

before he takes any tourists up. That same evening the weather turned really bad with sleet and snow so I decided to come down to Turin.' He again says how disappointed he is not to have put his feet on the summit and has to content himself with a piece of rock, some sort of yellow mica, which Carrel had brought down. 'Val Tournanche is really *en fête* again with music and dancing; even a song has been composed with the words: *C'est un monsieur Italien / Qui a vaincu le Mont Cervin.*'

No more attempts were made that year. The previous year, Quintino Sella, who lived in Biella, which was not such a distance from Val Tournanche, had asked Carrel to go there in person. It is not clear what passed at that meeting but shortly afterwards, on 7 August, Carrel wrote to Sella saying that the mountain could not be in better conditions for a summit attempt and that Sella should come to Breuil as quickly as possible. He also mentions that 'Vimper' had returned to London. (This was because Whympers's mother had died).

Unfortunately Sella was unable to go, being involved with state matters and suffering from some sort of infection in his leg that kept him in bed. It could be argued that the battle was lost then in 1864 with the great Sella *hors du combat*. It was he who so much wanted this conquest for the honour of the *Nuova Italia* and in a way is an illustration of the growth in importance of competitive sport between nations, which became so important from the end of the nineteenth century.

Quintino Sella's own ambitions for the mountain were not realised until some twelve years later when, for his fiftieth year, he finally made the ascent with his two sons, a nephew, Jean-Antoine Carrel and no less than three other renowned guides. Giordano, who was not a state minister and had more time, attempted it again in 1866 but was blocked 'for several days' at Pic Tyndall before having to descend. Returning in 1867 he was beaten by the weather. It was not until 1868 that he finally achieved his ambition. His friend Quintino was delighted and popularised the geological studies that Giordano had made on the structure of the Matterhorn. After the disappointment of it not being an Italian making the first ascent, he hoped at least it could be Italy at the forefront of Alpine geological research.

Elsewhere in the archive are plenty of letters from later years including ones of jubilation when Sella climbed the Monviso and indeed the Matterhorn and correspondence relating to the invitation of King Vittorio Emanuele, himself a great lover of the mountains, to accept the presidency of the CAI – and a gift to him of Whympers's books. There is plenty of scope here for future research.

JOHN CLEARE

Made For Television

The Matterhorn Centenary

The centenary of the Matterhorn's first ascent in 1965 was, the Swiss declared, to be 'The Year of the Alps'; marked by frolics, fun and festivities throughout the country. Radio Geneva's input was to be nothing less than a televised ascent of the Matterhorn on 14 July on the very day, even the very hour, of the anniversary that would be transmitted around the world.

Ambition is one thing, practicality another. The Swiss had little experience of this kind of thing so the BBC, with its live outside broadcast expertise, was invited to assist. Fifty years ago there was no colour television, let alone digital imaging, and live 'OBs' were still a fraught art, demanding very different treatment from film or even video recording. Knowing the size of the mountain and the fickleness of the weather, the project seems foolhardy in retrospect. But nothing ventured, nothing gained. Hamish MacInnes and I were drafted in to handle the task.

Actually, there were four of us, since each portable radio-camera required a two-man team. The camera itself was cabled to a large metal pack on the cameraman's back, whence more cables linked to another heavy transmission box carried by the second man, and onwards to an aerial. Our respective assistants, or 'tweakers', expected to hold the ropes, man the radios and tune in the transmitter, were our respective climbing partners, Davy Crabbe and Rusty Baillie.

Spring was late in 1965 and the Matterhorn hadn't yet been climbed that year. Up at the Hörnli Hut the snow was deep, soggy and uneven. Pandemonium reigned at the Belvedere Inn, temporarily turned into a television control-room, where engineers, technicians, directors, producers and celebrities were shouting in their own languages at no one in particular. It was clear few of them had been on a mountain before and many were suffering from altitude. Not surprisingly we had already decided to camp and we pitched our tents in falling snow among boulders a little way above the hut.

Snow fell for several days while we were briefed on our tasks; as the nature of the enterprise became clear, we realised how impractical the arrangements were to carry it out. There would be two large static TV cameras with telephoto lenses, one on a railway flatcar at the Gornergrat some five miles from the mountain, and another, airlifted in, close by the hut but still four thousand feet below the summit and a mile distant. The detail of the climb itself, the personalities, their commentary, the chat and the close-ups, would depend entirely on our two cameras sending back

radio pictures to the control-room, though it was uncertain that this was possible at the distances necessary. Six 25-minute transmission slots had already been scheduled throughout 14 July. Come what may, we must be on-air. But the transmission times bore little relation to the mountaineering involved.

Together with Alan Chivers, the inspirational BBC supremo, Hamish and I worked out a fresh plan of campaign. Once the straightforward first transmission – leaving the hut at dawn – was off-air, we would dismantle the gear, overtake the celebrities and leapfrog our respective teams up the mountain. I would handle the second transmission at a suitable location commensurate with the allotted time while Hamish continued upwards to locate the next likely site and be tuned in, ready for when the celebrities arrived for the next.

Meanwhile I'd dismantle and move through, overtaking the celebrities again to select the next photogenic site. And so on. It ought to work, but it meant that only one camera would be covering each 25-minute slot – supplemented of course by the long lenses from far below. We could only trust that the timing would allow us to locate reasonably photogenic locations and that the celebrities could keep up.

We'd need to move fast and logistics were a serious concern. Obviously the heaps of television and radio equipment, besides the normal gear needed by climbers on a major Alpine peak, made crucifying loads and so local porters had been booked. However, this was The Year of the Alps, and the best men were otherwise occupied.

Management held a press conference down at Schwarzsee. Besides the celebrities who were to climb the Hörnli Ridge, and the notable Swiss alpinists who were concurrently to attempt the North Face, the four of us who were to do the hard work were also presented to the European press. 'Who were we?' they asked. 'Were we real alpinists?'

MacInnes admitted to some remarkable Caucasus adventures while Rusty confessed to the Eigerwand with Haston two years previously. And then it was Davy's turn:

'And vot ist your best climb, Herr Crabbe?'

There was a pause before Davy answered.

'The first winter traverse of the Cuillin,' he finally told them.

'*Bitte*, vere is Das Cuillin, Herr Crabbe?' said a puzzled reporter. 'In Patagonia, *nein*?'

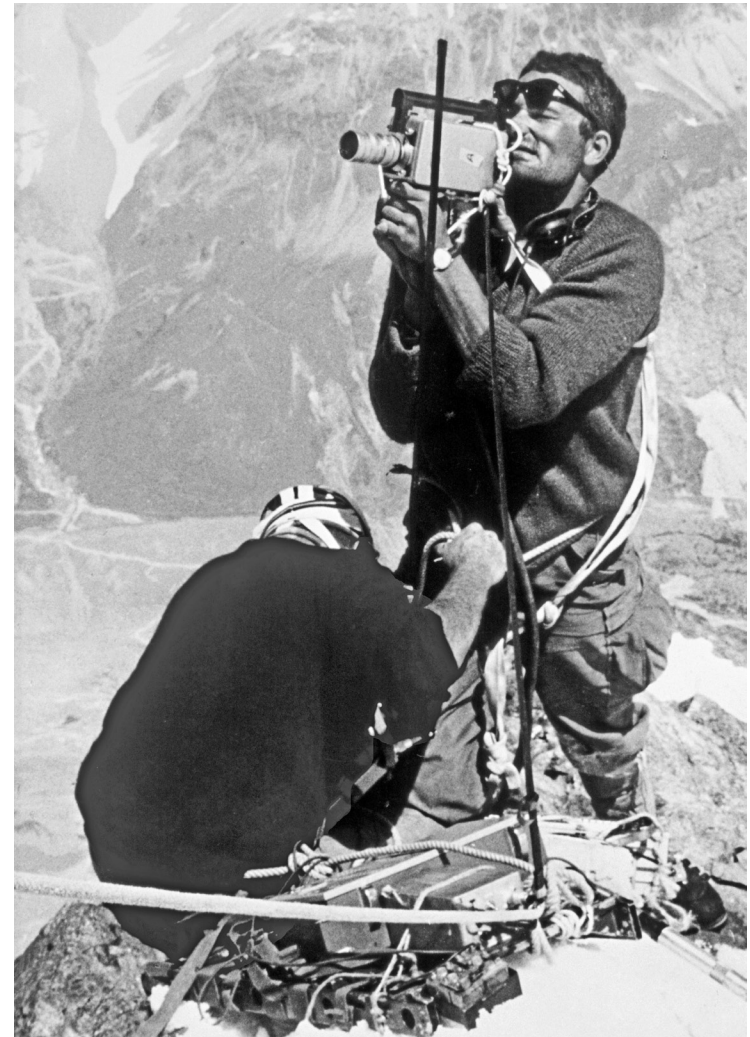
'Nay mon, 'tis in God's own country,' Davy countered rather testily.

'But pleez Herr Crabbe,' replied the puzzled German, still anxious for his quote, 'vot about ze Alps?'

'Ach, mon, 'tis good training for Scotland in winter.'

After a short but meteoric Alpine career and some considerable achievements on Scottish ice, I heard later that Davy had eschewed climbing and taken up ski instructing.

The plan called for us to make a reconnaissance on 12 July to transmit summit pictures but with no concern about timing. On 13 July there would



Rusty Baillie supports the author, busy concentrating on transmitting a steady picture with his radio-camera, in an exposed position at the 1865 accident site – the final transmission of the Matterhorn Centenary Live Outside Broadcast, 14 July 1965. Note the cables, aerials, electronic boxes, climbing ropes and associated gear. (John Cleare/Mountain Camera Picture Library)

be a full rehearsal with the entire programme recorded on videotape against the possibility – probability? – of bad weather or even disaster on the anniversary itself. But the Matterhorn was still inviolate and conditions were downright dangerous, with knee-deep slush lying on ice. Nevertheless we fought our way to the Solvay where the cameras wouldn't work and the stropy local porters did nothing to inspire confidence. It was near dusk



A Radio Geneva cameraman checks focus on a static camera positioned a few yards above the Hörnli Hut, prior to the live TV broadcast. This was the closest any conventional TV camera got to the action. (*John Cleare/Mountain Camera Picture Library*)

there was time to select a good camera position below the rock tower at the Whymper bivouac site at 3817m and, when he arrived, work out stage directions with Ian McNaught-Davis, the lead celebrity. 'Mac' had taken Chris Brasher's place as commentator after Chris developed piles, and was climbing with Heini Taugwalder, Zermatt's chief guide and a direct descendent of Wymper's guides on the fateful ascent. Then we were on-air. Chiv's steady voice crackled over my headphones: 'Okay John, we're on you now. Nice picture. Zoom in a bit. Hold that.'

Silhouetted against the distant Mischabel, Heini and Mac picked their way along the ridge crest and scrambled towards me. Panting a little and sweating below his white 'flat 'at', Mac started to explain that although the climbing appeared easy, this was a big serious mountain and a hundred years ago Mr Whymper

when we returned to the hut after a long day, dejected and frustrated.

Alan Chivers was not discouraged. A Battle of Britain fighter ace, 'Chiv' oozed confidence, whatever he must have thought privately about the situation. Ever alert to our concerns, he'd sent an assistant through the Zermatt streets that day, contract forms in hand, and recruited two likely looking English climbers as 'sherpas' to augment the uncooperative local porters. We were relieved to have Barry Whybrow and his chum join us; these were fellows we could trust.

Next day the full rehearsal started well. For the second transmission,

had bivouacked here on the eve of his successful ascent. Now close in front of me, I held Mac's face full frame as he went on to describe another tragedy that had occurred right here. I zoomed slowly out, intending to show a bronze plaque explaining how four men had died in a storm in 1890 to which Mac was now pointing.

I zoomed out to find in frame four healthy-looking fellows sitting beside the plaque and munching sandwiches. A burst of puzzled indignation filled my headphones.

'Cut! What the hell's all this?'

I yelled at Rusty who scrambled off across the snow and started gesticulating. The four fellows were rather piqued, being Italian celebrities who'd avoided the briefing, knew nothing of the scenario and had missed breakfast. Thankfully they accepted our explanations in good grace and the transmission was able to proceed. Luckily we were only on tape.

But the mountain was still dangerous. Despite knowing the summit sequence was scheduled for 3pm next day, the local porters refused to continue upwards after mid-morning. Despite the efforts of our new sherpas, the exercise seized up. Jabbering voices filled the airwaves, evidence of a shambles down at base also. Finally Chiv, remarkably sounding calm through the crackling chaos, ordered a retreat.

Back at the hut the well-lubricated debriefing session proved a fraught affair, but we were reassured to learn Chiv was now in complete charge. It turned out the local big chief had suffered a nervous breakdown. Then a hush fell. Approaching barefoot through the snow under a large rucksack came Mary Stewart.

'Who's that?' a BBC engineer whispered to Davy.

'A Glasgee mither o' five,' he answered loudly.

Close behind this redheaded Amazon plodded four more of our chums: Ian 'Jock' Martin, Johnnie Wright, Kris Paterson and complete with celebrated grin, Eric Beard, the Leeds fell-runner known as the 'Alpine Clown' in Rock and Ice circles.

'Sherpas, Chiv! Grab 'em,' shouted Hamish. 'Sign 'em up quick!'

Morale soared.

And so, on the day, although we were continuously extemporising, transmission followed transmission without a hitch until my camera died after the Shoulder slot, and we entered cloud. Now time was tight, for the next transmission was scheduled from the summit at 3pm and the fixed ropes were congested with struggling celebrities and their guides. But with our lusty sherpas we barged through, set up the single camera on the summit crest – considerably beyond its designed operating range – and endeavoured to 'net in'. A few moments before we were due on-air, Chiv came over the radio to say he had pictures and they were good.

After all that, the summit broadcast was something of an anti-climax. The celebrities plodded into view, arriving over the convex curve that concealed the north face, and there was much backslapping and handshaking. Hamish covered the transmission. It was a gruelling task and before it was over the sherpas had actually to hold him up. But for me the crux was still to come. The final transmission in some forty minutes time was mine, supposedly at the place where the 1865 accident had occurred.

No longer able to leapfrog, the moment Hamish was off-air we dismantled the gear and set off downwards with large packs at speed but a caravan of celebrities and guides of several nations were still occupying the fixed ropes. There were angry scenes as we tried to pass. Rusty even exchanged blows with one obdurate guide. But we located the site, set up and netted in just in time.



The two BBC radio-camera teams, l – r: John Cleare, Hamish MacInnes, Davy Crabbe and Rusty Baillie (on radio). (*John Cleare/Mountain Camera Picture Library*)

With Heini behind him on a short rope, picking his way gingerly down a stretch of unpleasant, rather loose and very exposed ground, Mac was explaining that this was where Douglas Hadow had slipped, dragging his companions to their death, exactly a century ago. Suddenly his feet shot from beneath him. He stumbled and fell. And was held easily after a few feet by Heini. It was entirely unexpected and the tension was incredible.

Ever the performer, Mac claimed afterwards that this fall had not been intentional, but whether it was or not, Chiv was soon on the radio with a special request from London; was I prepared to over-run for ten more minutes? We were all very tired and the camera was getting very heavy, but buttressed by Rusty I managed to shoot the other celebrity ropes as they crossed the awkward ground back to the Shoulder.

At long last Chiv came on again:

'We're off you now John. Thank you, my boy. Over and out.'

I let the camera fall on its strap and collapsed against the rope. With a rumble the big boulder on which I had been propped tumbled away to go plunging down the north face. Rusty pulled me back into balance and a sherpa put a mug of fresh-brewed tea into my hand. It was done. But there was still a mountain to descend and the weather was breaking. It was late afternoon, snow was falling, thunder rolled and we feared verglas, so we dumped most of the equipment in the Solvay Hut and continued the descent more easily and safely.



A guide leads one of the celebrities onto the summit past Hamish MacInnes driving his radio camera. Now in poor visibility, the whole show depends on the BBC team. (*John Cleare/Mountain Camera Picture Library*)

Mac claimed that during the descent he saw a local porter swing off his rucksack – heavily loaded with BBC spare batteries – to remove his crampons. But they must have pierced the sack and picked up a charge, for he received a hefty electric shock. With, Mac said, a cry of ‘Himmel! The BBC has bewitched me,’ he hurled the sack and its expensive contents into the void of the north face. Mac was unable to confirm the story.

At camp we gathered ourselves together and hurried on down to Schwarzsee where the cable car was running especially late. Of course it was the culminating day of the celebrations and Zermatt was making merry when we arrived; the bars were crowded and the restaurants were full. We had just put the Matterhorn on worldwide television but now, tired, hungry, dishevelled and impecunious, we wandered down the street feeling rather out of place.

Striding up the street came Chris Brasher. ‘Disgraceful!’ he cried. ‘After what you’ve done!’ And he led us into the best restaurant in town, introduced us to the management, had a table cleared and treated us to the best evening that Zermatt and the BBC could provide. In the early hours, replete and well satisfied, we crept away to crash out in the cave behind the station. It had been a hard day.

There was a sequel. Aware that official gratitude had been lacking, Constant Cashin, the Zermatt Kurdirektor, kindly invited Hamish and me back to Zermatt the following year, expenses paid, to attempt a film on the north face of the Matterhorn. But that’s another story.