

ABMSAC Journal 2008

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ABMSAC MEETS PROGRAMME 2008 / 2009

Dates	Meet / Venue	Organiser
2008		
9-11 May	Maintenance Meet, George Starkey Hut	Don Hodge
20-22 June	Oread Hut, Rhyd Ddu, North Wales	Ed Bramley
13-19 July	Neustift, Stubaital	Alasdair Andrews
19-26 July	Mandarfin, Pitztal	Alasdair Andrews
26 July-9 August	Innertkirchen, Eastern Oberland – Joint AC, ABMSAC, CC, FRCC	Mike Pinney
30 Aug. - 13 Sept	Camping Colfosco, Coryara, Dolomites	Jeff Harris
	Joint AC, ABMSAC, CC, FRCC	
6-13 September	Julian Alps (Strenuous Trek)	Ed Bramley
6-13 September	Julian Alps (Less Strenuous Trek)	Alasdair Andrews
19-21 September	George Starkey Hut, Patterdale	t.b.a.
10-12 October	Maintenance Meet, George Starkey Hut	Don Hodge
15 October	London Joint Lecture *	TCC
17-19 October	Alpine Reunion Meet, GSH	Mike Pinney
17-19 October	Beer, South Devon	James Bladwin
12 November	London Joint Lecture *	AAC
10 December	London Joint Lecture *	RC
2009		
14 January	London Joint Lecture *	AAC
6-8 February	Centenary Annual Dinner	Brooke Midgley
11 February	London Joint Lecture *	ABMSAC
11 March	London Joint Lecture *	FRCC
8-10 May	Maintenance Meet, George Starkey Hut	Don Hodge
9-11 October	Maintenance Meet, George Starkey Hut	Don Hodge
16-18 October	Alpine Reunion Meet, GSH	t.b.a.

*London Joint Lectures

The London Joint Lectures programme is organised jointly by the Austrian Alpine Club UK Section, ABMSAC, Fell and Rock Climbing Club, Rucksack Club and Tuesday Climbing Club. Lectures are held on Wednesday evenings and from the start of this year's winter programme will be held at The Chadwick Street Recreation Centre, 1 Chadwick Street, London SW1P 2EP commencing at 7.30pm. Attendance is free for members and guests. Refreshments can be purchased in the bar.

The nearest Underground station is St James Park or use National Rail/ Underground stations Victoria. By car approach from Horseferry Road or Victoria Street.

Full details of the 2008/2009 London Joint Lectures programme will be contained in the July Newsletter.

Editorial

Once again, here I am in a rush to finalise all the contributions for the Journal, get the layout sorted out and then the whole thing off to the printer. Once that is done I get a few days off before checking the proof copy then a few more days and its time for filling envelopes and licking stamps.

Every year is the same in that, as I assemble all the articles, I wonder at what ABMSAC and its members have achieved during the previous months. And once again this year is no different from before, with major reports from Nepal, the Alps, Central Asia, South America and Norway. Nikki Wallis has been quiet for a couple of years and now we discover why and Wendell Jones gives an idiosyncratic view on his mountain year. Sadly another year, another obituary; this time for Harry Archer who played such an important role in the Association for many years.

There are the usual meet reports and another translation by John Lagoe from that "ancient and battered book given me many years ago by Geoffrey Winthrop Young". And, of course, the President's Report and the minutes from our AGMs in February.

As I have been so lucky with articles and, most especially, photographs this year I have decided not to publish the lists of historic office holders. I'm sure that this may upset some members, for which I apologise. I hope that we will continue to publish this information on an occasional basis but this year I am substituting extra pages of colour pictures. I hope that you will approve.

The last thing I do before assembling the Journal is to update the Meets List and once again I am amazed by the programme we already have in place for the next nineteen months and I know that there will be much more to come. This list includes both mountain meets and the London lectures. The London lectures will now be in a much better venue and I hope that members will continue to give their support. In particular please note Wednesday 11 February 2009 when Hugh Chapman will be giving a lecture on the ABMSAC 2007 Trek in the Everest Region.

Finally it is clear that although we may be an ageing membership, we still have it in us to do interesting and challenging things. Long may it remain so!

Richard Winter
Honorary Editor

Nepal Trek: Everest, Cho La and Gokyo

27 October to 18 November 2007

by Pamela Harris

My first visit to Nepal was in 1972 after a long overland journey through Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, countries that are now virtually impossible to visit. We spent a month trekking from the road-head east of Kathmandu to Kala Pattar overlooking Everest Base camp, and I immediately fell in love with the country and the people. I returned twice in the next few years, both times to the Annapurna region in the spring, as well as making other Himalayan treks in Ladakh, Sikkim, Pakistan and Yunnan. My bookshelves became laden with accounts of the early explorers and expeditions, and I became involved with fund-raising for Sir Edmund Hillary's Himalayan Trust, the organisation he founded to help the Sherpa people.

But the Himalayas receded after I met the ABMSAC group on the joint AC/ABMSAC trek round Monte Rosa, and the next summers were busy with Alasdair's hotel meets and treks in the Alps. I read with sadness of how the Everest trek had become crowded and despoiled by litter, and wondered if I ever would return. Then came retirement and the need for to a trip to organise in place of the school field trips I had run for over 20 years. What better than an ABMSAC Meet to Nepal?

I tentatively broached the idea in a 2005 Newsletter, wondering what the response would be. After all, the majority of those attending Alpine meets were well past retirement age. But by the summer of 2006 I had a group of 16 who were seriously interested, four of whom had joined the club just to go on the trek, and I was able to finalise arrangements with Himalayan Kingdoms. Most of us were in our 60's, but we walked regularly in Britain and the Alps, and had a year to get fit.

We met as a group for the first time at Heathrow and after a comfortable flight with Qatar Airways landed at Kathmandu the following afternoon. Only three of us had been to the Himalayas before, and the others were clearly suffering from culture shock as we drove through the noisy, crowded streets to our hotel. Rickshaws, cyclists and cars weaved crazily in front of us, and everyone seemed to be carrying enormous loads. It was difficult to believe that only 50 years ago there were no roads into the Kathmandu Valley and all cars had to be transported from India on the backs of porters.

The following morning's sight-seeing was full of colour and excitement with

visits to the monkey temple of Swayambunath and the beautifully carved temples of Durbar Square. That afternoon a representative of Mountain Travel came to our hotel for a pre-trek briefing. We were all rather apprehensive about the trek, but his talk somewhat allayed our fears; it was only later that we realised that he had probably never left Kathmandu.

Our flight to Lukla was early the next morning, in a small Twin Otter plane. For much of the flight we were in cloud but we finally flew out of it only to head straight at a green mountainside. As we banked sharply to the right, missing it by inches, we headed straight at another mountainside; then, as we swerved again, a grey strip appeared carved in the hill in front of us, impossibly short and steep. We realized in horror that this was the landing strip, and most of us kept our eyes tight shut as we roared up the slope, swerved sharply to the right, and ground to a halt.

Our team of Sherpas and porters was there to greet us, led by our ever smiling sirdar Pasang, and we watched as they loaded our heavy red kitbags into their baskets; each carried 30-40 kilos, supported by a band round their foreheads, though some were as young as 17 and some were girls. When Don tried to lift one of their loads he just managed to stand before staggering back. After the first of our many cups of tea we set off out of Lukla down towards the Dudh Khosi River, the dusty trail crowded with trekkers of all nationalities and ages, their gear carried by yaks and porters. I looked back nostalgically to my previous trek in the Khumbu when we met only four other trekkers in 31 days.

We spent our first night in a small lodge near the waterfall at Benkar. This was typical of all our lodges on the trek, with a large sitting/eating area heated by a yak dung stove, and simple two-bedded rooms; these were unheated, and as the nights became increasingly colder, we were glad of our four seasons sleeping bags and nightly hot-water bottles. The sanitary facilities varied from indoor western toilets (rare) to a hole with wooden planks and a pile of leaves in an outdoor shed; unfortunately the outdoor variety were most in evidence as we gained altitude, as was the need to get up in the night. But all the lodges had some form of electric lighting and all provided food, cooked and served by their hospitable proprietors.

The Sherpas quickly settled us into what was to be our routine for the trek. Our days started at 6:30 with a cheery 'Good morning' delivered with a cup of bed tea and a bowl of warm washing water. After a breakfast of porridge and eggs we started our day's walk. We entered the Sagarmatha National Park and for the next two days we passed through villages with neat vegetable and flower gardens,

bright with dahlias and nasturtiums, and crossed several swaying suspension bridges high above the river, which swayed even more when shared by yaks. The mornings were mostly cloudless and warm once the sun got up and the views of the surrounding high peaks were spectacular, though the afternoons often clouded in, bringing the cold.

Our first view of Everest came as we trudged up the steep hill into Namche Bazaar. Namche is the trading post of the Khumbu area, on the route to the Nangpa La into Tibet, and is a bizarre mixture of old and new: yaks wandered the streets and there was no wheeled transport, yet there were cyber cafés and shops selling the latest trekking gear. Our lodge here was considerably more sophisticated than the others we stayed in, with internet access, a hot shower, and a more varied menu. By this time many of us were getting tired of eggs and potatoes for every meal, and it was a pleasant treat to have yak steak and even chicken Kiev, followed by delicious apple pie.

After an acclimatisation day walking up a side valley towards Thame, the village on the route to Tibet where Sherpa Tenzing grew up, we had an idyllic walk to the aptly named Everest View Hotel. We had our mid-morning tea-break on its verandah, drinking in the view of Everest just appearing over the Nuptse Ridge with Lhotse to its right, and further over the beautiful Ama Dablam which from now on dominated the view. Our objectives that day were the two villages of Khumjung and Khunde where we were to visit the secondary school and hospital built by the Himalayan Trust in the 1960's. We were given a guided tour of each by the resident Sherpa in charge, as we were later of the Pangboche primary school, and came away deeply impressed by what Sir Edmund Hillary had achieved in setting up this Trust to provide schools and hospitals all over the Khumbu region. The other highlight of our visit to Khunde was our overnight stay in the house of our sirdar Pasang. The house had been in his family for generations, but he had recently renovated it to provide rooms for trekkers on the ground floor, previously the animal shelter. We ate upstairs in the large family room, lined with shelves of brass cauldrons and beautifully decorated blankets comprising the family wealth, and the following morning visited his private family chapel with a large statue of Buddha and many priceless old Tibetan prayer books.

After a brief visit to the Khumjung gompa (monastery) and its yeti scalp – the closest we got to seeing a yeti - we headed towards the famous gompa at Thyangboche, rebuilt in 1988 after its destruction by fire, again with Himalayan Trust money. On first seeing it in 1953 John Hunt wrote that he had 'gasped in wonder at the stillness and beauty of it', but on his return in 1973 he was

dismayed at the changes: then, and even more so now, it was overrun by trekkers and lodges, and now is even the site of the highest bakery in the world – which incidentally makes the most delicious apple-pies! The 500 year old gompa at Pangboche with its brightly coloured masks and statues impressed us more, but perhaps we were made most aware of the importance of Buddhism to the Sherpas by the proliferation of prayer flags, chortens and beautifully carved mani stones on the trails, all of which had to be passed in a clockwise direction.

We next spent two nights at Dingboche from where most of the group ascended Nagartsang Peak, at 5083 metres the highest we had been so far, and attended a talk on AMS given by the doctors of the Himalayan Rescue Association. We then continued up the Imja Khola valley past the recently erected memorials to those who had died on Everest, but by the time we reached our highest overnight at Lobuche the altitude, the cold and the Khumbu cough were beginning to take their toll. Lobuche was a cold, bleak place, disfigured by piles of litter, now with several lodges to replace the one basic stone shelter of my previous visit. The following day was to be the climax of our trek, the ascent of Kala Pattar, at 5560 metres the highest we would reach. In 1972 I had spent the night at Gorakshep before the final climb, but this time we were to do it all in one very long day, and not all of us would make it. After a quick cup of tea at 5:30 we started up the moraine of the Khumbu Glacier. It was a long haul, parts of it steep, and as I struggled to breathe I couldn't help thinking of our recent talk on pulmonary oedema. Did I really have the symptoms or was I just imagining it? The cold and cloud did not help, and in the end discretion got the better part of valour and I turned back just before Gorakshep. Thirteen of the others continued, and finally, after an exhausting ascent, broke through the clouds to reach the prayer flags of the summit in glorious sunshine. It had all been worth the effort, with views across to the South-West face of Everest framed by Lhotse and Nuptse and down to the tents of Base Camp on the Khumbu Glacier far below. The 1953 route from the South Col over the Hillary Step to the summit was clearly visible and all the accounts by earlier expeditions finally fell into place. As I listened to their tales that evening, I remembered the thrill I had felt as I stood on the summit myself, 35 years earlier.

We left Lobuche the following morning in brilliant sunshine with wonderful views back towards Pumori, across to Nuptse and down towards Thamserku. From now on the weather stayed fine except for the day we most needed it, the crossing of the Cho La to the Gokyo Lakes. This was the most challenging part of the trek, a pass of 5420 metres. It was impassable for the yaks which had replaced some of our porters, so we had to divide our gear for the next overnight, half going by yak on a lower route. It was a long ascent, made worse as we got higher

by the snow which began to fall and the deteriorating visibility. Many of us strapped on crampons for the crossing of the summit glacier and the ice-covered rocks of the descent, but it was a long way down, then up over a final moraine, to our next lodge at Dragnak. But though it snowed in the night, the next day dawned bright and sunny, and it was only a short morning's walk across the Ngozumba Glacier to Gokyo and its five lakes which some of the group explored that afternoon. Cho Oyu dominated the valley, and the ten who made the ascent of the 5483 metre Gokyo Ri the following morning had spectacular views of this as well as of Makalu and Everest again.

After this it was all downhill – or almost all, for in the Himalayas there is always uphill too – and we had time to look for brilliantly coloured gentians and impeyan pheasants, and to stop at wayside stalls for jewellery and knickknacks sold by Tibetan traders. We passed through Namche and Benkar again, then all too soon came the final ascent to Lukla. It was time to say goodbye and thank you to our Sherpas and porters who had looked after us so well for the past 16 days, and then we boarded the plane for our return flight, several pounds lighter than when we set off. We were all looking forward to the luxury of the Shangri-La Hotel back in Kathmandu, to soaking off the Khumbu dust and to relaxing in its sunny garden surrounded by brightly coloured bougainvillea and poinsettia trees. We managed sight-seeing too, with visits to the Hindu cremation site at Pashupatinath, to the Buddhist stupa and thanka painting shop at Bodnath, and to medieval Bhaktapur with its beautifully carved temples. Our final dinner was in the Rum Doodle Restaurant where we designed an ABMSAC yeti foot in commemoration of our trek, to join those of other climbing and trekking groups.

It was indeed an adventure, perhaps a life-time's dream for some, and we felt justly proud that all of us had completed the circuit and reached 5420 metres in crossing the Cho La, no mean feat for a group whose average age was over 60, and that thirteen had reached 5560 metres in ascending Kala Pattar.

Only two months after our return we were saddened to read of the death of Sir Edmund Hillary, the first to stand on the summit of Everest 54 years ago. We had struggled to get up Kala Pattar, more than 3000 metres below that summit, and had visited some of the Himalayan Trust projects to which he had devoted his life. All the Sherpas we met spoke warmly of what he had given to their people in providing education and medical care, building bridges and implementing reforestation schemes. They will never forget him, and to commemorate our own trek to his beloved Khumbu perhaps the ABMSAC could honour his memory by making a donation to the Himalayan Trust

Participants: Alasdair Andrews, Antonia Barlen, Hugh Chapman, Steven Creasey, Keith Dillon, Ruth Greenham, Don Hardy, Pamela Harris, Roger James, Bill Jeffries, Roger Newson, John Monks, Terry Shaw, Bill & Rosie Westermeyer, Dick Yorke.

Completing the 4000m Peaks of the Alps

by Mike Pinney

For those not familiar with the Italian side of Mont Blanc and not having a suitable map to hand, the Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey sits to the south-east, 178m above the joining col de Peuterey and regarded in all lists as an independent peak.

In 1989, we were well acclimatised, having completed the Bionnassy to Mont Blanc to Mont Maudit to Tacul traverse in good time (see the 2009 Centenary Journal!). The weather broke, so instead of heading up to the Monzino Hut from Val Veny, for an attempt on the Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey, I ended up climbing the Gran Paradiso, possibly the easiest of the 4000m peaks.

In the 1980's the descent from the Monzino hut to the Freney Glacier, then ascending the Schneider Couloir to join the South-East Ridge above the Dames Anglaises Bivouac Hut was regarded as the normal route. However by the 1990's the descent onto the Freney Glacier had become more difficult and the Couloir frequently clear of snow and exposed to stone fall, such that this was not such an attractive option. In 1994 we went up to the Monzino Hut with the intention of going up to the Eccles Bivouac to attempt the AB by its north ridge on the following day, the route of the first ascent. However the weather came in overnight and the forecast (incorrect in the event) for the following few days was not good so we returned to the valley.

I ascended my fifty first 4000er in 1995 and for most of the last twelve years had declared little commitment to completing the list. I had returned to the Monzino Hut in 2003, to climb the Hurler/Ortoz route on the SE Face of Aig. Croux, a classic rock climb. From the summit we had good views of the west face of the AB and the receding Freney glacier, but with the hot summer conditions of 2003 the AB was not a serious consideration.

In 2006, I was persuaded to drive round from Zermatt and attempt the Aig. Blanche. I had wanted to attempt the Bietschhorn but the hut was fully booked! We called in at the Guides Office in Courmayeur and got a report on

conditions and weather; both were favourable. However the Monzino Hut was closed for refurbishment, with just the winter room available, so before setting off we made good use of one of several restaurants in Val Veny. Arriving at the Monzino in early evening there was a team of five Koreans who were also planning to go up to the Eccles Bivouac hut the following day with a view to attempting the Central Pillar of Freney and two Italians who warmed when they found out we were not planning to climb on the Aig Noire, their objective for the following day. We left at first light following the path leading up and onto the left bank of the Brouillard Glacier which we followed to just above Col Freney. After crossing the bergschrund we found a faint path that led to the lower of the two bivouac huts at 3850m. There were signs of occupancy (a couple were later seen returning from climbing one of the Brouillard pillars), so knowing the Koreans were on their way up, we inspected the upper hut which was unoccupied so we made ourselves at home there. In the afternoon we went up Pic Eccles, 4041m to obtain a view and establish the route to Col Eccles which we needed to cross on our way to Col Peutrey. From the summit of Pic Eccles we were rewarded with a magnificent panorama from west to east of M Bruillard, the Brouillard pillars of M Blanc, to the north the Innominata Ridge, then to the east the Freney face with its Central Pillar and finally further east the Peuterey Ridge of Mont Blanc, Col Peutrey and the Aig Blanche. Our view of the north ridge was foreshortened and we had to re-assure ourselves that it was not as steep as it looked!

We had been advised there was an easy way from the route up the Pic Eccles onto the upper Brouillard Glacier which would then lead across to Col Eccles. We failed to find this, so the following morning with a surprisingly overcast sky, we descended to by the lower hut from where we were able to abseil to below the bergschrund. From there we crossed to the middle of the glacier and started our ascent towards Col Eccles. Some while after leaving our bivouac hut we finally got back up to the same level! The conditions were not good with a thin breakable crust, so we ended up pitching the face. When we got to the col, any hope we had about the change in the weather were shattered so after the briefest of reconnaissance, we commenced our retreat. On our descent we again looked out for this "easy approach" following the left bank of the glacier and finally arriving at a point where we could get onto the rocks by the upper hut. It snowed overnight, but in spite of our fears to the contrary the route across the rocks was easily found with two abseils down on to the glacier. By the time the Monzino Hut was reached the sun had managed to break through, though on crossing the G. St Bernard back into Switzerland there was a notable deterioration in the weather. So much for that good weather forecast!

At the end of June 2007 the Alpine Club held its 150th anniversary celebrations

in Zermatt. It took a while to decide whether to go out for the weekend, a week's rock climbing or two weeks for an early Alpine season and possibly find good snow conditions. There were four of us, Jeff Harris and myself for which the AB was our final summit plus Steve Hunt and Keith Lambley who were close to completing the list. After the celebration weekend, the weather was not going to be good in the Alps for a few days, so we decided to move round to Courmayeur. After a days rock climbing, we then had a good weather forecast for several days, so after much debate as to whether the north face would be a better option, we took the opportunity to go up to Monzino Hut where only the winter room was still open and there were no signs of any work on the main hut. Compared with 2006 there was much more snow and we ended up pitching the final section to the Eccles Bivouac huts with no sign of the path. The following morning we went to just above the upper hut from where we were able to traverse onto the upper Brouillard Glacier with a comparatively easy ascent in good time to Col Eccles. The "easy approach" description now made sense! However it was not freezing at night so although we went about fifty meters from the col to inspect the descent to the Upper Freney Glacier, the avalanche danger was too great so we retreated, having confirmed the route to Col Eccles and the need to be there at first light.

Back to work for three weeks and then back out for my second Alpine trip. After a day rock climbing and an acclimatisation peak, after an initially poor weather forecast, we then obtained a forecast for a good weather window. In the mean time Steve and Keith had gone up to attempt the Dome de Rochefort. We established that the Monzino Hut, owned by the Courmayeur Guides, was still not reopened. Apparently they were unable to find a guardian and the fixed chains on the approach need to be replaced. A guardian is dependent on the sale of meals and the hut does not attract many day visitors. A sad state of affairs for the gateway to many of the classic climbs on Mont Blanc! After a night in the winter room, shared with two Italians who planned to climb the Innominata, Jeff and I made good time on our way up to Eccles Bivouac. When there we were able to sit in the sun and watch the Italians traversing Punta Innominata. The snow had rescinded somewhat in the five weeks from our previous visit.

From our experience on the July visit, we left the bivi hut at 03.00hrs taking an hour and a half to get to the col in spite of climbing by head torch. We went for about fifty metres up the Innominata ridge, and then there was a new abseil sling in place. A fifty metre abseil down a snow covered ramp led to a peg and a horizontal traverse to the edge of the snow. We then crossed the snow diagonally to the bergschrund, then horizontally across the Freney face before a short climb up to Col Peutrey. Initially we moved together up the start of the north ridge, but

then pitched the final fifty meters before getting on to the rock at an abseil point and removed crampons. The first fifty metres were quite steep (more than grade 2) but the angle then eased for the second fifty metres to just below the North summit. We traversed round both the North and the Central summit on the east side, before ascending the south ridge and reaching the summit in order to reach our elusive 4000m peak. After taking photos and an intake of food we abseiled down the north ridge then climbed back up to the N summit. Two abseils brought us down to the edge of the snow, crampons back on then a third abseil down the steeper part of the ridge where we roped up for the easy angled descent to Col Peutrey.

Whilst we had been ascending the N ridge we had met two parties abseiling down who were doing the Integral. The one party we saw continuing up Mont Blanc; the other we did not see. However there was a new set of tracks across the Freney face leading straight up to Col Eccles, which we followed. There were only a very few stones falling from the Freney face and sliding down the snow. After some deliberation we decided to follow their steps right up to Col Eccles (rather than reversing our approach) - Damilano gives it Facile II.

While we were removing coils, to climb the final forty five metres to the col as a single pitch, the next thing we knew was that we had been hit by a stone fall from Pic Eccles into the couloir. Fortunately, I was able to get a text message through to our friends in Val Ferret who were able to arrange a helicopter. A few minutes later the AW139 arrived and we were ferried down to Aosta. There had been no previous evidence of rock fall in the couloir, but in retrospect we wished we had followed our approach, which would have been slightly longer.

And in 2008, some nice solid Granite in the Grimsel Pass and perhaps, just to the west, the Bietschhorn beckons.

Golden Mountains.

by Roger S Aldred

Picture the scene. An urchin runs down a dusty track and knocks enthusiastically at the door of a Yurt/Ger. "Please Mrs. Hun/Khan, can your Attila/Genghis come out to play; we're playing heads you win!" The names are of course interchangeable. These Goonesque images and Herodotus' description of the Scythians and the writings of Sven Hedin and Francis Younghusband fired my young imagination and so the call of Central Asia, The Steppe and above all the mountains which form the borders of Siberia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and China

was heard but lay un-answered due to the political climate and later the demands of family and professional life.

A convoluted conversation towards the end of 2005 with Marina and her eldest son Pavel, recently de-mobbed from the Spetznaz convinced me that with their help and contacts things may now be possible and so plans were made. Detailed plans are doomed in the mire of Russian bureaucracy so on 25 June 2006 as I travelled south on the fourteen hour bus journey from Novosibirsk to the village of Artibash at the northern end of lake Teletskoi my only plan was to move progressively south and see what developed.

The Altai is formed by three sets of east – west ridges which march northwards from the Siberian, Mongolian, Chinese and Kazakh borders. In the south The Katun ridge 120 km long with Belukah 4506m as its highest point. The South Chuya ridge (120km/3960m); the Sailyugem ridge (130km/3499m) and the Listvyuga ridge (120km/4173m). Centrally there is the North Chuya ridge 4165m; the Telektinsky ridge (100km/2926m) and the Bastchelaksky ridge (120km/2421m). Finally at the southern end of Lake Teletskoi is the northern set of ridges: Lolgo (90km/2615m) and Sumultinsky (110km/2756m). This was my first objective but how to get there? Lake Teletskoi is 78km long, there are no roads and access is restricted to staff at the environmental research stations in the surrounding Taiga. An amphibious airplane which I had been told about had crashed three days prior to my arrival killing the pilot, his wife and two children. The first piece of friction! A conversation that stretched my Russian to its limits and the gift of two litres of vodka found me a place on a supply ship that makes the journey down the lake once a week to the southern shore, a collection of three hunters' cabins. From here a valley giving access to a ridge runs westward towards civilization and some interesting peaks are accessible, or so I was told by the hunters.

Never underestimate the Taiga, one kilometre an hour is very good going. Day two after leaving south shore saw me standing on the summit of Korumbu 2358m and my spirits lifted because the tree line appeared to end at around 1800m and my next visible objective was the small Tanis Pass 2142m some ten km away. From a high, bear free camp here it would be possible to traverse a number of peaks including Chakrik 2338m and Dyabazon 2618m north westward towards the valley of the river Eduzan its eponymous village and the road from Chermal to Gorno Altaisk from where the twice weekly bus to Mongolia runs towards the central Altai. These were nine very challenging days with not another human to share my thoughts with and only the most basic of foodstuffs that are available in this region.

The M-52 Chuisky Tract attains the height of 1894m at the Seminsky Pass but as a single lane of asphalt it creates a sedate rate of progress towards the central and southern Altai. My target was the Akkemscoe Lake where each summer the Russians establish an international climbers' camp for assaults on Belukah, international in this instance means mountaineers from any of the fifteen countries of the former USSR. A side track to the village of Katanda and the last available supplies led to a lift in multi-wheel drive military vehicle 15km to the lake with the mountain perfectly reflected in its waters. The camp consists of an administration block where the mysteries of documentation and rubber stamps are celebrated, a domestic block and a collection of wooden tents for those who do not trust the elements.

There were a number of fit young men planning to make the ascent during the week and so the old ploy of using them as a snow plough to ease the strain of my own ascent came to mind. Unfortunately the upper slopes are reached by a steep snow gully on the right of the glacier and I was too quick on this section and had to bide my time to find a group who would create a motorway type piste up the west ridge and around a significant gendarme for my ageing legs. A day of fourteen hours saw the summit attained and vodka consumed in large quantities with the camp supervisor and the team of Kazakhs and Russian Militia with whom I had shared the day. It was time to retrace my steps and head for Ziryanovsk and new supplies for my visit to the most remote part of the region.

Natsramvad at 4082m sits at 49 degrees 8 minutes Latitude, 87 degrees 49 minutes Longitude and hosts the meeting of the Russian, Mongolian and Chinese borders. Similarly an un-named peak of 3541m at 49 deg 5 mins Lat, 67 deg 18 mins Long. does the honours for the Russian, Chinese, Kazakh borders. The possibility of traversing all of these countries in minutes without documentation and formalities was too much of a temptation. After a hair raising journey to the village of Arshatii in a police vehicle, stores were replenished and a lift in military vehicle to the Pers Yukon pass arranged for two days hence. I was an object of interest to the local Telengit population who pointed out that my proposed plan would not make me taller, wealthier or better looking. "So why was I doing it"? When I explained about cocking a snook at authority and administration they understood and once again litres of airak were consumed.

The seven kilometres from the pass at 2519m to the base of the un-named mountain was amongst the most tiring that I can remember but the joy of this simple summit was worth all of the effort and to know that few people have ever stood there was a bonus. Four more days saw me further along the un-made road

over the Yukon pass and preparing to follow the river Arzadzhu south to my appointment with Natsramvad. The river valley was steep and delightful, the northern slopes of the mountain instantly forgettable but once again the summit was an experience to be savoured. Four months in remote Siberia had taken its toll on mind and body and a period of R & R among the flesh pots of Novosibirsk was called for, but first there was the process of being de-registered and the pleasant surprise of being given a badge declaring me to be an International Mountain Tourist of the USSR, these were created in 1985 and they still have over 950 of the 1000 that were made. Now I could take up an invitation offered by the Kazakh mountaineers with whom I had shared vodka, mountains and anecdotes.

On the 11th November 2006 the aged Ilyushin in which I was flying plummeted towards the earth, this could mean that it had at last given up the ghost, that the pilot was on his third bottle of vodka or that the city of Almaty was surrounded by very large mountains. Morning confirmed the later as I looked from my bedroom window and saw the Tailletzsky Alatau, mostly around 4000m but with a high point of 7004m. This is where I would spend the next month, on huge mountains that are virtually free of glaciers with mechanical uplift to 3560m, and some of the locals speak English and Guinness is available and they have an Arsenal Supporters Club.....but these are stories for another day.

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Peaks, Passes and Puna, Bolivia and Peru, 2008

by Peter Farrington

Arrival from sea level at La Paz Airport at 4050m in the early morning is not the best way to acclimatise for an imminent Andean trek. Neither is spending the rest of the day walking its steep bustling streets, probably sucking in as much carbon monoxide as oxygen.

I was there at the invitation of Kathy Jarvis, co-owner of Edinburgh based company, Andean Trails. So too were my three much travelled companions; ex outdoor pursuit instructors, Tony and Alison Pursell and Nick Ward, lean and fit Andean aficionado. The only person missing was Kathy who had been forced to withdraw but had arranged for a Bolivian friend to lead our exploratory visits to the remote Cordillera Apolobamba; Bolivia's highest peak, Sajama, 6549m in the Cordillera Occidental and the Peruvian Cordillera Vilcanota.

Julia Catunta Janco is a diminutive indigenous Aymara in her early thirties with a degree in English and several 5000/6000 metre peaks to her name. Assisting her was Victor Oropesa Lullya, a Peruvian Quechua, UIAGM guide and old friend of both Kathy and Nick. We seemed to be in good hands.

The following morning, we all set off in an overloaded Land Cruiser for the Apolobamba. The ten hour journey took us alongside Lake Titicaca and then north up onto the barren puna of the Ulla Ulla National Fauna Reserve, grazing grounds for large numbers of llamas and alpacas and heavily populated with wild vicunas and condors. The flooded rubble road led on through thunder, lightning and hailstorms before descending from 4860m to our destination, the small town of Pelechuco, nestling in a narrow valley above the rain forests of the Madidi National Park.

The main peaks of the Northern Apolobamba are Katantica, Ascarani, Palomani Grande and Chaupi Orco and rise to between 5600 and 6044m. Our intention was to make an anti-clockwise circuit of them. The route is unmapped and seldom visited but Julia had made a previous tour. The first pass, Paso Sanches at 4770m normally has a gradual approach via a camp at 4250m. However whilst our pack horses would go that way, we were persuaded by a local guide to take a short cut involving a direct ascent of 1100m. Being slow at acclimatising, this did not augur well for me. And so it proved. After a long hard struggle I reached the camp on the pass with as many signs of exhaustion as AMS.

The periphery of the mountains is scarred by several bulldozed roads accessing gold mines. At times we were able to utilise them to link lower meltwater soaked glens with spectacular high hanging valleys and passes. Close proximity to the jungle meant that rising humid air often produced cloud, mist and rain by afternoon, frustratingly obscuring views of the glacial peaks. Occasionally we would come across drystone corrals and stone walled thatched houses, very basic with no electricity and only crude sanitation. People were far and few between. Some quite elusive, women especially, carrying babies on their backs or with tousled haired children flitting bare footed amongst the rocks and streams.

For three days we walked northwards crossing the Rite and the two Pura Pura passes, all over 4800m before turning northwest up a long curving valley to the literally breathtaking Paso Lusani at 4950m. High in the clear air, within touching distance of the glaciers, we crossed the border into Peru. The superb scenery continued next day as we lost height and regained it up into another hanging valley to reach the rocky notches of Paso Viscachani and Paso Pucarini, both over 4800m. We had now turned 180 degrees and were heading back south. Day 6

took us over Paso Sina, 4770m and on to open puna. A mining road made the going easy for about eleven kilometres to Paso Puina where we turned off downhill to shores of Lago Suches at 4600m along the length of which lies the border. Our camp was to be at the eastern end but a strong wind and hail stones as big as mothballs battered us into submission long before reaching our goal. At the head of the lake we stepped back into Bolivia and climbed steeply up over Paso Chucuyo 4855m to a final elated romp down to our transport rendezvous by the road, 1200m above Pelechuco.

Whilst I continued to struggle with acclimatisation, Tony was suffering from an increasingly painful tooth abscess. Treatment in La Paz meant both he and Alison would not be going to Sajama. It was also obvious that I would be a liability above 5000m. Nick though, having made a previous unsuccessful attempt, was keen to return. So it was arranged that he, Victor and a local guide would make an attempt whilst Julia would take me to visit the Condoriri, just a three hour drive away.

Starting from Lago Khotia, at 4460m in the Hichukhota Valley, we trekked south-east, traversing from valley to valley over high moraine spurs stretching down from the jagged rock and ice chain of the Cordillera Real. The views were stunning and the campsites idyllic, no more so than by lagunas Juri Khota and Chiar Khota, in sight of the group of thirteen peaks known as the Condoriri. Thanks to ever patient Julia's gentle pacing, I was now feeling comfortable enough at high level to climb the outlying Pico Austria, 5200m, an easy ascent over shattered rock. From the summit belvedere we gazed across at the three highest peaks, Cabeza de Condor, 5648m, "The Head of the Condor" and its "wings" Ala Izquierda and Ala Derecha, one of the most celebrated views in the Andes.

During the last two days the route swung south over high passes to reach Lago Tuni, then climbed again through the tussocks of the ubiquitous wiry ichu grass to a mining road near Laguna Esperanza. Finally a dusty slog led to a fine campsite below the impressive west face of Huayna Potosi, 6088m. One more pass and an easy contouring descent beneath the hanging glaciers on the southeast of the mountain took us to Paso Zongo and our transport.

News had already reached us that Tony was now convalescing with Ali at Copacabana on Lake Titicaca. Nick had also suffered on Sajama, having to retreat from 5500m after high winds shredded his tent. The next day we were due to meet my son Simon and friend Joe at Puno in Peru by the shores of Titicaca. However getting there presented a problem as there was a blockade of all roads

out of the city by protesting transport workers. How we broke free, had our vehicle stopped and sabotaged by pickets, continued by ramshackle taxi, gravel lorry, tricycle and on foot to the border at Desaguardero is another story and probably produced more adrenaline than anything in the mountains.

The expedition, reunited and reinforced, now filled two mini-buses. Our journey to Ollachea, a small town lying above the jungle to the north of the Cordillera de Cara Baya and on the main route to the Tambopata-Candamo Reserved Zone, again proved eventful with a hair raising drive over the puna and down deep sided canyons.

After twenty days at high altitude it was a pleasure to feel warm and walk through lush vegetation. Within a few hours we were away from it all, high on a verdant ridge with ethereal views of many others amongst the billowing clouds. A high camp and two days of winding through complex grassy terrain took us down into a deep valley and the village of Corani.

For the next couple of days we followed a rough road, gradually gaining height up the widening valley. Though underfoot may have been monotonous, contact with local traffic was ample consolation. Horses, llamas and alpacas, mounted, herded or loaded; travellers, young and old dressed in gaudy mixture of traditional woollens and modern synthetics; the children, multi-lingual in their requests for sweets, a sure sign of being now being on a trekking route; and then all of us scattering when a dust raising lorry came trundling by. Near the hamlet of Aymana, a group of children ran down from the school to greet us as if we were a passing circus. Sadly there were no entertainers amongst us and we moved on almost embarrassed by their silent stare. Off road a single figure tussled with a roped bucking alpaca while down by the adjacent river fishermen tried their luck with rod or net. And all the time the hills were falling back to reveal high glacier clad mountains. When the road swung south we kept straight on, westward up a red dirt track, across the undulating puna towards Paso Chimboya, 5150m, portal to the Cordillera Vilcanota.

The Vilcanota range is around 60 km long and divided into six distinct groups of glacial mountains, the first of which, the Yaymari, lie to the north of the pass. To the south and entirely different is the fascinating phenomenon of the Ritipampa de Quelccaya, 20km long, tropical ice cap. Crossing Paso Chimboya and the lesser Paso Occe Mocco gives excellent views of both, as well as the stunning vista of the route ahead to Laguna Amayara with its spectacular backdrop of six continuous snow and ice summits, all over 5800m, of the Colquecruz.

The next five days were some of the finest trekking I have ever experienced. Large flocks of llamas grazed the puna whilst ibis, duck and Andean geese inhabited the lake, its still waters reflecting the elegant iced peaks beyond. Another pass took us over to Laguna Sibinacocha, lying at 4835m and 15km long. We followed the last six kilometres of its shoreline through rain and snow squalls to meltwater flats sandwiched between the lake and tumbling glaciers of the Huiscachani mountains, yet another superbly scenic campsite.

The Jutunhuma group and the obstacle of a long high ice capped spur running south now forced us circumvent, south by the lake, west over Paso Condor and back north across the rocky Pasos Yanacocha and Laguna Jano. Westward lay the final two massifs, the magnificently glaciated Cayangate and to the south, the highest mass of Ausangate, 6384m. Between the two was our exit, the narrow Paso Campa.

The circuit of Ausangate is considered one of the classic walks of the Andes. We camped at the start of its penultimate stage beside Laguna Ticllacocha and below the awe inspiring icy spire of Collque Cruz, 5950m. Above the pass, on the Ausangate side, lies the almost insignificant 5550m Pico Campa, a frequently climbed non-technical peak and the intended finale of the trek. Now only Simon and I remained enthusiastic.

So, before 4.00am we were following in Victor's torchlit footsteps to Paso Campa and up loose and precarious moraines to the peak's glacier apron. Crevasse free slopes led easily upward. I was now reaching my highest altitude and my ageing lungs were no match for my younger companions. Numerous breathers were required but by sunrise and far sooner than expected we were climbing up onto the steep summit prow. It was a glorious place to be on a fine June morning. By 9.00am we were back at the pass, waiting in the sun to make the short descent to our next camp at Pachaspata with the others. Beyond lay an easy day to Pacchanta with the promise of camping beside hot springs. It was not to be. Somehow word reached us that a German group were heading for the small campsite. Fatigue was forgotten. For the next hour we raced downhill. It was a wasted effort. It was hours before they arrived, by which time we were reclining in the hot soothing waters, our towels laid out for all to see. All that remained was a morning's walk off the puna, down a dirt road to the heat of the valley at Tinquí.

For those who like to get off the beaten track, I can recommend the Andes. During twenty-three days walking I came across only two other trekkers, despite being among some of the world's most beautiful mountains. Many areas still remain unspoiled yet easily accessible. Long may it stay so.

Rjukan Ice
by Robbie Robinson

The peaks of Norway have long attracted mountaineers from Britain, but it is only in the last ten years that the frozen waterfalls in and around the town of Rjukan have become a well-known and world-class ice-climbing venue. In January and February I joined several friends for two 5-day trips to the area; one I was planning, but the first was an opportunist chance, when three local Clitheroe climbers invited me to join them.

The season is long and there is climbable ice from the end of October through to early April. However, the best and most reliable time to visit is between mid January and mid March. Unusually, the weather proved fickle and although we arrived in sub-zero temperatures, this soon changed to mild, wet and snowy conditions. This did not prevent us climbing many routes of various heights, with grades of difficulty from WI 2 to up to WI 6. The ice was always thick and remained consolidated, though new snow soon covered the easier angled climbs.

The falls are spread in abundance along the Mana river valley, with longer routes lining the wooded slopes on the broader sections and the shorter ones in the narrow gorges and gullies, including those at the valley floor. As access to these follows the river, which remains flowing under ice and snow owing to the hydro-electric power pumping systems, care must be taken on approach walks. Many of the short waterfalls are close together, often with several routes on each, providing "ice cragging" situations ideal for practice and the climbing of numerous and varied routes.

We started our visits at the Krokan area, where we warmed up on the grade 3 routes (Bullen, 20 metres, WI 3 is the favourite) and then dropped top ropes down to practice on the steeper lines, many of them unnamed, ludicrously tapering icicles, which nevertheless gave great sport and some comical practice, using every possible technique, including ad hoc and invented ones to suit the situations.

Although I am more an alpinist than a pure ice-climber, I was surprised at how my own experience, plus modern equipment and a little modification in technique meant I coped with steep ice at a grade I had considered above my abilities. For this reason I can recommend a visit there for anyone who wants to try something new or wishes to put in some training for routes in the Alps. Despite this, the grade 5 routes I seconded were sufficiently serious to test my ability to bury my ice-tool picks as deeply as possible (even though a couple of centimetres works)

and to heave myself up in grunts and spurts. Back in the 70's, "whack and dangle" climbing referred to artificial routes, climbed on etriers and hanging on pitons. In January, it seemed to me that the name accurately reflected my mental and physical attitudes when attacking some of the steeper and harder sections of ice.

Many areas are easy to get to with a short walk-in, but the long, multi-pitch routes do require an early, less relaxed start. It is easy, though, to be delayed. Dismayed by a drizzly start to the day, we sluggishly set off to climb the oddly named To Menn og et Foster (WI 4; four pitches, 150metres). Wet ice on the approach road caused a slide into a snow bank and despite digging for an hour the hired car was only recovered by having it hauled out by a passing snowplough. The delay brought improving weather and an optimistic start on steep ice, which seemed to go up for ever. As there were three of us climbing, the two seconds moved together on the leaders locking belay plate, which was vital in maintaining progress. However, we still had an exciting series of abseils from the weeping top pitch as darkness fell. A carefully stowed head torch and knowledge of the stacked belay system proved rather important. As it was dark at the foot of the route, we drove to a well-known roadside waterfall (Swingfoss; 15 metres, WI 4), a good climb facilitated by strategically parking the car with the headlamps on.

The area has an interesting history. After the local farmers sold their water rights for a mere 600 Kroner to industrialists, the valley rapidly developed as a hydro-electricity centre, based on the large plant at Vemork, 6 km upriver from Rjukan. During the Second World War German scientists recognised the potential for the development of heavy water at Vemork, as part of their effort to build an atomic weapon. Norwegian saboteurs, trained in England, successfully attacked the plant, wrecking machinery and storage tanks. Vemork was quickly repaired and the American airforce, using 140 Flying Fortresses, bombed the area, claiming total destruction of the plant and killing many Norwegians. However, stored semi-processed water which was untouched was prepared for shipping to Germany, so local saboteurs blew up and sank the rail ferry once the tanks were aboard and en route. The story of the raids was made into the classic war film *The Heroes of Telemark*, which was made in the valley and at Vemork.

My first visit culminated on the very fine WI 5, three-pitch waterfall called Nye Vemorkfoss. This 120 metre route ends in the trees at the fence surrounding the old Vemork plant, and is the frozen outflow of the water supply which used to drive the turbines. The power station is now a museum and, I was told, well worth a visit.

My second trip meant I was able to take friends to climbs with which I was familiar, although none of us were up to the grade 5 and 6 standard of the first party's leader. The weather was again unseasonably mild, but we still managed to climb every day, starting with the one-pitch routes in the Krokan and Ozzimosis areas. We then planned some longer climbs. On the first of two days of snowfall which saw the early starters retreating from the upper gorge area owing to the unusual avalanche danger, we watched several avalanches roar down the waterfalls at the head of the upper gorge as we climbed out of the valley via Lettvan (3 pitches, 120metres, WI 2).

The next day we climbed four pitches of Bolgen (5 pitches, 220 metres, WI 3) and the leaner than usual conditions made themselves apparent as we discovered two sections were WI 4 rather than the guidebook 3. Below the top pitch we met two climbers on their way down and had to modify our descent. They told us that piles of old snow debris and broken trees blocked the normal access to the first abseil point. Abseiling is the normal mode of descent from the routes – I have never done so much! There is a good deal of tat in place, which helps to locate the descent lines on the multi-pitch climbs, but it is useful to carry a few bits yourself. Knowledge of how to construct ice-thread (Abalokov) belays is useful, too. The locals said they were unused to that volume of snow so low down the mountains at that time of year, so do not be put off. Weather and snow conditions in and around Rjukan can be checked on [www.http://vaer.sol.no/](http://vaer.sol.no/)

In conclusion I must say they were exciting trips. Although weather conditions were not perfect, the ice was good and we all made some fine climbs, adding greatly to our experience. The location is an ideal place for ice-climbers to climb really steep test-pieces and for Alpinists like me to push their limits on hard ice, which is superb training for the longer, less steep routes which I climb in the Alps.

Notes

Accommodation – There is an abundance of places to stay, from hostels in and east of the town (jakobfink@hotmail.com) to the hut and cottage rental centres such as Rjukan Hytteby and Ryukan Hytte og Caravanpark. These can be checked through several Rjukan websites via Google.com. Two apartments can be rented through Rjukan.co.uk

Travel – Several of the so-called 'low-cost airlines travel to Torp airport near Sandefjord. This is also known as Oslo Torp. However, I would not recommend flying with Ryanair owing, firstly to their system of charging for hold baggage up

to 15 kilos, then adding huge surcharges. Given that climbing gear with pointy bits and even ropes cannot be put in hand baggage, this can add considerably to the costs for any climber. Secondly, flights from Torp on Fridays and to Torp on Sundays often have many drunk Norwegian football fans aboard. This would not be a problem if the crews quietened them, but it appears that Ryanair has a laissez-faire attitude to this. I returned from our second trip on one such flight and, having put up with rowdiness for the whole flight, a British climber remonstrated with one of the drunks and was punched in the face for his pains. The cabin crew ignored this and on making enquiries we discovered that the pilot had not been informed and that the airline had ignored the climber's complaint. You pay your money and makes your choice! Cars can be hired from Torp airport through websites. These include the cheap Rent-a-Wreck company as more well-known, more expensive names.

Guidebooks – The best guidebook is Heavy Water, by Haukasveen and Bordevik, and can be ordered from www.rockfax.com. There is also a summary guide called Rjukan Ice, which can be downloaded from www.mountain-environment.com. Both contain all the visitor needs to know about the town and the climbs, plus the nearby ski station of Gaustablikk and the cross country skiing. The guidebooks give the locations of the parking closest to each area.

Accepting the Challenge

by Nikki Wallis

From March 2006 my life would never be the same again. A seventy metre sliding fall out of a snow gully 'trashing' my right ankle put paid to all activities for over twelve months, whilst also unfortunately providing me with plenty, too much time, to question the meaning of life, climbing, diabetes and anything else that pervaded my thoughts.

I guess, without breaking my ankle, some people would also call it a mid life crisis.

Ironically, during the couple of months after my climbing fall, my solace was found reading every morbid tragic mountaineering book and video that I could find.

Eventually, March 2007, saw me return to my full time job of being a Warden (Ranger) for the Snowdonia National Park – and my slow physical and, dare I admit, emotional transition back into the world of mountains that I knew, and

used to love so much. Gradually, with increased objectivity, I returned to the location where my fall had occurred, and bit by bit, I found myself, with increased confidence spending longer looking and analyzing that “fateful day” and what had gone wrong.

Visualising everything that I remembered – crampon slipping on the hard neve, an initial slip, ice axe braking, still ice axe braking, thinking “s**t”, still ice axe braking with no real effect, suddenly flipped on some rocks, passing my partner, then going head first on my front down the gully, seeing the nearing precipice approaching very quickly, shouting out “No” (although intriguingly no one else heard my shouts), imagining even in those few milliseconds pulling my partner off and us both tumbling to the bottom and then thinking “S**t. I wasn’t meant to die this way”

D-o-y-n-g.

Suddenly I wasn’t falling any more. I was upside down awkwardly facing outwards down the snow gully, but not being able to right myself or get my weight off the rope. My right leg didn’t seem to work and I couldn’t get my left foot in a position to do anything. Yowza, then the pain hit, searing pain all the way up to my lower leg above the top of my winter boots. No apparent blood; good sign. Someone climbing solo came over and grabbed my harness and assisted me in righting myself. Using both axes which miraculously didn’t seem to have holed my body, I scooped out a ledge then managed to straddle a rock that was somewhat protruding sufficiently, getting into “focus and rescue” mode and then orientating myself into a semi-sitting position, semi-safe, semi-clove hitched into my axes. Then more pain and nausea.

It took six months to get my ankle “sort of sorted”, then six months of more painful physiotherapy and recovery. The frustration during this period was overwhelming. I would have a really good day, being able to walk a few flat miles with no pain, then desperately want to go and test it out by doing something a bit more extreme (you know, “a mountain walk, Snowdon, please?”), but knowing that that probably wouldn’t do me much good.

Venturing to see my brother Craig and Karen and their triplet daughters in Australia in December 2006 saw me and Neil getting married on the beach, quite fittingly in a “rock fall risk area”! Well, we had been together for fourteen years.

Little by little, I started pushing my physical and mental comfort zone, and by June 2006, it was time to eradicate some more ghosts. I went to Zermatt,

primarily for the Alpine Club 150 Anniversary Dinner and by myself, (this had to be at *my* pace, *my* speed and *my* comfort), I slowly regained some of the confidence I had lost in being back in the mountains, bivouacking out by myself and even ventured back up onto the dreaded white snowy stuff, which, nearly eighteen months previously had caused me so much damage.

August 2007 saw me in the Montana mountains for best, MADiDEA 2007 *.

Now with renewed confidence, increased motivation, renewed enthusiasm, and marginally increased fitness coming back, not surprisingly I was motivated by a well known ultra-mad diabetic ultra-marathoner from Germany to try increase my running ability. Theoretically, increasing my running ability wasn’t going to be difficult, I didn’t run!! You can’t do less than nothing at all can you? But true to character, the problem was that for motivations sake, I had entered myself into an 11 mile / 18km long mountain race, the Penmaenmawr Fell race to take place on Saturday November 17 2007. My 6 week training regime, if you can call it training, culminated with a 12 mile run seven days prior to the race, which was all on flat trail, some uphill, predominantly downhill, and whilst it was more than I had ever run in my life, it still took me 2hrs 25mins. Looking at this positively, I now knew that I could at least run / jog / fast walk the race distance come what may. However, whether my little legs would still be able to continue to run, after 1500’ of ascent and descent, was still to be seen, but I would give it a go. At least, I couldn’t come less than last, unless of course I didn’t finish the race.

I wasn’t first, *BUT* I wasn’t last (.....you know two runners dropped out, and thirty or so didn’t even turn up) – *and* (always looking on the bright side of life) I did have more energy still in reserve at the end..... 18km later, and having been running with an average heart rate of 156 during the 2hours 44mins – I felt good. My first proper race; steadily paced? So steady that ironically my speed seemed to generally increase as I progressed through the course! I felt even better once presented with my “race finish specially brewed bottle of beer”. So in summary, a turbulent chaotic eighteen months – but now somewhat addicted to trying to get really fit anyone up for some adventure racing??

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* Mountains for Active Diabetics is an international forum for people with diabetes who enjoy the challenge and excitement of outdoor sports and exercise. The MADiDEA group has arisen from idea2000 (www.idea200.org) in the USA and MAD (Mountains for Active Diabetics) in the UK. Although many members are hikers, mountaineers and climbers with insulin dependent diabetes -

MADiDEA welcomes contributions from all diabetics and health professionals who are involved in promoting an active and healthy life for diabetics. For further information visit their website at www.mountain-mad.org

2007 – A Year’s Pottering

by Wendell Jones

Early February brought the alpine club’s 150th Anniversary Meet at a rather obscure hotel near Shap. At the end of a long drive, off the A6, it is close to both the M6 and the main line to Scotland, but not much else. Having grabbed the ABM’s usual Glenridding slot, it made a better job of the weather. Alasdair and Pam, Stuart Beare and I wandered up the hills behind Haweswater on a day which would have graced September; it was a crying shame to have to return for a series of lectures starting a 3.00; however, that was what we were there for!

I find most lectures easily forgettable; what did stick in my mind was a remark made by Peter Habeler, the guest speaker. “If at 25,000 feet your colleague can’t keep up go on without him. At that height you cannot afford to stand around”. Perhaps a trifle ruthless and contrary to traditional British codes, but never having been to 25,000 feet, who am I to judge?

Enforced movement of the ABM Dinner Meet to March did not fool the weather Gods. On the Sunday I potted up the path beyond the mines, aiming for the main Helvellyn ridge. A young man came speeding down. “It’s pretty windy up there”. I felt it had already reached that stage. Pressing on, I breasted the broad ridge. Pressing hard on two sticks driven into the ground, I could maintain a degree of balance during the gusts; between the gusts I could struggle five to ten yards before the next burst arrived. *Maybe my friend had a point. March or not, this was no place to be.*

Lower down the rain moved in to prove the inadequacy of my old Gore-Tex anorak. I got back to the hotel shivering, fell into a hot bath and remained there for an hour until I felt that hypothermia had been beaten. This is where the hotel wins over the hut.

By way of contrast late April saw Jenny and I battling unseasonable heat between Collioure (France) and Cadaques (Spain). Whilst this mostly involved pottering along the cliffs, I seized an off day to ascend Saint Salvador Saverdera (670m), the high point of the Pyrenean ridge which reaches down to the Creus peninsula. This involved a four hour trudge in unrelenting heat. Close to the top lay the ruins

of an ancient fort and, 100m lower down a slightly better preserved abandoned monastery.

An extensive view over the surrounding waters would have been enjoyed by those two naval heroes Hornblower (fictional) and Cochrane (real life) both of whom made their reputations on this coast. Cochrane, perhaps Britain’s most brilliant sailor since Nelson subsequently court-martialled his admiral – not a career enhancing move!

Fiesch, base for the Summer Meet, was reached and the hotel found with some difficulty. “Turn left at the second roundabout and you will find the hotel on your left” wrote Alasdair. He was of course absolutely right and by inclining one’s head at an angle of 135 degrees to the direction of travel – don’t do this too often – the building can clearly be seen. Following a further search the ABM were to be found knocking it back happily at the bottom of the garden.

The next morning saw most of the ABM bound for the lift. There was a small misunderstanding as to whether start at 8.45 meant the car park or the lift, and this created difficulties for the late arrivals who did not know where the lift was. Some hours later I was just short of the hut, when I meet the ABM’s chief Alleinganger coming down. Mike Scarr needed little persuasion to re-ascend and imbibe more beer.

The first week was wet. We tramped up to Erden, on the opposite side of the valley, where there was a fine church. “Ave Maria” sang Alasdair most impressively. The Edinburgh Festival would be proud of him. A few moments later, getting into practice for Nepalese prayer he followed up with “Mani, Mani ...” At this point we took him away.

The hotel and food were good and Madame could not have been more helpful. Rolf her husband was a chef with strong post-prandial views on the PR value of alcohol. The sight of Rolf bearing down left some members a little uncertain as to whether he intended to embrace or strangle them. However he could hold forth with the best.

Fiesch at 900 meters is backed by a ridge rising to nearly 3,000. The only lift runs in two stages to the ridge, close by the Eggishorn, and the ABM mounted a number of expeditions from the first lift station, most of which involved a scramble over the rocky sections of the ridge. Quite a long way down lay the Gross Altesch glacier, this broad highway bisecting the view down to the snow peaks of the Oberland beyond. No one seems to have ventured down to the

glacier, perhaps held back by the dread disease Lastliffitis.

A couple of visits to the Binntal prompted a walk to the pass on the Italian frontier and the worst joke of the holiday, namely that the older inhabitants of Binn were known as Hasbinns. A curious feature of the approach route was a mile long dead straight tunnel. You could see light at the far end but were quite unable to determine the precise location of the Post Bus or indeed whether it was there at all.

The Musketeers were absent and hopes of great things rested on our two Geordies. They started well and were late for supper every night; then as some sort of retribution, a bug confined only to them, left them as a melancholy pair in a window seat.

Crossing the channel on the Sunday rather than the Monday cost me a penalty of £60 and by demanding that this be paid by credit card in Euros, P & O managed to get this up to £61.70. I bought a paper on the boat, "Five inches of rain at Brize Norton" – a few miles from us, I looked hard for the decimal point. A phone call home elicited the fact that all was well and that Burford Bridge which had been closed might now be open. So all was well for us if not for the 1,600 households in West Oxon who had been flooded out.

OBITUARY

Wing Commander Henry David (Harry) Archer. DFC 1922-2007

Harry Archer was a prominent and enthusiastic member of the ABMSAC to which he was elected in 1967 and was Vice President in 1984, President from 1985 to 1987 and was at his death an Honorary Member. He was also a member of the Alpine Club (1973) and was their Honorary Secretary 1978 - 1982. In addition he was a member of the SAC (Diablarets 1952).

The son of Canon George Archer, who served as a Military Chaplain throughout the First World War, Harry had an early introduction to the Alps when his parents took the family on ski-ing and climbing holidays, mostly to Zermatt. This instilled in Harry a great love of the mountains which remained with him for the rest of his life.

Educated at Winton House Preparatory School and St Edwards, Oxford he was too young to enlist at the outbreak of War so went to work as a clerk at the Bank of England. Living in a flat in Dolphin Square the property was severely damaged by a bomb but Harry, in bed at the time, managed to escape uninjured together with most of his possessions. In June 1941 he volunteered for Pilot training in the RAF, was accepted and sent to the USA for his training. On completion of his Advanced Training he was retained as a Flying Instructor - an early indication of his exceptional flying skills. After accumulating some 1000 instructional flying hours he returned to UK in the summer of 1943 and was posted to a Lancaster Squadron. Over the next 14 months he flew virtually non-stop day and night bombing raids surviving many near-misses but always managing to get his damaged aircraft safely back to base. During this period 450 of his Squadron's air crew were killed. On completion of this tour Harry was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. He was then posted to the Far East with a new crew to fly Liberators out of India and the Cocos Islands and more drama was to come. In August 1945 when briefed to attack and destroy Japanese aircraft on an airfield on the west coast of Sumatra, Harry's aircraft was hit by cannon fire setting the starboard outer engine on fire, damaging the pilot's instruments and severely wounding the Navigator. Doubting the Liberator's ability to survive a ditching (it had a bad reputation in this respect) Harry decided to try to fly back to the Cocos Islands some 600 miles away. Now at only 300ft and in the dark, all moveable equipment was jettisoned and with a reducing fuel load the aircraft was able to climb to 2000ft and four hours later Harry made a safe landing on the Cocos runway. Happily the Navigator subsequently made a full recovery.

After the War, Harry was posted to Transport Command where he took part in the Berlin Airlift and in 1956 greatly enjoyed flying Fitzroy McLean (Eastern Approaches), then PUS for War, to Kathmandu where he enjoyed his first views of the Himalayas. Prior to retirement from the RAF in 1977 Harry filled a number of staff appointments at Command Headquarters and Ministry of Defence. He then went into the Engineering Manufacturing industry until finally retiring in 1997 at the age of 75.

In 1957 Harry married Valda Mildred Smart a former WRAF Officer and they were blessed with four children, two boy and two girls. Tragically Valda was taken seriously ill around the time Harry retired from the RAF and she died in 1978. This left Harry in sole charge of four teenage children in addition to a full-time job. Remarkably all difficulties were overcome by the family all pulling together as a team and the children completed their education, all entering into excellent careers and now all happily married

I first climbed with Harry in 1961 when we were both stationed at RAF Eastleigh in Kenya. Together we climbed numerous routes on Mount Kenya, Kilimanjaro and Mawenzi and he accompanied me, providing wise advice, on the reconnaissance which led to Tommy Thompson and I achieving the first ascent of the East Face of Mawenzi in 1964. We also enjoyed two wonderful expeditions to the Ruwenzoris', a range which fascinated Harry, and were able to climb all the peaks and manage a couple of first ascents. On return from overseas we climbed together in the UK, European Alps and the Himalayas. He was an adventurous mountaineer but always prudent and safe and I shall forever remember his favourite dictum which probably saved my skin on more than one occasion when I wanted to press on in adverse conditions - "John, the mountain will still be here in the morning -let's make sure we are!"

Harry will probably be remembered most affectionately, by Association members, for the wonderful series of twenty Alpine Meets that he led between 1975 and 1994. These were organised in self catering accommodation in various areas of the Alps with the food provisions and cooking managed by Valda at the early Meets and after her death by a number of willing volunteers recruited by Harry. These Meets would invariably attract 80 or more members and many adventures and challenging climbs were enjoyed by the participants.

After an horrific accident in 1998 when he was hit by a speeding car when crossing the road on his way to Church one Sunday morning, and the subsequent lengthy stay in hospital undergoing a series of operations, Harry's climbing activities were severely curtailed. However he still enjoyed a number of excursions, with his old friend George Watkins. They had made a trip to New Zealand prior to Harry's accident and undertook a series of treks in the Mount Cook and Mount Aspiring range and climbed Mount French. During this visit they went to the New Zealand Pilot's Association Museum where Harry met an ex-Wing Commander who had also flown out of the Cocos Islands thus providing an excellent opportunity for exchanging a few reminiscences and more than a few beers! After the accident Harry and George confined their trips closer to home visiting the Orkney Islands, the Hebrides and a mad Quad Biking holiday at Aviemore! Thereafter Harry's illness confined him to hospital and subsequently a nursing home.

Having touched and enriched the lives of so many, Harry died peacefully on 11 April 2007 after a long illness borne with characteristic fortitude. He is survived by his children John, Margaret, Charlotte and Matthew and seven grandchildren.

John Edwards



Harry Archer DFC
1922 - 2007

Valley Hopping in the Valais by Terry Shaw

Those who have completed the whole or part of the Haute Route in summer or winter will have experienced the delights and challenges of the glaciers, passes and peaks that straddle the border between the Valais Alps and Italy. Alasdair Andrews' trek at the end of June 2007 was an opportunity to enjoy and learn more about the valleys that lead south from the Rhone to those alluring mountains along the frontier.

Our week's trekking began in the tiny hamlet of Pralong which at 1600 metres lies close to the towering wall of the Grand Dixence dam. Completed in 1966 and reputed to be the greatest feat of Swiss civil engineering, the dam wall at 284 metres is more than two and half times the height of St Paul's Cathedral measured to the top of its cross. Swiss guide books will also tell you that the amount of concrete used in its construction was enough to build two pyramids. Another remarkable feature of the project is that some of the water feeding the dam lake comes through sixty miles of tunnel from the foot of the Matterhorn glacier.

Despite the looming presence of the dam and the occasional thought about the devastating power of the water it was retaining, the party of thirteen, who had arrived by car or public transport, spent a peaceful first night in the tiny but comfortable Val des Dix Hotel. It was sunny the next morning for the steep zigzagging climb up through alpine pastures to the Col de la Meina at just over 2700m and our first real views of the great peaks from the Grand Combin to the Dent Blanche. A long descent through high Alpine meadows rich in flowers and then through forest took us to our second overnight stop in Evolene in the Val d'Herens which must rank as one of the most charming villages of the Valais Alps.

We awoke next day to leaden skies and rain. Following considerable debate and heart searching over whether such a course would be ethical after only one day of a week's trek, nine of the group decided that valley hopping by bus and train was preferable to a soaking on foot over the 2900m high Col de Torrent. The post bus journey to Sion through the Euseigne rock pyramids must be among the most spectacular in the whole of the Swiss Alps. A short train ride along the Rhone valley and another absorbing post bus journey from Sierre into the Val d'Anniviers delivered us to Grimentz, one of the loveliest of Alpine villages, beautifully preserved and with numerous wooden houses perched on mushroom stones to prevent the invasion of mice. Some took advantage of local hostels to

lay foundations for the afternoon's exercise. They were wise to do so as the weather decided it was pay back time for those who had "chickened out" over crossing the pass. It rained torrentially on the two-hour 700m climb from Grimentz to our overnight accommodation in the hut above the dam wall of the Lac De Moiry. The three who had earlier braved the weather and crossed the col - Dick and Lin Murton and Dick Yorke - had found it cold in the occasional snow shower but had arrived much drier at the pension than the valley party.

Feeding at the Lac de Moiry was in a refuge alongside the dam wall and five minutes below the overnight hut accommodation. Such a split in the facilities can be good for the appetite and the digestion and in addition, as I descended the hill for breakfast the next morning, it gave me the pleasure of watching a group of marmots see off a fox that, perhaps also in the hope of finding a breakfast, was invading their territory.

It stayed dry that day for our 600 metre ascent from the dam at 2250m to the Col and Corne de Sorebois from where there were fine views of the Weisshorn and Zinalrothorn. Most descended directly to Zinal from the Sorebois ski bowl but some more energetic members of the party made the longer descent via the Petit Montet. Two climbed the Roc de la Vache, which at 2581m is a celebrated viewpoint above Zinal.

Rain and low cloud the following morning led to the group splitting up to take different routes to our next overstop at St Luc. Some favoured the higher route via the Montagne de Nava and the Hotel Weisshorn while others made a lower level traverse via Nava Secca in the hope of keeping drier and below the cloud. Two, who had a car available, drove to Chandolin and climbed the cloud-bound 2717m Illhorn.

A comfortable night in what was voted to be the most luxurious hotel accommodation of the week's trek was followed the next day by a most agreeable means of making height - a train ride on the fenicular from St Luc to Tignousa. From there the trail wound gently upwards through thickening cloud and deepening snow - any hopes of climbing the 3025m Bell Tola were abandoned - to the Meidpass at 2790m. Once over the pass the weather improved and even the sun put in an appearance as we made the pleasant 1000m descent past the Meidsee to the tiny hamlet of Gruben in the Turtmanntal.

With the continued uncertainty of the weather, only a hardened minority of the group completed as planned the final stage of the trek across the 2894m Augstbordpass to St Niklaus in the Zermattental. Others resorted once again to the

use of postbus and train to reach their final destination.

Switzerland, of course, is noted for the diversity and excellence of its transport facilities. But as I left the Turtmanntal earlier that morning to join a friend who was coming to the club's next meet that weekend in Fiesch, I had the novel experience of being driven from Turtmann to its railway station by a nun training for her driving test. With her instructor, she had kindly offered a lift to those who had descended with her in the tiny cable car from Oberems.

It was somehow a fitting end to a week of great pleasure, interest and curiosity. As usual Alasdair's organisation of the meet, with much assistance from Pam, had been immaculate. The weather could have been kinder but the company was good, the accommodation more than adequate and we had eaten to a standard that one takes for granted in Switzerland. An added pleasure of the week was that Karen Yorke had made herself available to transport gear between our overnight stops so that we were carrying much lighter sacks over the cols.

Participants: Alasdair Andrews, Stuart and Cheryl Beare, John Dempster, Pamela Harris, Jon and Rowena Mellor, Dick and Lin Murton, Dinah Nichols, Terry Shaw, Dick and Karen Yorke.

Fiesch Hotel Meet, Upper Valais

7 to 21 July 2007

by Pamela Harris

If we, being otherwise for the most part persons of moderate respectability, and not more obviously mad than most people, continue in these unremunerative pursuits merely for the sake of pleasure, and proclaim that our climbing days have been among the best of our lives, we ought to be able at least to define that pleasure in an intelligible way.

AD Godley

This year's meet was based in the Upper Goms Valley in the Hotel Park at Fiesch, a small, quietly situated hotel which we had almost to ourselves. We arrived there on a sunny afternoon, the warmth of the weather matched by the warmth of the greeting by our hosts, Rolf and Rosemarie Frei. That evening 28 of us sat in the hotel garden, still bathed in sunshine, for the first of Rolf's many excellent barbecues accompanied by a large buffet salad. We enjoyed these barbecues every sunny evening - except perhaps for the occasion on which kangaroo steaks were served - and also enjoyed the local specialties of fondue

and raclette on rainier days.

The first morning most of the group took the nearby cable-car either to the top of the Eggishorn or to the midway station at Fiescheralp from where we walked, or in some cases via-ferrataed, to the top. The views were magnificent as we looked across to all the giants of the Bernese Oberland towering above the Aletsch Glacier, the longest in Western Europe, and over to Monte Leone, the Matterhorn and the Mischabel in the Pennine Alps. But we had scarcely unwrapped our lunchtime picnic when the rain set in, and we had a damp return to the hotel in time to watch the Wimbledon Finals on their giant television screen.

The rain continued on and off for the next few days, but we managed to find a variety of low-level routes to keep us busy. A popular choice was the walk to the lovely old village of Ernen with its painted houses and 16th century church containing a splendid fresco of St George and the dragon. It had good acoustics too, as we discovered when Alasdair burst into song. As we left Ernen churchyard we came across a monument to J-J Bennen, the guide from nearby Lax who had accompanied Tyndall on many of his climbs, including the first ascent of the Weisshorn. Bennen was killed in an avalanche in 1864, less than 45 years old, after which Tyndall had organised a collection in England for his dependent mother and sisters and then, with Tuckett and Vaughan Hawkins, had sponsored the raising of this monument to his memory.

On one rainy day most of us did the Gommer Ridge Path from Münster back to Fiesch, visiting lovely Baroque churches en route; some visited the castle at Brigue; much time was spent in huts and cafés sampling such delights as goulash soup, schnaps and coffee, beer and apricot tart; but there were signs of unrest as comments in the Meet book testify: 'If it rains tomorrow I'm staying in bed' (Roger Newson), and the ambiguously worded 'A Rotten Ramble Route to Reckingen' (Mike Scarr).

Fortunately the weather improved by the Thursday, and those who arrived for the second week had sunshine every day. This enabled us to tackle a variety of peaks and huts from the nearby road passes. The Westermeyers and Roger had tackled the Sidelhorn from the Grimsel Pass the first week and struggled to find the route through treacherous knee-deep snow (their comment on return was 'more tiring and challenging than expected'), but by the time the rest of us went up a week later the snow had almost completely melted, except for some patches on which sheep were cooling off. Several of us made expeditions to the Furka Pass from where we climbed the Tällistock with wonderful views across to the Rhône glacier and down towards the Pennine Alps and the Rhône Valley, and some

carried on from there to the Gross Müttenhorn. The Nufenen pass was an easy drive, from where ascents were made of the Brudelhorn and walks made to various huts in the Corno-Gries area. The Fosters drove up to the Simplon Pass and walked up to the Monte Leone Hut, the hillsides covered with gentians.

Other nearer destinations were the lovely Binntal, a veritable flower garden, with the Binntal Hut and the Albrun Pass at the end of the valley on the Italian border - provoking the comment that 'Italy looked like Switzerland'. The Eggerhorn was an easy ascent from Alpe Frid above Ernen, though the Baldwins and others started from Binn which made it considerably longer. The Fieschertal itself was easily attainable from Fiesch, and the cable-car to Fiescheralp was frequently used by different groups for walks up to the Märjelensee at the edge of the glacier and along to the Bettmerhorn, Riederfurka and the Botanic garden at Villa Cassel. On one occasion a small group made an Alpine start by catching a 5:00am cable-car up to the Eggishorn to see the sunrise over the peaks of the Oberland and the Pennine Alps. The party was depleted by the absence of our meet leader who had said he would be there; his excuse was that his alarm clock failed to awaken him, which prompted the Shakespearean quotation about 'gentlemen still in their beds'.

Blatten and Belalp were not far down the valley, and the Tyndall Memorial at Belalp was the start of the long ascent up the scree-covered slopes of the Sparrhorn. This memorial, an immense granite block from the nearby glacier, was erected in 1911 in memory of John Tyndall, eminent Victorian scientist and mountaineer of the Golden Age. He first visited Belalp in 1861, just six days prior to his success in achieving the first ascent of the Weisshorn, and went on to build a villa there where he spent every summer until his death in 1893, an honorary member of the SAC and the AC, and an honorary citizen of the commune of Naters for his help to the local community. The bronze plaque on the memorial was added by the commune in 1993 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of his death, a celebration at which several AC members were present. (*n.b. I am indebted to Trevor Braham for the above information on Tyndall.*)

Although the snow was too low to ascend the high peaks or to overnight in a hut, there were many ascents made of peaks around 3,000 metres. Mark Davison and Tony Arkley, on occasions accompanied by Dick Yorke or Myles O'Reilly, frequently disappeared in search of via ferratas or higher things, including the Bättelmatthorn and Corno Rosso, the Jägihorn via ferrata on the Weissmies, a long grade 3 ridge scramble on the Sparrhorn (with no climbing gear) and the exciting via ferrata round the Gibidum Lake near Blatten, with an 80 metre

suspension bridge, narrow rope and plank bridges and a Tyrolean traverse. Most of these expeditions were in winter conditions with cold, mist and snow, and after arriving late for dinner on four consecutive evenings they collapsed into illness and inertia on the second week and were frequently seen in the hotel garden enjoying the sunshine and the beer.

Marmots, ibex, chamois and golden eagles were occasionally sighted, and the flowers were spectacular on every walk. The three Swiss favourites of edelweiss, alpenrose and trumpet gentians abounded. We found spring gentians and the less common spotted and purple varieties on most walks; there were martegon and St Bruno's lilies, globe flowers and aquilegias in the Binntal; soldanellas, moss campion and pulsatillas on the higher slopes; many varieties of orchids, primulas and saxifrages; and at the Furka Pass the rare campanula thyrsoides, a strange yellow bellflower.

As the meet drew to a close, we all agreed that once again Alasdair had chosen a lovely area, easily accessible from Geneva Airport, with good uplift facilities, road and rail transport to the high passes, and plenty of excellent walks for a group of our abilities, many from the invaluable Rother Walking Guide to the Valais. And again he had managed to find a modestly priced hotel with delightful proprietors, good food, a lovely garden and a large parking area. In his speech in response to Wendell's vote of thanks on the final evening, he hinted that since 2008 would be his tenth consecutive year of organising Alpine Meets it would be his last, but who knows? At least we have the Stubaital and the Pitztal to look forward to.

Participants: Alasdair Andrews, Tony Arkley, Mike and Penny Austen, James and Belinda Baldwin, Antonia Barlen, Geoff and Janet Bone, Ian Brebner, Sheila Coates, Mark Davison, John Dempster, John and Marj Foster, Peter Goodwin, Ruth Greenham, Pamela Harris, Wendell Jones, Züsi Kunze-Loeliger, Morag Macdonald, Roger Newson, Myles O'Reilly, Bill Parish, Bill Peebles, Renate Romer, Mike Scarr, Terry Shaw, Elizabeth Wells, Bill and Rosie Westermeyer, Ursula Woodhouse, Dick and Karen Yorke

"Necessity Is the Mother of Invention"
A Tale of Changed Plans on the Innsbruck Trek
September 2007.
by Ed Bramley

The plans were for a strenuous six day trek around the Karwendel range, but it

was apparent as soon as we arrived in Innsbruck, from the low snow level, that the original plan was no longer workable. A short telephone conversation with the warden at our first intended hut confirmed this. Half a metre of new snow had fallen, blocking all the passes we needed to use, and more was on the way in the next couple of days. Deep joy! We decided that the best course of action was to make for our first hut, the Solstein, get local knowledge from the warden, and then revise our plans for the week.

As the high passes were out, the next day we took a valley route to the Solstein Hut. Even this was not without its tribulations, as the new snow had taken out parts of path, and turned other sections into a mud bath. At one point, people could do nothing but slide across a slope to the continuation of the path. It was therefore mid afternoon before we reached the Neue Magdeburger hut, and the protected path to the Solstein hut. This started out with an exposed but protected traverse across scree and rock area, before the path, with the assistance of cables, ascended a number of short snow filled gullies. It was then a long snow covered traverse, through and area of junipers, before we reached the hut at gone 6pm. A long first day.

The welcome at the hut was warming, but the fact that part of it was undergoing an extension and the washing and toilet facilities were outside in a container, dampened the spirits somewhat. That night, the warden was in earnest conversation with a number of his counterparts, and confirmed what we already suspected. The original route was not tenable, and even remaining on the south side of the Karwendel would leave us with limited opportunities. We were also due for more snow the next evening. We therefore took the decision to transfer to the Stubai valley, but not before we had ascended a local peak, the Grosser Solstein, the next morning.

The next day began sunny, with glorious views southwards over a cloud covered Inn valley. Our ascent of the Grosser Solstein, which was next to the hut, was straightforward in the upper half, and gave us great views south back towards Innsbruck. It was just the lower slopes, where we were knee deep in snow at times, that we questioned our sanity, particularly as we were wearing shorts. With the visibility of our original route from the peak, we could not only see that the trails were snow choked, but had also been avalanching. We needed no further confirmation that we were making the right decision. To reach our next overnight stop at Seefeld, that afternoon, we took the long walk out northwards to Scharnitz, over eight miles, with some of us enjoying the spectacular gorge scenery along the way. At Scharnitz, whilst we had missed the train up the valley to Seefeld, enquiries in the station bar got us a taxi ride instead, and meant we

could enjoy a quick beer into the bargain. That evening, we stayed at a hotel in Seefeld, the hot showers being most welcoming.

Next morning, the forecast had been accurate. We were met with low cloud in Seefeld, and snow higher up. By midday, a variety of transports saw us at Milders, where the road to the Oberbergtal and the Franz-Senn Hut left the main valley. However, no food in the village, and as we walked on, we thought things were starting to conspire as signs proclaiming first "closed today due to illness", and "closed – quiet day" appeared on the various hostelry doors. Time to call in the cavalry, and a taxi ride up to the road head, where a very pleasant stuberl was most definitely open and spirits rose again quickly. The hut was a grand affair, with over two hundred beds, and lots of facilities, including showers. Not only that, but the snow line was appreciably higher, nearer 2000m than the 1500m we had just left. Whilst there were a modicum of walkers and climbers at the hut, the main contingent was about fifty people learning about alpine medicine, who added a lot of young energy to the building. For the next three days we stopped at the Franz Senn hut, and our luck was definitely on the up with the weather with glorious sunshine each day.

Heartened, we set off on a number of excursions from the hut. The first day took us up a rock step to the Berglas glacier and moraine above the hut. The flag cairns on the moraine below the glacier gave the whole place a decidedly Himalayan feeling. If we needed the dangers of the mountains to be emphasised, stone fall at a number of places higher up the valley reminded us of the unstable nature of the terrain. More sets of rock steps and moraine slopes saw us traversing another open path, complete with new snow, before we reached a glacial lake, beyond which the final snow ramparts of the Aperer Turm rose. A number of the party pushed on up the slope, aided by some cabling on the final traverse, to the summit. On the way, we spotted a magnificent Steinbok, complete with a very large set of horns. As the snow softened with the warmth of the day, the descent proved less testing than the ascent, and we were back at the hut by mid afternoon. Not satisfied with the day's exertions, a number of us went on a small via ferrata in a gorge just upstream from the hut. Whilst "just a bit of fun", the position of the via ferrata in the midst of the roaring torrent, certainly rounded off the day's excitement nicely.

The next day saw us heading up the Basseljoch, a simple peak on the way to the Regensburger Hut. Once again, the new snow made the paths entertaining, but we were rewarded by superb views over the Stubai valley. On the way up we joked at the "dogs on a lead" sign, but were surprised to meet one on the way down, not far from the narrowest part of the path. Our nature adventure

continued, spotting an adder on the path, less than four hundred metres from the hut. Luckily, it moved off into the undergrowth without further prompting. Another via ferrata before tea, this time a good 200ft of v.diff style climbing less than five minutes from the hut. Some good overhanging moves on big holds and bent steps – all good for keeping the interest level up.

The last day, Friday, saw parties ascending the Sonnenwand and the Rinnenspitze. Both offered straight forward ascents to peaks, with the occasional cable for protection. On the Rinnenspitze, it was the higher snow covered slopes that gave the most entertainment. Melting snow had turned the track muddy, and a number of large blocks had all the stability of a set of stacked skateboards. Once we reached the upper cabled section, the ascent became straightforward again, despite the occasional section without cables. Another big summit party was again rewarded with more stunning views, although the building clouds made it evident that the weather was on the turn again.

We were back down at the hut before mid afternoon, and after another fantastic Austrian dinner snack, we began our journey back to Innsbruck, pleased at how much we had all got from a week that might not have been.

Participants: Roger Aldred, Ed Bramley, Andy Burton, Mark Davison, Natasha Geere, Mike O'Dwyer, Miles O'Reilly, Marian Parsons, Mike Parsons, Terry Shaw, Marcus Tierney, Richard Winter.

Beer Meet - East Devon
October 2007
by Belinda Baldwin

Ten members were based in Beer, John and Dinah met us at Venford Reservoir car park on Saturday.

Saturday was dampish but we set off for Dartmoor with the hope of a long walk over Snowdon a rise on the plateau much lower than its Welsh namesake but nonetheless somewhat exposed. Two members had decided that a gentle riverside walk was more to their taste. The morning was lovely by the Dart and through the woods but the loveliness was not to be found once up on the moor. We kept on track until lunchtime but decided that we could give Snowdon a miss. The rain was horizontal and the ground tufty and boggy. We made do with twelve miles rather than fourteen with another pleasant stroll to the cars once we were off the high moor.

Sunday dawned just as in the previous years with the threat of rain. Again we had a post breakfast discussion about what to do in the inclement weather. Three opted for a walk from the village of Hawkchurch, where we planned to have lunch at the Old Inn. The remainder of the party went to Lyme Regis to admire the fossils on Monmouth Beach. They are a remarkable site and I don't think anyone minded having the opportunity/excuse to spend the morning thus before an excellent lunch at Hawkchurch.

This year we had no fun and games with flooding in Beer. The Dolphin Hotel, as usual, provided us with more than ample dinners on Friday and Saturday nights but maybe next time we will have the good fortune to have two dry and sunny days. In a year with such a good autumn we managed to pick the one wet weekend.

Present at some point: Michael and Penny Austen, James and Belinda Baldwin, John Dempster, John and Marge Foster, Myles O'Reilly, John and Rosemary Percival, Elizabeth Wells and Dinah Nichols.

Loch Tay Meet
11-13 January 2008
by John Foster

We arrived at Machuim Farm cottages above Loch Tay in freezing conditions on Friday evening, with later arrivals having increasing problems with fog and ice en route. Jim and Margaret were non-walking participants at this meet, as Jim was recovering from surgery.

Geoff (who had arrived before dark) reported wet snow on the slopes above, but after a night of sub-zero temperatures all of the walkers decided to ascend direct from the cottages to Meall Greigh and Meall Garbh in the Ben Lawers group.

We were surrounded by thick mist for the first part of the walk but then emerged into a glorious sunlit winter world, with mountains covered in crisp snow and valleys full of low cloud. These conditions remained all day, and made one of the most memorable winter walking days that we have seen in Scotland in recent years. There was no breeze, and the temperature remained well below freezing even down to loch level.

With ice-crusting snow which might or might not bear your weight, walking was

warm work. Even before we reached the hill slopes one (nameless) member managed to land on his head in the only patch of mud encountered all day, and further interludes occurred later with the usual crampon-related disasters of perforated gaiters and an impressive somersault down the hillside (by your reporter). Most of us decided that one summit was enough, but John Dempster and Peter Farrington continued determinedly to the second before returning in the twilight.

Margaret and Marj had offered to make a meal for us on Saturday evening, and Peter Goodwin provided the wine to celebrate his survival of a danger-packed summer, so we all settled in to one of the cottages for dinner. It was some time before we realised that due to a misunderstanding the wine was awaiting us – opened - in the other cottage, with fifty yards of icy track between us. The situation was resolved by very careful transportation, and no contents were lost en route. This state of affairs didn't last long, understandably, and a very enjoyable and alcoholic evening ensued.

Sunday morning “dawned” with heavy rain and floods so we all elected to forego the option of another day on the hill and returned home through the deluge, in some cases nursing considerable hangovers!

If only we could book more days – and nights - like Saturday.

Attendees: Peter Farrington, Jim and Margaret Strachan, Geoff Urmston, John and Marj Foster, Ursula Woodhouse, Peter and Dominic Goodwin, John Dempster.

Pontresina Meet
19 to 26 January 2008
by John Dempster

Those of us who went to Arosa last year were sure we could not expect such excellent conditions again, but we were wrong. The Engadine had had a good fall of snow the previous week but we enjoyed five days of sunshine with glorious views. The Hotel Engadinerhof (which has been used by ABMSAC meets in the past) proved friendly and comfortable, with excellent food.

Walking on the prepared paths was often fairly undemanding, seemingly designed for ladies in fur coats. But there were two high level routes open, one at

the Diavolezza and one from the top of the Muragl funicular both of which offered exhilarating walking in spectacular scenery. The finest views of all were of the Piz Bernina from the Corvach chair lift although no walking was possible from there.

For the cross-country skiers there was more than enough to do and the more energetic members often notched up over 25km a day although no-one completed the Engadine Marathon (44km) in one go. The Fosters and Myles O'Reilly successfully completed what is claimed to be the longest toboggan run in the world, and then demonstrated their skill (or otherwise) on the skating rink. Pontresina also boasts some artificial ice walls but none of the party had the inclination or equipment to tackle them.

Our winter Alpine meets can hardly be described as serious mountaineering but for those who like taking some exercise while enjoying mountain scenery at its winter best, they have proved very enjoyable holidays.

Attendees:- Geoff and Janet Bone; John Dempster; Philip Draper; John and Marj Foster; Dick and Lynn Murton; Dinah Nichols; Myles O'Reilly.

Annual Dinner Meet – February 2008
by Brooke Midgley

This year we reverted to the more usual time of early February and the Meet Leader was rewarded with lots of happy members as we coincided with a period of perfect weather. Probably they'll have forgotten next year when in rains! The change back to early February also seemed to improve the turn-out from last year (early March) – are you creatures of habit? i.e. “... it's early February so it must be dinner time”!

The Meet Leader and Arline always go early, usually Thursday, to have a peaceful start to the weekend. This year we had a dozen or more by dinner time – well it served them right that Friday was the only poor day and they all went out and got wet! Friday evening the hotel was fairly full and getting noisy, always a good sign.

Saturday started dull but rewarded those who went out with a brilliant afternoon. The Meet Leader spent most of the day attempting to shoe-horn seventy eight people into a space where we'd only managed sixty seven last year. The management said couldn't be done; we shifted tables, measured angles, fought

but had to concede it couldn't be done! Gilly, Andy and children (organiser's family) were banished through the archway and nearly out of sight so seventy eight is possible – just!

The new management and staff did a pretty fair job feeding and watering about the largest party they've had in (we'd tested them a month earlier with a family party of seventy two guinea pigs and that hadn't been a disaster).

Our guest was Mark Vallance, Past President of BMC and a climbing equipment manufacturer (think Friends). He had a very full weekend giving a talk at the AGM on the workings of the BMC and answering many questions from the floor. His after dinner speech was funny and interesting giving details of his mountaineering life and work. Later he gave a slide show of his time in Antarctica with some fantastic slides.

As usual many departed on Sunday but very nearly as many stayed and enjoyed the wonderful weather. Sunday had cloud in the valleys and sun on the ridges. Two hundred feet thick cloud sat on the lake during the morning so no boats sailed but Place Fell and the tops were visible from the hotel – lovely! There were still folk staying on Wednesday and possibly later – that was a bit greedy.

So next year is our Centenary – book early if you want a “Prime” table or you may be banished to “outer darkness”.

Braich Goch Bunkhouse, Corris

28 to 30 March 2008

by Dick Yorke

This is the third meet held at the Braich Goch; attendance has again increased, this time from eight in November 2006 to twelve this year. This is very encouraging for the leader and the meet will certainly be held again in a year or so. Ten members stayed at the bunkhouse and two at a local guest house, the latter option will also be available in future years. On the Saturday evening we again had an excellent and good value meal at the Railway Inn at Abergwynolwen, if anything again portions were over-generous. Members, new to the area, seemed favourably impressed with the opportunities for interesting and peaceful walking in relatively remote mountains and hills, and with the general ambiance. However, there are also opportunities for rock-climbing.

Once again the bunkhouse proved comfortable and well equipped, and the live

band on the Friday evening stopped before most of us went to bed. The bar provided excellent draught Brains' Reverend James bitter, so good, one member bought bottles, from another source, as a birthday present for his son, also a Reverend James! In previous years I have described this as a Mid-Wales meet; however, the bunkhouse is in Southern Snowdonia and thus in North Wales. As most members head North or East we tend to walk in North Wales but there is the opportunity to go south to Pumlumon or the Cambrian Mountains.

The weekend's weather was a mix of bad and acceptable. Saturday was grim, cloud, very strong winds, heavy rain/hail; those meeting a warden on Cadair Idris, who was equipped with ski-goggles, were told gusts were reaching 90-100mph. Sunday was much better, although dull at first it became brighter, the wind moderated, cloud lifted, and it became sunnier and clearer as the day progressed. Although rain was forecasted for later on, all got off the hills before or as it arrived.

On Saturday: despite the weather, three groups went out. One explored local history; with trips to Castell y Beree, and the church at Llanfihangel-y-Pennant, and then, considered a route up Cadair, but by this time the weather had deteriorated. A brave group of four ascended Cadair Idris. They went up the Minffordd path, then along the north side of the lake to the col and made a diversion to Craig y Cau before ascending the summit, after this they went along the ridge to Gau Craig and then back via the bridle way. Conditions on this trip were reported to be horrendous, high winds on the tops at a level to topple and accompanied by hail. The more conservative members of the group, however, explored the Dovey Hills which were judged to have appreciable attractions and deserved another visit to complete the horseshoe under more reasonable conditions.

Sunday was a much better day, warmer, less wind, some sun, despite a promise of rain later. A group of three; Mike P, Mike G, and Ed decided, fairly late on, to go to the Arans, they had originally planned to ascend the Rhinogydd from the East. However, they went up the Arans from Cwm Cywarch, got to the summit of Aran Fawddwy, the highest peak south of a line from Llanwrst to Porthmadog, and reported magnificent views of Cader Idris and most of the surrounding peaks and later of Creiglyn Dyfi, the source of the Afon Dyfi one of Wales' premier sea trout rivers.. They arrived back at their vehicles before the rains arrived.

The rest of the group went to the Rhinogydd; parked at Llyn Cwm Bychan, at appreciable expense (£2/car + £1/person). Then ascended the path towards Clip, returned to Bwlch Gwylim and headed south towards Llyn Pryfed and Craig

Wion. From here we headed against the grain of the land to meet the Roman Steps exploring some of the less frequented parts of these mountains.

Overall I judged this an enjoyable meet, and hope that many of the attendees will want to come again.

Attending: Ed Bramley, John and Marg Foster, Peter Goodwin, Mike Goodyear, John Percival, Mike Pinney, Terry Shaw, Suzanne and Tony Strawther, Richard Winter, Dick Yorke.

The Amethysts

by Rene de Jeandre – translated by John Lagoe

Rain lashed the windows of the verandah where we were taking tea. The door opened briefly and a gust blew the newspapers on to the floor as Miss Barnes and Mme de Rivaz came in. To occupy themselves on a wet afternoon these ladies had gone out to visit the bazaars of Chamonix, with the firm intention of looking at everything and buying nothing. They returned with their arms full of miscellaneous objects which they tumbled on to the table: photographs, nougat, a paper-knife, an inkwell, a bouquet of edelweiss, a paper-weight. This latter was a magnificent smoked crystal surmounted, and debased, by a metal chamois.

As we passed the ladies' booty from hand to hand, Jean Reviol held on to the paper-weight for a long time. Jean Reviol, the celebrated alpinist contemplating a cheap chamois! Was he demoralised by the bad weather and lack of action?

"Hey, Reviol, are you proposing to eat that chamois?"

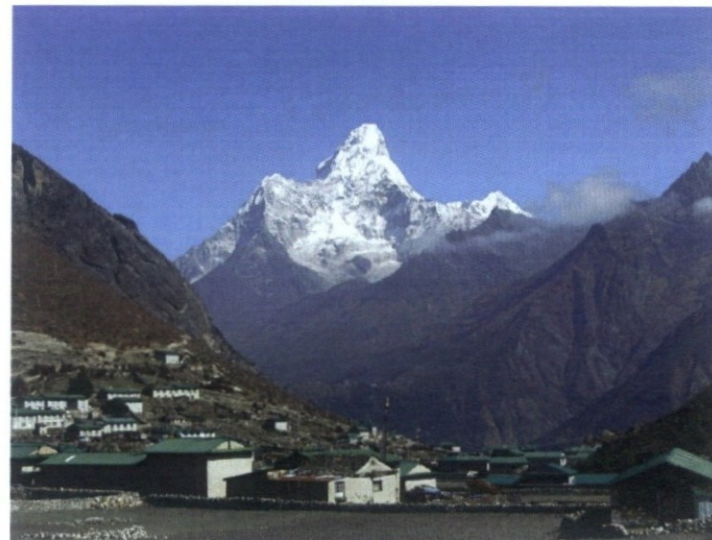
"Leave him alone, he's studying how such animals can climb steep rock."

"It's not the chamois I'm looking at", said Reviol, unsmiling, "it's the crystal. It's magnificent, look how clear it is in spite of the dark interior colouring. It's a smoked crystal, which the local people call amethysts."

"Can you still find these around here?"

"Certainly. Near the Col d'Argentieres there are many, darker ones. There is a Glacier des Amethystes in the region, and in the Miage massif you can find completely white crystals, usually smaller than this. This...this one must come from... from the Aiguille Verte chain...from the Mer de Glace face of Les Droites.... I almost think I can recognise it...yes, from a long time ago, more than thirty years...."

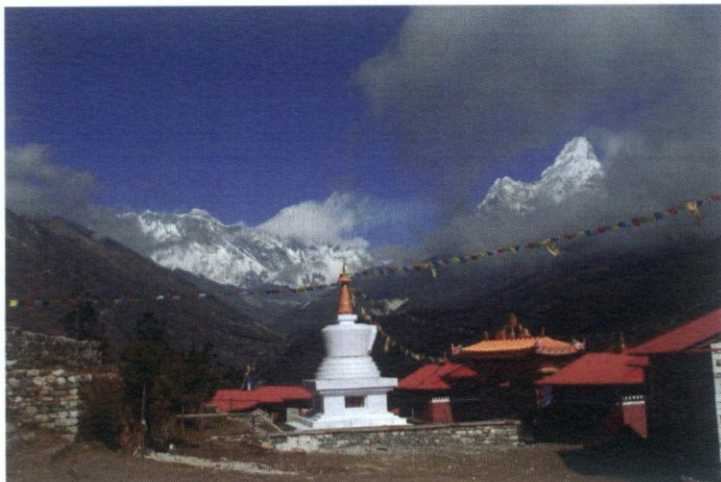
All fell silent. Those broken phrases seemed to rise from the depths of his memory. We scented a story. A story from Reviol would be a godsend on a long wet afternoon. Now in his fifties, he was one of the finest French alpinists, with an unsurpassed knowledge of the Mont Blanc massif. When he spoke, which was



Ama Dablan and Khumjing
photo: Pamela Harris



Visit to a "Hillary" School
photo: Dick Yorke



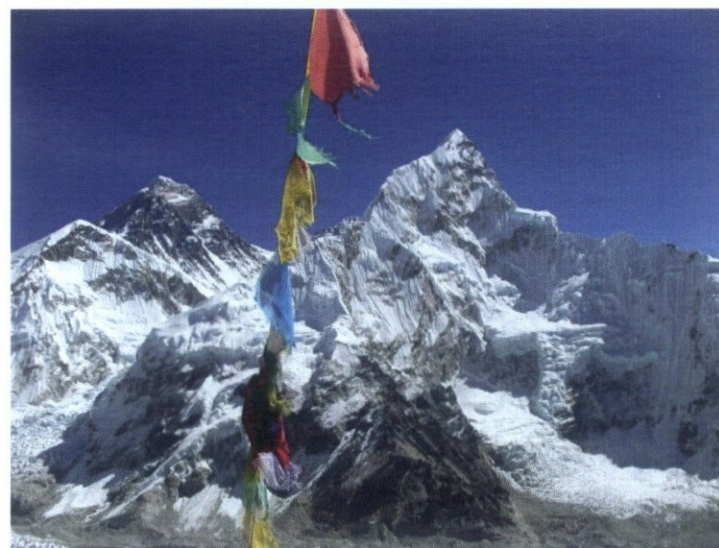
Everest and Ama Dablan from Thyangboche Monastery
photo: Hugh Chapman



ABMSAC Group Near Lobouche
photo: Steven Creasey



Crossing The Cho La 5420m
photo: Hugh Chapman



Everest From Kala Pattar 5560m
photo: Steven Creasey



On The Trek To Dzong La
photo: Keith Dillon



In Kyenzoma Village
photo: Keith Dillon



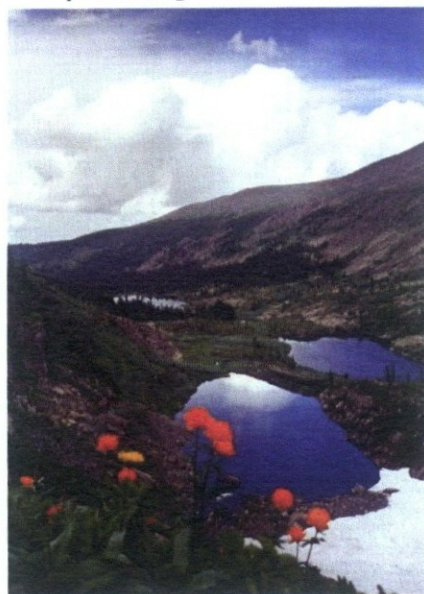
Trekkers, Sherpas and Porters
photo: Alasdair Andrews



Col Peutrey and Aig. Blanche From Col Freney
photo: Mike Pinney



Natsramvad and Lake Arzadzhu
photo: Roger Aldred



Karakolskie Lakes, Northern Altai
photo: Roger Aldred



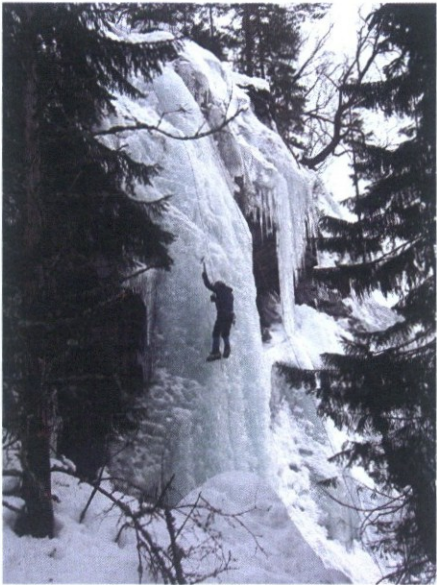
Cordillera Vicanota, Peru
photo: Peter Farrington



Colquecruz, Cordillera Vicanta, Peru
photo: Peter Farrington



Road Traffic Near Corani, Peru
photo: T & A Pursell



Robbie Robinson On Ozzimosis



Robbie Robinson Leading Kajokentrappa



Terry Shaw On the Meid Pass, Valais Trek
photo: Dick Yorke



Mark Davison On A Via Ferrata, Valais Trek
photo: Dick Yorke



Aletsch Glacier, Feisch Meet
photo: Ruth Greenham



Tony Arkley and Dick Yorke On Rope Bridge, Feisch Meet
photo: Mark Davison



Protected Path, Karwendel Trek
photo: Ed Bramley



Approaching the Frans Senn Hut, Karwendel Trek
photo: Richard Winter



Beinn Damh River Crossing, Scotland
photo: Dick Yorke

rarely, he was always interesting.

"Come on, you're dying to tell us the tale!" Said Mme de Rivaz. "I promise I won't interrupt you, especially if it's about alpinists. I'm passionate about your mountains."

"As I have been for thirty years", replied Reviol slowly.

"There are two errors", he began, "which enthusiastic novice alpinists commit every year at the start of the holidays: two errors which are really one. They tackle climbs above their capabilities, and do so impetuously on the first day, scorning the proper preparation and the gradual training which city-dwellers need.

That's exactly what we did, my friend Leon Forgier and I, setting off like young hotheads to climb Les Droites. The first ascent had been made by English climbers only a few years earlier, and we were impatient to follow their route or even discover another. Les Droites are a group of summits in the massif which separates the Argentiere Glacier from the Mer de Glace, with the huge Aiguille Verte at its extremity. That is why this fine mountain chain is rarely seen and little known: the Aiguille Verte, directly dominating the Arve valley, has a majesty which completely overshadows its neighbours.

Les Droites are nevertheless worthy of an alpinist's attention: a serrated crest 4000 metres high. On the Argentiere side, the rocks crown a steep face of many couloirs constantly swept by stone and serac falls. On the Mer de Glace side three formidable jagged buttresses of fine red granite rise from the Talefre Glacier. There, full of illusions of success and very little precise information, we were going to attack the mountain.

It was the start of the season in Chamonix, which had not yet become the world-renowned centre which it is today. You arrived on foot or by car, and the Montanvers railway wasn't even thought of. After an hour's walk, having tried a short cut, we were lost in the forest, wading through bracken and fighting rhododendrons. Just at the point of retracing our steps, the noise of broken branches stopped us. A startling figure appeared: a peasant, in rags, descending rapidly with an astounding sureness and leaning on an old-fashioned ice axe, crude and heavy like a pickaxe. 'It's Le Sournois', whispered Forgier, who had seen him the previous year in Chamonix.

Le Sournois seemed well-named. His wrinkled, misshapen face, his twitching eyes, his bony chin with its grey goatee beard, his tobacco-stained moustache and his huge deformed shape made him a repugnant, frightening sight. In a rough,

stuttering voice he pointed our way back to the track. But just as he was about to continue his rapid descent he noticed our rope and asked, with a twisted smile, where we were going. When we told him 'Les Droites' his expression changed and he almost flew into a passion.

'It's a ba... ba... bad mountain; don't get yourselves lost; climb well to the left, near the Aiguille Verte couloir...but you're too young to go up there...better go somewhere else...towards the right it's bad, very bad! People have died over there!' With an unpleasant laugh, he disappeared among the trees.

My confidence in our enterprise was more than a little shaken. 'We might have done well to ask him to come with us', I said, 'he seemed to know the mountain.' 'Oh no!' cried Forgier, 'Le Sournois has a very bad reputation. His real name is Louis Bezancy. He used to be a guide, but was expelled from the Compagnie. It's said that one day he came back without his client or his comrade. When asked to explain he became embarrassed, then angry, and finally offered to resign from the Compagnie des Guides. They took him at his word; but nothing has been learned about the two who disappeared and they've never been found. Le Sournois had to sell his chalet and land and now lives in a miserable cabin. No one is allowed in it, and no one knows what mystery lies there. They say he's a half-mad old miser hiding his gold.'

After a rest and food at the Montanvers inn, we finally arrived at the Couvercle where we were to pass the night. Now, under the huge overhanging rock called the Couvercle, there is a comfortable refuge. Then, there were only a few planks, a drystone wall and some prickly hay. We slept little and badly in the penetrating cold on the hard wood. Cracking sounds from the movement of the glacier disturbed us. I was sure I heard footsteps, but Forgier assured me I was dreaming.

Before dawn we set off up the glacier in the direction indicated by old Bezancy; easily until we reached the immense rimaye, which stopped us from getting on to the rock at our chosen point. It was a long time before we found a narrow bridge; the rimaye was so wide that even with our rope at full stretch we had to be both on the bridge at the same time. We wasted no time in leaving the snow for the rocks, enormous granite blocks piled on top of each other, becoming steeper and steeper. We climbed diagonally, as Forgier who was leading had to clear and throw down many loose rocks: they reached the snow in a few bounds and were swallowed by the gaping crevasse.

It was still very cold. Our fingers were half frozen from the cold granite, and we began to feel the effects of the bad night and the altitude. To justify our

increasingly frequent stops, we admired the immense glacier at our feet and the torn precipices; these were fixed and immobile at first, but if we stared at them for too long they began to tilt and wave. We had to quickly look back at our hands gripping the rock to recover a feeling of security, the sense of the vertical.

In these circumstances, when the stomach is nauseous, the heart beats too rapidly and discouragement is near, one must recover one's energies with rest and food. We sat for a while, backs to the granite, legs hanging over the void, but we couldn't eat much and set off again, unconvinced but still trying to approach the Aiguille Verte couloir, according to Bezancy's advice. On our left we had the terrible faces of the Verte and its companions, the Nonne, the Capucin and the Moine. These summits seemed to rise at the same time as we did, so we could see how slowly we were climbing. The sun was now high above us and stones no longer held by frost began to fall. A whistling, a pistol shot, then a pebble pulverised when it hit the rock. I was hit by a small stone which left me with a deep wound on the forearm".

Interrupting his account Reviol, as if he felt it necessary to support his story, pushed up his sleeve to show us a pearly scar.

"It was dangerous to continue. We must have misinterpreted the advice of the old guide, or else he'd given us false information. In any case we had to retreat. It is often said that descent is more difficult than ascent, but that isn't entirely true; it is certainly more nerve-wracking to lower oneself on an exposed face without being sure where to put one's feet, but the effort is much less than climbing up. In effect we descended more rapidly than we expected, and this change of movement was almost restful. It was still early in the day when we reached the foot of the rocks, feeling stronger and in high spirits. The sun and the lower altitude doubtless helped! We shouldn't have given up so soon, we told ourselves, forgetting the danger and the tiredness which had stopped us. Forgier particularly was not happy. He claimed never to have been defeated by a mountain. He was twenty years old.

'We should try again by another way', he said. 'Suppose we explore more to the east?' But, I objected, Bezancy told us that the ground over that side was very bad. If it's worse than where we've been, it's not worth trying.

'Dammit', said Forgier, 'he's misled us by telling us to climb this side; perhaps the old fool just doesn't know'. Well it's true his appearance didn't exactly inspire confidence.

So we set off on the glacier, roped up at a safe distance, towards the two south-west buttresses of the mountain. We were traversing parallel to the rimaye and

well below it when we came across tracks, around two days old but still visible as they had been made deep in soft afternoon snow. The length of stride showed that the traveller had been descending. The traveller? It was clear that there had been just one man. A lone tourist on a crevassed glacier, that was strange enough. A smuggler would have nothing to do up here. It must have been a poacher, hunting chamois. But why had he been looking in this desolate region?

We followed the tracks, climbing obliquely up a large slope which rose in a triangle between the buttresses. They led to a bridge which this time let us cross the rimaye easily. Above stood the steep loose granite face, very similar to the one which had turned us back.

We looked at each other. There was still time to push our exploration a little further and we were deeply intrigued by these footsteps which seemed to have fallen from the blue. Reaching the foot of the rocks, our curiosity was vastly increased by the sight of a veritable track in the granite. It was not, of course, a path, but the route was clear from nail marks and it had been cleared of all loose stones: a striking contrast with the face we were on earlier. In several places we even found boot nails. Evidently this route was frequently used; yet the Droites had been very rarely climbed up to then

As we climbed on up chimneys, couloirs and slabs, always the mysterious marks showed us the route and encouraged us. Despite feeling tired again, despite the increasing heat, we easily climbed pitches which were certainly harder than those which had seemed so daunting in the morning, simply because we were encouraged and stimulated by the track. We realised that men, or one man, had often been up there, and that gave us the assurance which was missing, only a few hours earlier, on the untrodden face. We forged ahead, now hoping to reach the summit, when we were decidedly stopped by a vertical wall four or five metres high. We were in a cleft, surrounded on three sides by smooth, unclimbable walls. All traces of the track ended here.

Surprise, then disillusion, then discouragement. We should try again to eat something! We descended ten metres or so to find a suitable ledge. At our feet the face dropped in a single step to the majestic glacier. Opposite, the jagged Chamonix aiguilles were profiled against the enormous mass of the Mont Blanc. To our left and right, a vertical chaos of huge granite blocks defying the law of gravity. As we tried to eat a few dry biscuits, we noticed a small pile of stones on a ledge, and saw that the tracks reappeared at that point and led down to the right following a broad line of quartz. A little further, we spotted an iron piton in a crack. Tying the rope to it, we slid down to a platform with a black hole at its

back. In front of the hole stood a heap of magnificent crystals!

We stuck our heads into the hole but, dazzled by the brightness outside, we saw nothing at first. Happily we had our lantern. Bent double to get in, we could then stand up in a sort of long fault two metres high, lined with crystals. We shivered in the glacial cold which seemed to emanate from the thousand reflections from the walls. Our eyes, adjusting to the soft light of the candle, opened wide at the marvellous sight, unequalled in our wildest dreams. Everywhere the floor was littered with shining fragments from which we could choose fine crystals to replace the few poor pieces we had found on the climb. Suddenly my foot struck a metal object. A chisel, and next to it a hammer! Delighted with this find, we could now cut out fine souvenirs from superb pyramids on the opposite wall. At this point the ceiling was lower; we shone the lantern there. It was then that, frozen with horror, we saw a man, flat on his face, appearing to grasp the crystals under him.

Forgier was the first to recover from the shock, and approached the man, who was very tall and clothed in brown. From his back there rose the haft of a knife; rips in the jacket showed that the man had been stabbed many times. We steeled ourselves to touch him. His boots were old and hardened. Pushing his trousers up, we saw a brown leg, mummified by the cold and the dry air. As we tried to turn the body over we discovered a second, smaller body on which the first had fallen. This corpse was more finely clad; a hat decorated with feathers lay by his head, his hair stuck together by dried blood; bony fingers, one with a ring, were clenched tight. When we lifted the first corpse we were surprised by its lightness, but could not bear the sight of the empty eye sockets, the lips drawn back over the teeth. We covered the horrible face with the hat.

A great terror seized us, but before fleeing we had to find out who these two sinister companions were. Feeling in the guide's pockets, Forgier pulled out a pipe, some tobacco, a knife, a carnet and a handkerchief which crumbled into dust. I found a wallet in the tourist's jacket. It seemed our duty to do this, although we knew it would bring us much trouble, questioning and even suspicion.

What a relief to return to fresh air, space and light! As soon as we got outside we looked at the carnet and wallet. The carnet was in the name of Simon Couttaz, Guide. The wallet contained several visiting cards, embossed with a baron's crown and the name Hauptmann Ulrich von Federer, Magdeburg. Behind us the black hole seemed threatening, as if the dead men were trying to drag us back to them.

Loaded with crystals we descended as quickly as possible. It was late now and the snow was soft. We reached the Couvercle rock tired and unsettled, and spent another uncomfortable night there, troubled by nightmares. The wound on my arm, which I had hardly been aware of during the day, was inflamed and painful and I felt feverish..

Awakened by the cold we set off for Chamonix. Below Montanvers we found ourselves again face to face with Bezancy, barring our way.

'Well, h..h..have you had a good climb'? He began, good-humouredly.

With a naivety which I find today inconceivable, we started to tell him about our discovery. He changed colour.

'Ah! It was you', he said, shaking with rage. 'It was you I saw up by my grotto. You have stolen my amethysts; my treasure....and my secret'.

He was terrifying. His deformity made him seem larger and stronger than an ordinary man. He glared at us, took out of his trousers an ancient pistol, and checked the priming.

'This is for one, and this', lifting his enormous axe, 'is for the other. And the amethysts will be mine'.

We tremblingly offered to give him the crystals.

'And my secret? Can you give me that back?'

We were lost. Our quick look down the slope was seen by our executioner, who seemed to enjoy keeping us quivering, half dead already with fatigue and fear.

'Don't try to run away', he growled, 'I'd soon catch you!'

We knew it. We'd already seen him running down the hill. Better to fight than turn our backs on him. He was slowly raising the pistol when he suddenly froze. Happy shouts rose from the woods below. A huge wave of hope swept over us as the shouts, whistles and calls drew closer and a large group of schoolchildren appeared at the corner of the path. Quickly Le Sournois hid his pistol in his trousers and threw himself through the woods towards the valley. The schoolmaster, seeing our pallor, made us drink a little of his cognac, which gave us the courage to continue our descent to Chamonix, though at each turn of the

path we feared that Bezancy would jump out at us.

We went at once to the *gendarmerie*. Our tale was not believed until the door of Le Sournois' hovel was forced and he was found hanged. In his bedroom there was a large pile of smoked crystals.

The Mayor, who had a bazaar, murmured 'They're easily worth two hundred francs'. He probably got them for less. And I'm sure that among the objects found today in the souvenir shops there are still some from Bezancy's treasure. Did he really think he had discovered something very precious? I believe he had killed his companions in the first mad moment when he saw the beauty of the grotto and the mass of crystals, and afterwards tried to justify his crime by forcing himself to believe that the amethysts were very valuable precious stones.

At that moment the dinner gong rang. Everyone left the verandah. A woman's voice could be heard:

'If I'd not seen the scar on his arm I wouldn't have believed his tale'.

And then a man's voice, asking: 'Did you go back to the cave?'

'I tried', replied Reviol, 'about 15 years ago. I wandered all over that face of Les Droites. I thought I remembered precisely, but nothing resembles a block of granite like another block of granite. All traces had disappeared. I never found the place'."

President's Report 2007

by John Dempster

Judging by the number of meets 2007 was another active year for the Club. We held fifteen meets; most of which were well attended and some were over subscribed. The programme included two new features. First we held our first winter meet in Switzerland, at Arosa, which was blessed with excellent conditions, allowing us to walk and ski while enjoying the splendid scenery of the Alps in winter. Second, the Club organised a very successful trek in the Everest region of Nepal, in which sixteen members took part. Pamela Harris is due our thanks for organising such a successful expedition. The remaining meets followed our familiar pattern with events in Scotland, Wales, the Lakes and the Alps. Unfortunately the quality of the weather did not always match the quality of our programme, and both Alpine trekking meets were affected, with one having to be re-routed entirely. At the annual dinner the principal guest had to withdraw at short notice because of family problems but his place was taken by Bishop Ian Griggs the former Bishop of Ludlow, who lives in Patterdale and is much involved with the local mountain rescue team. He gave us an interesting and entertaining speech.

For the Directors of ABMSAC Ltd a major preoccupation during the year was the issue of the rent for the George Starkey Hut. The lease provides for rent reviews at four year intervals, but the reviews due in 2002 and 2006 remained unsettled, largely because our landlords, the Patterdale Parochial Council, proposed *substantial increases, based on the rise in residential property prices in the area*, which we were unable to accept. At one point during the year it looked as though the deadlock would only be resolved by arbitration, but it was clear that the costs of this would be out of all proportion to the sums at issue and the outcome would in any case be highly uncertain. We therefore agreed with the Church that we would ask our respective agents to make one final attempt to reach agreement on a figure which they could recommend to their clients. This was duly done and both sides agreed to accept the resulting figures. At our suggestion the agreement also covers a formula to determine the two future rent reviews required before the end of the lease in 2016. The figures which finally emerged represent a large increase on what we previously paid, and have necessitated an increase in hut fees. However the Directors are reasonably confident that, with further efforts to increase hut use, the new rent can be afforded without running down the reserves. And at least we now know the full extent of our financial liability up to the end of the lease.

For several years there has been a debate within the Club on whether the rules

should be amended to reflect the fact that full members of the SAC represent less than a third of the total membership. A particular issue is whether it is right that election to President and Vice President should be restricted to full members. Following a discussion at the 2007 AGM a questionnaire was distributed to members seeking views on this and other issues. A substantial majority of the responses supported a change to the rules to open all offices to all members, and a motion to this effect was passed at the 2008 AGM.

During the year we were saddened to learn of the death of Harry Archer, a former President and honorary member of the Club. Harry organised a series of very successful meets in the Alps in the eighties and early nineties which did a lot to reinvigorate the Club following a somewhat fallow period. An obituary will appear in the 2008 Journal. On a happier note the Committee decide to award honorary membership to Alasdair Andrews, the immediate past President, in recognition of his enormous contribution to the Club in organising, first the *Scottish, and then more recently the Alpine meets*.

Looking ahead, the committee, with the assistance of Bill Peebles, has been considering plans to mark our centenary next year. A centenary dinner will be held at Patterdale at which George Band, one of the few surviving members of the 1953 Everest expedition, will be the guest speaker. We also plan a centenary meet in the Valais, which we hope will include a reception at the Britannia Hut. We are also planning a special centenary journal. I hope that our centenary celebrations can also be used to raise the profile of the Club and thereby attract some new blood which we badly need.

No report would be complete without a word of thanks to everyone who has assisted with the running of the Club during the past year. Although we are a comparatively small club the number of jobs for which we need volunteers is *surprisingly large* – not just the *officers* but also other jobs such as *organising meets, helping to run the hut or managing the website*. A big vote of thanks is due to all of them.

Association of British Members of The Swiss Alpine Club

Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on Saturday 9 February 2008 at the Glenridding Hotel, Patterdale

The President John Dempster was in the Chair. 43 members were present.

Apologies for absence:

Apologies were received from: Malcolm Yorston, Nigella Hall, Robbie Robinson and Natasha Geere.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 3 March 2007:

The term subscription rates should read subscription bands. The minutes were approved subject to this amendment.

Matters arising:

There were none.

Rule Changes:

The committee proposed 4 groups of amendments

SECTION 2 OBJECTS

Insert a new object:

“To provide and maintain a hut in the English Lake District for the use of Club members and members of kindred bodies”

Given that the George Starkey hut is one of the most important features of the Club it seemed odd that its existence was not reflected in the objects of the Association. This amendment was agreed.

SECTION 3 MEMBERSHIP

Insert the following:

“Junior Members under the age of 18 who attend club meets shall be accompanied by a parent or other responsible person”

This caveat was proposed in order to comply with the BMC's insurance requirements in relation to child protection.

Delete: “Election to membership” and substitute “Admission to membership”

It is no longer the practice to elect new members. Anyone who applies to join the club is normally admitted without question, although the Committee retain the right to refuse an application.

These amendments were agreed

SECTION 4 SUBSCRIPTIONS

Delete all references to entrance fees.

It is no longer the practice to charge entrance fees.

This amendment was agreed.

SECTION 6 COMMITTEE

Delete the words: “save that an affiliate member shall not be entitled to hold office as President or vice-President”

The President explained that over 60% of the Club's membership is now affiliates and it was estimated, on the basis of those attending Club meets, that affiliates represent about 80% of the active members. The Committee considered that it was undesirable to restrict eligibility for the most senior offices in the Club to such a small proportion of the active membership. This view was strongly supported in the replies to the questionnaire which had been distributed earlier in the year, where 86% of those responding supported this change. The 2007 proposals would have addressed the point by abolishing the distinction between full and affiliate members entirely. However there was a feeling that such a change would appear to weaken the Club's links with the SAC, and this view was reflected in the responses. The Committee therefore proposed to deal with the matter by the simpler course of removing the current restriction in the rules, while retaining the different classes of membership.

The President said that he recognised the importance of ensuring that the President was a full member of the Club during the forthcoming Centenary year and he would ensure that this was the case.

A wide ranging discussion then ensued. A concern was expressed that the name of the club was illogical. A proposal was made that the problem would be solved if all members were required to be members of the Swiss AC. It was explained that affiliate membership was introduced during the 1970's as a response to

falling membership, and that if affiliate membership were now abolished that would entail a significant increase in subscriptions which would only make it harder to attract new members.

Mike Pinney referred to Rule 5(d) (which provides that affiliate members should not vote on any resolution that directly concerns relations with the SAC). The President pointed out that Rule 5(d) provides that the ruling of the Chairman of the meeting as to the entitlement of Affiliate Members to vote on any such resolution shall be conclusive. He had considered the point and concluded that it was in order for Affiliates to vote on this proposal.

Stuart Beare then proposed the rule amendment and Bill Peebles seconded it. A vote was taken and it was carried by 30 for and 9 against.

The work of the BMC:

There was a presentation by Mark Vallance, a past President of the BMC.

Mark said that for clubs with a hut, membership of the BMC was particularly good value. He then highlighted four benefits of membership

1. Liability insurance for Clubs, their officers and members.
2. The work on access that the BMC does. Mark stressed the importance of this.
3. Accident insurance at very competitive rates
Members could buy BMC maps at discounted prices.

Mark then invited questions. The first related to members of the club who were not active on the hill or who lived abroad; could these members be excluded from BMC membership? The answer to this needed clarification so Ed Bramley agreed to write to Dave Turnbull for a definitive answer.

The next question concerned members who belonged to more than one club; it was asked why members had to claim back their second BMC subscription each year. Mark said that the BMC was aware of the problem and had just introduced simplified procedures for reclaiming.

Election of officers and committee:

All the existing office holders and committee were eligible for re-election and all had indicated that they were willing to continue to serve. There being no further

nominations, they were all re-elected.

Hon Treasurer's report and subscription bands for 2009:

James Baldwin as treasurer presented the accounts which were duly adopted. Peter McCulloch was adopted as auditor.

The subscription bands for 2009 were agreed as follows:

Single membership	£20 – 23
Joint membership	£30 – 34
Junior membership	£8 - 10

President's report:

This is reproduced below.

Any other business:

There was no further business.

*Anne Jago
Honorary Secretary
7 March 2008*

Association of British Members of The Swiss Alpine Club Ltd.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
held at the Glenridding Hotel, Patterdale
Saturday 9 February 2008

Present: Directors J.W.S.Dempster (Chairman), A.I.Andrews, J.A.Baldwin, D.Buckley (Treasurer), G. Davies, D.R.Hodge, W.L.Peebles, T.J.Shaw (Secretary), R.B.Winter and about 20 members.

Apologies for absence

None.

Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on Saturday 3 March 2007 and which were circulated in the 2007 ABMSAC Journal were approved without dissent and signed. There were no matters arising.

Hut Rent reviews

The chairman summarised the negotiations leading to the eventual resolution in October 2007 of the 2002 and 2006 rent reviews and agreement on a formula for settling future rent review during the remainder of the lease. He explained the need for the increase in hut fees from January 2008 following settlement of the rent reviews.

Directors' Report and Accounts

In explaining the accounts for the year ended 30 June 2007, the treasurer said turnover from the hut had increased to £13,864 compared with £12,208 in 2006. Administrative expenses had risen from £10,989 to £13,392 because of higher light and heating costs, a bill for professional fees of £905 and a sum set aside for hut roof repairs. There had been an operating profit of £772 compared with £1,219 in 2006. He envisaged the company making a loss during the current financial year as rent back totalling £8,487.50 had been paid following the rent review settlements. Mr Andrews proposed and Mr Wendell Jones seconded acceptance of the accounts that were approved without dissent.

Reappointment of accountants

As there were no other nominations, the accountants, Carpenter Keen LLP, of Richmond, Surrey, were reappointed.

Any other business

There was none.

*T.J.Shaw,
Honorary Secretary
20 February 2008*