

## ABMSAC Centenary Journal 2009

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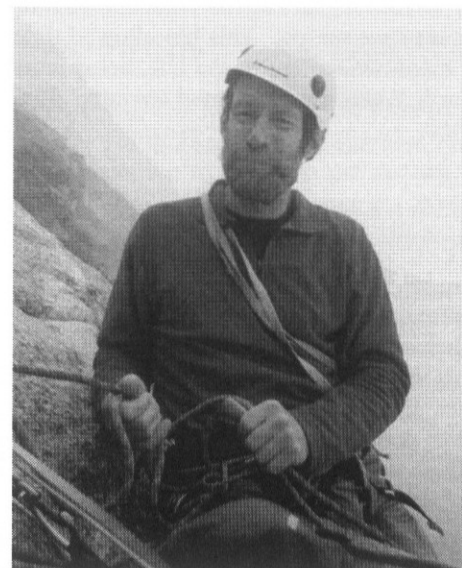
## Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club

### Meets Programme 2009 – 2010

Dates	Meet / Venue	Organiser
<b>2009</b>		
24 April–2 May	Inchnadamph Lodge Hotel, Scotland	Book-Your-Own
12-14 June	Oread Hut, North Wales	Ed Bramley
13–27 June	Pyrenees Meet, Benasque	Jeff Harris
11–26 July	Centenary AlpTrek – Haute Route	Ed Bramley
18 July 1 August	Centenary Alps Meet, Saas Almagell	Alasdair Andrews
25 July–8 August	Centenary Alps Meet, Saas Grund	Mike Pinney
	<i>Joint ABMSAC/AC/CC/FRCC camping meet</i>	
27-28 August	Hut Maintenance, George Starkey Hut	Don Hodge
29 August-12 September	Dolomites Meet, Canazei	Jeff Harris
Early September	Uri Alps, Switzerland	Alasdair Andrews
18-29 September	Centenary Buffet Party, GSH	Mike Pinney
2-4 October	Braich Goch Bunkhouse, Mid Wales	Dick Yorke
9-11 October	Beer Meet, East Devon	James Baldwin
16-18 October	Alps Reunion Meet, GSH	Mike Pinney
14 October	London Joint Lecture – John Hardwick, AC	
11 November	London Joint Lecture – Mike Pinney's 4000m peaks	
9 December	London Joint Lecture – TBA	
<b>2010</b>		
12-26 May	Morocco: High Atlas Trek and Toubkal Climb	Alasdair Andrews

For full details and up to the minute information on Meets, please see the latest edition of the ABMSAC Newsletter.

## The New President



**Mike Pinney**

Mike Pinney first became involved with hill walking through the scouts. During the year between school and university rock climbing was added to the agenda. In 1975, the year the George Starkey Hut was opened, he joined the ABMSAC and the Grindelwald section of the Swiss Alpine Club prior to his first alpine season based at Zinal.

Initially Mike's involvement with the Association was through the use of the hut. However in 1978, plans for the Alps were thrown into disarray when his climbing partner managed to get stranded for the winter at an Argentinean base in Antarctica, the Belgrano. So he attended his first Alpine meet at Zermatt and although conditions were not ideal, made some good friends.

In 1979 Mike joined the committee as an ordinary member, and then a year later took over as Treasurer a post he held for sixteen years. He has subsequently been ABMSAC Ltd. Hut Treasurer, Director, Vice President and is still Hut Booking Secretary. He has been actively involved in the running of the joint Alpine

meets.

Subsequent to joining the Association he has joined The Climbers' Club, the Alpine Club and Yeovil Mountaineering Club. In 2008 Mike completed the Alpine 4000m peaks. In recent years he has tended to concentrate on Alpine rock routes with a shorter summer season. This has allowed time for involvement in ice climbing and ski mountaineering. In the UK, being based in the SW the sea cliffs and crags of North Wales are his normal territory. With eighty Munros, he still has some way to go.

### **Editorial**

*by Richard Winter*

So finally here we are with my final Journal. And what an honour to be able to edit the Centenary Journal as my last effort, I hope that it will prove to be a good one. Editing the Journal is the main job of the Editor's year and is always a matter of brow beating people into agreeing to write contributions and then chasing them to actually do it. Once again I must make a big "Thanks You" to all who have contributed to my seven Journals and I hope that you will continue to support my successor Mike Goodyer, who as a former President should at least know what he has let himself in for.

Once again we have enjoyed a year of varied meets and activities; whatever people may say about our ageing membership we do keep ourselves busy and offer a quite extraordinary range of meets. I hope that this is something that we will continue and, with a new Meets Secretary in Jeff Harris, let's give him our full support. We also have a new President and changes too in the Committee, so a bit of a shake up all round but that's probably no bad thing from time to time.

Not many clubs can say that they are one hundred years old but this year we can. We have already enjoyed an excellent Centenary Dinner in February with some of us battling snow drifts (in Buckinghamshire – honestly) to get to Patterdale and when we got there we had good weather – almost unheard of in recent years. I hope that this sets a new precedent and that we get good snow and ice conditions for all our Annual Dinners too. From this we move on to the overseas based celebrations and it looks as though they will all be well supported.

Despite getting a bit long in the tooth I think the Club is in fine fettle and I raise my hat to the last hundred years and look forward to the future. Now its "over to you" Mike!

### **Eiger Adventures**

*by John Edwards*

**"Because it is there" - George Leigh Mallory.**

Having enjoyed the privilege of climbing the North Face of the Grandes Jorasses (Croix Spur Direct) and the North Face of the Matterhorn (Schmid route), I have cherished a longstanding ambition to complete the famous Trilogy by climbing the North Face of the Eiger – my previous two attempts having ended in retreat in the face of violent objections from the mountain! Moreover, having made the first, and to date, only recorded ascent of "The Eiger of Africa", the 1200m precipitous East Face of Mawenzi, (see The Alpine Journal 2007) I had a strong desire to be able to compare these two iconic routes situated on separate Continents.

Conscious of the passing years, I decided 2008 would be a good year for three main reasons. Firstly, our eldest son and my regular climbing partner, Simon, was available and was enthusiastically up for it; secondly it would be the seventieth anniversary of the historic first ascent and thirdly it would be an appropriate early tribute to mark the Centenary of the ABMSAC by carrying the Association's Shield to the summit.

On arrival at Grindelwald we decided that the Schwarzhorn would provide an interesting acclimatisation climb on Day 1. However we were extremely disappointed on arrival at the mountain to find that the one worthwhile route, the Wildgerst Ridge had been converted to a Klettersteig, bedecked with intrusive metalwork which was very difficult to avoid. We climbed it anyway and traversed to the Gernsburg with our return down the valley to Grindelwald being wonderfully enriched by the company of numerous Chamois and Marmots.

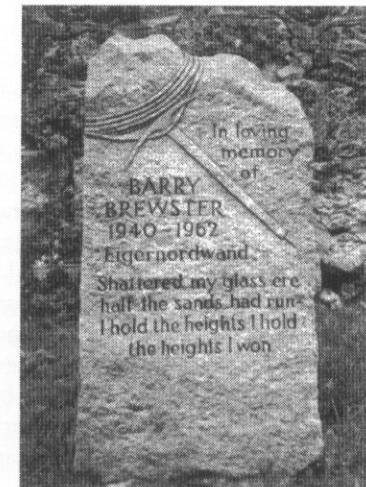
Having noted a surprisingly high quantity of snow on the Schwarzhorn and nearby peaks we visited the Guides Bureau for a weather forecast. The prognosis was cautionary for the next few days, and when we mentioned our intentions on the Eigerwand we were advised "better to come back in October!" So deciding it was time to look for ourselves, we took the train to the Eigergletscher Station to scramble up the Eiger West Flank and get some good views across the North Face. This proved both enjoyable and encouraging with the Face appearing sufficiently quiet and well behaved to strengthen our resolve. So the next imperative was to hone our climbing skills on some challenging routes. Over the

next few days, using some Hut bases, we enjoyed some wonderful climbing, first on the Mettenberg (SW Flank), traversing to the Klein Schreckhorn via the Ankenballi and down the Nassi Glacier to the Schreckhorn Hut. Next the Schreckhorn (Terror Peak!) which in my experience is the hardest of the sixty one Alpine 4000ers (if you accept the North Face of the Aiguille Blanche as being reasonably straightforward). We chose the one route I hadn't yet climbed, the South Pillar (D+,V), and carrying Bivvi gear for a traverse to the Lauteraarhorn and return to the valley via the Strahleggpass. This was a splendid outing and although surprising to find some in-situ protection, the Pillar provided us with some excellent and exposed rock climbing with the 30m crux pitch proving particularly challenging. From the summit of the Schreckhorn a classic traverse of the gendarme studded NW Ridge of the Lauteraarhorn – which includes two tops above 4000m – brought us to the summit of the Lauteraarhorn where we enjoyed a comfortable Bivvi, with scenic views and plenty of snow for cooking. This was followed next morning by an interesting ridge to the Strahleggpass, with a brief diversion to pop up to the top of the Strahlegghorn thus down the valley to Grindelwald with a pause for beer at the Schreckhorn Hut. Our next target was the Wetterhorn (known locally as the Hasli Jungfrau) via the Mittelhorn (marginally higher than the Wetterhorn), then a traverse to the Scheidegg Wetterhorn and hopefully a descent SW to the valley. Armed with Bivvi gear we set out from our camp above the Gleckstein Hut (saving Hut fees!) and soloed up to the Wettersattel in about three hours and then along a lovely mixed ridge to the summit of the Mittelhorn in time for lunch. Returning to the Wettersattel we were confronted initially by a broad snow ridge which was heavily corniced and soon narrowed and steepened, so rope on and a cautious ascent saw us on top of the Wetterhorn within the hour. The traverse route to the Scheidegg Wetterhorn was a delightfully exposed ridge descending about 350m and demanding the respect of a rope and stance belays. On arrival at the top we inspected the possible descent routes towards the Grosse Scheidegg pass and found ourselves confronted by an impressively steep limestone wall about 1300m high with no easy options. After some debate we set up the first abseil towards the SW, then enjoying panoramic views, in good weather and with sufficient food, we decided to Bivvi in an ideal spot and take the Wall on in the morning. After a comfortable night we embarked on a precarious descent and with a combination of abseils and down-climbing reached the foot of the Wall in four hours. Thence on to the Hotel Wetterhorn to enjoy an excellent lunch and reflect on a couple of days interesting and worthwhile climbing.

Throughout the trip our eyes had been drawn towards the Fiescherhorn, surely one of the most picturesque snow peaks in the entire Alps, and one Simon hadn't climbed. Before setting foot on the Eiger we decided to visit the Fiescherhorn and

duly invested in two return rail tickets to the Jungfrauoch. Armed with Bivvi gear we set off over the Obers Monchsjoeh and thence the Ewigschneefeld, avoiding crevasses, eastward to the NW Ridge. On reaching the Ridge we enjoyed an interesting mixed climb with just one steep exposed pitch to see us on the summit in four hours. After refreshments we traversed the scenic Ridge to the Hinter – Fiescherhorn and realising we were well ahead of time decided to traverse the spectacular looking Ridge to the Klein and Gross Grunhorn. This proved an interesting and worthwhile trip requiring caution on the heavily corniced, narrow Ridge and on arrival at the Klein we left our Bivvi gear, proceeding to the Gross and returned to the Klein for a comfortable Bivvi. Next morning we descended West to the Ewigschneefeld and on arrival at the Obers Monchsjoeh, found we had plenty of time to spare before the last train down to the valley so decided to climb the Trugberg, which is only marginally below the 4000m mark and displayed a very attractive looking NW Ridge. Concealing all our non-essential gear near the foot of the Ridge we soon found ourselves climbing a superbly exposed narrow Ridge on corniced snow for about 300m altitude gain, then a steep rock wall at about D+ to gain the summit. Well pleased with this enjoyable diversion we hurried down and had time for a beer before catching the train down to Grindelwald.

It was now time to get to grips with the Eiger. First I made my usual visit to the local Church Cemetery, this one in Grindelwand, to pay my respects to fallen climbers. I was particularly sad to find the grave of Barry Brewster who died at the tender age of twenty two, on the North Wall in 1962 a lovely lad who I had met in Snowdonia in 1961.



Then after shopping in Grindelwald for some additional food supplies we transported heavy sacks to Alpigen and pitched our tent in the meadow beneath the North Wall. First we decided to climb the Mittellegi Ridge so we caught an early train and jumped out at the Eismeer station to exit through the window (a weird sensation) and drop down to the Kallifirn terrace where we took the first opportunity to make a long rising traverse along the side of the Ridge and were lucky enough to exit just above the Mittellegi Hut. The Hut was closed so we pressed straight on up the Ridge making good time but finding a series of fixed ropes intrusive and unnecessary but having been fixed there by that great body of men – the Grindelwald Guides – who was I to complain? Our main purpose in climbing the Ridge was to try to get more views across the North Face and in particular to identify the position of the Exit Cracks where they form the junction with the North-East Face. Accordingly Simon secured me down the Ridge and I was able, with a good degree of certainty, to identify the exit point. Well satisfied we continued to the summit, down the West Flank and back to our tent, dumped our gear and walked to the nearby Alpigen restaurant for a few beers and an excellent supper.

With time and weather conditions still on our side we thought “what about the Lauper Route?” At TD sup, the Guide Book called it “A masterpiece of traditional climbing in the free style, mainly on ice, and one of the finest routes of its class in the Alps.” Heinrich Harrer wrote “The Lauper Route certainly offers a training climb on the way to the North Face, but only for the best trained and the most accomplished of climbers”. Although we did not quite see ourselves in this light we decided to go for it and making a pre-dawn start made good progress over the lower slabby shelves to the Wandfluhe by daybreak. The climbing standard increased and route finding was proving a bit of a lottery so we just followed our instincts and made upward progress over a series of limestone tiers, scree gully’s, snow bands, couloirs, chimneys and rock bands until we eventually reached a balcony on the North rib which gave us excellent views across the Eigerwand. Here we had a brew and decided we were well over halfway up the route. Looking over to our left towards the Mittellegi Hut we spotted a coloured object on a snow shelf a hundred feet or so away from us. Curious, we made a precarious traverse to find a brand new Portaledge, empty and apparently abandoned – we were sorely tempted, particularly as I had priced one specially for this trip but on being told in our local Climbing Shop that it would cost £250, had baulked. Anyway we did the decent thing and left it where it was! Continuing, the climb became increasingly more challenging on difficult ice and rock wall barriers until we came to what we found to be the crux – an ice-filled overhanging crack which Simon finally managed to climb and I followed removing the gear en-route. This brought us to a snow rib which led to the

summit ridge and to the top in about fifteen minutes. With just sufficient light left we raced down the West Flank and arrived back at our tent just as darkness fell. We dined and reflected on a splendid adventure. The only downside was that I had managed to kick the two front points off one of my crampons, however all was not lost for our North Face endeavour as John Brooks had kindly handed down his crampons to me a few months earlier and I had brought them out as back-up!

### **The North Face**

So the time had come for our big adventure. We had a simple plan – climb to the Swallows Nest on Day One and bivvi, then complete the climb on Day Two. Having organised and packed our gear we walked down to the Alpigen Restaurant for a good lunch and a couple of beers then collected our sacks and set off to the foot of the Face. Thanks to the First Pillar there is no difficulty in identifying the start of the Heckmair Route and after negotiating the wide Bergschrund we soloed up the wet slabs until we came to a system of chimneys and cracks where we roped up and embarked on a few hundred feet of what I call “dangerous scrambling” with just two pitches of around 5m where we gave our etriers an airing. Confirmation that we were on route came on arrival at the “Wet Cave Bivouac” where I had spent a night some years earlier and where some kind soul had left a rope dangling down the vertical wall above it. Traversing right we soon came to the unmistakable pillar marking the start of the ‘Difficult Crack’. It was my lead, so off-loading my heavy sack and selecting a rack of pitons I set off up this famous pitch (80ft, grade V) only to find four pegs in-situ and I was up in ten minutes, hauled my sack and Simon followed even quicker. Next came a narrow couloir and an ascending traverse to the left brought us to the platform at the start of the “Hinterstoisser Traverse” where we found a rope in position to make the 130ft traverse. On inspection it appeared rather frayed in places so we fixed our own, using the existing pegs where we could reach them, traversed across to the stance at the far end and recovered our rope. We were confident in pulling our rope in because we had already decided that in the event of an enforced retreat we would use the Whillans abseil point which would get us down on the right side of the Hinterstoisser. From the stance we climbed the 60ft vertical crack to the “Swallows Nest” where, on arrival, we disturbed two Choughs’ who flew off noisily – happily they were roosting, not nesting, so we did not feel too guilty. Although we had about three hours of daylight left we decided to stick to our original plan and bivvi at the Swallows Nest and make an early morning start. The bivouac was comfortable with plenty of snow nearby for cooking, and happily no yellow stains for flavour! As we dined we could not help but think about Andreas Hinterstoisser and his friends and the tragedy that befell them at this very spot, particularly the courageous fighting spirit and bravery of

Toni Kurz as he hung alone on his rope not many feet below us, only to eventually lose his life. We got to sleep early and were awakened at 4.0am by our alarm, a good breakfast and were on the "First Icefield" with head torches by 5.0am, with crampons gripping well on the fifty five degree slope. Leading through, we were quickly at the foot of the 40ft perpendicular wall separating the First and Second Icefields. The "Ice Hose", with insufficient ice, was not an option so we chose a line well to the left and using the insurance of two pegs Simon was soon up and I removed the pegs as I followed what we thought was about a grade IV pitch. Next, following our pre-arranged plan, we climbed directly up to the rocks at the top of the "Second Icefield" and by using the rift between the rock and ice made very fast progress across the Icefield towards the "Flatiron". Here the climbing became more serious as we tackled the rocks to gain the crest of the "Flatiron". The first obstacle was a tricky overhang climbed with the assistance of an in-situ ring piton, then upwards and trending left, three easy rope lengths with just one awkward overhang, brought us to the crest of the "Flatiron". Here we encountered our one drama of the climb – the mountain had been very quiet and friendly all day but now it decided to treat us to a volley of stonefall and in shouting a warning to Simon I opened my mouth and allowed my pipe to fall, I watched it bounce twice before it disappeared into the abyss below! Not to worry – there was a spare in my sack! One further pitch took us up to the "Death Bivouac", nicely situated under an overhanging rock so we stopped for a brew and a snack and admired the views. Next move was to traverse across the "Third Icefield" and although it is the smallest icefield it is also the steepest and composed of black ice, it demanded caution. We crossed safely to a projecting rock buttress and thus to the foot of the "Ramp". Here, in anticipation of some 600ft or so of high grade rock-climbing, and noting that although wet in places, there was very little snow, we removed our crampons and sorted a decent rack each, including Birdbeaks and Skyhooks. Leading through, we enjoyed five pitches of around grade IV or V climbing until we reached a very steep, wet chimney – the "Waterfall Chimney" – this was testing but with the help of some aid we were both up, in about ten minutes, to a good stance at the top. A short traverse to the left brought us to an edge and 40ft up at around grade V to another stance and the foot of an ice gully. Crampons back on and up the gully expecting to encounter the famous "Ice-bulge", we did, but there was no ice on it(!), just smooth rock which we turned on the left with the help of an in-situ piton and arrived at the "Ramp Icefield" which we climbed straight up at about fifty five degrees for about 170ft until we came to a platform on the right which we guessed was the start of the "Brittle Ledge". Traversing right we soon came to the foot of a near-vertical crack, the "Brittle Crack", about 130ft high and presenting the only available route to our next target – the "Traverse of the Gods". The crack proved to be a supreme challenge, we thought about grade V, very exposed, a lot

of bad rock, some of which came away, and difficult to get any protection in, we were relieved to get to the top, haul the sacks up and find ourselves at the start of the "Traverse of the Gods". Here a rising traverse to the right, with a sensational sense of exposure, quickly got us to the start of the "Spider". It was steeper than I had expected and keeping close to the bulge in the middle, we put in plenty of protection and exercised due caution. It was while climbing the final pitch that I got an uncannily strong impression that I was climbing the final pitches on Ama Dablam, twenty two years earlier! My lead at the top, and I took the first exit couloir to the left only to find I was in a complete cul-de-sac. I shouted down "Simon there is no way I can get out up here" The reply came "Yes Dad, that's because you're climbing the wrong couloir!" So I had to sacrifice one of our precious ice-screws (we still finished 2-1 up on the day) and descend to climb the second couloir. One rope length led me to the foot of a 50ft concave shaped black rock where happily it was Simon's lead. He climbed it, probably grade V; with the use of one piton and following I was able to remove two pitons! After this pitch the slope of the couloir eased off and trending right for two pitches we were happy to confirm we were on the right route by arriving at the well known "White Quartz Crack". This looked difficult; around 130ft high with an overhang at the top – it turned out to be very enjoyable and we climbed it, with aid and sack hauling in about half an hour. At the top we traversed left over smooth slabs to a shallow couloir which we ascended for a short distance in our search for the next landmark – the "Pulpit Rock". Happily we spotted it and reached it with a rising traverse to the left. Here we knew the Guide Book recommended a diagonal abseil to the left to gain a ledge below a steep couloir. We set up the abseil and I caused Simon great amusement by returning twice to the take-off point before managing to secure a footing on the target ledge. On safe arrival we climbed the steep, wet couloir for four rope-lengths which brought us to a low-relief ridge. Here the rock, although downward-stratified was sound and free of ice and we enjoyed four pitches of almost Welsh style rock climbing to emerge joyfully on the ridge which forms the junction with the North East Face – at exactly the point we had identified on our diversion when climbing the Mittellegi Ridge. Crampons back on to climb the firm snow up to the Mittellegi Ridge and on to the summit in fifteen minutes. After a warm handshake and feeling just as happy as we had when standing together on the summit of a virgin Himalayan Peak twenty five years earlier, we offered my usual prayer of thanksgiving on safe completion of a major route, then out with the camera and ABMSAC Shield for a few photographs. Next, out came the miniature "Cymru" rugby ball which I had carried to photograph to celebrate Wales Grand-Slam victory earlier in the year. With a couple of celebratory nips from our hip flask we settled down for some nourishment, enjoying the stupendous views and listening to Bryn Terfel singing "My Little Welsh Home in the Mountains" on Simon's iPod. Suitably sated, we

rather reluctantly packed our gear and set off down the West Flank, back to our tent, tidied up a bit and down to the Alpiglen Restaurant for beer and supper.

### Postscript

Whilst dining and reflecting on a wonderful North Face climb and how kind the mountain had been, it occurred to us that whilst I had been privileged in completing the Trilogy we had not even set foot on the Monch or Jungfrau to complete the "Most famous mountain trinity in the world" (Lunn). With just one full day remaining for us we realised we could not both complete the remaining two mountains but each of us could climb one, which would be the next best thing. We decided that a traverse of the mountains would be the most interesting, so accordingly we put the two names in a hat, shook them up and I was relieved when Simon drew the Jungfrau! This meant he had to solo the North-East Ridge at D with pitches of IV and descend the normal route via the Rottalsattel and back to the Jungfraujoch. In comparison my trip up the Monch would be technically easier and quicker – up the South-East Ridge to the summit, then down the South-West Ridge, none of it much harder than PD. Next morning we invested some of our dwindling supply of Swiss Francs in two return rail tickets to the Jungfraujoch and caught the first train up. On arrival, in good weather conditions, we parted company at the exit gallery, Simon heading for the snow peaklet of the Mathildenspitz at the start of the Jungfrau North-East Ridge and me across to the Ober Monchjoch for the South-East Ridge of the Monch. A leisurely but enjoyable scramble up the ridge, mostly snow with some rock, saw me to the top of the Monch in three hours and after a drink and a snack I trained my binoculars on the North-East Ridge of the Jungfrau to see if I could spot Simon. I was amazed to see him already beyond the Wengern Jungfrau tackling the narrow snow crest, only about 250ft from the summit of the Jungfrau – he would be down before me at this rate! Without further delay I set off down the South-West Ridge and encountered much more rock than on the ascent with some steeper sections requiring due care and attention. It took me almost two hours to descend and I set off across the Jungfraufirn to meet Simon on his descent. I had not gone far before I saw him racing down towards me from the Rottalsattel. With time to spare before the last train we indulged ourselves with a couple of beers whilst Simon regaled me with an account of his ascent of the North-East Ridge which he rated highly. Then back down on the train, a walk to our tent where we packed all our gear and walked down to Grindelwald arriving in time for a late supper. Next day we said farewell to the Bernese Alps and set off for home. This had been my 30<sup>th</sup> Alpine Season and undoubtedly the most fulfilling and enjoyable. On return home I hung my ABMSAC Shield in its position on my study wall from whence it had come!

## A Short History of The Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club

by James Bogle

In June 1909 a meeting was held of some London members of the Swiss Alpine Club with the hope of forming a London Section of the Club. The leading light was James A.B. Bruce. He had earlier been in touch with Professor F.F. Roget, a Geneva resident and a member of the Geneva Section of the SAC (as was Bruce) who was in close contact with the SAC Central Committee. He encouraged Bruce to go forward with a London meeting. But the hope of forming a London Section was thwarted as the SAC statutes at that time only allowed sections within the boundaries of Switzerland. The President of the SAC suggested the formation of a local committee affiliated to an existing section. The proposal of a local committee, a sub-section, affiliated to the Geneva Section met with the approval of the President that section. Bruce began recruiting. However the President of the SAC as a whole, Colonel Repond, then had second thoughts, pointing out that this might lead to the weakness of other sections and bad feeling. The British members ought not to join one section en masse and the Central Committee should determine the maximum. It was next suggested that a Union of all members of the SAC in Britain should be formed. It was eventually decided that there should be a British Association (not a section) and this met with satisfaction on the part of the Swiss. In due course the suggestion of a local committee attached to the Geneva Section was quietly dropped. A meeting was called on 8th December 1909 at the Holborn Restaurant to form the Association, the President of the SAC having given the idea a warm welcome. Professor Roget represented the Geneva Section of the SAC and was the delegate of the Central Committee. Some 130 members of the SAC were present, including Edward Whympers, an honorary member. Clinton Dent was appointed President; though not Bruce's first choice, he was a good one. He was widely respected professionally as Chief Surgeon to the Metropolitan Police and every bit as much as a mountaineer with notable climbs in the Alps and the Caucasus to his credit. He was a former President of the Alpine Club and an honorary member of the SAC. He edited the Badminton volume on *Mountaineering*. It was a sadness that he was only to serve as President for less than three years before his fatal illness at the age of 62. Bruce was elected secretary. He deserves to be regarded as the founder of the Association for his vision, his persistence, his diplomacy, his persuasiveness and his energy. Bruce took to climbing early in life and kept it up regularly until the 1914-1918 war. After that, though he did not climb anything but minor peaks, he still continued his annual visits to Switzerland. He loved the Alps and was always ready to encourage younger climbers. He continued in office for many years first as Secretary, then as Treasurer and latterly as Vice

President.

The Association's first objects were to be:

- (a) To encourage British Alpinists to support the Swiss Alpine Club in all its work, by becoming members of a section of that body;
- (b) To collect funds and present to the SAC a club hut, and for such purposes as the Association might from time to time determine;
- (c) To form a body able to present a collective opinion to the SAC on any question of Alpine interest;
- (d) To promote among British members the sociability which was so conspicuous a feature of the Swiss sections, but from which they were necessarily debarred by living at a distance from the headquarters of their sections.

The first object had already been marked with success, as Bruce had recruited no less than 70 climbers to the SAC Geneva section. Of course many more were to follow. The second object was Bruce's own idea and was soon to result in a remarkable achievement. The third object aroused some misgivings; would the Central Committee of the SAC welcome expressions of opinion from a foreign body? In the event it has been little used, and then only to support the SAC in such matters as opposing undesirable developments in the mountains. The fourth object has been one of the most attractive aspects of the Association; it was instantly put into practice on that occasion over an eleven course dinner! An omission, though perhaps taken for granted, was to encourage climbing in the Alps; that has been made good in practice.

The young Association's energies were put to fund raising for a hut. By May 1911 the target was reached. A number of sites were suggested and it was decided to erect a hut on the Kleine Allalinhorn near Saas Fee. Work went forward on construction and the opening ceremony was held on 17th August 1912. It was a perfect day of bright sunshine with a pleasant breeze. No one had been allowed to stay in the hut, so a long procession of over 200 guests, of whom nearly 100 were British, set out at 6 a.m. to be greeted on arrival by a salvo from a cannon. After lunch the formal opening took place. The keys were handed over to a representative of the Central Committee and it was announced that the Committee had decided to call the hut the Britannia Hut in recognition of the Association's gift. The hut consisted of a living room and dining room with stove and washing up facilities, a sleeping room for the hut warden and another for the guides. Upstairs there were several sleeping rooms, a ladies room; a washroom with water laid on and a sitting room with books, writing materials and games. It was reckoned the soundest built and best-equipped hut in the Alps. Regular dinners and meetings for lantern slides, to which ladies might be invited, were held in

London; a Club Room was arranged attached to a restaurant and in due course a library was formed. But the activities of the Association were much curtailed during the years of the First World War.

After the war the former pattern of activity was resumed with an annual formal dinner in November or December, a half yearly informal dinner in June and regular informal dinners on the fourth Wednesday of each month, followed by a slide show. Ladies nights were increased from two a year to three. George Leigh Mallory, a member, had joined the 1921 reconnaissance expedition to Everest and was chosen for the 1922 expedition led by General Charles Bruce, another member; Mallory reached 27,000 ft. Bruce, Mallory and Noel Odell, also a member, all took part in the 1924 Everest Expedition, in which Mallory and Andrew Irvine came close to reaching the summit, if they did not actually do so. They were lost on the mountain, Odell being the last person to see them alive. The committee of the Association sent Odell a telegram of congratulation on his climbing achievement. In 1927 the Geneva Section, which administered the Britannia hut, wished to make a substantial enlargement to it as well as other major works and wrote to the Association to that effect. The hut had become very popular and was often overcrowded. The proposals were:

- (1) enlargement;
- (2) the new part to be stone wood-lined for warmth;
- (3) modification of the old hut enlarging the dining room giving 86 places in the summer and 44 in the winter.

The Central Committee made a grant and at first the committee of the Association hoped to raise the balance of the money needed but it proved too heavy, and in the event rather over half of the costs were raised. At the formal re-opening in August 1929 the Association was represented by General Bruce. 1929 also saw the achievement, very remarkable for its time, of the climbing of all the Alpine four thousanders by a member, Eustace Thomas. An important development was an Easter meet held at Dolgellau in 1931. This was the first climbing meet that the Association had ever arranged. The Dolgellau meet included the ascent of Cader Idris and 'the more venturesome spirits attacked the Milestone Buttress on Tryfan'. This does not suggest that the standard of climbing was very high! In subsequent years the venues were in Wales, the Lake District and Scotland. The Depression hit the Association hard; 61 members did not renew. It was difficult to get to Switzerland and those who did found the pound greatly depressed in value against the franc. Swiss guides and hoteliers had been used to the British being well off patrons, and still expected them to be; now, however they were not. Two members did manage to go, H.B. Thompson and Frank Smythe. They made a hard new traverse of the Bietschhorn. Two members were included in the 1933 Everest Expedition, Hugh Rutledge, who led it and Frank Smythe who



climbed as high as any member of the party. But they were thwarted by the weather. At home the committee became concerned at the number of accidents, especially fatal accidents, to climbers. It was resolved to publish a pocket book, under the title *The Technique of Alpine Mountaineering*, which was sent free to all members. Though fairly elementary it was sound and useful. Noel Odell, a very long standing member, climbed the highest mountain yet, Nanda Devi, 25645 ft., with H.W. Tilman in 1937. But the Second World War was soon to curtail the Association's activities even more sharply than the first. Evening meetings became impossible and some lunches were held instead. By 1943 the number of members at the lunch and Annual General Meeting was down to 10. It was possible to continue the Easter meets.

After the war the regular pattern of meetings was resumed on the 4th Wednesday of the month, excepting July August and December, with informal dinners after. In 1947 a momentous event in the Association's history was the first Alpine meet, at Arolla. 21 members enjoyed a fortnight of perfect weather. Several good ascents were made. The committee decided that guests, including ladies, would be welcome at the annual dinner in November. The stocks of the Association's climbing manual, *The Technique of Alpine Mountaineering*, were exhausted and it was decided to publish a translation of a more recent SAC manual, which appeared in May 1950 under the title *Mountaineering Handbook*. It was considerably longer and fuller than the previous publication and formed a useful introductory climbing manual. Alpine meets were held in 1948 and 1949. By the 1950's the Association was beginning to become much less a social and dining club for climbers and much more an active climbing club. The membership reached 758. The Year Book for 1953 commemorated the historic first climb of Everest: 'We are proud to offer our heartfelt congratulations to our member, Sir John Hunt, and his gallant team on their splendid achievement'. Association members had played a distinguished part in the expeditions in the years up to and including 1953. In 1957 a tragic accident occurred on the Gross Venediger. A Sapper officer, Michael Benner, a member of the Association, took a party of soldiers on to the mountain. One of them slipped. Benner instantly tried to hold him but the snow was too soft and they fell to their deaths. Benner was posthumously awarded the George Cross.

Events for the Jubilee continued throughout 1959 culminating in an August meet at Saas Fee. It was an excellent season for climbing and a formal dinner was held in the village. A pewter platter commemorating the jubilee was presented by officers of the Swiss Alpine Club to the President of the Association, George Starkey. In its turn the Association made a gift for furnishing one of the dormitories of the Britannia Hut. The fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the

hut was commemorated in 1962. Again a present was made, this time for furnishings for the common room. In 1963 J.O. Talbot, a member who regularly put up routes on Alpine rock to a very high standard, successfully climbed the North Face of the Eiger. He reckoned it 'a magnificent climb'. Dougal Haston, also a member, made several ascents in the Dolomites including three British first ascents. With Rusty Baillie he then climbed the north face of the Aiguille du Plan and the north face of the Eiger. These men were in the front rank of climbers in their time. Alpine meets had fallen into a pattern of being held every other year, but in 1964 the pattern was changed to every year. The Association broadened its activities in the British Isles. In 1969 weekend meets were proposed for Edale in February; for Betws y Coed in April; for the three Peaks in May; for North Wales in July; and for Langdale in October. Next year the programme widened to include Scotland with an Easter meet at Killin. The first Northern Dinner was held in February 1970. In the same year discussions began about the possibility of an Association hut in the Lake District. The membership were sounded both with regard to the idea in general and with regard to finance. Of 200 replies 90% were in favour. The first site considered was lost, but the idea of a hut was clearly one to be taken up if possible.

The outstanding climb of the year was made by two Army officer members, Henry Day and Gerry Owens, who climbed Annapurna successfully by a perilous route. In London a cheese and wine party replaced one of the informal dinners and was judged a very welcome innovation. The Swiss National Tourist Office generously contributed both cheese and wine. In 1972 the Carlisle Diocesan Board of Finance suggested the Parish Rooms in Patterdale as a climbing hut. An architect, Alec Wells, was appointed and planning permission sought. By September outline planning permission had been granted. Negotiations continued and by March 1974 the architect's plans were ready showing a large common room, a drying room, a kitchen and male and female toilets on the ground floor with male and female sleeping areas upstairs. An appeal for the hut had raised £4,246 including a very generous gift of £1,000 from Maurice Bennett. In addition the Central Committee generously made a contribution of the order of £2,500. Nevertheless this still left no financial latitude and a proposal from the Tuesday Climbing Club to share the hut was warmly welcomed. They contributed about £1,500. A limited liability company was set up for the management of the financial affairs of the hut and a 28 year lease was negotiated with the Church Commissioners. On 4th October 1975 the hut was formally opened by the Bishop of Leicester. It was named 'The George Starkey Hut' to commemorate a much revered member who had been tireless in his activities for the Association over many years. Also in 1975 a new category of membership was introduced, affiliate. Applicants should:

- (a) be men or women over the age of 18;
- (b) have a genuine love of the hills;
- (c) be proposed by an ordinary member of the Association and seconded by an ordinary or an associate member;
- (d) attend at least one climbing meet of the Association before election;
- (e) be approved by the Committee.

This allowed for those to join the Association who did not have membership of the SAC and included women as well as men. This was a very worthwhile reform. This summer saw the first chalet based meet, at Saas Fee; it was the first of very many, greatly enjoyed, led by Harry Archer supported by Valda Archer who undertook the catering.

The first year of the hut was a greater success, both in numbers and finance than had been anticipated. The Association Meets Programme for 1978 showed no fewer than 18 meets, 13 at Patterdale and five at other locations in the U.K. (only one in Scotland). This is a measure of the extent to which the Association had become a climbing club in Britain, as well as in the Alps, with a policy of having the Patterdale hut as its base. In the Alps there was a combined hotel and camping meet, the latter a very welcome innovation. The Swiss Women's Alpine Club merged with the all male Swiss Alpine Club so that women were eligible as ordinary members of the SAC and thus of the Association. 1981 saw the completion of the climbing of all the Alpine four thousanders by Will McLewin, the first British climber to have done so since Eustace Thomas in 1929. McLewin's climbs formed the basis of an excellent book - *In Monte Viso's Horizon*. The 75th Anniversary of the Association was celebrated in grand style from 21st-26th August 1984 - no fewer than 126 members came to Saas Fee to celebrate. The first event was a service at the English Church at Zermatt. The energetic climbed to the Britannia hut the evening before, spent the night at the hut and after a 4.00 a.m. start crossed the Allalin Pass to reach Zermatt in time for the service. The less energetic were transported from Saas Fee to Zermatt by special bus and train. On the Friday of the week a very large party donned 1909 climbing clothes to assemble at the Britannia Hut for the night. There was much singing and music. The weather was not very favourable so that only small numbers completed the next part of the programme, the climbing of the Allalinhorn in the early morning. The main celebration took place at the hut on the Saturday with a Mass said by the Vicar General of Sion when the Bishop of St Alban's preached. A picture of the Lake District was given to the President of the Geneva Section of the SAC, the picture to be hung in the hut. The celebrations were rounded off on the Sunday with a banquet at Saas Fee. In the autumn there was a historical exhibition of pictures, books and documents at the Alpine Club which the Swiss Ambassador, M. Pictet, opened. The books included early

travellers in Switzerland, natural history, dragons, guidebooks, books with coloured plates, literary associations, children's books and Association journals. The paintings and drawings included works by Ruskin and Whymper among others. There were *fuheerbucher* of several guides. There were some documents including a vivid note from Whymper on his descent from the Matterhorn asking for help in searching for the dead.

Since 1985 the activities of the Association have gradually fallen into a regular pattern. Outdoor meets in Britain have included winter meets in Scotland. Regularly there has been a meet at Glenridding, on Ullswater, at the beginning of February. Since 1997 this has been combined with the Annual General Meeting and the Annual Dinner. Attendances at London meetings, including the Annual General Meeting had been declining markedly while the Northern Dinner remained popular. There has generally been a maintenance meet at the hut at Easter and a meet at Rhyd Ddu in North Wales in the late spring. The season has been rounded off with an Alpine Reunion Meet at the George Starkey Hut in the autumn. For some years there were also pleasant walks for Southern members in the countryside near London. Alpine meets have been held every year, with one exception. There are members who make serious and strenuous climbs. In 1989 Paul Mackrill made the first continuous traverse of the Swiss 4000m peaks, every peak from Piz Bernina to the Grand Combin, travelling entirely on foot, a remarkable achievement. In 1991 the first official Association Himalayan trek took place with the successful climbing of Randung Go. By 1997 the Britannia Hut again needed updating. £10,000 was raised in Britain for this work largely through the efforts of Peter Ledeboer. He, together with Brooke Midgley as President was present at the reopening of the hut in June 1997. By 2007 eleven Britons had climbed all the 4000 m peaks, of whom seven were members of the ABMSAC - Eustace Thomas (1929), Will McLewin (1981), Les Swindin (1985), Peter Fleming (1986), John Mercer (1990), David Penlington (1997), and Mike Pinney (2007).

The Centenary finds the Association a club for active climbers and hill walkers with a wide range of standards from serious and demanding Alpine routes to easy walking. There is an attractive year round programme of meets both in Britain and the Alps and groups have ventured to the Himalayas. There are fully illustrated mountaineering lectures in London and there is a well produced Journal. The Association's hut in Patterdale is much used both by members and other groups. The Association is much prized by the membership.

*A fuller account of the history of the Association, also by James Bogle, can be obtained from the Association Editor, Richard Winter.*

## The History of the Britannia Hut

by Pamela Harris

The Britannia Hut stands at 3030m between the Klein Allalin and the Hinter Allalin above Saas Fee. It is an imposing four-storey stone building with 134 sleeping places, owned by the Geneva Section of the Swiss Alpine Club. Now easily accessible with the upper station of the Felskinn cable car only 45 minutes away, it is a jumping off point for the ascent of several 4000m peaks, notably the Allalinhorn, the Alphubel, the Rimpfischhorn and the Strahlhorn.

The history of the hut is inextricably linked to the history of the ABMSAC for it is thanks to the generosity of the Association, and in particular to the hard work of one man, James Bruce, that the hut was built. When the ABMSAC was founded in 1909, the two main objectives were to encourage British alpinists to support the SAC by becoming members, and to collect funds to present a hut to the SAC as a token of gratitude for the hospitality that British climbers had received in Switzerland. The gift of a hut was Bruce's idea, and he was indefatigable in promoting the fund-raising. By 1911 even more than the original target of £500 had been raised, and the final choice from among the sites proposed was agreed on by the SAC and ABMSAC committees. The four communes of the Saastal were persuaded to donate the land on which it was to be built, and the architect's plans were approved. The task of overseeing the building was entrusted to the Geneva Section which had been instrumental in assisting the formation of the ABMSAC and to which many ABMSAC members belonged.

The estimated cost of 20,000 sfr, in those days £800, was raised by January 1912, and the hut was ordered. It seems that the Geneva Section had a low opinion of the builders in the Valais for the prefabricated parts were prepared in Geneva then delivered to Visp in the form of 35 to 40 kg loads, 500 in total. The original intention was to transport these loads to the site by sledge, but the lack of snow that winter meant that they had to be carried up later on the backs of porters. In the end almost one third of the total cost of the hut was spent on the transport of materials as only the stone foundation was prepared by local contractors. In early summer a team of builders from Geneva arrived to erect the hut, and by 27<sup>th</sup> July it was standing and the interior ready to be fitted out. It was 9.40m long, 5.5m wide, and 8m high with two floors: on the ground floor were a kitchen/dining-room and sleeping rooms for the hut warden and 10 guides; upstairs were two dormitories for 16 men, a separate dormitory for 8 ladies, a sitting-room, and a wash-room with water supply, a rare luxury in those days.



21. CABANE BRITANNIA - BRITANNIA-HUTTE

*Britannia Hut 1912*

At the inauguration on 17<sup>th</sup> August that year the hut was formally named the Britannia Hut in recognition of the gift by the British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club, 'the club with the long name' as the Swiss called it. Accompanied by guides and led by the daughter of one of the members carrying the Association banner, a large group of 200 members and guests left Saas Fee early that morning to climb the 1300m up to the hut, decorated for the occasion with Swiss and British flags. The ceremony took place outside for as yet no one was allowed to enter, and commenced with a lunch provided by the Geneva Section, followed by speeches. The key was handed to the ABMSAC who then presented it to the Geneva Section as its future owner and administrator, and after a blessing by the clergy the hut was opened for the first time for everyone to admire what was, in the words of Clinton Dent, the first President of the ABMSAC, 'the largest and best hut in the Alps'. The day ended with a banquet in Saas Fee with further speeches and the reciting of a poem entitled 'La Cabane'. Written especially for the inauguration by a member of the Geneva Section, it tells the story of a group of climbers caught in a blizzard while attempting a nearby peak and saved by their timely arrival at the hut.

The hut proved instantly popular for by this time Saas Fee was a much frequented mountaineering centre with several hotels. Though there was no motor road up the valley, the Visp-Zermatt railway went as far as Stalden from where a mule-track led to Saas Almagell in four hours and to Saas Fee in a further hour, with the additional possibility of access from Zermatt over the Adler and Allalin passes. In its first season the hut hosted 353 overnights, and the following year this had already increased to 1,042. By 1927 it had become so popular that an

extension and other major works were planned at a cost of 40,000 sfr, twice the cost of the entire hut in 1912, and once again the ABMSAC donated 20,000 sfr. The original wooden structure was faced with stone and a stone extension was built, doubling the size of the hut to provide bunks for 80 and a larger dining-room. The hut was re-opened in a formal ceremony on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1929 in the presence of several members of the Association, including General Bruce, that year's President, whose speech was enlivened by anecdotes of his adventures in the Himalayas and the singing of a Nepalese song.



*Rededication of the enlarged Britannia Hut in 1929*

Once World War II was over mountaineers flocked to the Alps, and by 1947 the Geneva Section realised the urgent need to enlarge and renovate the Britannia Hut yet again: there were not nearly enough bunks, on occasions more than 100 people had been crammed into a dining-room for 40, and the water supply from the Chessjen Glacier was drying up as the ice retreated. The newly built hotel at Längfluh was providing competition for the cramped and inadequate hut, so it was essential that work should begin as soon as possible: the problem was finding the 60,000 sfr needed. The Section began a fund raising campaign entitled Pro Britannia, appealing to members' pride in the reputation of the Section and their hut. For the next three years their monthly bulletin included pleas for money, listing the amounts that members had donated, from 2 sfr up to 500 sfr; one such donor was Ernest Hofstetter who was to be a member of the 1952 Swiss Everest expedition that paved the way to British success the following year, and British members of the Section donated 661 sfr. By February 1950 the pleas were getting desperate for only 13,383 sfr had been raised, but with help from the Central Committee there was finally enough for the work to take place in 1951. The

lower floor now comprised a large well-lit dining-room seating 100, a much larger kitchen with an indoor wood supply, more comfortable accommodation for the hut warden, bunks for 16 guides, and an indoor wc and wash-basin. A wide staircase led to the upper floor which could now sleep 104 in four well-ventilated dormitories, three with 88 bunks for men and an additional one with 16 bunks for ladies. There was also a water tank of several thousand litres and a ski-room, for the hut was popular with ski-mountaineers, especially those doing the Haute Route from Chamonix. The re-inauguration took place in early September 1952 with ceremonies both at Saas Fee and at the hut.

Switzerland now began to build more roads and lifts, facilitating access to the mountains and to the huts: in 1951 a motor road was constructed to Saas Fee and in 1954 the first cable car was built there, to Spielboden, 2448m, which in 1959 was extended to Längfluh, 2869m. 1959 was also the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ABMSAC and a meet was held in Saas Fee that August for 74 members, the biggest function the Association had held there since 1929. To celebrate the Jubilee the sum of 2,600 sfr was donated towards the cost of furnishing one of the dormitories of the hut, in commemoration of which gift a plaque was erected in the dining-room. A large party of British and Swiss members walked up to the hut on 9<sup>th</sup> August for the dedication of this plaque, and after a night there, eight ropes of ABMSAC members set out early the following morning for an ascent of the Allalinhorn.

Three years later in 1962 the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Britannia Hut was celebrated and once again the ABMSAC donated funds, this time to provide new furniture for the dining-room. In early September the Geneva Section organised a weekend of celebrations at the hut which were attended by a small number of British members, one of whom, Mr LA Ellwood, had been present at the inauguration of the hut in 1912 as a ten-year-old boy. After an informal dinner on the Saturday, there was a more formal ceremony on the Sunday with presentations, speeches and a religious service. The President of the Geneva Section paid special tribute to the ABMSAC not only for their generosity in founding the hut but also for their continuing interest, and Mr Ellwood replied on behalf of the Association, making his speech in French, German, Italian and English.

The 1960's saw the increase of mass tourism with package holidays and cheaper flights. Two additional cable cars were constructed at Saas Fee: in 1963 to Plattjen, two hours from the Britannia Hut, and in 1969 to Felskinn, at 2989m only 45 minutes' walk from the hut. This was now more easily accessible even for non-mountaineers, and the restaurant service profited from day visitors. The

hut continued to be increasingly popular, and by the 1980's was hosting more than 8,000 overnights per year.

The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ABMSAC was celebrated in 1984 with a meet in Saas Fee that August and the hut once again provided the focal point for the festivities. The first official event was a church service in Zermatt, and more than 40 members elected to arrive there via the Britannia Hut, leaving at 4:00am to cross the Allalin Pass. the hut but is now in the Section's Clubrooms in Geneva. Perhaps the only ABMSAC member to be present on this occasion as well as at the inauguration in 1912 was Noel Odell of Everest fame, now 93 years old. Everyone kept on their traditional outfits for the descent to Saas Fee after lunch, and the celebrations ended with a Grand Procession and final banquet there.



In 1996 the hut was closed for almost a year in order for it to be totally renovated and enlarged to its present size. The interior was gutted and an extension was added to provide a spacious entrance hall, modern kitchens and sanitary facilities, and three dining-rooms, while upstairs were light airy dormitories of varying sizes with 134 sleeping places, each with an individual duvet; in addition there

was a drying room, winter quarters, and a water tank of 18,000 litres. Peter Ledebocr, past President of the ABMSAC, organized the raising of £10,000 to help pay for this, the money being used for the renovation and furnishing of one of the beautifully carved dining-rooms, in commemoration of which it is named 'Britannia Stube' by a plaque over the doorway. At the re-opening in late June 1997 Peter Ledebocr and Brooke Midgley, that year's President, were guests at a gala dinner and entertained by a choir in traditional dress while outside the hut a blizzard raged with heavy snow, thunder and lightning. The ceremonies of the following day had to be curtailed for the cable car from Saas Fee could not run in the strong winds, and no more guests could reach the hut.

Now it is not the hut itself but its access route which needs attention, as with global warming the Chessjen glacier is melting and the previously easy track across it from Egginerjoch has become unstable in summer, with shifting boulders. This provides difficulty not only for those visiting the hut but also for the wardens who have to transport all their supplies, including drinking water, from the Felskinnbahn. However, the Geneva Section is working with geologists to resolve this problem, and the Central Committee has promised funds to aid in this costly enterprise.

This year the ABMSAC is looking forward to celebrating its Centenary, and once again the Britannia Hut will be a focal point for the celebrations in July with a Jubilee luncheon there. The Hut too is approaching its Centenary, and the Association should be rightly proud of their foresight in 1912 in donating funds for the foundation of what has become the most frequented of all Swiss Alpine Club huts.

### **Bietschhorn 3934.1metres – 17 to19 August 1967**

*by Paul French*

*edited by James Bogle, one of two remaining members who undertook the climb*

Rope 1 : Otto Stollner (guide), Vincent Cohen, Virginia French

Rope 2: Paul Wallace, Harry Archer

Rope 3: Hamish Brown, James Bogle, John Lawton

Rope 4: Karli (assistant guide), Paul French, John Noake

"To come to Ried in the Lötschental is to come home again 'somewhere in the Valais'. The waters of the Lonza fall to the Rhone to mingle there with those of the Vispbach and the streams from Arolla and Zinal... Above all, here springs the great horn..., imposing, taking its place, for all its less then 13,000 feet, among

the few really great separate mountains of the Alps." (Schuster Peaks and Pleasant Pastures)



*Bietschhorn from Lauchenalp in the Lotschental*

Our 1967 holiday was spent at Fafleralp, and it seemed fitting that the culmination of our stay should be an attempt to ascend the Bietschhorn, 'The King of the Löttschental'. The guidebook did not make too much of it except that it was best undertaken in perfect conditions: it was only later we found this time we had really undertaken something. It is long.

The party assembled at Blatten on 17th August to rendezvous with Otto and Karli, our guides, and a comfortable walk of three hours brought us to the Bietschhorn Hut, pleasantly placed below the Schafberg and the Bietschjoch, our route for the morrow. However the morrow is disappointing; heavy rain commences early in the night and becomes continuous. There is no possibility whatever of arising at the appointed hour of 1 a.m. When we do eventually breakfast nearer 8 a.m., skies are beginning to clear, and after debate we decide that it is worth awaiting another morrow, and we laze the day away whilst the more energetic guides descend to the valley for fresh supplies. There is no guardian in the Bietschhorn Hut during our sojourn, and we amuse ourselves concocting our own meals.

Up at 1 a.m. on 18th August and off at 2 a.m. Otto has arranged the early start in order to give us the maximum possible time, calculating to arrive at the bottom of the West Ridge at first light. He is dead on. We make our stumbling way up the

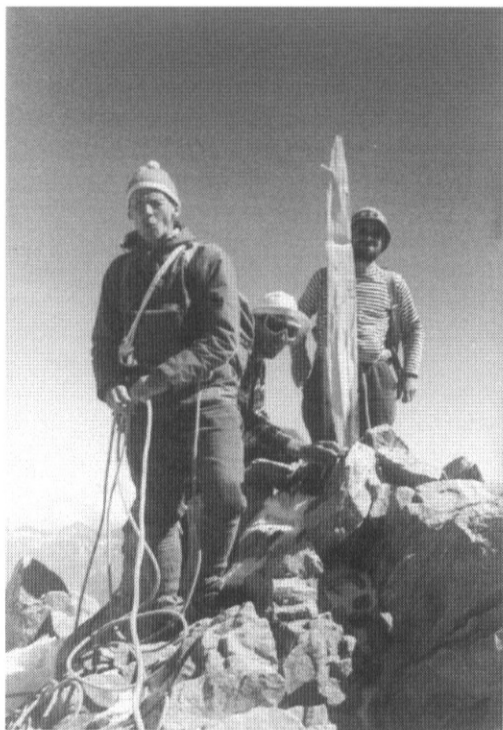
the steep scrambly, zig-zaggy slope of the Schafberg behind and above the hut, roping up after a while. It takes rather more than an hour and a half to the Bietschjoch, where one comes, at the upper edge of the cliff, suddenly upon the snow of the Bietsch Glacier. It grew light as we passed eastwards over the glacier to the foot of the West Ridge, keeping south to avoid the sunken valley in the ice at the foot of the ridge, which sunken valley figures very large later in the day. The sun is rising as we close to the ridge; the morning is fantastically beautiful and heralds, though we do not know it yet, a transcendent day

At the bottom of the West Ridge we make our first - and only! - halt of the day, about 20 minutes, probably about 4.30 a.m. It is slightly chill in the dawn but windstill. Now after this halt, we are eleven hours in more or less continuous motion to reach the summit at 3.30 p.m. Of course in these eleven hours there is much waiting about, with four ropes, and continuous rock pitches, much of it icy, which probably saves any fatigue, for we are not at all tired, only a little worried over the lateness of the hour. Vincent was slow and moving with some difficulty. The ridge is hard enough; it is loose, it is snowy, it is excessively narrow - now and then a cheval; great care must be unremitting. Two pitches, especially, are cruxes, the Grey Tower, and then the Red Tower near the top. I think we went over the Grey Tower, possibly with some traversing on the right, and certainly over the Red. Neither is terrible, but all is exposed. We noticed the plaque where two doctors were lost down a couloir about 1904.

No stop on top; there is no time. Write our names in the summit book; eat a sweet; and turn round. Otto is fully engaged today, a fine day's guiding, strenuous and enervating, he is said to have been sick afterwards three times at 1 a.m. Now he forges on with his party. he says to prepare abseils on the North Ridge for our quicker descent: what a hope! The North Ridge resembles the other in narrowness but has rocky sections alternating with steep snow ridges. On these little pitches, interlarded with abseils, not vertical but icy, we needed either steps or crampons. Hamish and Paul as rope leaders were wonderful: we gave Hamish one top rope on a fiendish pitch; and he helped Paul a little.

And so we came to the summit of the Klein Nesthorn (Klein Bietschhorn) the sun swings steadily around the cloudless sky - we do not yet know we are to witness another dawn. We are on point 3336 probably about 7.30 p.m. It is a light evening, but darkens as we move down on the left of the ridge, now about due west, on the right bank of the developing Nest Glacier. We can see the steepening icfall of the glacier far below. The rocks are now exceedingly loose

and one rope must wait for another to avoid falling stones. It gradually grows darker.



*Bietschorn Summit: Harry Archer, James Bogle and Hamish Brown  
"This is FRIGHTFULLY dangerous" – Harry Archer*

I thought, and may have been wrong, that here Karli wanted to leave the rest of the party and descend to the glacier with his rope alone, while Otto, ahead was continuing to slant at an angle down the rock wall to meet the glacier considerably lower down where there was a tongue of rocks reaching out into the snow. John Noake and I strongly discouraged this separation; we felt that Otto had enough to do, and the party should hold together. We were a little delayed by this, and did not know - it devolved later - that Vincent was now going very feebly and slowly (Otto: 'I beseech you to move faster') and indeed gradually reaching a state of real collapse.

A wonderful sky and we are getting gradually lower. It is finally dark about 9.30 p.m. except for sky glow. Slowly we continue until we reach the rock peninsula jutting into the Nest Glacier, about 250 feet above the obvious and large bergschrund. 10.30 p.m. The glacier is steep with little snow covering. Here Otto and Karli fix up a bollard abseil while the party adheres as best they can to the steep slope above the ice, shivering and slithering and trying to keep warm. Two sixty metre abseil ropes are used fastened together and a safety rope through a karabiner, operated by Paul Wallace. Karli found a crossing point for the bergschrund, only vulnerable at one point, and over a period of two hours we all performed a nocturnal and painful abseil down to the level glacier below, painful because of the immense weight of 120 metres of rope below passing over shoulder and thigh. Vincent, who was almost beyond it, performed all the upper part lying flat and only abseiled erect over the actual bergschrund. He had a lengthened safety rope to reach the bottom but the rest of us had to take off the safety rope which was not long enough, and do the last, worst crevasse part with abseil rope alone. We all reassembled below the bergschrund, and the guides had to do the usual thing of climbing back up to release the jammed abseil rope, and we were justly chided that we had not meanwhile coiled the safety ropes. At the time Virginia and I were lying beside Vincent to help keep him warm and putting on him my duvet.

Otto and Paul Wallace and Hamish, together with John Lawton (a doctor), now helped Vincent who was rapidly becoming helpless and really could not stand or walk, though talking rationally. Karli led across the glacier contouring towards the hollow of the morning, below the West Ridge, but although we contoured, the glacier was steep and it was pitch dark and we knew there were giant crevasses right and left. The whole stunt, in pitch dark is excessively dangerous. As Karli says 'I don't like it.' However Karli, blast him, leading our rope must forge on ahead and leave others behind saying he must make a route. But he goes too fast, over difficult terrain with no consideration for the rest who have obviously soon lost us. Karli acted stupidly here in my opinion; he goes through boulders in the bottom of the hollow and crosses a trench where Vincent could palpably not come and then cuts up the awkward wall on the right when a yard or two more would have taken us into our morning tracks. We are right beneath the West Ridge.

Otto and John Lawton had fully decided that Vincent could go no further - this is the proper drill anyway - and that the two of them would remain with him while the rest went with Karli to the hut and Hamish and Harry would carry straight on down to Blatten to summon the rescue helicopter. Time now 1.30 a.m. We left spare clothes and, after a final conference, Otto went down to the hollow again

where Virginia and Paul had been tending Vincent and then the two came up alone on Otto's precarious staircase, no steps, but mere nicks; we got under way again about 2 a.m.

Westwards to the Bietschjoch - during the last hour we have been greatly helped by the presence in the sky of a nearly full moon, though behind the Bietschhorn, as was the sun for most of the morning. Karli came expertly to the right place for the Bietschjoch - he had left a mark there in the morning to identify the place. Karli led well back to the hut though Hamish and I were able to help. Reached the hut about 4.30 a.m about the time to witness our second dawn this day another beautiful one. Hamish and Harry go on to the valley. I roused to hear the helicopter pass over at 7.23 and also to return at 7.38; they were up within minutes of calling. Hamish and Harry continued, after giving the alarm to Fafleralp, an hour's walk, but Vincent, Otto and John Lawton were there first. An excellent rescue, Vincent in bed when we arrive about noon, but sleeping it off and all's well

It could be that some will aver that we had been, here and there, a whit tardy; but we had enjoyed ourselves, and all in all we considered our twenty six and a half hours on the move a day well spent.

### **The Pigne de la Lé - 3396m**

*by Morag M Macdonald*

Kev Reynolds (2007) has it right. 'The Val d'Anniviers has been hailed as the grandest or greatest of all the Swiss valleys of the Pennine Alps - and who would dispute that claim?' He also calls it 'a magical district' before detailing seventeen walks with numerous variations. At least two weeks are necessary to do justice to the two valley branches which rise high above the Rhone valley and to savour the full walking potential. However, blessed with fine weather after two previous attempts to visit the area when it rained, it was possible during a week of modest acclimatisation to climb a peak which has one of the best views in the Alps.

The base was Grimentz, a picture postcard almost traffic-free village, approached via two changes of postbus and some unnerving hairpin bends on the road after leaving Sierre. Watching the drivers roll the wheel round in their hands without actually gripping it became an interesting diversion on frequent journeys. It took a few days to sort out the geography. A car is not really needed but careful attention to postbus timetables is required to make the necessary links. Late finishes could benefit from a non-walking driver.

There appeared to be only three hotels and one guest house available. People seem to return year after year to apartments. The village street hosts an artisan day on the first Saturday in August. Every stall, from bakers to painters and clockmakers, is set out by artists in national costume demonstrating old craft tools.

The area is relatively undamaged by ski facilities except on the Zinal side which is perhaps the least attractive of the all the valley bases. A bubble serves the Grimentz /Bendolla area; a funiculaire from St Luc goes to Tignousa accessing the Bela Tola summit and walks of varying difficulty. The Zinal téléphérique goes to Sorebois but this col, with its panoramic views north across the Rhône to the Oberland and Aletsch mountains and nearer to the Weisshorn/Zinalrothorn group, can be approached from the Barrage at Lac de Moiry on the west side of the valley.

The choice of the Pigne de la Lé was partly determined by expert advice and the internet where 'Courses Collectives' été 2008, offer brief descriptions and very good value group guided prices to this peak, Col Durand, Arête du Blanc, Trifthorn and Bishorn on specified dates throughout the season. For example, CHF 250-/pers en demi-pension for the Pigne. For interest, guiding costs 2000 CHF to climb the north arête of the Dent Blanche and the same to traverse the Weisshorn from the Gd. Mountet to Tracuit huts, both two-day expeditions.

Dates being unsuitable and in any case unwilling to commit in case of bad weather, I hired a guide. His information was that the 4000m Bishorn, the well-known satellite of the Weisshorn, can take from two to six hours from the hut and that after a previous five to six hour or more effort from the valley. There is no lift facility from Zinal into the high mountains where all the hut walks are lengthy and arduous. He also recommended spending two nights at a hut before and after a major climb in the area. This advice may of course be age related!

The approach to the Cabane de Moiry starts with the Grimentz postbus to the ice-blue Lac de Moiry car park, a favourite spot for day visitors. It is a beautiful walk on glacier moraine with a steep finish taking approximately two and a half hours. Apparently, it can be dangerous early in the year. The Moiry glacier icefall, in spite of recent retreating glaciers, commands the scene and seems untouched by global warming. The Cabane, perched high above the icefall, is being rebuilt and will not be ready until 2010 when it will provide spectacular views over the glacier. Presently, it is a building site with one outside tap for all. In spite of these deprivations, the best hut dinner experienced was served to over a hundred people



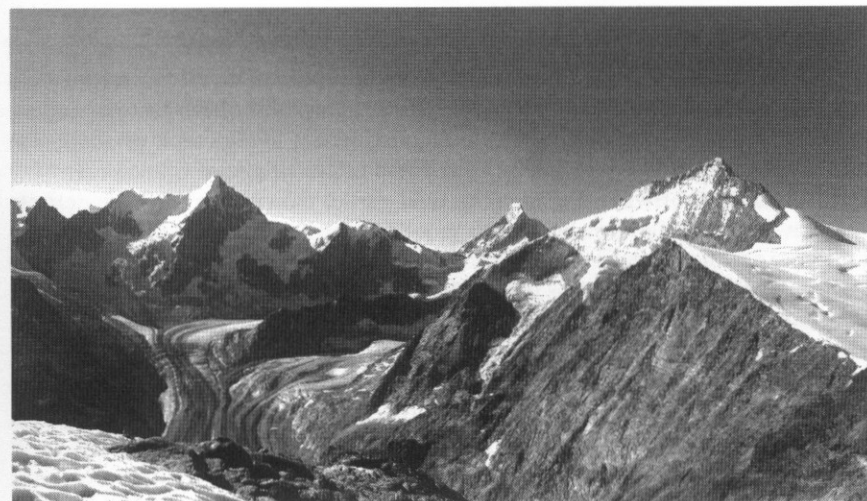
and the guide bought a bottle of wine! A huge bonfire underneath the stars made it a memorable evening.



Moiry Glacier from Lac du Moiry  
*photo: Morag M Macdonald*

The actual climb takes three hours neatly fitting into three equal parts: one hour boulder walk from the hut after a six am. departure; one hour across a dry glacier; and one hour up a snow slope after which crampons can be taken off to finish with a short easy ridge walk. There is no exposure but a great sense of height. The Grand Cornier and the Pigne share the same start and finish routes and the early morning sun glowed on the former to tempt us upwards.

Dwarfed by its mighty neighbours but holding its own due to its magnificent position, one can see five huts from the Pigne summit: the Tracuit; Grands et Petit Mountets; D'Ar Pitetta; and the Moiry. There is also a 360 degree panorama over the Alps. It was a good day in the mountains.



Pigne View  
*photo Morag M Macdonald*

**Reference:**

Reynolds, K. (2007) Walking in the Valais; A Cicerone Guide: 2 Police Square, Milnthorpe, Cumbria LA7 7PY.

**Spring Walks in the South-West Jura**

*by Pamela Harris*

The Jura mountain range on the Swiss-French border is little known by British walkers, but these hills are easily accessible from Geneva and are well worth a visit, especially in early spring. Due to the local micro-climate the snow melts early on the southern slopes, opening up the trails well before those in other mountain regions. An added bonus to walking at this time of the year is that the flowers are in bloom early too, covering the ground with a myriad of colours.

Spring comes earliest to the Vuache (1100m), a continuation of the Jura range south of where the River Rhône flows through the narrow defile of the Bellegarde Gap. From the village of Chaumont at the southern end of the long ridge, a trail runs behind the church through the trees reaching the highest point in about one and a half hours. As you get higher the white snows of Mont Blanc and the

nearby peaks of the Haute Savoie are visible through the trees, with the long line of the Jura range rising above Lake Geneva. In early March there are cowslips and periwinkles at the side of the trail and higher up the woods are a mass of Spring snowflakes, then from late March through most of April the rarer Dog's tooth violets (*Erythronium dens-canis*) appear, along with daffodils and scillas. The flowers continue right along the ridge, and it is a lovely walk of about five hours to the Oratoire Sainte Victoire then down to the village of Chevrier. In May the woods are full of white Ramsons or wild garlic, then in late June the delicate Martagon lilies begin to flower.

Also south of the River Rhône is the Plateau de Retord (1200m), the setting for the recent film 'The Fox and the Child'. In winter this is a cross-country ski trail, but once the snow melts there is a circular walk of about four hours starting from the car-park at the Col de Cuvéry. This is an easy walk with good views over Mont Blanc and the Haute Savoie, with an interesting detour to the little chapel at Vézeronce, a centre of the French Resistance movement during World War II. It is a favourite of those in the Geneva area as from late April the whole plateau is covered by daffodils, then when the cows are out to pasture at the end of May the sweet-smelling Narcissus poeticus comes into bloom.

Back in Switzerland the Dôle (1677m) to the north of Nyon is the nearest mountain to my house, and the white domes on its summit are visible from my garden. From here on a clear day there is a magnificent panorama of the Alps, with Mont Blanc towering in the centre, the giants of the Bernese Oberland and the Valais to the left, and the peaks of the Gran Paradiso and the Dauphiné to the right. Below lies Lake Geneva, and it is possible to discern even the famous Jet d'Eau at Geneva which the Swiss proudly advertise as the highest fountain in the world – and on which a football bounced for the duration of the EuroFoot championship in June 2008. There are several different routes to the summit, but the snow melts first on the south-west facing slopes around the chalets at Sonnaillays just across the border from where there is an easy trail up to the white domes, the slopes covered with crocuses peering through the last patches of snow, then a little later soldanellas, spring gentians and daffodils. A longer route up is from the small village of St Cergue in Switzerland, where the flowers are equally prolific.

Perhaps my favourite spring walk in this area is further east along the Jura range, from the Col de Marchairuz to Mont Tendre (1679m), the highest summit of the Swiss Jura. The walk takes about two and a half hours and undulates through woods and cow pastures until the final steep ascent to the summit. From here there is another magnificent view of the Alps and of the rest of the Jura stretching

towards the north-east. The walk is particularly attractive from mid-May to mid-June when the later spring flowers appear, with the bright blue of both spring and trumpet gentians mingling with the pale pink of *Primula farinosa* and the white of Narcissus-flowered anemones. Early purple orchids are abundant and there are much less common flowers to be found too: tiny green Frog orchids (*Coeloglossum viride*), the strange lemon-coloured yellow Bellflower (*Campanula thyrsoides*) and the bright pink ground-covering *Daphne cneorum*, whose sweet smell pervades the air. But the real rarity to be found at the foot of the Jura is the spectacular Lady's slipper orchid (*Cypripedium calceolus*). I can still remember my excitement when I saw this for the first time in the wild rather than in an Alpine Garden, in the woods just a few kilometres from where I live.

A useful guide with maps to these and the many other walks in the area can be obtained from the Tourist Office in the spa town of Divonne-les-Bains just outside Geneva, itself well worth a visit, though I have yet to discover a guide book in English.

### **Pottering on the Periphery**

*by Wendell Jones*

Glenridding again started the year; a short walk with Alasdair and Co. in the Mungisedale Fells; St Sunday Crag in mist and high wind, but at least I got there; Catsydicam, an improbable name for a hill, on a better day.

In years past hill pottering had to be fitted round meetings – six hours of them one weekend. Unwonted freedom from about fifty years of such gatherings caused me to wonder what had been achieved.

The first round of the Hut debate arose whilst the pound was in freefall from twelve Swiss Francs to three and a half – labour Government too, wonderful how history repeats itself – and our eight hundred odd members were departing in droves. A hut might mean an incentive for change, or so said the Young Turks. The Old Men worried about the Swiss Association or going broke.

After some soul-searching, the money was raised from members, the Swiss and the TCC, the hut was fitted out. The sad demise of George Starkey gave us a name.

The Law of Unintended Consequences played its part. Over forty years a large London club with very specific Alpine connections had been converted to a small

national body without formal base but strong links to Upper Ullswater. Swiss membership was confined to a small minority of older members.

The hut's Achilles heel was its ownership; the original lease had run out; its successor had rent reviews long in arrears; rumours of freehold purchase surfaced, and a major overhaul was necessary.

The lease was from the diocese, negotiations with the PCC – a little like buying from the Lord of the Manor and arguing the toss with the under butler, however only two bodies were involved. We had four, a club committee, a Board of Directors, a Hut Management committee and our friends the TCC – overwhelming fire power but the guns were rarely pointing in the same direction. Friendly fire, or “Blue on blue” as the Yanks who are specialists describe it, caused no fatalities but a few resignations.

Having strayed from the periphery to being Chairman of the Board, it became an objective to end each meeting with the same number of directors as had come under Starter's Orders. Not a happy time.

Eventually all subsided. The work on the hut was done; a skilled senior civil servant as President, used to bending Ministers to his will, sorted out the rent arrears, and the freehold issue swept itself under the carpet doubtless to re-emerge in a few years hence.

Committees were not always hard work; fond memories too. M N Clarke, well-to-do briefless Irish barrister and Editor for the past 3000 years.... “So and so has died” said the Secretary. There followed a pregnant pause while the Committee searches in its corporate memory, disturbed by a grunt... “Good chap! Climbed with him on the Blankerhorn in '02.” Duty done, M N Clarke resumed his slumbers.

April took Jenny and I to the Amalfi coast, mountains as high as Ben Nevis, cold weather for Southern Italy, steep sided hills and innumerable stops. Capri and Pompeii provided surprising contrasts, the latter a sharp reminder that three million unworried Italians live within range of Vesuvius' next round.

Pam Andrews has shown her hand in the Newsletters with an excellent report on Alasdair's Meet. An umbrella proved the most vital part of the mountain kit. Hotel parking was excellent; however the good burghers of Neustift, appreciating the eco importance of wood burning stoves and the thousand metres of forest rising above the village, thought differently. “Ach Himmel haben we muss ein

vielen grossen stove for the whole dorf”. Roads were dug up and large pipes inserted; smaller pipes would connect every building. ABMSAC's arrival coincided with this mammoth dig. The surviving half of the hotel road was controlled by lights, and vehicular access required a polka reverse shuffle which would have done credit to John Sargent on a good day.

Ten miles away by crow and seventy by crow, Mandarfen, possibly built the previous week, had no similar problems.

Half a mile away, at the valley junction, stood the railway station. The “train” consisted of rows of mobile benches, each forty five degrees from its neighbour. For a paltry fourteen Euros one could be transported from 1700 to 2800 metres to an ugly hutted camp giving access to the Mittagsskogel and other morsels. I bought a single ticket but a meeting with the Baldwin Team, who had of course walked up, dissuaded me.

“To get a return ticket pay at (sic) the driver” said the notice. Alas there was no driver at whom Euros could be discharged.

In desperation I inserted my upward ticket, causing the barrier machine to give a spirited imitation of an enraged Dalek. The queue lengthened ..... “Go under the barrier” said a friendly voice; there seemed no alternative ..... at the bottom there was no one to collect the fare. Feeling guilty, I heard from the President that he had mislaid his ticket and vaulted the barrier. Presidents can do this; proles crawl underneath.

Next afternoon, waiting to enter my more up-market hotel, I visited the local church, which contained the village war memorial. A list of names followed by place of death ..... Russland, Rusland, Russland. At the bottom of the list, cryptically “En Fusil”; perhaps the poor chap didn't want to go to Russland.

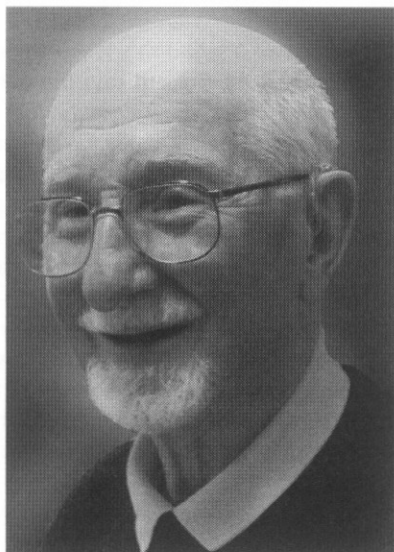
Other jaunts included a few visits to the Malverns, only forty five miles from home. From a distance their ridge front is impressive; up close you feel you have entered a garden suburb.

Further away lie the Black Mountains, with Offa's Dyke bestriding the crest and the Welsh border. Some years ago I watched a helicopter carrying large stones to improve the path. Expensive and the stones now form a key blocking two sections of undrained bog. In about the year 3000, with the credit crunch all over our descendants will be excavating the sunken stones and trying to find Druid links.

To conclude on a high note, in February at the 2008 Dinner Meet, I chatted to John Edwards, who intended to climb the Eigerwand in August. I shook him by the hand and said goodbye ..... a mistake. Nearly a year later came the news of his success after two previous failures. At any age, let alone on of John's maturity, this must rank as one of the most outstanding mountaineering achievements by any member in the long history of the club.

## Obituary

**George Gleave Watkins M.A. (Hons.)**  
1926 – 2008



George Watkins was an enthusiastic and popular member of the ABMSAC in which he was elected in 1963. He was also a member of the AC (1990) and the SAC (Monte Rosa). In addition he was a member of the FRCC (1961) and was their Vice President (2000-2002) and President (2002-2004). He was also their Club Librarian and Club Archivist from 1988 to 1998.

Educated at Cowley Grammar School, St Helens, George won a scholarship to Cambridge University but before going up was called for his National Service in the royal Air force where he served in the engineering Branch – an experience he

enjoyed hugely. On arrival at Cambridge George quickly developed a passion for rowing and displayed considerable talent as an oarsman representing College throughout his degree course.

After graduating with Honours, George accepted a post at Lancaster Royal Grammar School where he was to remain until his retirement. He was a House Master and Head of the English Department and inevitably took over the school Boat club equipping it with new boats and enjoying much success in regattas during the thirty years he was actively involved with the Club. He was also in demand nationally as an umpire and presided over regattas at Shrewsbury, Liverpool and Chester to name but a few. During his final two years at the school George re-designed and refurbished the school library.

In 1967, following the death of his father, George set up home in Lancaster for his elderly mother and five year old niece Felicia Jane. He quickly became a father figure to his niece, teaching her to read, cook and play tennis as well as enjoying walks together in the Lake District. She enjoyed this lovely, stable life until the age of twenty one when she bought her first house. Felicia Jane gave a wonderfully moving tribute to George at his funeral in St Paul's church.

Additionally to his great love of the mountains, George had a wide range of interests and was well known for writing poetry. Perhaps his best known poem "The Salving House" was read at his funeral by John Fidler a fellow FRCC member. He was also a very active Freemason and was twice Provincial Grand Master of his local Lodge. In recent years he had become a member of the Manchester Lodge for Masonic Research and at his death he was Worshipful Master and President of the Association. George was an expert on Keswick's Abraham Brothers, having researched their lives thoroughly and gave wonderful illustrated talks on their activities. His talks were given to raise funds for his local hospitals but he did entertain the ABMSAC on one occasion.

George was virtually an "ever-present" at the ABMSAC Alpine Meets during his active years and assisted his great friend Harry Archer in organising Meets between 1975 and 1994. Together with Harry he made a trip to New Zealand where they undertook a series of treks in the Mount Cook and Mount Aspiring ranges and climbed Mount French. He also loved to visit Norway. Following Harry's accident when he was hit by a car in 1998, George and Harry confined their trips closer to home visiting the Orkney Islands, the Hebrides and a mad Quad Biking holiday at Aviemore!

On the occasion of the last Glenridding Meet that George attended in 2008, I had

the pleasure of collecting him from his home and enjoying his overnight hospitality. We took a walk into Lancaster and were stopped every twenty yards or so by friends wanting to speak to George. His funeral service in the lovely St. Paul's Church in Scotforth was an inspiring occasion with the church so packed that some people had to stand at the back and the hymn singing almost raised the roof!

Having touched and enriched the lives of so many, George will be sadly missed by so many of us, especially by his sister Margaret and adoring niece. But he will never be forgotten!

*John Edwards*

### **Loch Tay, 11-13<sup>th</sup> 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.*

### **Stubaital and Pitztal, Austria**

12 to 26 July 2008

*by Pamela Harris*

Alasdair decided that this year's hotel meet should again be shared between two centres, Neustift in the Stubaital and Mandarfen in the Pitztal, both attractive valleys offering a wide range of walks. Our hotels as usual were excellent, and the friendliness of Hans and Patti, owners of the Hotel Bellevue at Neustift, made this an especially welcoming base. Nothing was too much trouble for them, even greeting us with champagne on our first evening, and Hans' expertise as a guide as well as chef was much appreciated.

Although we were not very lucky with the weather, the torrential rain of the first two days driving a large group down into Innsbruck, most of us got out into the hills every day and several peaks were climbed by various members of the group. The highest was Habicht, 3277 metres, climbed by Tony Arkley, Mark Davison and Myles O'Reilly after a night in the Innsbrucker hut. They had a perfect day for their ascent, with blue skies and views in every direction. Other peaks climbed were the Elferspitze and the Zwolferspitze from the Elfer hut, the Schafgrubler from the Franz Senn hut, and the Burgstall from the Starckenburger hut.

Once the weather improved most of us went up to Mutterberg at the southern end of the valley, using the lift to get as high as possible on the glacier to see the views. An adventurous route across it was taken by John Monks and Tony Welling from the Dresdner hut over the Peiljoch to the Sulzenau hut, and some of us walked up to the idyllic Muttersee, the surrounding peaks mirrored in its waters. Other scenic objectives on different occasions during the week were the Pinnistal, the Maria Waldrast convent from Mieders, the Neue Regensburger hut with its special flora and geomorphology, and the Alpine Garden above Fulpmes.

The weather in the Pitztal was also mixed, though the sunny days at the end of the week gave the opportunity to ascend the highest peak of the meet, the Wildspitze, 3772 metres. Tony Arkley, Mark Davison and Myles O'Reilly climbed the AD route up the E ridge, while John Dempster and Dick Yorke climbed the normal F route, not a bad record for a group with an average age of well over 60. The Mittagskogel, 3195 metres, was climbed by a large group with the help of the underground funicular from Mittelberg though James and Belinda Baldwin elected to reach this summit from Mandarfen itself, necessitating a 1485 metre ascent; this made their total ascent for the two weeks of the meet a mind-boggling 14,000 metres.

In general we found the Pitztal harsher than the Stubaital, the mountains rising sheer from the narrow valley. This made for steep ascents to the various huts and lakes on both sides and knee-crunching descents. Perhaps the steepest ascents were to the Kaunergrat and Russelheimer huts, and though the Braunschweiger hut looked easier on the map, even this track was stony and difficult. The most popular destination during the week was the Riffelsee as there were several long-distance walks to be made from there linking the various huts by Hohenweg or high-level paths, some protected by chains. Most of us went along the Fuldaer Hohenweg to the Taschauchhaus hut which gave splendid views; Mike Scarr later told us that this was the first alpine hut he ever visited, exactly fifty years ago in 1958.

The mountains at the northern end of the valley near the River Inn were gentler, with hay-stooks in the meadows and cows grazing on the lower slopes. On a cloudy day several of us walked from Wald over the Benni-Rauch suspension bridge high above the Pitze River, and on another occasion three of us caught the lift above Jerzens to a lovely alp from where we ascended three peaks on a long ridge walk, with glorious 360 degree views in all directions.

The flowers on both weeks were wonderful, with Alpine rhododendron covering the slopes, several different varieties of gentians, orchids, primula and cam-

panula, and occasionally martagon lilies and the tiny soldanella pulsatilla. Eagles, marmots, squirrels and salamander were sighted, but all agreed that the most bizarre animals were the enormous long-eared sheep.

Despite the weather all agreed that once again this had been a very successful meet in interesting valleys, with plenty of possibilities for all levels of walking, first-class hotels and excellent company.

### ABMSAC Slovenia trek – 6-13<sup>th</sup> September 2008

or

It's either macaroni with meat or sausage with cabbage ... again!

by Ed Bramley

With so much bad weather in England, and the clouds in Kranjska Gora promising more of the same, it was debatable whether the luck had finally run out on having good weather for the September trek.

Sunday started with the clouds a little higher, but still moving ominously in our direction. To help with the start of the walk, we took the local weekly bus to the top of the Vršič pass, the highest in the country. This pass was constructed in the First World War by Russian PoWs, when the Soca valley formed the front line between the Italians and Austro-Hungarians. Up until dinner time, the scenery (and weather) let us in gently, with the path contouring round a steep wooded valley, with only the odd rock step to cross.

After dinner, the scenery changed abruptly, with a set of traverses out and over a series of rock slabs, with several of them with pegs and wires (for comfort only, I hasten to add). As ever, on the descent over steep wet limestone, the pegs ran out, and there was a nervous few minutes crossing the next section of rock. The path then ascended into the clouds, winding its way ever upwards, before flattening out at the col at Planja. We then descended a steep section of scree between Planja and Razor, at one stage crossing a set of pegged rock slabs, before arriving at Pogačnikov Dom, our accommodation for the first night. The hut was in an incredible location, right next to a doline (a giant enclosed limestone depression), over 500ft deep, and half a mile across. The welcome from the young people running the hut was welcoming, despite the goulash refusing to cook. "He is taking his time to cook today" protested the young lady in charge of the cooking.

The following morning, whilst clouds were still milling round the mountains, we headed out on the big walking day. This would involve a descent of over 3,000ft into the valley, and then ascending a further 5,000ft to the Triglavski Dom. Away from the hut, before descending into the valley, we passed a line of fortifications on the ridge, a reminder of the turbulent times in the mountains in the first and second world wars. The descent to the valley was straightforward, down steep scree and grassed slopes, to the river at the bottom of the valley.

Immediately on the other side of the valley, we set about ascending the Prag route, and straight away the path steepened to pass through a rock band, with the normal steel pegs and wire ropes for the most exposed parts. Up and up the path went, sometimes steep but straightforward, at other times, ascending rock steps with pegs and wire. At one point the path rose nearly vertically for about 60ft in this manner, with just a few in-cut steps into the limestone for comfort.

At the top of the valley, the scenery changed dramatically, opening out into a vast area of undulating limestone, devoid of any large area of vegetation. It was with some relief, after almost nine hours of walking, we arrived at the Triglavski Dom, the proverbial stone throw away from Triglav itself. The hut was crowded with folk of all nationalities, and the neighbouring plateau had a church, weather station, helicopter pad, wind farm and reservoir, not to mention a number of mobile phone masts – civilisation with a vengeance. Apart from one thing – water – which was only available in bottles, a situation which was going to be repeated on a number of days.

An incredible sunrise above the clouds introduced the next day, with most of the party taking the opportunity to ascend Triglav, the highest mountain in the country. All sorts of people were ascending the mountain, including old ladies on the trip or a lifetime, and even one person with his stone hammer, maintaining the steps! The path was entirely on rock, with the ubiquitous pegs and handrails in abundance, until they are really needed. On the top of the mountain is a stolp – an ancient form of shelter – but as its metal, not to be recommended in a storm. In the afternoon, we walked out to Tržaška Koča Na Doliču, a much smaller hut, passing Dom Planika on the way. Here the local flying skills were on display, as a helicopter servicing the wind turbines took off with less than 3ft clearance.

Wednesday saw us ascending Kanjavec, on the way to the seven lakes valley. The scenery here was at its most stark, with little plant life in evidence, yet alone water. Often by the path were massive sink holes, often over 100ft deep. On our way, we came across two herds of ibex, complete with young. Earlier we had seen the most cool trekking dog ever, complete with its own saddlebag rucksacks.



John Edwards on the Eiger Summit with ABMSAC Shield  
*photo: Simon Edwards*



Jim Strachan's Last Munro  
*photo: Dick Yorke*



ABMSAC Scotland Meet - May 2008  
Terry Shaw on the way to the Cobbler  
*photo: Dick Yorke*



Moiry Glacier Icefall - Pigne de la Lé  
*photo: Morag Macdonald*



*Daphne cneorum*  
*photo: Pamela Harris*



Mont Tendre - *Gentian acaulis*  
*photo: Pamela Harris*





Stubaital and Pitztal Meet  
*photo: Dick Yorke*



Stubaital and Pitztal Meet  
*photo: Dick Yorke*



Dick Yorke on Wildespitze Summit  
Stubaital and Pitztal Meet  
*photo: John Dempster*



Wildespitze Summiteers  
Stubaital and Pitztal Meet  
*photo: John Dempster*



SloveniaTrek 2008 - The Participants



SloveniaTrek 2008 - Gladski Rob  
*photo: Ed Bramley*



SloveniaTrek 2008  
View north from Triglavski Dom  
*photo: Ed Bramley*



SloveniaTrek 2008 - Seven Lakes Valley  
*photo: Ed Bramley*



Centenary Dinner - February 2009  
Assembled Presidents - Past, Present and Future  
*photo: Richard Winter*



Centenary Dinner - February 2009  
Frank-Urs Mueller - Central President, SAC  
*photo: Richard Winter*

In the afternoon, the supposedly easier slopes overlooking the seven lakes valley gave occasional raised pulses, as the path dropped away to the scree slopes on the far side of the mountain. The Koča Pri Triglavskih Jezerih at the seven lakes valley was in a superb setting by the side of a wooded lake, and we were all very well looked after by the young lady who ran the hut. She was very keen to try her English out on us, as well as her Slovenian jokes.

On the next day, part of the team took the relatively gentle route to the top of the valley and the next hut, Zasavska Koča na Prehodavcih, whilst others opted for the seriously exposed ridge, complete with an ibex demonstrating its sure footed nature, by jumping 20ft down onto a ledge, over a 3,000ft drop. At the hut, it was evident that we were approaching the end of the season, as painting of all the exterior was in progress, even the WC, which fell into the basic and alive category. The hut was run by another young person, and was very much a social stopping off point for people moving between the valley and the tops. As always, we were made very welcome. Around the hut, in addition to the lakes, were some amazing sheets of limestone, which looked for all the world like a fossilised glacier, complete with crevasses.

The last day was an easy descent to the valley, along some First World War mule tracks. This was followed by a winding track through a forest, which neatly dropped us out on our exit road, and the local village of Trenta. As usual, we managed to locate a suitable hostelry in the village whilst we waited for our mini buses to pick us up. They took us back over the Vršič pass to Kranjska Gora, stopping off at several points on the way, to view local points of interest, including the face in the rock, and the Russian chapel.

Arriving back in Kranjska Gora, we knew that we had exhausted our luck with the weather, as within an hour of us arriving back, the heavens opened, and the clouds were once again drawn over the marvellous mountain scenery, but not over our experiences in the week, not least of which was the great hospitality of the Slovenian people.

*Participants:*

*Ed Bramley, Andy Burton, Steve Caulton, Steve Creasey, Mark Davison, Roger James, Mike O'Dwyer, Marian Parsons, Mike Parsons, Ian Mateer, Myles O'Reilly, David Seddon, Marcus Tierney.*

## Kandersteg - 24<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> January 2009.

by John Dempster

This was our third winter Alpine meet. The first two were blessed with excellent weather so we were braced for disappointment this time, but it was not to be. Because it is situated in a narrow valley Kandersteg does not enjoy a lot of sun in January, and low mist in the valleys was a common feature. But above the mist the weather was sunny and clear almost every day, with spectacular winter mountain scenery. The cold weather ensured that there were frozen waterfalls in abundance, but no-one in the party had the equipment or inclination to climb them.

The Hotel Alpina proved friendly and comfortable, and their package for the week included a memorable fondue supper at the top of a cable car, and an evening torchlight procession culminating in the consumption of copious quantities of *gluwein*.

For me the highlight of the week was the ascent of the Gemmi pass (2322m), a six hour expedition through wild and beautiful country, with the added excitement of not missing the last cable car down. On another day we went through to the Lotschental, and took the chair lift to the Hockenhorn (3111m) with breathtaking views of the Valais peaks to the South, Mont Blanc to the West, and the Oberland to the North. Another good day was spent at Oeschinensee which included the opportunity to descend by toboggan. For the meet organiser at least this proved a rather more exciting undertaking than he had bargained for. For the cross country skiers there was quite an extensive network of loipe in the valley and further opportunities on the sunnier slopes of *Sunmbuel*. On the last day I hired snowshoes and walked up into the Gasterental, a valley which is completely deserted in winter and unspoiled by the apparatus of skiers.

For many the idea of a winter holiday in the Alps equates to skiing. Our three winter meets have shown us that winter walking has an attraction of its own. Although the published walks tend to be on prepared tracks, the use of snowshoes allows the more adventurous to enjoy a rewarding mountain experience. It is different from our summer walks and climbs but most enjoyable none the less, so much so that you forget the miserable exchange rate!

*Present. John Dempster, Philip Draper, John and Marj Foster, Dinah Nichols, Peggy Stiller, Jim and Margaret Strachan, Bob Thornton.*

## Centenary Meet and Dinner

6-8 February 2009

by Brooke Midgley

The meet was, as is usual, based in Patterdale / Glenridding. The Hut was nearly full as was the Glenridding Hotel. At the peak of bookings we had ninety eight but due to illness and "weather" this dropped to ninety sitting down at dinner.

The weather was extremely good – sunny, mainly below freezing with snow and ice; roads dry and clear of snow; valleys mainly snowy; truly a photographer's dream. The hills were used extensively as we mountaineers should. The lake steamers were also used by those who now are "just looking", it was good just to be there!

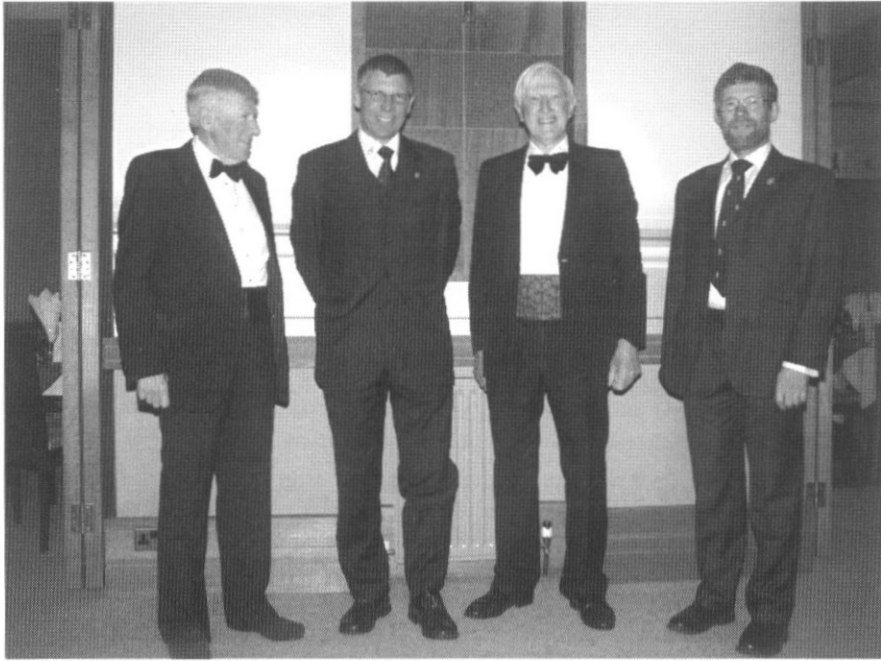
Prior to the meal we held a reception which was slightly marred by the Swiss ambassador having to cancel due to an attack of 'flu. He sent a letter of good wishes for a successful meeting – so that is what we had.

Despite some anxiety the hotel did a lovely job with the dining room looking wonderful, decked out with Swiss flags of all sizes. Even more importantly the service and meal were good. The members were also decked out in their finery and were fittingly decorative.

We had speeches from George Band (*member of Everest Team in 1953*), Frank-Urs Mueller (*Central President of the Swiss Alpine Club*), Terry Shaw (*Vice-President ABMSAC*) and our President (for one last night) John Dempster. Possibly the "home team" won but only by a short head due to a brilliant try from Terry Shaw. All were good and, most importantly, humorous.

So we celebrated our Centenary in fitting style and a good time was enjoyed by all.

The hotel and Hut have been reserved for 5-7 February 2010, see you all there and before that enjoy the remainder of our Centenary year.



John Dempster, Frank-Urs Mueller, George Band, Mike Pinney  
*photo: Richard Winter*

### **President's Report 2008**

The Club organised 14 meets in 2008, following our normal pattern with meets in Scotland, Wales, Devon and the Alps and at our hut at Patterdale. The Alpine programme included a trek in the Julian Alps, a camping meet in the Oberland and two hotel based weeks in Austria. Our first meet of the year was the January Scottish meet at our usual venue by Loch Tay. The conditions on the Saturday were spectacular – low mist over the Loch but a cloudless sky above with a good covering of snow on the hills. Our luck with the weather held for the winter Alpine meet at Pontresina and the February dinner meet (not noted for good weather) but the weather on the rest of our meets did not live up to that standard. Nevertheless all the meets were enjoyable and most were well attended.

At the Annual Dinner in February the principal guest was Mark Vallance, a former President of the BMC, who attended the AGM and gave a resume of the benefits which the Club and its members receive from affiliation to the BMC. Unfortunately, although he made a persuasive case for affiliation to the BMC, the impact of his talk was subsequently diminished by the news of a further large increase in the cost of affiliation, which now accounts for over half of the ABMSAC subscription. This understandably causes members to question the value of affiliation to the BMC, which is an issue to which the new committee may need to give some thought.

At the end of the year our membership stood at 243 of whom 147 (60%) are affiliates. This represents a net increase of 3. In recent years our membership numbers have been dropping so perhaps numbers have now stabilised. But our average age is still high and rising although judging by the numbers of people attending meets there is little evidence to date of a dropping off of enthusiasm for the club's activities.

At the 2008 dinner it gave me great pleasure to announce that the committee had decided to award honorary membership of the club to Alasdair Andrews. Alasdair's record in organising club meets is unmatched. In particular he was responsible for starting the weekend Scottish meets which have proved very popular even though they are something of an acquired taste! More recently he has organised a series of very successful Alpine meets and treks. I think his honorary membership was well deserved.

In the year to 30<sup>th</sup> June the accounts of the George Starkey Hut showed an operating loss of over £8,000. However this includes the considerable arrears of rent resulting from the much delayed rent reviews due in 2002 and 2006. After making allowance for this the hut achieved a modest operating profit, thanks partly to the increase in hut fees, and partly thanks to energetic marketing, for which Mike Pinney as hut booking secretary must take some of the credit. The financial position of the hut is not robust, but the signs are that we should be able to hold our own at least until the expiry of the present lease in 2016.

2009 will mark the centenary of the founding of the club, and during the past year the committee has been much engaged in planning appropriate celebrations. The first major event will be the Centenary dinner in February at which it is planned that the official guests will be the Alexis Lautenberg the Swiss Ambassador, Frank-Urs Muller, the President of the Central Committee of the SAC, and George Band OBE who was a member of the 1953 Everest expedition. [In the event the Ambassador was unwell and unable to attend] Later in the year we plan a Centenary

meet at Saas Almagel This meet will include a reception at the Britannia Hut which was originally built with money raised by the ABMSAC At the reception we plan to present the hut with a painting of a Scottish mountain scene kindly arranged by Bill Peebles

My term of office as President ends at the 2009 AGM During the past three years I have discovered that one of the main tasks of the President is to find people to help with the running of club and the hut. In addition to the officers and the committee the club needs people to help with the maintenance and management of the hut to organise meets to run the website, and to arrange the annual dinner I have been fortunate to have had willing volunteers for all these jobs and I should like to say a thank you to all of them. Without their efforts the club would not be what it is today For the future I offer my successor my very best wishes as the club moves into its second century

*John Dempster  
8<sup>th</sup> February 2009*

#### **Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club**

#### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

#### **Minutes of the meeting held on Sunday 8 February 2009 at the Glenridding Hotel, Patterdale**

The President John Dempster was in the Chair 50 members were present.

#### **Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from John and Marj Foster

#### **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 9 February 2008**

The minutes were approved

#### **Matters arising**

John Dempster provided the following clarification about affiliation that he had received from the BMC

#### **Members who are resident abroad**

They are not required to be included in the Club s return to the BMC therefore they are not required to pay the affiliation fee

They may elect to be included if they so wish  
Life members

They are required to be included in the Club s return, even if they are no longer active in the hills

Stuart Beare suggested that the cost of affiliation to the BMC was excessive and that we should look again at ways of reducing it

Mike Pinney explained that BMC membership was very important because it gave 3<sup>rd</sup> party cover to meet organisers and to the club

Mike said he would raise the concerns of members at the Club Forum meeting he was going to attend in March and would report back

#### **Election of officers and committee**

The committee nominated Mike Pinney to succeed John Dempster as President John s term of office expired at the AGM

The committee nominated Jeff Harris as Hon Meets Secretary and Mike Goodyer as Hon Editor because John Foster and Richard Winter are standing down The committee proposed that the change of journal editor should not take place until after the publication of the 2009 Centenary Journal

The committee proposed Marj Foster and Dick Murton as new members of the committee and invited Margaret Strachan to serve for a further year to which she has agreed, in order to achieve a better spread of vacancies on the committee

All other office holders and committee members indicated that they were willing to be reappointed

There being no further nominations they were all duly elected

#### **Hon Treasurer's report and subscription bands**

James Baldwin as treasurer presented the accounts which were duly adopted

James explained that the loss on the SAC transfer had been incurred due to an exchange rate change between the setting of the rate and transfer to Geneva He said that a change had been made to the procedure for 2008 2009 to reduce exposure to this loss in the future

James thanked Ed Bramley for his assistance

Nigel Harding a local retired banker had audited the books this year as the

appointed auditor left the area.  
Nigel was adopted as auditor for next year.

The subscription bands for 2010 were agreed as follows:

Single membership	£22 – 25
2 <sup>nd</sup> member at same address	£14 – 16
Junior membership	£9 – 13

[Note: This is subject to an amendment to the Rules which currently only provide for reduced subscriptions for married members].

John said the Centenary Dinner had been a great success and thanked Brooke Midgley for organising it. John thanked the Committee and other volunteers for all their hard work. He sent his best wishes to his successor Mike Pinney.

**Any other business:**

Stuart Beare spoke on behalf of the members in thanking John for all his hard work as President.

*Anne Jago  
Hon Sec  
13 February 2009*

**Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club Ltd**

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at the Glenridding Hotel, Ullswater  
Sunday February 8th, 2009 at 9.40 am.

Present: Directors J.W.S.Dempster (Chairman), J.A.Baldwin, D.Buckley (Treasurer), D.R.Hodge, W.L.Peebles, M.Pinney, T.J.Shaw (Secretary), R.B.Winter and about 50 members.

**Apologies for absence.** G Davies.

**Minutes of Previous Meeting.** The minutes of the previous meeting, held on Saturday February 9th 2008 and which were circulated in the 2008 ABMSAC Journal, were approved without dissent and signed. There were no matters arising.

**Directors' Report and Accounts.** In explaining the accounts for the year ended June 30<sup>th</sup> 2008, the treasurer said the considerable loss was largely attributable to back rent payable on settlement of the hut rent reviews and professional fees incurred in the settlement. Mr Wendell Jones proposed and Mr Pinney seconded acceptance of the accounts and they were approved without dissent.

**Reappointment of accountants.** The chairman explained a decision of the directors at a meeting on the previous Friday evening that the Company no longer needed the appointment of outside accountants. The treasurer confirmed that their appointment was not a legal requirement and the savings to the Company would be more than £500 a year. It was agreed nem con that, so long as the treasurer was a professional accountant, the company did not need to appoint outside accountants.

**Any other business.** There was none.

*T.J.Shaw,  
Hon. Secretary.  
12/02/2009*