore, *Paragliding in Five Easy Lessons* and *Grand Capucin in Winter*
9 April	Victor Saunders, *Elusive Summits*
23 April	Ed Webster, *Desert and Canyon – Colorado Rockclimbing* (extra meeting)
14 May	John Wilkinson, *Matterhorn to Motorhead – Three Decades of Alpinism*
18 May	General Meeting, Derbyshire
10 September	Ian Smith, *From the Peakland Moors to the Jersey Sea Cliffs*
28 September	Lakes Meet and General Meeting John Porter, *Last Mountain on the Bone Trail*
8 October	Graham Little, *Andean Volcanoes*
12 November	Dr Anthony Kenny, *Men and Mountains*, and George Band, *Classic Alpine Climbs*
19 November	Lorensino Cosson, *The Italian Side of Mont Blanc* (Italian evening)
23 November	General meeting and Symposium at Plas y Brenin, *Climbing in the Caucasus*

2 December	Annual General Meeting Jerry Lovatt, *The First Ascent of Mont Blanc*

The Annual Dinner 1991 was held on 3 December at the Basil Street Hotel. The Chief Guest was Janet Adam Smith and the Toast to the Guests was proposed by Luke Hughes.

CLIMBING MEETINGS 1991

2 March	ACG Winter Meet, Glencoe
15–17 March	North Wales Meet Jerry Gore, *Paragliding in Five Easy Lessons* and *Grand Capucin in Winter*
28 July – 17 August	Joint Meet with Climbers' Club and ABMSAC, based in the Zermatt valley at the Atermenzen campsite, Randa.
28–29 September	Lakes Meet and General Meeting John Porter, *Chong Kumdan – Last Mountain on the Bone Trail.*

THE ALPINE CLUB LIBRARY

The library is at last housed in new 'permanent' premises and its full resources are again accessible to members and to the public. Thanks are due to all those, especially Bob Lawford, who helped to ensure that the move of the working library from the Ski Club, and of the rest of the books from storage, went smoothly. Thanks also to the Librarian, Pat Johnson, for coping so well during two very difficult years.

The Alpine Club Library Appeal for £250,000 was launched in September 1991, AC members being approached first. The initial response is encouraging, but there is a long way to go. The need for the appeal arises from the fact that the library trust now has to pay a market rate for its accommodation whereas, in the past, it shared with the Club the benefit of a long lease at low rent. Without a successful appeal, rent would absorb the trust's entire income, leaving nothing for staffing, cataloguing, acquisitions or other purposes.

The Himalayan Index forms an increasingly important part of the library's information service and is frequently consulted by expedition planners. Now that the coverage of expeditions reported in English is nearly complete (for identified peaks over 6000m in the Himalaya and Karakoram), we are able to devote some time to checking doubtful data, of which we have a plentiful supply. It is surprisingly difficult to get hard information from articles about some expeditions. Even the mountain itself is sometimes in doubt and in very many cases the route or the time of year is unspecified; team members' names are often missing, or they lack surnames. The research is interesting, but it adds to the time and effort required to produce a reasonably accurate database.

Michael Westmacott

ALPINE CLUB SYMPOSIUM 1991: CLIMBING IN THE CAUCASUS

'The grandest chain of ice mountains that Europe can claim'
Clinton Dent, AC President 1887–89

The 1991 Alpine Club Symposium, in association with the Alpine Climbing Group, was held at the National Mountaineering Centre, Plas y Brenin, on 23 November 1991. About 120 people attended. The acting Chairman for the morning session was Dr Charles Clarke, in place of Lord Hunt who was unable to attend.

The Land and its People

In his opening talk, **Charles Clarke** said that this spectacular range, with many peaks between 4000m and 5000m, is still quite seldom visited by foreigners. The mountains form a wall from the Black Sea to the Caspian, dividing Europe from Asia. To the north are the Moslem valleys of Balkaria, while across the passes to the south is Georgia, Christendom's second oldest state, and its picturesque Caucasian province of Svanetia. The area was subjugated by the Tsar's armies in the mid-19th century, overrun by the Germans in World War II and remained part of the Soviet Union until this year. This is a land of high alpine valleys, ancient Orthodox chapels and rich farms. There are few huts, some monolithic ski hotels and several well-established Russian climbing camps. Charles Clarke visited the area in 1984 with Eugene Gippenreiter, one of the Alpine Club's few Russian members.

Early History and the Alpine Club

Victor Saunders described the part played by early members of the Alpine Club in the exploration of the Caucasus. The names are familiar: A F Mummery, A W Moore, Horace Walker, Clinton Dent, William Donkin, Harry Fox, Douglas Freshfield, Tom Longstaff. Accounts of their exploits fill the early volumes of the *Alpine Journal*. Freshfield's 1868 expedition to Elbruz marked the start of the Alpine Club's interest in the region, but the real explosion of exploration took place during the decade 1886 to 1896, when all the major peaks except Ushba were climbed. The British involvement waned after the turn of the century and, with one notable exception (see below), the major new routes put up during the inter-war years were by Soviet, Austrian, German and Italian expeditions. While the immediate post-war period brought few British expeditions, the last decade has seen access become markedly easier. Perhaps the Alpine Club will soon return to one of its most successful early hunting grounds.

Ushba 1937

Robin Hodgkin took part in a highly successful Oxford University Mountaineering Club expedition to the Caucasus in 1937. The team climbed new routes on four major peaks: Jailik, Adyr Su Bashi, Tetnuld and Ushba South. The direct ascent of the massive Red Wall of Ushba South was not repeated for over 20 years.

Shkhara and Dykh Tau 1958

George Band was a member of the British Caucasus Expedition 1958, the first serious post-war Western climbing team to visit the region. The other team members were Dave Thomas, John Hunt, Alan Blackshaw, Ralph Jones, Derek Bull, Mike Harris, John Neil and Chris Brasher; they were all CC/AC members. In the summer of 1958 they drove, by Standard Vanguard (remember them?), to Brest Litovsk on the Polish border and then by train to Moscow. George Band was fortunate enough to participate in two of the best routes – the third ascent of the N ridge of Shkhara (5200m) and a new route on the S face of Dykh Tau (5198m), Europe's third highest summit, first climbed by A F Mummery with Heinrich Zurfluh in 1888.

In the afternoon the Chairmanship was taken over by the President, Lt Col H R A Streather, OBE.

The North Face of Pik Schirovski 1970

Paul Nunn recalled the British Caucasus Expedition of 1970. After visits to the Caucasus and Pamirs around 1960 by British climbers, there was a lull. The deaths of Robin Smith and Wilfrid Noyce in the Pamirs, and the Soviet reaction to 'Red Peak', may have played a part; the cold war did the rest. In any event the 1970 British Caucasus Expedition (Hamish MacInnes, Alan McHardy, Chris Woodall, Paul Braithwaite, Paul Nunn and Pete Seeds) was the first for some time. Nakra Tau's N face was attempted but abandoned in poor weather, and an ice climb was completed on Pik Schirovski. Further bad weather sank hopes on Ushba and plans for Svanetia met with a resounding '*niet*'. Though only partially successful, this was a remarkable and memorable trip, even involving rock climbing on valley cliffs, which totally bemused the local enforcers of Law and Order.

A Local Perspective

Shota Elisashvili is from Tbilisi and spent some months in Britain this year before returning home to Georgia in these troubled times. He has climbed in the Pamirs and elsewhere in Soviet Central Asia. In the Caucasus he has climbed Kasbek, Djantougan, Tcegetcara, Elbruz and Ailama. In Britain he has not been idle and has climbed on Cratcliffe, High Tor, Beeston Tor, Pic Tor, and in Scotland and Wales – up to E3.

Some Recent Climbs

Mick Fowler, who has climbed extensively in Soviet Central Asia, visited the Caucasus in 1986 with Margaret Urmiston, Bert Simmonds and Victor Saunders. He described the mountains and possibilities in the Baksan valley of the Caucasus, with specific attention directed at the Abalakov route on the N side of Nakra Tau (4200m) and a new (1986) route on the W face of Ushba North (4700m).

Barbara Grigor-Taylor produced a display of antiquarian books on the region. **Andrew Wielshovski** and **Pat Stephens** provided up-to-date information about

travel, maps and details of potential mountaineering and ski tours. The 1991 Symposium was organised by **Victor Saunders, Kate Phillips, Sheila Harrison** and **Charles Clarke.**

Charles Clarke

ANNAPURNA REUNION, 14–17 JUNE 1990

(See *AJ96*, 313–315 and Plate 89)

In *AJ96* the Editor asked readers to try to help complete the list of those who attended the Annapurna Reunion in June 1990. The following are additional names, a few of which take the place of names which were listed incorrectly in *AJ96*:

1 Annie Beguin
4 André Bertrand
12 Laurence de la Ferrière
13 Bernard Müller
14 Claude Jaeger
15 Jean-Claude Mosca
27 Achille Compagnoni
29 André Roch (not 23)
30 Benoit Chamoux
37 Guido Magnone
41 Jorgi Pons
42 Pierre Leroux
51 Michel Vaucher
55 Robert Paragot
58 Maurice Gicquel
60 Maurice Lenoir
62 Andrzej Zawada

Wogeiech Branski and Kacimierz Olech were definitely at the Reunion and must be somewhere in the photograph. Any further help from readers is still welcome. Please send names either to the Editor or to the Alpine Club.

The Editor thanks readers who responded and apologises to anyone who was wrongly designated in *AJ96*.

THE BOARDMAN TASKER MEMORIAL AWARD 1991

The award ceremony was held at the Alpine Club on 17 October 1991. The judges were Livia Gollancz (Chairman), Harold Drasdo and Ronnie Wathen. The prize was divided between *A View from the Ridge* by David Brown and Ian Mitchell (The Ernest Press) and *Mer de Glace* by Alison Fell (Methuen). Shortlisted were *Suspended Sentences from the life of a climbing cameraman* by Jim Curran (Hodder & Stoughton) and *The Endless Knot, K2 – Mountain of Dreams and Destiny* by Kurt Diemberger, translated from the German by Audrey Salkeld (Grafton Books).

THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF MOUNTAINEERING LITERATURE

Bretton Hall, Yorkshire, 30 November 1991

The Festival was organised by **Terry Gifford** and comprised ten events consisting of papers, readings, discussions and a picture exhibition.

Harold Drasdo opened the proceedings with a reading from his book in progress. The subject, 'Falling Off', was treated in both the actual (amusing) and the metaphorical (serious) senses. This was followed by a theatrical demonstration by **Steve Ashton** (with props) of 'Staying On' – the hilarious story of a solo ascent of a Chamonix aiguille.

After lunch came the day's centre-piece: a paper from **Anne Sauvy** on 'Fiction and Fact in French Climbing Writing'. Mme Sauvy traced the genre in France from the famous travellers and writers of the 18th century through to the many 20th century climbers who have made important contributions to the literature. Next came a reading of the 1991 Boardman Tasker Memorial Award speech by **Livia Gollancz**, chairman of the judges; this was followed by readings by the authors from the two winning books, and a discussion.

Paul Nunn delivered a paper on 'Climbers, their Writing and History' in which he discussed the factual books of the 1950s and showed how, gradually, a more imaginative approach was taking over and how this could lead to the acceptance of climbing writing as part of the general literary experience.

Peter Gillman announced the winner of the Festival's writing competition organised in conjunction with *High* magazine: **Moira Viggars** for 'Avoiding the Touch'. Her short story was read by **Ian Smith.**

Neil Murison, who accompanied Jim Curran on his '100 climbs in 10 days' event, exhibited landscape paintings which were splendid evocations of rocky places. To conclude, **Jim Curran** read some amusing extracts from the manuscript of *Suspended Sentences* that had been cut from the finished book.

The 80 or so who attended went home with plenty to think about, thanks to **Terry Gifford**'s vision in arranging this lively and stimulating symposium.

Livia Gollancz

NORSK BREMUSEUM – THE NORWEGIAN GLACIER CENTRE

Anyone who is in the area should take the opportunity of visiting the new Glacier Centre at Fjaerland in Norway. I first heard about it in the summer of 1990 when I spent a few days at the Hotel Mundal, where W C Slingsby used to stay. Dr Olav Orheim, Head of Research at the Polar Institute in Oslo and part-owner of the hotel, told me about his latest project: a glacier museum which would combine tourist interest with the most modern research facilities. Plans must have been already well advanced, for when I returned to Fjaerland the following spring the museum was virtually finished and due to be opened by the Queen of Norway on 31 May 1991.

The Centre is an impressive achievement and probably unique in the world. Beautifully sited between mountains and fjord, the building has been imaginatively designed in concrete, wood and glass by Sverre Fehn, one of Norway's leading architects. A broad outside staircase leads to the roof, where a large circular viewing area surmounts the vast projection room below; long walkways overlook stunning views in all directions.

Inside the building there is a tremendous feeling of space. Light floods in through enormous glass panels set at unusual angles. The wide range of exhibits

are designed to stimulate the curiosity of those who know little about glaciers, and modern technology is used to give visitors an exciting learning experience. The whole of one end of the main exhibition area is devoted to a lifelike model with a tunnel running through it. Eerie lighting and sound effects of wind, creaking ice and dripping water contribute to the illusion of actually being deep within a glacier.

The Norsk Bremuseum is much more than just a tourist attraction. It aims to provide an important scientific centre and a natural base for fieldwork on the Jostedalsbreen – the largest glacier in mainland Europe. The Glacier Centre is ideally placed to make use of frozen environmental data to gain further knowledge of ice and glaciers, weather and the natural environment, and the interaction between man and nature.

Glaciologists from 15 nations have donated literature and already the Centre has built up a substantial library. Generous financial support has come from both local and central government, as well as private companies and individuals, for this new and exciting enterprise.

Johanna Merz

PIOLET D'OR 1991

At the suggestion of the Groupe de Haute Montagne and the French magazine *Montagnes*, a new international award has been initiated for the most outstanding achievement in mountaineering taking place during the year. A special jury of experts selected a short-list of the finest ascents in Asia, America and Europe and their award was presented on 23 November at the 8th International Film Festival *Neige et Glace, Aventure et Évasion* at Autrans, near Grenoble, by Jean-Claude Marmier, President of the Groupe de Haute Montagne, the French equivalent of the Alpine Climbing Group.

Serious candidates for the award were Pierre Beghin and Christophe Profit for their bold ascent of the NW ridge of K2. Three European solo ascents were also considered: Jeff Lowe (Eiger), Catherine Destivelle (Dru) and Slavko Svetičič (Grandes Jorasses). But the **Piolet d'Or** (Golden Ice-Axe) was awarded to Slovenians Andrej Stremfelj and Marko Prezelj who, in late April 1991, climbed in alpine style the 3000m unclimbed SW pillar of Kangchenjunga South, *c*8500m.

There are plans afoot to make the **Piolet d'Or** an annual award to encourage and promote authentic, innovative mountaineering. The GHM deserve hearty congratulations for the idea of creating this award and for their excellent organisation of the event.

Józef Nyka

THE SIERRA CLUB (ESTABLISHED 1892) AND JOHN MUIR

1992 marks the centenary of the Sierra Club, which will always be associated with the Scottish-born conservationist John Muir who was the first president.

The purpose of the Club was 'to explore, enjoy and preserve the nation's forests, waters, wildlife and wilderness'. The ambition of the original 162 members always went well beyond their own playground of the Sierra Nevada, and subsequently the Club supported wilderness bills protecting over eight million acres in 20 states of the USA, including the 1916 Federal National Parks Bill.

After John Muir died in 1914, the John Muir Trail was established under the auspices of the Sierra Club and constructed in his memory. It runs southward for 70km from the Tuolumne Meadows in the Yosemite National Park, along the spine of the Sierra Nevada to the summit of Mt Whitney.

Today, in its centenary year and with 400,000 members, the Sierra Club is one of the most effective environmental organisations in the world. Its opinions are respected and widely listened to on such urgent problems as acid rain, air pollution and disposal of toxic waste. However, the primary aim of the Club remains the same as it was at the beginning: the preservation of America's wilderness areas.

Edward Peck

THE CENTENARY OF THE YORKSHIRE RAMBLERS' CLUB

The Yorkshire Ramblers' Club was established in 1892. It has always been relatively small, keeping its membership to around 200. In its early years the YRC was prominent in the exploration of the Yorkshire caves and potholes including the second descent of Gaping Ghyll (the Frenchman Martell having made the first).

In 1988 a small expedition was mounted to the Apolobamba mountains in Bolivia. Two first British ascents were achieved.

The Club normally has an annual Alpine meet, but this year it has arranged the 'Norsk Project' in which it is attempting to repeat all the first ascents of one of our early Presidents, Cecil Slingsby. This involves 'spreading' the Club members from the Jotunheimen to the Lofoton Islands. It is hoped that some of the ascents will be completed on skies on two visits in March and May 1992, but the main thrust will be in the July/August period.

There will be a meet on Boxing Day at the Hopper Lane Hotel, just outside Leeds, which was the venue and date of the first Yorkshire Ramblers' meet.

The Centenary Dinner will be held at Skipton in November, when all the current Presidents of our kindred clubs will be invited.

Derek Bush
Hon Secretary

UIAA INFORMATION SERVICE ON MOUNTAIN MEDICINE

The UIAA Medical Commission offers advice to mountaineers about the problems of High Altitude and other aspects of Mountain Medicine. For information, please write to UIAA Mountain Medicine Centre, c/o Dr Charles Clarke, St Bartholomew's Hospital, London EC1 7BE, England.