

Steck shuffled off to his basement and came back with the biggest, heaviest agricultural implement Uncle Sam had ever produced. But its blade was cunningly full of holes.

'What were the hardest routes in Yosemite when you started climbing there?'

'*Lost Arrow Chimney*', said Roper, 'was probably the hardest climb in the world in its day.'

'*Higher Spire*,' chipped in Steck, the elder and earlier pioneer.

'Allen, what's the story I've heard about you getting benighted on your own route?'

'It was the fiftieth anniversary ascent, when I was 73. All went well until at the Narrows I ran out of steam. I simply could not climb it. This has only ever happened to me twice before in my life. So we were benighted. There was nowhere to lie down and my head kept falling off my arms folded over the rock. It was a horrible night. In the morning my partner rigged a pulley system and hauled me up. It was the end of my annual anniversary ascents of that route.'

The last time I had seen Steck was at Stange a decade ago when he'd arranged to meet Ken Wilson and Dick Turnbull for an ascent of *Right Unconquerable*, an old favourite of his. It was raining heavily and Steck approached the crag with an umbrella and street shoes. It was clear that climbing was not on for a Californian in his 70s, although Dick did actually lead the route in the rain. But Roper remembered their first visit to Stange when Steck was leading the route.

'He was close to the top when suddenly there was an almighty scream. He'd taken a fall onto a number four Friend. And I was only using a hip belay. Californians of a certain generation, like us, were slow to adopt the Sticht plate from Europe.'

Steck was grinning at the memory of this story told against himself. It was time to leave.

'End of an era,' mumbled Steck as we walked out the door.

A few days later Larry took me into the Valley again to climb a three pitch 5.6 called *Munginella* to the left of Yosemite Falls. There was snow on the top of Half Dome and the Falls gave their famous display of rainbows in the sun as we gained height above the trees. There was no-one above or below us on the route. We took time to linger and chat on the stances. The rock offered its bright granular friction and perfect jams. This, I was forcefully reminded, is what I like doing. And 67 is no age at all these days. I decided to give up alcohol for a month again, stick to Larry's high fat/low carb diet and get fit for a long classic route in Scotland this spring with my son.

'Rock!' shouted Larry on the lead. A rock the size of a haggis fell at speed between us. A raven flew away above us with a stick for its nest. I know, I know. I should have been wearing more than a Californian bandana.

Et in Arcadia Ego. It could have been the end of an era.

Terry Gifford

ALPINE CLUB LIBRARY ANNUAL REPORT 2013

Hywel Lloyd, Chairman of the Council of Trustees of the Alpine Club Library writes: This has been the year of the 'Road Shows'; the Library initiative to bring out some 'Treasures of the Alpine Club' from the basements of Charlotte Road, and show them to our members.

We started in January with a small exhibition in the Frenchay Museum, near Bristol. The main theme celebrated the centenary of the death of Frank Fox Tuckett, a Frenchay man, pioneer alpinist and our Vice-President 1866-1868. The Chairman of South Gloucester Council, Janet Biggin, opened the show.

In the summer, we staged an exhibition at Charlotte Road to recount the stories of the Nine AC Expeditions – 1921 to 1953 – that led to the summit of Everest 60 years ago. During four weeks, we were able to exhibit many books, paintings, artefacts, and original photographs. We also showed a compilation of historic photos on a large screen at the Pen y Gwryd Hotel in Snowdonia over the anniversary of the ascent. Next, we took a selection of the exhibition (to keep extra insurance costs sensible) to Hathersage in the Peak District, also for four weeks. Finally, the show moved to Buxton for the weekend of the Club AGM and Dinner. In all, a total of over 2,500 members, guests, and public visitors viewed these shows during the year.

Now to report on the plan to scan the many thousands of historic photographs held in the Library; new rules published by the Heritage Lottery Fund in spring 2013 gave us some advantages but also several significant disadvantages. After careful consideration, the Library and the Club felt we could not proceed with pursuing this possible line of funding. Thus,



Members and guests at the opening of 'Everest 1921 to 1953 – the nine AC expeditions leading to the summit'. (*Hywel Lloyd*)



Janet Biggin, Chairman of South Gloucester Council, opened the AC exhibition brandishing Frank Fox Tuckett's hefty 1850s ice axe, while Hywel judiciously retreats. (*Hywel Lloyd*)



Discussing methods and achievements of the 1922 Everest Expedition at the 'Everest 1921 to 1953 – the nine AC expeditions leading to the summit' show. (Hywel Lloyd)



The Library Team examining donated books for items to fill gaps, or allocate to back-up loan stock: L to R: Tadeusz Hudowski, our Librarian; Glyn Hughes, the Hon Archivist; Barbara Grigor-Taylor, Library Trustee; Jerry Lovatt, the Hon Librarian. (Hywel Lloyd) Below: Sandy Irvine's ice axe, lost when he disappeared in 1922; found in 1933. (Hywel Lloyd)

we are now moving ahead with a modest project, funded by the Club with some additional funds from the Library and the BMC, and volunteer work by the Photo Library team. Already, we have reproduced many historic photos to exhibit at the road shows.

Looking ahead, 2014 will be the celebration of the climax of 'The Golden Age of Alpinism', the period of achievement of many alpine summits by British alpinists, virtually all members of the AC. We are working with the Chamonix Museum to stage a significant exhibition of our archives, paintings and artefacts, which will be open for many months. Before and after this major show, we will take smaller shows to several locations in the UK. Dates and locations are not yet final, but 'watch this space'.

All this involves a great deal of effort and I am privileged to be working with the strong, keen and knowledgeable team of Library volunteers that is making this all happen. Our thanks are due to each of them.



Contributors

DEREK BUCKLE is a retired medicinal chemist now acting part-time as a consultant to the pharmaceutical industry. With plenty of free time he spends much of this rock-climbing, ski-touring and mountaineering in various parts of the world. Despite climbing, his greatest challenges are finding time to accompany his wife on more traditional holidays and the filling of his passport with exotic and expensive visas.

JOHN CLEARE has been a freelance professional photographer for over 50 years but a climber for rather longer. Business and many expeditions have taken him all over the world, while he has several dozen books, several films and live TV broadcasts, more than a few new routes and several virgin summits to his credit. An ex-vice president of the AC and an ex-president of the Alpine Ski Club, he lives in remote Wiltshire.

KATHARINA CONRADIN is the managing director of Mountain Wilderness, board member of the International Commission on the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA) and herself an active mountaineer, though her current job doesn't leave her as much time in the mountains as she would like to.

KELLY CORDES Aside from being short, having a low IQ and a girl's name, Kelly Cordes is a climber and writer resident in Colorado, USA. He's climbed throughout the world including the Greater Ranges, though a series of injuries has relegated him primarily to the crags rather than the mountains; a reality he'd long secretly desired. He was formerly Senior Editor of the *American Alpine Journal* and now survives as a freelance writer.

EVELIO ECHEVARRIA is a professor of international literature, now retired, and has been an AC member since 1959. His mountaineering record includes many obscure peaks in South and North America. He specializes in the history and chronicling of Andean mountain ascents.

PETER FOSTER is a recently retired hospital physician and is researching the life of T. Graham Brown. He has been a member of the Alpine Club since 1975.

MICK FOWLER works for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and, by way of contrast, likes to inject as much memorable adventure and excitement into his climbing ventures. He has climbed extensively in the UK and has regularly led expeditions to the greater ranges for more than 26 years. He has written two books, *Vertical Pleasure* (1995) and *On Thin Ice* (2005). Mick served as president of the Alpine Club from 2010-13.