
PETER BERG

From the Archives

One of the most evocative items in the Archives of the Alpine Club is a letter written in 1827 on the summit of Mont Blanc. The writer, John Auldjo, was a well-to-do young man who in the course of a conventional Grand Tour decided that he must climb to the top of the highest peak in Europe, and, with the help of a mere six guides, did just that.

A 1952 article in the *AJ* gives an account of Auldjo's life and achievements.¹ Suffice it to say here that he was born in Canada just 200 years ago, in 1805, to parents of Scottish descent and was educated in England. His Mont Blanc climb is counted as the 19th ascent, but his account² published the following year met with considerable interest and ran into three editions, not least attributable to the quality of the illustrations taken from his own sketches. He later lived in Naples, and his investigations of Vesuvius were subsequently rewarded with Fellowships of the Royal Society and the Royal Geographical Society. Auldjo ended his days in Geneva where he was British Consul until his death in 1886.

The letter from the summit of Mont Blanc was preserved in a presentation copy of Auldjo's *Narrative* and later presented to the AC. It is addressed to his sister and written in pencil in a rather shaky hand. Confusion over the date and odd spelling point to the effects of altitude and lack of acclimatisation.

Summit of Mont Blanc [*sic*]
11 o'clock Thursday
9th August 1825 [*sic*]

My dear Annie

It may give you some pleasure to know that I am looking down upon you at this moment. You can judge of the gratification I have in being above the habitable world – a thing I've [*sic*] much desired. I have just drank [*sic*] a bottle of wine to your health. My guides join me & we all wish you well while drinking – long life and happiness – & even this high I am not forgetful of the many times I have written & now write again the I am your

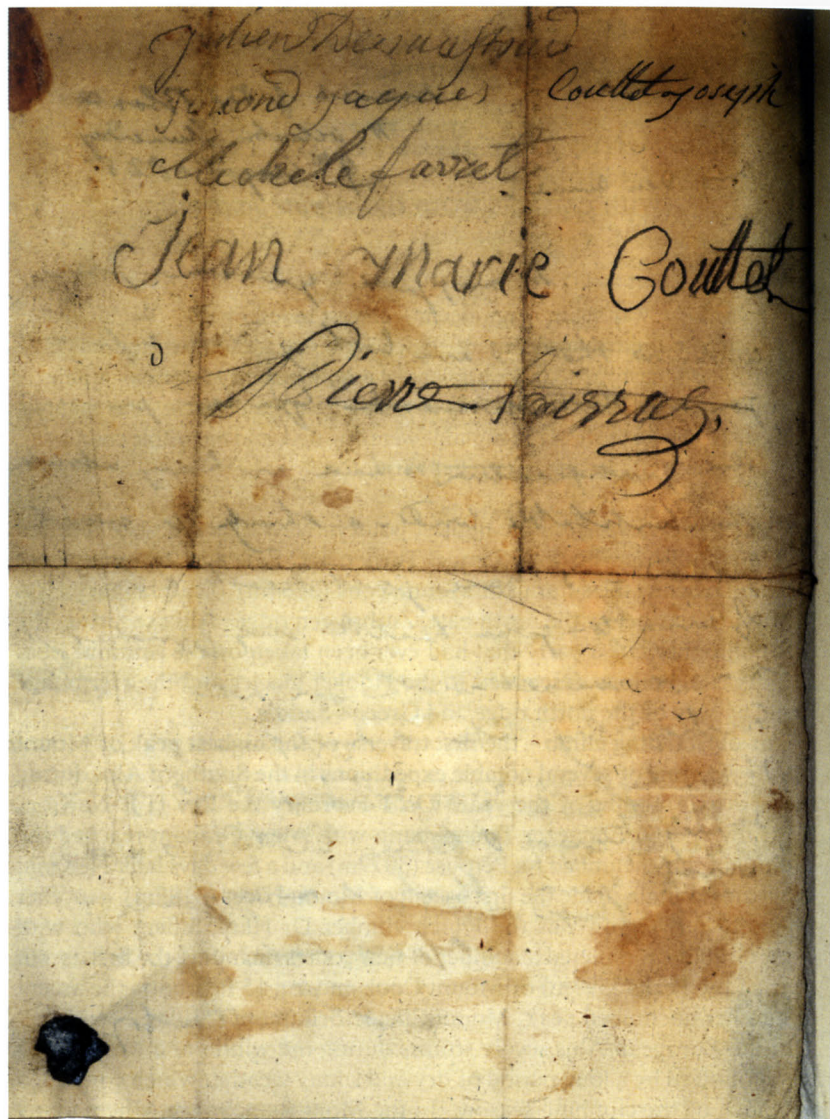
affectionate brother

John Auldjo

Summit of Mont Blanc
11 o'clock Tuesday
9th Aug 1825.
My Dear Anne -
It may give you some pleasure
to know that I am looking down upon
you at this moment. You can judge of
the gratification & love in being above
the habitable world - a shroud so much
desired - I have just drank a bottle
of wine to your health my friends join
me & we all wish you what whole
hearted long life & happiness - & wish
these wishes I am not forgetful of her
many times I have written & now
write again that I am yours
affectionate Brother
John Hall

132. Letter from the AC archives written from the summit of Mont Blanc in 1827.

The letter is signed on the back of the single sheet: Julien Devouassoud, Simond Jacques, Couttet, Joseph, Michele Favret, Jean Marie Couttet, Pierre Tairraz. We have a number of other Auldjo documents in the AC archives and these have been of particular interest to researchers during this bicentennial year.



- 1 J Monroe Thorington, 'John Auldjo, Fortunate Traveller' in *AJ* LVIII 285 (November 1952).
- 2 John Auldjo, *Narrative of an ascent to the summit of Mont Blanc*. Longman 1828.