

Foreword

At the end of 1943 Geoffrey Winthrop Young gave his valedictory address as president of the Alpine Club: 'For the first time in our history the term of a presidency has been begun and ended under the shadow of war.' Hitler's war put several dents in the Club. GWY's first act had been to disperse the Alpine Club Library, so the Luftwaffe wouldn't get it. Yet with the books went 'the last chance of consoling ourselves for the loss of active mountaineering'. In the First World War, the proximity of the western front had allowed younger members on active service to return to London. That wasn't so easy now, Winthrop Young explained, with fighting so widely dispersed. What's more, rationing of food and travel, limits on lighting and heating, and the dwindling numbers qualified and able to join a mountaineering club necessarily diminished the Club's prospects.

I thought of this moment in the Club's history after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As we report, a team of Ukrainians had made what must be regarded as one of the greatest Himalayan ascents in late 2021: the inaccessible and outlandish south-east ridge of Annapurna III. No one had gone higher than Nick Colton and Tim Leach had during a futuristic attempt in 1981, despite the world's best trying. Then the Ukrainians arrived. The style Nikita Balabanov, Mikhail Fomin and Viacheslav Polezhaiko employed to overcome this immense challenge was exemplary. In an era of what the Slovenian alpinist Marko Prezelj calls 'business climbing', here was magic. And yet, within weeks, their homeland was facing an existential threat as Russian troops poured across Ukraine's borders. Now is the time, Fomin said, for Ukrainian climbers to don soldiers' helmets and put aside their passion for the mountains.

I wonder if these courageous men are still thinking about what they achieved on Annapurna III last year and miss the sense of freedom and possibility that time in the mountains can offer. Even though war left the Alpine Club on its uppers, Winthrop Young was determined to keep a small flame burning. The *Alpine Journal*, reduced in size and starved of material, still appeared. Its wartime content was what you might expect from such disruption: nostalgia for happier times, a reappraisal of the past (Winthrop Young's own essay 'Mountain Prophets' is an excellent example), and reports from what members were still able to achieve, either as relief from war or in its service. Wilfrid Noyce, whose life and times Simon Pierse recalls in this edition of the *Alpine Journal*, was teaching mountain skills to air crew in Kashmir. Edward Peck, a diplomat in Turkey, was exploring the Ala Dağ with Robin Hodgkin. Raymond Greene and Fred Pigott wrote on mountain rescue in war and peace. Bill Tilman's 1943 piece 'Zaghouna by Verey Light' is well worth seeking out, bringing the gritty tension of war to the process of climbing a mountain. In another piece he described

being in northern Italy ‘ostensibly with a view to prosecuting the partisan war there, in reality to see some hills.’

Tilman, you feel, would have rolled his eyes at the media’s new buzzword: ‘perma-crisis’. Yet one aspect of today’s gloomy headlines needs our close attention. While I was stuck at home editing the *Alpine Journal*, I was in frequent contact with Alpine guides who were describing to me how rising temperatures were impacting their summer season. During the Second World War, those fighting knew the mountains would still be there at the end of it. Now the mountains themselves are changing under the impact of climate change; glacial ice melts away, prompting a new intensity of rock fall. In this issue, Stuart Dunning describes an astonishing event last year in the Nanda Devi region when a large chunk of Ronti Peak weighing 49 million tonnes detached itself, landing with the force of 15 Hiroshima atomic bombs. Such events are not only the consequence of our changing climate. The world is rarely so simple. But it’s clear our carbon emissions are responsible for the rapid changes we’re witnessing in mountain ranges around the world.

How we respond to these changes is complicated. Do we give up? I hope not. But it’s time to press pause on the consumerist attitude many climbers developed in the era of cheap travel. Just as the disruption of the Second World War made alpinists reflect on what they held to be most important in life, so climate change will make us stop and think: a difficult task in this age of constant communication. But I don’t think we really have a choice, and the lessons learned from a more thoughtful approach to adventure will surely offer benefits in the future. We must learn once again to savour our adventures rather than gobble them up.

I had intended this to be my last edition of the *Alpine Journal*. Indeed, one member of the Club took the trouble to write suggesting this should be the last edition ever. In the internet age, he suggested, isn’t the *Alpine Journal* simply out of date? It’s an engrossing question but one that largely answers itself. When I started writing about climbing in the 1980s there were lots of mountaineering magazines around the world. The internet killed most of them; this past year, the longstanding American magazine *Climbing* stopped its print publication. Social media is fun but marketing departments at outdoor brands dominate that world. If you want perspective and context from inside our community, then increasingly you’re left with club journals. And as the oldest such publication in the world, I think the Alpine Club would do well to keep going with its own journal, just as Winthrop Young did during the war.

The lack of an immediate successor has meant a delay to my departure. Hopefully, this time next year the new editor will be in post. Meanwhile I want to thank Rod Smith for his work on the In Memoriam section, and our Area Notes correspondents. I want to thank once again Chris Russell, who has handed over his column 100 Years Ago to Peter Foster. We would not have a journal at all without the dedication of volunteers and we thank them for their efforts.

Ed Douglas