
Alpine Club Notes



Great End, oil on canvas, 40x50cm. (Tim Pollard)

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MICK FOWLER

President's Valedictory Address

Read before the Alpine Club on 4 December 2013

I was introduced to mountaineering by my father, George. He was widowed when I was three and had a superficial interest in mountaineering before I was born with a highlight being failing to reach the Bertol hut by going up the wrong valley and spending a night bivouacking in the rain. As far as I know his only summit from those early days was the Allalinhorn which he employed a guide to take him and my mother up in 1947 on their honeymoon.

The seed of enthusiasm must have been sewn and by the time I was 13 he decided that the time had come to do something about it. That something was to book us both on a two-week mountaineering course in Austria run by the AAC. I remember that I was under the minimum age requirement but somehow he persuaded them to take me. We were not well off and I realise now that the trip must have been a huge expense for him.

After the course he decided that we would start to take annual trips to the Alps. We would go out by train from London and spend three weeks each year climbing routes up to about PD standard. Because we climbed from hut to hut and took all our equipment with us we had to leave home travelling light. I still vividly recall the embarrassment I felt leaving our suburban home dressed in climbing breeches and boots and hoping against hope that we would not bump into any of my school friends.

After a few years of these trips I rebelled as older teenagers do. Then, when I was 18 or so, I developed a liking for rock climbing and by the age of 20, in 1976, felt the urge to return to the Alps with friends that I had met climbing at the southern sandstone outcrops. One of these friends was Mike Morrison who I have just spent four weeks with in the Indian Himalaya. I spent two months in Chamonix in 1976 and 1977 doing classic routes with Mike and others on a shoestring budget.

Returning home in 1977 I ended up back at George's house in London. He was clearly becoming concerned at his son's focus on climbing as opposed to a career and thrust various job advertisements under my nose. The tax office paid the most, they proved appropriately flexible and I have been working there full-time for 36 years.

In 1979 I joined the AC, well the ACG actually, and in 1980 I climbed the North Face of The Eiger with Mike Morrison. That was the last climb that I had on my early alpine tick list and I started to look further afield.

It was through meeting Al Rouse at an ACG event that I ended up