
DEREK A SMITHSON
The Norsk Project

(Plates 49, 50)

‘The mountains of Norway – probably the oldest in Europe –
invite us all’¹

William Cecil Slingsby (1849–1929)

The YRC and William Cecil Slingsby

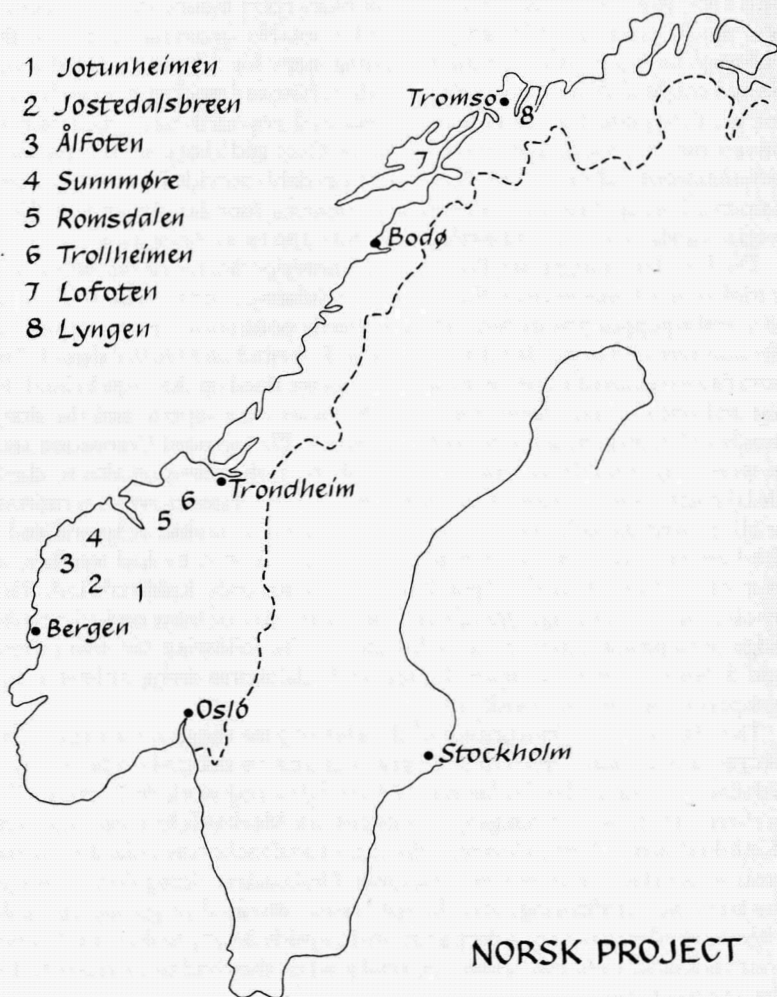
The Yorkshire Ramblers’ Club, which celebrated its centenary in 1992, has always been relatively small, keeping its membership to around 200. The YRC members are mostly Yorkshiremen by birth or adoption, but not all. Most members remain so for life and this has created a club of close friends with a resultant trust, understanding and exceptional selflessness. William Cecil Slingsby, who was one of the finest climbers of his generation, was president of the YRC for ten of its formative years (1893–1903). Geoffrey Winthrop Young described him as ‘the first mountaineer to explore the high ranges and glaciers of Norway, and to reveal their possibilities of adventure and beauty to the Norwegians themselves. It was they who named him Father of Norwegian Mountaineering.’² Slingsby’s book *Norway: the northern playground* is a classic of mountaineering literature.

The origins of the Norsk Project

The idea of the Norsk Project originated in 1988 during informal discussions on how to celebrate the Club’s first hundred years. We wanted something that could involve all members, that would relate to Slingsby’s activities, and that could involve Norwegians as well. Thus the Norsk Project was born. Our original idea was to repeat all Slingsby’s first ascents; but the list of his routes in Norway is formidable and the length of some of his outings intimidating. The number of his first ascents is judged to be 79 and are spread from Lyngsalpene to Jotunheimen. The general view of those visiting Norway (which we did in both the summer and winter of 1990 and 1991) and of the Norwegians who took an interest in the project was that the YRC was unlikely to complete all the first ascents and would therefore be unwise to persist with that ambition. A success/failure attitude might develop which could easily lead to dangerous behaviour; it would also mean leaving out Slingsby’s many great routes which did not involve the first ascent of a summit. So our initial plan to try to repeat ‘all Slingsby’s first ascents’ was abandoned.

The Norwegians

We hoped that the project would extend the friendships and understanding between Norwegians and Britons. We found the Norwegians capable of great generosity in response to our enthusiastic interest in their country. We were given introductions to some, others we met in the villages or towns or at the huts. Nearly always we could communicate in English. However, a common language does not ensure understanding, and care was needed to avoid misunderstandings arising from our very different social and mountaineering cultures.



Reporting the project

Each area to be covered by the project had a co-ordinator and a report was prepared to record the enjoyment, achievements and difficulties that were experienced among these fabulous mountains. Club members were 'spread' from the Jotunheimen to the Lofoten Islands. Two expeditions took place on skis, during March and May, but the main thrust was in the July/August period.

Jotunheimen in winter (March)

This area, which includes the majority of Norwegian mountains over 2000m, was much favoured by Slingsby. He did a notable circumnavigation of the Hurrungane range, which included cutting steps for a horse, using ski and being benighted in Utladalen. Our friends in Norway stocked huts with food for us, they guided us away from danger and provided accommodation in private mountain huts and an elegant hotel. Over and above all this, the local mountaineering clubs, led by Petter Arnt Løvdahl, provided wonderful companions. For the first week our party comprised four Britons and six Norwegians and, for the second week, five Britons and two Norwegians.

The first day, skiing from Tynosen with heavy packs, tested our fitness and it took us five hours to cover the 20km of undulating country. This brought us to a well equipped private hut, almost perfectly positioned for our purpose, at the northern end of Koldedalsvatnet below Falketind and Hjelledalstind. The next day we enjoyed good clear conditions as we skied up the slope behind the hut and onto Uranosbreen; from here the views were superb, and the sharp profile of Uranostind was especially impressive. We ascended Uranostind and, in worsening weather, continued to Slingsbytind; the intention also to climb Urdaknatten was abandoned. Descending in a near whiteout, with no contrast at all, proved difficult and everyone had at least one tumble. A second and a third attempt was made on Urdaknatten, each thwarted by bad weather, so four of us headed in the opposite direction towards Koldedalstind. This involved us in a long zigzagging ascent on a thin layer of snow on ice up to the ridge and a pleasant snow arête to the summit. The following day, two Britons and a Norwegian made it to the top of Urdaknatten using altimeter and compass to beat the poor visibility.

The planned circumnavigation of the Hurrungane range via Turtagrø and Skogadalsbøen was agreed to be impractical and we decided simply to cross Utladalen to the Årdal Turlag hut at Gravdalen and work from there. The preferred route was in Slingsby's footsteps via Morka-Koldedalen and Vettismorki down to Vetti. However, the risk of avalanche was judged to be too great so we skied up to Smoget and down Fleskedalen. Skiing down through the trees was challenging, and the gymnastics involved in getting up again after you had ended up in a deep snow drift, upside down, unable to get out of your rucksack, were exhausting, especially when they had to be repeated for the umpteenth time!

We stayed in the small but very comfortable DNT hut at Vettismorki, a magical place providing occasional glimpses of Hurrungane and only ptarmigans for company. The next morning we descended to Vetti in Utladalen and down the path towards Hjelle. The signs of spring were in the valley but we turned up to Avdalen. The farmstead at Avdalen was being renovated and we paused there before continuing up, struggling with the deep snow and birch trees on the way to Gravdalen. Another early start in good weather found us using skins up onto Gravdalsryggen heading for the Hurrungane. We followed an undulating ridge for hours but did not reach the main mountains. However, we did have breathtaking views in all directions and then a swift descent down Slufsedalen on near perfect snow. For the final night we descended to Avdalen where kind Norwegians provided a feast of fresh food and champagne. During the weeks following the departure of the Britons several of the routes planned to be done were completed by Norwegians.

Ålfoten in spring (May)

This area was traversed by Slingsby shortly after it was first mapped. We aimed to traverse Ålfotbreen, which is an ice cap, and then ascend Blånibba via Gjegalundsreen. We received valuable information from the Florø Tur-lag, but best of all was the advice to go in May with ski and the offer by Kjetil Tveranger to guide us. In the event the party consisted of one YRC member and Kjetil.

At our start point, Grøndalen, the river provided a magnificent waterfall and to avoid river crossings we used an alternative route which included two steps of moderate rock. When we joined the snow we fitted skins and mounted steadily up into a valley and up to Blåbrebu. After a rest we decided to continue over Ålfotbreen to Gjegnabu. We left at 4pm, which indicated Kjetil's confidence, and it took us almost ten hours including rests, but it never became really dark. The skiing was not really very difficult but the incompetence of the Briton made it seem so.

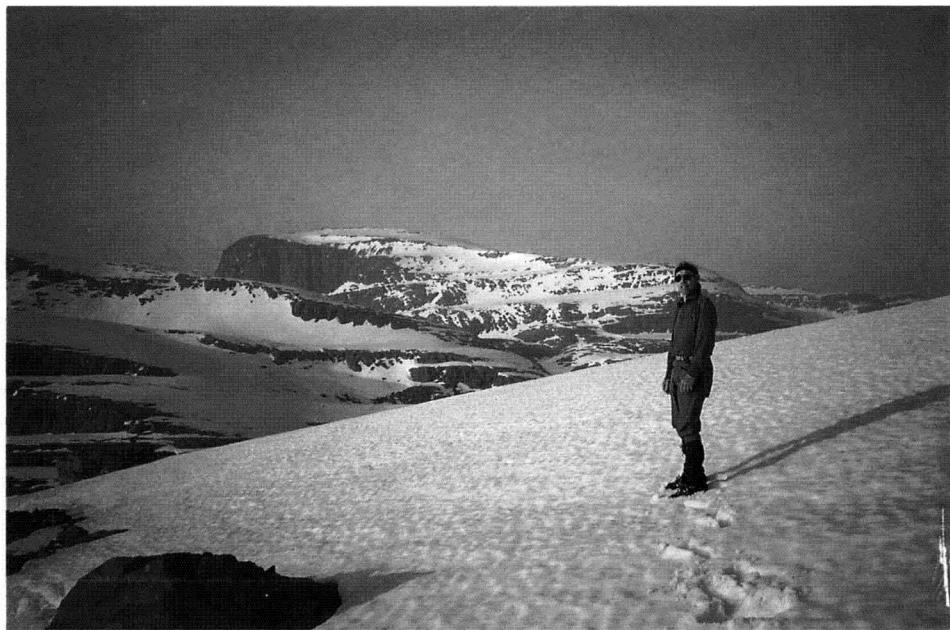
The next day was a straightforward route up Gjegalundsreen to Blånibba and then to Månnya in blazing sun. The Briton felt the strain from the day before but was inspired by the magnificent scenery. Three days of good weather had been forecast and as this was only the second day we felt secure for our return to Blåbrebu. It was a delightfully relaxed outing. We lunched perched like eagles at the top of a crag with fabulous snow and rock scenery in every direction. The final descent to Blåbrebu was beyond the Briton's ability to ski so, as on other occasions, he walked.

Our final day illustrated the fascination of the area. We agreed to climb Keipen which involved a descent of about 300m to get round a crag. We then found the river almost impassable and the route was abandoned because the river would be even higher later in the day. A very long detour to Keipen was possible but Saga was a shorter and easier alternative. Saga was very straightforward in the clear weather with a wonderful summit buried beneath a cornice. The other side of the mountain was truly precipitous. We returned, packed our gear and descended to our start point at Grøndalen.



49. *Above Jotunheimen: Gravdalen saeter, Hurrungane.*
(*Duncan Mackay*) (p176)

50. *Below Ålfoten: Derek Smithson on Blånibba with Gjegnalundsreen in the background.* (*Kjetil Tveranger*) (p176)



Jostedalsbreen in summer (early July)

Jostedalsbreen is often referred to as the largest glacier in mainland Europe but it is like an ice cap with glaciers descending from it in all directions. Slingsby devoted a lot of time and effort to exploring this area, usually with local Norwegians. He made first ascents and did new routes across the ice cap; he also repeated routes not attempted for many years. He visited Lodalskåpa more than once and his wife made the first lady's ascent.

Two separate parties visited Jostedalsbreen in 1992 but one party of three did no more than traverse Lodalskåpa. Our other party was of seven Britons and occasionally one or two Norwegians. We approached Lodalskåpa from Jostedalen, which is unusual, and traversed from a camp at the head of Lodalsbreen. The route from there up Småttene was tortuous but safe and, after crossing a further crevassed area on the N side of the glacier, we followed a steep snow slope to the eastern summit. We had magnificent views from the snow slope but after the rock ridge to the main summit we were in cloud all the way down the normal route as far as Bohrsbreen. However, we found Ståleskardet with its recognisable windscoop, and the descent from here to the tents was interesting but straightforward.

We split the section from Fossheim to Bøyadalen into two by camping above Instebotnvatnet which reduced the journey time to Bøyadalen. We crossed four unnamed tops, just as Slingsby had, and enjoyed views into Kjøsneshjorden. After reaching the main plateau a long curved route on breakable crust was followed to drop down to the normal Lundeskardet route at Kvitevardane. Even in clear weather we had to rely almost completely on compass and altimeter to cross this changing desert of snow. Once the normal route was found the descent to Bøyadalen presented no problems.

We left the Flatbrehytta at 4pm and climbed up to Flatbreen where we were surrounded by stunningly beautiful snow and ice scenery. Unusual snow conditions provided a snow cliff to surmount and, after contouring round upper Bøyabreen, a direct line was taken to the cairn (Snoadvarden). The journey was made harder by breakable crust but gave magnificent views of the whole Hurrangane range. After a long tea break at the hut, Kvannebakku, we descended the snow slope to Strupen and then on to Bevringsstølen.

When the cloud lifted sufficiently we left our camp at Høyset to start for Larsnibba and Geitaskjeret. We walked up Haugadalen and up into Jostebotn, crossing some distinctive moraine boulders, each about three metres in height. These gave way to heather, normal moraine and then we continued up the snow to Larsnibba summit. Despite the deteriorating weather we continued to Geitaskjeret which is also called Onsdagnibba and is not often visited.

We set off to ascend Fremstekåpa from Vetledalssaeter along the well marked track in Stordalen towards Erdalsbreen and continued up this glacier into low cloud accompanied by the crashes of ice avalanching off the nearby slopes. A compass guided us safely to the rocky ridge summit of Fremstekåpa but poor visibility robbed us of the anticipated impressive view of Tverrfjellet and Lodalskåpa. We then set off northwards onto Vetledalsbreen and the well marked route back to the hut.

Jotunheimen in summer (July and August)

This is the most popular mountain area in Norway with many of the highest mountains and plenty of facilities for walking. Slingsby was attracted back repeatedly and in one period of six days made six first ascents. Many YRC parties visited Jotunheimen, the main party being centred in Årdal and two members camping for five days at Spiterstulen. As in other areas help and companionship came from all the Norwegians that we met and it was particularly pleasing that Norwegians were involved in the only ascent of Store Skagastølstinden, that is Støren.

Our first party of three arrived at Årdal in the middle of July to meet a Norwegian friend, all with the intention of climbing Støren by traversing the mountain from Slingsbybreen to Bandet. We established a camp in Midtmaradalen but bad weather and future commitments reduced the party to one Briton and one Norwegian. When the weather cleared late in the day we walked up to Skagastølsbu on the Bandet and met two Norwegians also planning to climb Støren and who were familiar with the route. They guided us to the summit direct from Bandet and shared abseils down. With the limited visibility, rain and new snow, this probably made the difference between success and failure.

Our main party of six set up camp in Årdalstangen and ascended the two tops of Vestre Austanbotntind which is a short distance east of the road at Berdalsbandet. The route was simple, with minimal scrambling, but we met extensive boulder fields and greasy rock which required great care. When we looked at the more difficult ascent of the main summit in rain and low cloud we decided to return to the cars. The adverse weather, which was a feature of our stay, made us abandon an intended three-day trip in favour of a journey by car and boat to Torfinnsbu where we climbed the highest of the three summits of Torfinnstindane. The route took the most easterly gully with some short steep rock pitches and some snow. Whilst at Torfinnsbu we were lucky to meet Knut Lykken whose great grandfather climbed with Slingsby and who had many stories to tell.

Our party now divided: one group climbed Galdeberget from Eidsbugarden and the other group attempted Stølnostinden from Koldedalen. Both parties were hampered by low cloud but the route up Galdeberget was resolved by accurate compass work and presented no technical difficulties. We all went to Olavsbu from which one group climbed Mjølkedalspiggen whilst the other climbed Mjølkedalstind, both in cloudy and unfavourable conditions. Three of us then walked up to the hut in Stølsmaradalen and made an attempt on Midtmaradalsryggen but allowed the weather to beat us. The other three walked up to the hut at Vettismorki. We had all enjoyed the view of fabulous waterfalls along the valley to Vetti, cascading many hundreds of feet to join the river down Utladalen. The initial walk up to Stølnosi en route to Stølnostinden was straightforward, but then again we found ourselves in dense mist. Our compass led us over a series of small snowfields to an ancient cairn covered in moss. Our altimeter setting, when checked at the campsite, led us to believe that we had reached the summit.

The departure of our main party signalled a day of good weather and the arrival of two members to camp at Spiterstulen. From then the weather varied from dull and wet to atrocious. It took two attempts before the conditions allowed them to climb Glittertinden. They had a most exhilarating day, with a close view of a golden eagle, and finally reached the summit in a blizzard.

Another pair driving home from Lyngen knocked off Glittertinden and Galdhøpiggen with great glee on successive days. Glittertinden, done from Grønbui via Glitterheim, provided the most excitement because the pair had no map or route description. The near complete whiteout and blizzard reduced the time spent checking that the summit had truly been reached but equally it reduced the risk of discovering that it was corniced! The weather continued wet for the ascent of Galdhøpiggen but they had a series of stunning views of the Jotunheimen peaks during a half-hour period near Keilhaus topp. Then the weather reverted to add more new snow to the existing layer, but this time the summit was positively identified. Their skilled descent by bumsliding made a suitable impression on ascending Norwegians.

Sunnmørsalpene in summer (July)

Of Sunnmørsalpene Slingsby said, they 'are bewitching and are like glorified Coolins of Skye' and 'during the eighties and nineties friends and I practically completed the mountain exploration.'³

Two pairs of members met at Sæbø and enjoyed good companionship with the Norwegians, and help from them in organising a helicopter ambulance to move an injured man when one pair slid about 300m down a glacier in full view of the Patchellhytta. Two of us went directly from England to Hjordedalen at the southern edge of Sunnmøre. The next day we walked up Blåbredalen with its long slabs of rock leading up to the snow and made our way to the summit at 1443m, traversed by Slingsby on the way to Storhornet. The pinnacled ridge to the next summit looked very forbidding so we descended to Indre Aksla and down to the camp. We then moved on to Sæbø to meet the other pair and ended up camping together at Ørsta. En route we left the cars, walked up Litledalen and climbed Dalagubben. We found this craggy mountain with its summit ridge straightforward, but much looser and more lichen covered than similar mountains in Scotland. This was one of the fine days, with breathtaking views.

Low cloud was a problem on Kolåstinden. After we had walked up to Kvanndalsskardet we could just distinguish the gap in the ridge which took us onto the main glacier, high on the E side of the mountain. We stayed on the snow following the rocky ridge and climbed a false summit before finding the way to the true summit barred by a huge bergschrund. We frightened ourselves on the moss-covered ridge before descending without reaching the main summit. We then transferred to Patchellhytta just above Øye which provides a comfortable centre for many mountains. The first day, in fine weather, we traversed round the W side of Brekkeitind, mostly on snow, in order to climb Brunstadhornet from the south. This route enabled us to look at Slogen,

Brekketind and Smørskredtindane, all magnificent mountains with the pointed Slogen as the most notable.

The next day we divided. One pair left early to try for the two higher peaks of Smørskredtindane and the others left later and followed a straightforward route to the eastern summit of Slogen and then on to the main summit. The day started clear but with threatening cloud. Our early pair climbed the ever steepening glacier up to the saddle between the two highest peaks of Smørskredtindane. We descended the other side on poor snow, but the chosen climb proved harder and more continuous than expected so the route was abandoned. Whilst we sat eating, all the surrounding mountains disappeared as a rain storm struck. We decided our luck had run out and that we would have to descend via the saddle and glacier.

Where we had front-pointed up there was now wet sugary snow which looked as though it could avalanche, but it was a badly placed crampon which led to the accident. The belay pulled out. One of the pair who had now returned to the hut from Slogen reported: 'They seemed to fall for an age – two tiny black dots silhouetted against the snow – until they hit a rock band and were lost from sight.' A perfectly organised rescue ensued to take one of the fallen to hospital, whilst the other walked down to the hut with only bruises. Maybe our luck had not run out after all. All the Norwegians helped. They ran to the valley to call the helicopter, brought a blanket up the hillside and allowed us to use their telephone. No one could have done more or done it more pleasantly and unobtrusively.

Lofoten in summer (July/August)

The unique character and beauty of these islands has long been recognised by British mountaineers, who first discovered the attractions of Lofoten at the turn of the century. One of those early pioneers was Slingsby who made extended visits there in 1903 and 1904. He wrote: 'The aiguilles of Lofoten have an uncanny atmosphere about them in addition to their great beauty.'⁴

Our party was twelve strong but the weather was poor; there was rain every day, some of it extended and torrential. The journey by road from Bergen to Lofoten is about 1000 miles and was completed in 2½ days. We spent nearly all our time there at three centres. We started and finished camping near Svolvær and, in between, we camped on a wonderful beach at Buneset and just managed to find space for all of us to camp at Reknes.

Buneset was a short walk over a low pass from the head of Bunesfjorden. Despite the weather, four of us went to look at Bisplua. We abandoned the crumbling northern ridge going up from Vindstad, even though we believed Slingsby had found this route acceptable. We then found a route up a stream and scrambled to a col west of the summit where we climbed half a dozen rock pitches to the feather bed of moss on the small flat summit.

The second day was fine and clear nearly all day and we managed to get a lift by boat to the southern end of Forsfjorden where we divided into two groups. One group went west towards Hermannsdalstinden, fighting our way over boulder strewn slopes covered in thick carpets of sodden moss and, just

to make things really interesting, dense birch scrub. We scrambled up onto Brynliskardtind and then onto Klokkaåttetinden. After a slight descent we overcame a steep brown slab by an airy arête onto the N ridge of Hermannsdalstinden. The summit provided an excellent viewpoint of the stunning ridges on Breidtinden and Ertnhellinden, which looked incredibly difficult and serious routes. Meanwhile, the other group headed for Munkan, ascending the wooden staircase and following a cairned route to the new hut on the west side of the mountain. The main peak is a pyramid of sound granite whose gentler sloping W ridge appeared to be the easiest route. The worst of the scrub-covered slabs were avoided and only about six short roped pitches were required to reach the summit.

We had four days camping at Reknas and a lot of rain. The weather decided that we only had one day's climbing and we all agreed to go up the Snøskard glacier and look at the W peak of Rulven. Two of the party descended to the west of the col and climbed up onto the ridge but found themselves in a complex tower system with hard climbing, poor visibility and rain. The climb was abandoned. We had repeated sightings of a pair of White Tailed Sea Eagles and felt our short exploration of Rulven was worthwhile if only for a closer view of these magnificent birds.

From the camp at Kabelvåg, we climbed Løva at the beginning of our stay in Lofoten and on our last full day we climbed Svolværgeita, the Goat, above Svolvær and jumped between the horns – a joyful finish!

Lyngsalpene in summer (July/August)

Slingsby wrote of 'the sharp peaked ranges and mysterious haunts of the frost giants about the Lyngen fjord, where nature has, apparently, developed her wildest and most eerie forms.'⁵ When Slingsby and friends went to Lyngen the journey took eight days but, despite this, the friends made repeated visits to these mountains. They are still a long way from Bergen, over 1000 miles, but this did not deter our party of fourteen. Our contact with Norwegians was very limited but we were greatly impressed by the efficient way in which they mounted a search and rescue operation late on a Saturday.

On a dubious cloudy morning a group of four of us followed a route of steep scree, steep snow and the short loose SE ridge to the summit of Istind from Urda. A very satisfactory first outing. A similar cloudy morning the next day found us walking from Høgtun through the trees and up the moraine to Isskardbreen with the intention of climbing Trollvasstind and Store Isskartind from Slingsbyskardet. Five of us continued mounting the glacier into a beautiful snow bowl surrounded by rock peaks where we had a moment of sunshine. One pair climbed Trollvasstind which proved to be an awkward ascent with large amounts of loose rock and short vertical sections. A good view of Isskartind from Trollvasstind enabled this pair to by-pass a lesser summit and many of the difficulties and ascend Store Isskartind whose summit overhangs a spectacular cliff.

The other pair climbed a lesser summit of Isskartind and then descended and crossed Slingsbyskardet to climb Trollvasstind. During the descent a

boulder came down the mountain and knocked Roger Allen off the cliff onto the inaccessible N side of the skardet. Shouts brought the whole party together but brought no response from Roger. During the next few hours two helicopters, a rescue team from the Tromsø Alpine Club, the local doctor, and the police who co-ordinated the operation all arrived. Roger was seen at about 2am and was reached at 2.30am. He had fallen a long way and had died in the fall.

The next day was sunny but we were all too shocked to decide sensibly what to do next and mostly we just wandered about aimlessly. There were formalities to complete with the police. It was a very edgy and peculiar sort of day. The contacting of Sue Allen the next day seemed to release most of us from the feeling that we should hang about any longer. A party of three set off for North Cape and everyone else went for a walk. Two of us climbed Kavringtind, south of Lyngseidet, and found Drooping Saxifrage, a plant which our book did not place in Scandinavia. Soon a little more enthusiasm for the mountains asserted itself and another ascent was made of Kavringtind and we visited Koppangsbreen, SW of Lenangstind and climbed Goalbårri. A solo journey was made of the tops round Gjerdelvatnan (Kavringtind, Kvalvikfjellet, Ruksesvargaisi and Rornestinden).

The final day seemed to typify so much of Norway in the summer of 1992. The morning was remarkably wet so instead of attempting Store Fornestinden we drove to Kippanger and tried a rather complex compass route through the cloud and enormous crevasses on Koppangsbreen. However to our astonishment we eventually reached what might have been the correct col for climbing Store Lenangstinden. Eventually we reached a summit with a small cairn but it hardly seemed impressive enough to be the true summit. We had all reached equilibrium wetness – water was running out of clothes and boots as fast as it was arriving! After that everyone headed south by car.

Epilogue

Slingsby had an enthusiasm for many other places in Norway to which we were unable to devote much time or where we achieved little. For instance, we completely neglected Trollheimen because one of the allocated pair suffered a head injury in a fall and we had no replacement. Other areas where we were less than successful included Romsdalen, Kjerringøy, Sørfold and Dovrefjell. Limited space precludes a detailed description of our activities in these areas. Overall, the weather in Norway during the summer of 1992 was much worse than usual and we also suffered the great sadness and trauma of two serious accidents. However, I hope that this article has provided a taste of what was achieved in the mountains with the help of our Norwegian friends.

The most important result of the project is the friendships that we have made. A special relationship has developed between the YRC and the Årdal Turlag, our first overseas kindred club, and we have been honoured with an invitation to be represented on the management board of the Slingsby Institute, an organisation founded to foster good relations between Norwegians and Britons and to strengthen our mutual interest in the wonders of nature.

Participants in the Norsk Project

British

Ken Aldred	David Hick	Howard Papworth
Mike Allen	Howard Humphreys	Neil Pomfret
Roger Allen	Jason Humphreys	Roy Pomfret
John Barton	Raymond Ince	Peter Price
Alan Brown	Mike Kinder	Arthur Salmon
Kevin Brown	Cliff Large	Graham Salmon
Derek Bush	Alan Linford	John Schofield
Cliff Cobb	Angie Linford	David Smith
Dorothy Crowther	Paul Linford	Fiona & Richard Smith
Ian Crowther	Harvey Lomas	Helen Smith
John Devenport	Duncan Mackay	Mike Smith
Iain Gilmour	David Martindale	Derek Smithson
Marcia Godden	Pam Mayhew	John Snoad
Mike Godden	Ainsley Mayhew-Seers	John Sterland
Steve Goulden	John Medley	Sue Thompson
David Hall	Rory Newman	

Norwegian

Johnny Bruheim	Petter Arnt Løvdahl	Arve Tvedt
Steinar Bruheim	Jan Schwarzott	Kjetil Tveranger
Edvin Folven	Vidar Søyseth	Rune Valsvik
Rein Arne Golf	Johan Støyya	Biko, the dog

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- 3 William Cecil Slingsby, *Norway: the northern playground*. D Douglas (Edinburgh), 1904.
- 4 *Ibid*
- 5 *Ibid*