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# Obituaries

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'La Montant sur la Pitz Val Rhein et Glacier du Rheinwald',  
Johann Ludwig Bleuler, 1820-40, body-colour,  
56.7cm x 43cm. (British Museum)

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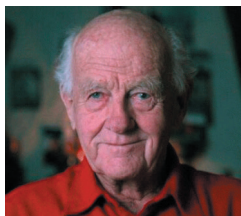
# In Memoriam

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<b>The Alpine Club Obituary</b>	<b>Year of Election (including to ACG)</b>
Derek Fordham .....	1972
Denis Bertholet .....	1968
Mark Bricknell .....	1957
Lizbet Fairley .....	1975
Tom Hornbein .....	Hon 2010
Barry Imeson .....	2005
Ron James .....	1974
Robert Langford .....	1960
Denis Mitchell .....	2009
Graeme Nicol .....	1959
Bill Norton .....	1992
David Pownall .....	Asp 1975, 1979
Bill Roberts .....	2019
Fred Smith .....	1976
Maryke Tilman-Deelen .....	LAC 1947
Alan Wedgwood .....	1962

The editor will be pleased to receive obituaries for any of those above not included in the following pages.

## Denis Bertholet 1929 - 2022



Denis Bertholet

Denis Bertholet, who died in August 2022 aged 92, was born in Montreux and spent much of his life in Verbier as a guide and ski instructor where he founded the ski school. He was member of the AC from 1968. A pioneer of off-piste skiing when other instructors preferred keeping to the marked routes, during his life he was a potholing, parachuting and diving instructor as well as a high-altitude mountain guide.

Denis had a life-long passion for the mountains and travelled to the Himalaya on many occasions. A photographer and cameraman, he was a graduate of the School of Applied Arts of Vevey. He was the author of several books as well as director of a couple of films. He shot his last film *Kanchenjunga* following the 1983 Swiss expedition to the Himalaya. Because of avalanche and rockfall May and Bruchez climbed the first ice barrier by the 1980 Japanese route. They established camp four in an ice cave and eventually got to the summit in 10 hours by the British route, returning by moonlight. He also directed *Spedizione al Nevado Taulliraju* a documentary about alpinism that takes place in Taulliraju.

Denis loved the Sherpa people and dedicated much of his later life to Nepal where he built a school.

*Robin Quine*

## Elizabeth Diana Fairley 1940 - 2022



Lizbet Fairley

Lizbet was born in Oxford, the second of four children, to Robert and Lettice Strickland-Constable but home until marriage was in the village of Brasted near Westerham in Kent. She was educated at Walthamstow Hall School, Sevenoaks (known affectionately as Wally Hall) and won a scholarship to study cello at the Royal College of Music. She continued her studies at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik, in Köln, under Gaspar Cassadó. She was a talented cellist and had a passion for teaching cello in schools and several of her students went on to play professionally. Lizbet played with a variety of chamber music groups in south Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Ealing until well past retirement age when advancing Alzheimer's disease curtailed her activity. Music was to punctuate our climbing and skiing visits to the Alps when we would always attend concerts in the locality.

She came from a mountaineering family. Her father was a member of the AC, which he had joined whilst still a student at Oxford. Mountain holidays

were common, and two summer holidays based at Saas Fee with Lesley Letts, Neil Ker and Hugh Pasteur (all AC members) and their families introduced her to the Alps. By age 17 she had climbed 12 summits including the Tête Blanche, Pigne d'Arolla, Alphubel and the Nadelhorn. A cousin recently commented that Lizbet was the first woman she had ever seen who wore boots.

We met at Hywel Lloyd's cottage in Brecon. By then she had already completed four more Alpine seasons including a summer traverse of the Haute Route and an unguided ascent of the Hörnligrat on the Matterhorn. Many climbs had been in all-female ropes with, among others, Dorothea Gravina, Heather Wheeler and Sylvia Yates with whom she did the traverse of the Barre des Écrins.

Our first summer together was based at the campsite in Zermatt where we made many lifelong Alpine friends. Two years later we were back again with big ambitions. After a warm-up climbing the Zinal Rothorn via the Rothorngrat we went up to traverse the Wellenkuppe and Obergabelhorn but on the descent of the Arbengrat we were delayed by bad weather and spent the night in a snowhole. Next morning, none the worse, we descended to the path towards Zermatt. Having breakfasted at Biel we continued in a leisurely fashion towards Zermatt to be met at Zmutt by a flurry of concerned friends alarmed at our non-appearance at the campsite the previous evening. Slightly chastened, the following day we went up to the Bétemps Hut intending to climb Monte Rosa by the ordinary route. Instead, on hearing of our adventures, the guardian sent us up the Cresta Rey: steeply direct to the summit of the Dufourspitze. This, he said, was the dry and sunny way, adding that he would rather climb it twice than trudge along the ordinary route with everyone else. We had the route to ourselves.

We married in the summer of 1972 and spent a glorious four-week Alpine honeymoon climbing, amongst many others, the Lenzspitze-Nadelhorn-Ulrichshorn traverse, the Aiguille du Purtscheller south ridge and the traverse of the Aiguilles Dorées. In those days we thought we could achieve anything. We climbed regularly in Wales and Scotland and our summers would be spent in the Alps on classic routes such as the north ridge of Piz Badile, the Dent Blanche, the Biancograt to Piz Bernina, the *Forbes Arête* of the Aiguille du Chardonnet and the *Éperon Renaudie* on the east face of the Dent du Requin. We always shared the lead.

For six years we lived in south-west Germany near Villingen on the eastern edge of the Black Forest and just three to four hours' drive from the Alps. This proved to be an ideal place for mountaineering parents to bring up a young family and enabled us to explore many corners of the Alps that are relatively unknown to most British mountaineers, such as Montafon, the Alpstein, Filisur, the Swiss Val Ferret, the Oberengadin and the Swiss National Park. Lizbet developed a strong interest in geology with many field trips in the surrounding region, the Schwarzwald, the Wutachschlucht, the Schwäbische Alb and throughout the Alps, an interest that passed on to our younger daughter. We learnt to ski here.

On returning to the UK we made our home in Gerrards Cross where we lived for 40 years. Holiday weekends, half terms and school holidays spent at her cottage at Gwastadnant, Nant Peris, were a regular occurrence. North Wales was an ideal base to get out into the mountains and she encouraged our children to explore from an early age. She was always more at home in the outdoors and camping than staying in a fancy hotel. It always felt like she could always rustle up a feast out of whatever was available ('nosh' and pasta being the most memorable) after a long day out in the mountains. And every year without fail we made the pilgrimage to Tschagguns in Montafon, Austria, to ski.

In 1975 Lizbet became one of the first women to join the AC by direct application rather than through membership of the Ladies' Alpine Club. She was always interested in the AC. It was important to her and she derived great pleasure from all its activities. She was elected to serve on the Committee and ran the publicity for the 1982 *Treasures of the Alpine Club* exhibition at South Audley Street. She trekked in the Garhwal Himalaya and climbed in Mongolia with other AC members and few London lectures, dinners or Alpine meets passed by without her presence. Her collection of alpine plants is a constant reminder of our many Alpine starts, walks and climbs in the mountains.

Friends and family were special to Lizbet. She always paid great attention to maintaining relationships and friendships, organising celebrations for every significant anniversary. So it was a great joy to her that we were able to celebrate our golden wedding anniversary together with the family at home just two months before her death. She died peacefully in her sleep at dawn on 22 August. Apart from myself, her daughters, Lucy and Alice, her granddaughters, Hannah, Charlotte and Sophie and her brothers, Fred and Bob survive her.

*John Fairley*

### **Derek Fordham** 1939 - 2022



Derek Fordham

Few Arctic travellers were able to convey so brilliantly the mesmerising effect of that landscape as Derek Fordham, who has died just shy of his 83rd birthday. Over the course of almost 50 years he led dozens of expeditions to Greenland, Svalbard, Iceland and northern Canada, first for the climbing and then later for the epic journeys. In this article entitled 'Arctic Voices' (*AJ* 1997, pp32-8), he reflected on his travels:

*I was drawn by the two voices of the Arctic: that of the hauntingly beautiful, cold, silent landscape and that*

*of the Inuit, descendants of Peary's Eskimos, a people whose degree of warmth, friendliness and total adaptation to their environment seemed in inverse proportion to the comfort of their homeland.*

*On the first expedition I shared with the Inuit we dog-sledged north-wards up the East Greenland coast. ... We cooked with them on the very oldest and most potentially explosive-looking Primus stoves. We hunted seals in the pastel light of the Arctic night, and cut them up back in our happy camp on the pack ice surrounded by a vast number of hungry dogs giving vent to their coda of the Arctic. We had an insight into a world little changed since Peary's time.*

The expedition was the 1971 Anglo-Danish Trans-Greenland Expedition, a 49-day 800km traverse from the east coast, over the icecap which rises to 3,000m, to the west coast. The journey began from the airstrip at Kulusuk with a 125-mile dog-sledge journey with 10 dog teams northwards over the frozen Denmark Strait to the head of the fjord, Kangerdlugssuaq. The dog drivers returned to Kungmiut while Fordham, John Anderson, Erik Hjelm and Sven Poulsson began a 55-mile man-hauling sledge trip up the Glacier de France and Paris glacier to the Inland Ice. Derek navigated using a sextant.

*Considerable difficulties were encountered on the lower section of the glacier, but Camp 12 was established on the margin of the Inland Ice three weeks after leaving Kangerdlugssuaq. We headed northwest across the Inland Ice on the 435-mile traverse to Nuuaqaq on the west coast, which was reached 30 days later, thus completing the longest man-hauled sledge traverse ever made across the Inland Ice.*

Theirs was the fifth crossing after Nansen. It wasn't exploration in the sense of discovering new land already known to the Inuit but as he put it 'the purpose was to explore'. As he later elaborated:

*... not to find new land ... but to climb a mountain as well as make a very long ice cap crossing and, in so doing, explore our reactions to life in the Arctic and with each other. It was the journey that was important.*

Derek's first expedition to Greenland was in 1968 where, as leader of the London University Graduate Mountaineering Club expedition, he led a team of five with the first ascent of Ingolfssjeld as the main objective (*AJ* 1969, pp282-4). Although the summit eluded them, it was a great success with long-term friendships and a passion for the region forged. The team had travelled by boat driven by local hunters from Tasiilaq to the base camp at the head of Kangerdlugssuaq fjord. Two team members found a way onto the long, difficult summit ridge from the south-east before being weathered off the mountain without making the final ascent. In the interim, Derek and other members of the team managed the first ascent of a peak they



Fordham at home in the Arctic. (Derek Fordham)

named Pinderbjerg. (His wife Jeni's maiden name was Pinder.) There were also first ascents of three other peaks, Semberg, Pt 1600 and Pt 1400. Ingolfsfeld, with its then challenging access, was not climbed until 1975.

Some 23 expeditions to Greenland followed, often with his wife Jeni. He kept detailed records of each of his journeys, regularly pored over maps of Greenland in his house in Greenwich with those who visited him to learn from his vast knowledge of the country. In 2016 he received the Polar Medal 'for outstanding achievement and service to the United Kingdom in the field of polar research as Arctic expedition leader, mountaineer and ambassador.'

The penultimate visit to Greenland was in 2015 to the northern part of Disko Bay, with fellow Arctic Club member and partner, Dr Lorraine Craig. Travelling by small motorboat, they revisited Saqqaq, the place where his Trans-Greenland expedition ended in 1971. He returned to Saqqaq for the last time in 2017. Although not as physically able as in earlier days, he visited Camp Eqi, where he had arranged for one of the huts, Hut 10, to be named after Col Andrew Croft to recognise his significant polar expeditions, and see old Greenlanders for the last time.

Derek Ernest Fordham was born in Lewisham on 9 August 1939, the son of a carpenter. He was an Alleyn's scholar before studying architecture at the Northern Polytechnic, Holloway. Remarkably, he managed to combine his forays to the Arctic with the professional life of an architect, working on large-scale public projects such as social housing schemes for the Greater London Council and the Thames Barrier.

Over the years, Derek built up an enviable expertise – as well as photo and book libraries – on all things Arctic, and he enjoyed passing that encyclopaedic knowledge on. He wrote the Arctic notes for the *Alpine Journal* from 1969 to 2010, which stopped when Greenlandic home rule was established and

expeditions were no longer required to register in either Denmark or Greenland. He wrote reviews of polar books for the science journal *Nature* and authored a 48-page book, aimed at younger people, entitled *Eskimos* (Macdonald Educational, 1979). He had two letters published in *The Times*, on lead poisoning and Franklin in 1984 and more recently to correct the claims of a British adventurer to have broken a west-to-east Greenland speed record.

A dedicated committee man, he served on the Alpine Club Committee from 1977 until 1979, was on the Mount Everest Foundation screening committee from 1982 until 1994, then a member of its management committee from 1995 to 2001. He was involved in organising various events through the Alpine Club and the ski-mountaineering symposia that run every five to 10 years organised jointly by the Alpine Club, Eagle Ski Club and Alpine Ski Club. But it was as honorary secretary of the Arctic Club, a post he held for 32 years, where Derek's idiosyncratic style will perhaps be missed most.

Derek's other skill was in organising expeditions. He was a meticulous planner, able to organise complicated logistics, whether liaising drop-offs with Inuit or sourcing classified US maps. This talent was paired with dogged determination. Whatever the situation, he had an ability to keep going day after day. Above all, he just loved the sheer remoteness and beauty of the Arctic. In an article for the Alpine Ski Club, he reflected poignantly on a lifetime spent venturing north.

*Those who have experienced the icy deserts often fall under a spell similar to that which Wilfred Thesiger ascribed to the sand desert: 'no man can live this life and emerge unchanged'. Perhaps, if you have the chance to ski for endless untracked kilometres under the pastel skies of the Arctic night, you too will lose yourself to that special magic of the Arctic and a part of your heart will lie forever in that hauntingly beautiful land.*

His wife the molecular biologist Dr Jeni Pinder died in 2009. Their son Charles and his partner of the past 13 years, Dr Lorraine Craig, also a past president of Arctic Club, survive him.

*Lorraine Craig and Tarquin Cooper*

*Graham Elson writes:* We were young architects when we met in 1964, before becoming lifelong friends, walking, climbing and skiing in the UK, Europe, Russia, North Africa and Greenland. His early climbing experience was with the University of London Mountaineering Club, where he met his future wife, Jeni. His climbing and ski-touring trips took him to Greece and Spain as well as more travelled destinations such as Chamonix and the Verwall and Silvretta in the Austrian Alps. One of the early trips Derek took was to Morocco where he and three university friends drove down to explore the Atlas mountains in an old Ford, which provided many tails of mirth before the climbing even started. Derek's is a sad loss, and his passion and knowledge of the Arctic as well as his lighthearted and dry humour will be greatly missed.

*David Drewry writes:* I knew Derek for over four decades through our shared Arctic interests. He was a frequent visitor to the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge, where I was on the research staff. It was quite clear from our earliest encounters that Derek was a serious expeditioner and mountaineer. When we first met, he had just completed the impressive crossing of Greenland in 1971. It was an inspiring expedition that deserves to be better known, perhaps because the telling of its story was a little delayed. Derek sent me a copy of the expedition report in September 2011 with the words: 'Here is the expedition report I talked of – 40 years late!'

He went on to make many further and challenging visits to remote parts of Greenland and Arctic Canada, several with his engaging wife, Jeni, often living with Inuit communities. She shared Derek's enthusiasm for the polar world but died tragically of cancer in 2009. They were a formidable team.

During our varied meetings and discussions I was grateful for his interest in the Arctic Club. I was the secretary of the club for a number of years and when I looked to hand over the baton, I was delighted that Derek showed himself willing to take it on – a role he fulfilled for two decades with great diligence. Notwithstanding his impressive achievements, recognised by the award of the Polar Medal, Derek remained a man of considerable modesty, almost diffident about his accomplishments, but ever eager to assist others in gaining their expedition goals.

### Tom Hornbein 1930 - 2023



Tom Hornbein

In the early hours of 23 May 1963, Tom Hornbein found himself enduring a bivouac at 8,500m on the south-east ridge of Everest. 'The night was overpoweringly empty,' he wrote in his classic account *Everest: The West Ridge*. 'Stars shed cold un-shimmering light. ... Mostly there was nothing. We hung suspended in a timeless void. ... Unsignalled, unembellished, the hours passed. Intense cold penetrated, carrying with it the realization that

each of us was completely alone. Nothing Willi could do for me or I for him. No team now, just each of us, imprisoned with his own discomfort, his own thoughts, his own will to survive.'

That isolation from his three companions was ironic for a man who set the greatest store by human connection. Beyond his exceptional new route on Everest, his distinguished medical career, his research into high-altitude physiology and his passion for literature, Tom had a genius for friendship: humorous, caring and engaged, talking with him was a delight. I recall a

lunch with him and his old friend Nick Clinch, who he had met cleaning out the latrines on a summer camp in Colorado when they were still students. The richness of their conversation, their sense of fun, the absence of grandeur all left a deep impression on me. Yet, as the Canadian explorer and writer Jerry Kobalenko put it: 'Though kind and loving, Tom was far from a pushover.'

'My mom and my sister used to call me "Tom Mule",' he once confessed, although looking back at his life he could see moments when that 'stubborn persistence' paid off. He could also see moments when he might have more profitably backed down. A willingness to reflect with an open mind on his own nature was one of the many appealing things about Tom. 'When my parents sent me to summer camp, I fell in love with the natural environment. But the enduring foundation is not the mountains; it's the people I've shared them with. Over the long haul it's the enduring friendships. With Everest, for me, the best part was these relationships as they unfolded in the years after the expedition.'

Thomas Frederic Hornbein was born the second of three children in St Louis, Missouri, on 6 November 1930. His father was an advertising executive while his mother focussed on raising their family. As a boy, Tom was climbing trees and onto the roof of his home. Aged 13 his parents had sent him to summer camp in Estes Park, Colorado, near Rocky Mountain National Park. Discovering the mountains, he would say, was 'the major pivotal event of my life. Those high hills became my spiritual home, underpinning all that followed.'

It was, therefore, predictable that he would end up returning to study geology at the University of Colorado Boulder. It was also predictable that he would spend a lot of his time rock climbing, sometime cutting classes to do so. He did a number of impressive first ascents at this time, notably *Chasm View Crack* with Bill Eubank and Brad Van Driver, to the right of the Diamond on Longs Peak. This was in 1950, before the Diamond itself had been climbed. The route included a 60ft layback crack too wide to protect with what was then available, a pitch Tom led. It still gets 5.9+ but is avoided by many parties, despite improvements in gear. Another 5.9 from this period was *Zumie's Thumb*, left of the upper east face on Longs Peak.

While at Boulder Tom was an early volunteer with the Rocky Mountain Rescue Group, which fired an interest in first response. During the summer, he worked at the same summer camp he'd gone to as a boy, which is how he met Clinch, who would be instrumental in taking Tom to Asia. The pieces of his life were coming together. Having gone to Boulder as a geology major, he switched to pre-med and having graduated returned to St Louis to study medicine at Washington University. There he began to ask questions about how humans adapt to altitude and his idea of becoming a general practitioner in a small mountain town gave way to curiosity about acclimatisation.

Graduating from medical school in 1956, the following year he went to Alaska on an expedition led by Fred Beckey, flown onto the west fork of the Ruth glacier by the legendary Don Sheldon. The team made a spirited attempt on Mount Huntington, which finally succumbed to Lionel Terray in 1964,



The iconic image of Hornbein and Unsoeld on the west ridge of Everest used on the cover of Hornbein's classic account of the ascent.

and made the second ascent of Mount Barrille. In 1960, Nick Clinch invited on an expedition to Masherbrum, so nearly climbed in 1957 by Joe Walmsley and a team that included Don Whillans. Tom took a fall of over 200ft following an avalanche and on the first summit attempt held Jawed Akhter, who cartwheeled off down the slope having slipped out of his steps. Tom grabbed the rope with one hand and wrapped his other around a fixed line. Akhter had gone more than a hundred feet by this point and Tom's teammate Dick Emerson, as teammate Willi Unsoeld recalled, 'asked with some interest, "Are your arms going to be strong enough, Tom?" The reply was, naturally enough, "Well, they'd better be." And they were.'

Emerson was himself unwell and in the aftermath of this fall, Tom descended to perform his role as expedition doctor, missing out on the successful summit climb. Yet his performance and understanding of oxygen equipment and its shortcomings

made him an obvious choice for the 1963 American Everest expedition. By then he had finished a research fellowship in St Louis and was now obliged to work as an anaesthesiologist for the American navy. Connections in the Kennedy administration sprung him from that.

The Americans, ably and democratically led, had two objectives, the most pressing of which was the first American ascent. That didn't suit everyone. 'We wanted more uncertainty in our diet,' Tom recalled. 'If getting to the summit was the only goal, then you would choose the route most likely to get you there, which the team also achieved. But there was a subset of us who had a dream to pursue the West Ridge.' On the approach and at base camp, there was much group discussion about how the large expedition should apply its resources. 'Willi and I complemented each other handsomely,' Tom said. 'As we made the case for the West Ridge to the other men on the expedition, I took on the role of being very outspoken, even a bit extreme at times. He felt exactly the same way as me, but he was able to come across as the guiding force that helped everyone reach common ground.'

After Jim Whitaker and Nawang Gombu reached the summit on 1 May, the pressure was off and the team on the west ridge was given the full support of the expedition. A strong Sherpa team along with Dick Emerson, Al Auten and Barry Corbet worked to get Unsoeld and Hornbein to a high camp at 27,200ft at the base of the couloir that now bears Tom's name, since it was he spotted the line on an Indian air force aerial photograph. (Tom used to dine out on the story of how, in a climbing shop in Copenhagen, the assistant had looked at his credit card and said: 'Hornbein? As in the couloir.') Climbing without the security of fixed ropes, the pair was slowed by technical challenges, including a 60ft rock pitch on crumbling limestone, and didn't reach the summit until 6.15pm. The plan was to descend in the boot-prints of Barry Bishop and Lute Jerstad, who had also been to the summit that day. Unsoeld and Hornbein caught them up on the way down and when it grew too dark to see, they bivouacked. Unsoeld and Bishop suffered terrible frostbite injuries but Tom escaped, perhaps because he had warmed his feet on Willi's stomach.

Tom Hornbein would live another 60 years, give or take a few days, after his Everest ascent. He was the last of the four who suffered on Everest that night, by some margin. The climb itself is now widely regarded as one of the great ascents in Himalayan history, achieved of course with commitment and imagination, but also integrity and as Tom himself would say, a lot of luck. He was content that Jim Whitaker, thanks to his primacy, got all the attention, which, in Tom's phrase, 'he carried magnificently.' All Tom wanted to do was get home, forget about Everest and start his career in medicine. He didn't want to be known as simply the doctor who climbed Everest.

Back in the United States, Tom was appointed assistant professor in the anaesthesiology department of the University of Washington and he and his first wife Gene Swartz moved with their children to Seattle. Tom described the appointment as a 'professional candy store' mixing intensive care, research and shaping how the next generation were trained. He published scores of papers, went on to run the department and retired as professor emeritus in 2002. His one climbing book, published in 1965, turned out to be a classic and is still in print, with the most recent edition appearing in 2013 for the 50th anniversary. It was typical of Tom to award the royalties to the Seattle-based publisher The Mountaineers.

Everest was not the end to his expedition life. In 1985 he joined old friend Nick Clinch on a joint Sino-American trip that made the first ascent of Ulugh Muztagh and he returned to China four years later with his son Bob and his friend Charlie Houston's son Robin. Ten years later, and four after a hip replacement, he achieved a long-held ambition to climb the *Casual Route* on the Diamond. After his retirement, he returned to Estes Park with his second wife Kathryn Mikesell, a paediatrician, whom he married in 1978. She survives him, along with his five children with Gene, Lia Scavotto and Lynn, Cari, Andrea and Bob Hornbein, and his daughter with Kathy, Melissa Hornbein.

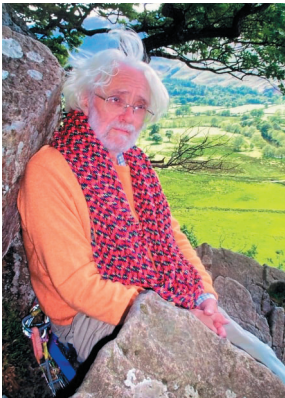
Tom had great admiration for his teammates on Everest but held Barry Corbet in particular regard. Corbet became a paraplegic after Everest in a

helicopter accident and after that a champion for those like him who had suffered a spinal injury. Tom often reflected that 'if he hadn't been paralyzed, there's no way he could have touched so many lives. He was a real hero to me.' A lot of people felt the same way about Tom Hornbein.

*Ed Douglas*

*Dr Jeremy Windsor writes:* During Tom's time at medical school he became fascinated with the process of high altitude adaptation. Like other researchers at the time, his attention was particularly drawn to how the body sensed low levels of oxygen and communicated this information to the brain. During his final year, Tom was able to conduct his own experiment. Using himself as the only subject, he pedalled a static bicycle and measured his ventilation across a series of different work rates. This was then repeated whilst breathing a hypoxic gas mixture. Over the course of the next few days Tom then prescribed himself a series of blood transfusions. This had the effect of increasing the number of red cells in his circulation by more than 30%. Consistent with Tom's predictions, his levels of ventilation fell significantly when the tests were repeated, especially in hypoxic conditions. For the first time, it had been shown that the concentration of red blood cells could play a key part in controlling breathing at high altitude. A publication in a prestigious medical journal soon followed. So too did several opportunities to further his research career. Over the next two decades he conducted a series of studies on the control of breathing in a hypoxic environment. His appointment as chair of the anaesthetics department at the University of Washington meant that by the late 1970s his opportunities for research had dwindled dramatically. Nevertheless, research remained a lifelong interest and he did much to support the work of others.

### **Barry Imeson** 1937 - 2022



Barry Imeson

Seasoned mountaineers were saddened to learn that the journal *Loose Scree* had finally slipped downhill. Published six times a year for nearly 20 years before its final issue in September 2019, *Loose Scree* was the creation of Barry Imeson, its founding editor, and contained articles, letters, poems and short stories but no photographs. Written by and for the older climber, contributors received a free copy and, according to Barry, an immediate surge of wellbeing. Barry was not interested in fame or personal fortune: he was a true socialist much admired by all he came in contact with.

## LOOSE SCREE

Issue No 111

September 2019



The final edition of *Loose Scree*, Imeson's labour of love.

Apprenticed first with engineers Reyrolle's at Hebburn on Tyneside, after his national service Barry trained as a teacher at Trent Hall, Middlesex. He returned to the north-east as a teacher and coordinator of outdoor activities, developing his skills and starting youth groups in Bellingham and surrounding schools. He took parties of students on novice climbing courses, camping in the Lake District and abroad to Italy in a vehicle that turned out to be very unreliable. He was a keen cyclist, regularly doing long-distance tours.

His next job, as a youth officer for the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), gave him the chance to start a training course for youth workers to take groups on climbing expeditions.

A keen photographer, Barry left boxes and boxes of slides, images taken at these meetings in Wales and Scotland. During this period, Barry was in the first cohort to gain his degree through the Open University. The demise of the ILEA prompted Barry to work briefly for Derbyshire County Council and then came his return to the north, to Highgreen in Tarnset.

Without doubt his favourite area was the Cuillin hills on the Isle of Skye to which he made an annual pilgrimage for something like 40 years, usually in June when the days were long. He liked to go late into the hills 'because it was more sporting' and often finished after dark. A colleague, Bill Burlton, remembers climbing *Collie's Route* on Sgurr Mhic Coinnich with him, starting rather late in the day. 'This is a 1,000ft (300m) ridge finishing right at the summit where we arrived about 11pm. The descent, scrambling along the main Cuillin ridge in the gathering dark, and then down Coire Lagan at 1am, was truly memorable.'

Barry was fascinated by the early climbing pioneers with their tweed jackets, nailed boots and hemp ropes whose expeditions required fortitude and stoicism, unlike modern-day climbers who have state-of-the-art gear, maps, guidebooks and GPS to help them. He had a very impressive library of mountaineering literature. At a guess, over 3,000 books, and without doubt one of the largest private collections of such books in the country. It included first editions, signed copies and sets of climbing club journals and it spanned the whole age of British mountaineering from the mid 1800s right up to date. Some of the books were bought as new but he spent a lot of time at second-hand sales venues, looking for 'treasure'. No matter to what part of the country his travels took him, Barry wouldn't miss the opportunity to browse bookshops and local jumble sales. Not surprisingly he was very knowledgeable about the mountaineering world and entertaining to talk to.

In 2001 Barry began his great effort with *Loose Scree*. A number of the contributors were well known writers in the mountaineering world: David Craig, Harold Drasdo, Terry Gifford, Colin Wells, Dave Gregory, Robin Campbell, Dennis Gray and Hamish Brown. Barry also dug out old articles

and poems from books and journals to flavour each issue. The magazine was distributed free to anyone interested and ran for 111 issues, the final one appearing in September 2019. Recipients looked forward to Barry's editorial, which appeared under the title 'Flatus Decrepitus', which was always full of wit and pawky humour and often took a dig at modern mountaineers and the mountaineering establishment.

He was elected to the Alpine Club in 2005 whilst engaged in researching and writing a biography of the noted late Victorian mountaineer John Percy Farrar, editor of the *Alpine Journal* and later president of the Club. This was published by *Loose Scree* in 2010 as *Playing The Man: A Biography of the Mountaineer, Captain John Percy Farrer DSO*. In a generous review, (*AJ* 2010, pp378-9), Stephen Goodwin quoted Geoffrey Winthrop Young: 'Farrar's was probably the strongest single influence modern mountaineering had known, and as editor of the *Alpine Journal* he had kept it at a level of literary and scholarly excellence that could challenge comparison with any more celebrated quarterly.'

Barry was twice married and had five children of whom he was very proud. 'They have all grown up to be respectable adults,' he said, 'without any input from me, a tribute to their respective mothers.' For the last 25 years, Dorothy Bell was his partner. She writes:

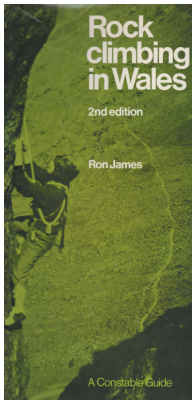
*On the Tarsset Parish Council, Barry served first as a member, then as Chairman. His style was inclusive and all-encompassing; instigating regular public meetings when anything controversial arose; dealing with difficult situations with equanimity and grace. A complex and complicated character, he made a valuable and varied contribution during his life on this earth.*

Roderick A Smith

### **Ron James MBE 1933 - 2023**

Ron James richly deserves the epitaph of 'influencer'. During his long life he was a powerful and safe rock climber, an instructor and mountain guide, leader of an innovative mountain rescue team, director of a pioneering course in outdoor studies and the environment, author of a significant selected guidebook and, on his retirement, a golfer of merit and a warm family man. The esteem in which he is held by so many people can be judged by the enthusiasm for him and his activities that an internet search for 'Ron James, mountaineer' will reveal.

Ron was a science teacher in Birmingham before he moved to north Wales and started climbing in earnest in 1956. In 1959 the opportunity arose to buy Ogwen Cottage to use as a mountaineering school, beating off competition from a major brewery that wanted to turn the property into a pub. He prided himself in being a neat, precise and safe climber, skills gained from early days wearing Tricouni nailed boots, where it was important to



Ron James and his celebrated guidebook.

Ginny and Ron James in 2009 at Buckingham Palace, where Ron was awarded the MBE.

accurately place the toe on the hold. He often wore nailed boots when taking students on climbs. His philosophy was: 'If I can't down climb a route in the wet wearing nailed boots then I shouldn't be taking students on it.' Ian Campbell, an instructor at Ogwen Cottage with Ron in the early 1960s recalled:

*Ron was the guru and he influenced us all. He was the master of rope technique and placing protection. He would climb with people of all abilities and always made sure they enjoyed the climb and did it properly. As a Guide he was unique in that he would take clients up routes that were near to his own top standard; there was nobody else guiding climbs like Cenotaph Corner and White Slab. Ron was one of the best climbers of his time.*

With companions like Ian Campbell, Mo Anthoine, Davy Jones, Dave Potts and Dave Yates, Ron pioneered more than 80 new climbs, including *Mean Feet* (HVS) and *Inverted Staircase* (VS) in the Moelwyns, *Grey Arete* (HVS) on Glyder Fawr, *Meshach* (HVS), *The Plum* (E1) and *Falcon* (E1) at Tremadog and *Lavaredo* (VS) on Carreg Alltrem. He had snatched *The Plum* from under the nose of Joe Brown. The pair had been standing under Tremadog one evening and nodded towards the crag. 'There's one plum left,' he told Ron, who could see exactly where he meant. Ron was back next day to grab it.

In 1964 Ogwen Cottage was taken over by the city of Birmingham, with James remaining as head of centre for a further five years at the end of which he was appointed principal lecturer and head of outdoor education at I M Marsh College of Physical Education. As Ron's work at I M Marsh matured over two decades, the course morphed into a degree and its reputation flourished. Over the years hundreds, perhaps thousands of teachers came under Ron's influence, his ideas and his enthusiasm for the great outdoors. As a qualified guide, from 1996 to 1999 president of the British Mountain Guides, he had the technical skills to back it up.

Shortly after this move, his book, *Rock Climbing in Wales* (1970, Constable)

was published, although its real scope was Snowdonia. This was probably the first and certainly best known, independent selected guide to a specific area. It became a tick list for the 1970s generation, describing 'some 200 climbs I have found during the last eighteen years of climbing to be the most enjoyable on any particular cliff or in any one valley.' By the time the second edition was produced in 1975, James had become a well-known figure and his guidebook a bible for many. He was also the author of *Rock Face* (1974), an instructional book to accompany the BBC TV series.

Back in 1964, Ron had co-founded the Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Organisation. (He cut his teeth early in rescue work, helping a teenage Chris Bonington off Tryfan in the early 1950s.) His work was influential and innovative. He enlisted the assistance of the RAF helicopter teams from Valley, visited Austria to observe developments there and imported specialist equipment, such as a Mariner stretcher, the Tragsitz rescue harness and reels of steel cable and a winch for use on the big cliffs.

Throughout his career in north Wales, Ron was also climbing in the Alps, particularly in the Dolomites, his favourite area, where he climbed for 40 years. He was elected to the Alpine Club in 1974, and the Club published his *Selected Climbs in the Dolomites* in 1988. In 2005 he fully updated this work, the Alpine Club publishing *Dolomites East and West* in two volumes, based on his deep experience of these mountains.

Although he retired from I M Marsh 1985, he remained extremely active in climbing, cycling and golf, passions he shared with his wife second wife Ginny. (He had been married previously to Barbara James.) He became a competent golfer at the Maesdu Club near his home in Llandudno. He brought his organisational skills, particularly with computer and spreadsheet, to the club and became captain in 1992. In 2009 his work with mountain rescue was recognised with the award of the MBE. He suffered a debilitating stroke five years before his death greatly restricting his mobility, and making his final years difficult, but the spark remained until his passing.

*Roderick A Smith*

*John Wilkinson writes:* Ron not only taught me to climb but also to get out in all conditions. He revelled in doing routes in foul, cold weather, my initiation coming on *Munich, Main Wall* and first sorties on Cloggy, all in winter. Likewise in his favourite stomping ground, the Dolomites, where I did many of the big climbs of the day (many of which still are) behind him as a beginner, even when in snow. The experience was usually lightened by his fund of improper stories, recounted in his Brummie accent. Thanks Ron. I owe you a lot.

## Robert Endean Langford 1938 - 2022



Langford leading the North Ridge of Ramchukor Peak in Kulu.



Robert Langford graduating just before his death.

Robert Langford was born in Bromley, Kent, the son of Ernest and Cora. His father died when Robert was 10. He attended Eastbourne College and then Sandhurst, before going up to King's College, Cambridge in 1959 to read mechanical sciences, already an officer in the Royal Engineers.

Early mountaineering interest is evidenced by several trips with Sandhurst Mountaineering Club, the Royal Navy to Folgefonna glacier in Norway for surveying and meteorology, and with the Army Mountaineering Association (AMA) to the Alps, all of which combined to support his election to the Alpine Club in 1960.

In 1961, while at Cambridge, Robert led an undergraduate expedition to the Cumberland Peninsula and Baffin Island in Arctic Canada, authoring an enthusiastic account in *AJ* 1962, available online. At the time of this expedition Baffin Island was little explored and few mountains had been climbed. Spirited attempts at the spectacular peaks of Asgard and Friga reached the col that separates them. Many years later Robert contributed to the booklet published to mark 100 years of the CUMC, *A Century of Cambridge Mountaineering* (2019), an interesting update of subsequent climbing in Baffin Island, including the opening sequence of the Bond film *The Spy who loved Me*, which involved Rick Sylvester skiing off the summit snows of Asgard.

In 1965, and now a captain, Robert was one of a small party of the AMA led by Bob Pettigrew to the Kulu Himalaya. Exploration led to the first ascent of Ramchukor Peak (5200m) and the crossing of the Sara Umga La, (*AJ* 1966, pp236-48). He married Susan in 1966 and had three children, Jonathan, Louise and James. After further service in the Paras and Commandos, Robert left the Army in 1972, becoming a chartered accountant occupying increasingly senior positions with Coopers and Lybrand, Lloyds Bank and the Institute of Chartered Accountants. He was the principal author of *Sustainability: The Role of the Accountant* in 2003.

He took up skiing, and ski touring in the Alps, Finland and Canada, and sailing, in a small boat he kept in Cornwall. His son, Jonathan, recalls:

*Dad's two favourite hobbies were sailing and skiing. He was also a keen walker. My happiest memories of dad besides family skiing and sailing holidays are our times together in St Mawes, Cornwall. He was very interested in geography and in particular the environment and further pursued this, completing a geography degree at Winchester University and graduating in October 2022, shortly before he died.*

In 2020 Robert married Cheng, who survives him together with his three children.

*Roderick A Smith*

### **Denis Mitchell 1948 - 2023**

Denis was born into a coal-mining family in Durham, where later he went to university to read biology, which he taught during his career as a teacher.

We met in the early 1970s through the Shropshire Mountaineering Club. We were then in our 20s and just starting our teaching careers near Wellington in what is now Telford. He had tremendous energy and enthusiasm for the mountains and wild places and was already in possession of the Mountain Leaders Certificate. It didn't take us long to get together and bond as climbers, nature lovers and committed country dwellers. We did much voluntary work together with young people from his school, taking them on the hills and introducing them to camping and climbing, as well as being volunteer instructors at centres in north Wales.

Denis was rather shy and quiet in those days but eventually he popped the question, on the Munro top of Meikle Pap on a freezing winter's day when we'd already climbed a snow gully on nearby Lochnagar. We had a honeymoon in Benidorm but regretted not taking climbing gear and after one interminably boring morning on a beach trying to be ordinary tourists, we gave up sunbathing and caught a bus most days into the rugged Spanish hills, seeking out scorpions and praying mantises, and enjoying the wildflowers and unusual birds.

Denis and I had a wonderful few years together living in Treuddyn in the Welsh borders, climbing in the Alps in our summer holidays and rushing off to climb rock in the Lake District, north Wales and Scotland for all our school holidays. By then we were keen members of the Chester Mountaineering Club. Our first Alpine trip was a backpacking expedition from Montreux to Interlaken, over high passes. This was over the Whit holidays and there was a lot of soggy snow covering the footpath with its security chains and ropes all completely hidden. Denis decided it was great fun to jump hard onto the mass of snow at the top of the pass, so it began to slide and carried us down



Denis Mitchell on the summit of the Zinal Rothorn.

the other side. He would squeal with glee. I was absolutely sure we were about to die. It was great character-building stuff and we did well to survive. Our very next Alpine efforts were climbing 4,000m peaks around Chamonix. Denis was bold and strong and soon developed into a safe and confident mountaineer on rock and snow. Eventually, in 2009, he joined the Alpine Club, and completed climbing all the Alpine 4,000ers, which is a considerable feat.

Sadly, after a few years we ended up drifting apart, mostly due to his perfectly natural urge to further his career by taking a post at a school in Cuddington, in the flat heart of Cheshire, where I absolutely didn't want to live. There he remarried and had a daughter, Laura. However, we remained friends, and continued to meet up at climbing venues at home and abroad. Mutual love and respect continued, through our later relationships, and it was always a pleasure to share a climb, ski, a cuppa or a chat with him as an old friend.

His personality suffered a serious change after a terrible head injury in 1998, when he fell from *Hollybush Crack*, a VS on the Roaches. He lost a chunk of right brain but after emergency treatment, his strength of character really showed as he fought to understand and control his new mental condition and return to some kind of normal life.

He was always so proud of his daughter and grandchildren, and longed to live nearer them, but he had relocated to Kendal, close to the hills that he depended on for mental strength and his dream was never fulfilled. Sadly, in 2021 he was diagnosed with prostate cancer, which spread. After several operations and eventually some weeks in hospital, he passed away in January 2023.

He was truly a man of the mountains.

*Marian Parsons*

*Dave Wynne-Jones writes:* I first met Denis in 1984 in Wrexham where we were both teachers and shared a need to get into the hills to counter the inevitably stressful experiences associated with the job.

Snowdonia was just an hour away from Wrexham, ideal for a day out on the Nantlle Ridge or Snowdon Horseshoe but we also stayed at Pen Ceunant Uchaf, the Chester Mountaineering Club hut, rock climbing in the Pass and Ogwen during longer weekends. Denis regarded himself as more of a winter climber and in the 1980s and 1990s Crib y Ddysgl and the Trinity gullies offered far more frequent opportunities for snow and ice work, often soloing for speed during the short winter days. Always up for exploration we once climbed a tenuous line of ice pitches to the right of Cynr Las that turned out to be quite testing and may well have been, ironically, *Schoolmaster's Gully*. On another gloriously sunny winter day we made a lightweight traverse of Tryfan, Bristly ridge and down Y Gribin ridge in snowier condition than we'd expected.

I was marginally stronger on rock routes, so we made a good team in the Alps, climbing mixed routes in the Chamonix area. Marian, Denis' first wife and herself a climber, encouraged us to join the Alpine Club where we fell in with a motley crew focussed on climbing the 4,000m mountains of the Alps, although none of us was blinkered about that. If there were good routes on lower mountains in the area, we'd be up for those as well. It was a way of exploring the Alps beyond Chamonix together with the likes of Mike Pinney, Jeff Harris and John Mercer. I remember Denis' keenness to take on some of the big traverses like the Alphubel-Täschhorn-Dom and the Bishorn-Weisshorn. He was an utterly reliable alpinist, although on the steep north-west ice face of the Aiguille de Bionnassay, with no natural runners and no time to place and remove ice screws by pitching it, we both opted to un-rope and remove the risk that one of us might slip and drag the other off. Later that season, emerging onto the ridge after similar unprotectable climbing in the Schneider Couloir on the Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey, Denis said, 'I really don't know why we didn't take the rope again off for that, because it was absolutely no use.'

As our skiing developed, Denis and I began to look for new challenges off piste and then in ski mountaineering. In 1991, Ralph Atkinson joined us for our first hut-to-hut ski tour: the classic Haute Route from Chamonix to Zermatt. The following year we were skiing 4,000m peaks including the Strahlhorn, Rimpfischhorn and Allalinhorn from Saas Fee. On the Weissmies, Denis and I pressed on despite negative comments from one of the party, who flatly refused to continue, while we took turns to break trail all the way to a wind-swept summit that in winter felt Himalayan in scale. There's more on all this in my book *4000m: Climbing the Highest Mountains of the Alps*, but in the later 1990s, with differing Alpine objectives and my increasing interest in expeditions, we climbed less together in the Alps and more often in the UK.

In 1998 Denis suffered a terrible head injury whilst climbing at the Roaches but characteristically fought his way back to fitness, so that in 2001 he finally completed his ascents of the Alpine 4,000ers, becoming one of the small group

of British climbers that, in 200 years of climbing history, have actually managed to do so. There were times when the after-effects of that injury put him into hospital again or made him difficult to get on with but sooner or later his characteristic grin let you know that the same old Denis was still there.

His move to Kendal and mine to Bristol meant that we saw much less of each other in recent years, although I always called in on him during a visit to the Lake District, impressed by the way he kept active and sociable through walking and cycling, often in the company of local friends. Even in marginal weather he would insist that we get out on the hill, however briefly. Ill-health limited those activities as he grew older, but only a year before his death I'd found him cheerfully sunbathing with his shirt off in his back garden, oblivious to my knocking at his front door. It was great to see his face brighten with recognition but it was also clear his body was suffering the ravages of illness. Still, it was a shock to hear from him in hospital and a greater shock to hear of his death so soon after an operation on his spine.

Life dealt Denis a hard hand but he played it with a determination to make the best of whatever came his way.

### **Graeme Nicol 1935 - 2023**

Graeme Nicol was one of four British climbers who raised the Union Jack on the summit of Peak Kommunistika (7495m) in Tajikistan in August 1962. Known today as Ismoil Somoni, it was then the highest peak in the former Soviet Union. Nicol started his climbing career while a medical student at the University of Aberdeen and he soon established himself as one of Scotland's leading ice climbers.

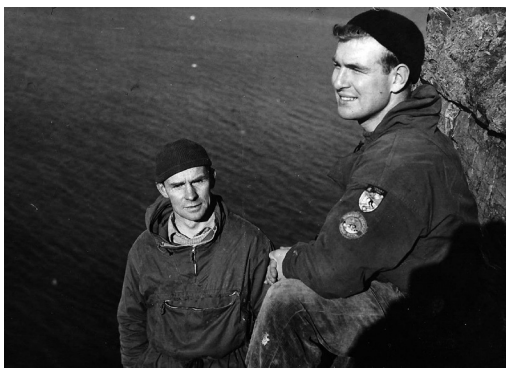
Andrew Graeme Nicol was born there in 1935, son of Rosella (née Ewen), a former typist, and her husband Andrew Nicol, who had fought in the First World War trenches and against the Bolsheviks in Murmansk in 1919 before teaching business studies. He had a brother, Donald, a physicist who migrated to Australia. It was a modest upbringing. The brothers shared a room in a two-bedroom ground floor flat until their early twenties. Two spinster aunts and a bachelor uncle lived upstairs.

Encouraged by his fiercely ambitious mother, Nicol was educated at Aberdeen Grammar School, where, with the scouts, he developed a love of hillwalking, rock climbing and the mountains. With a group of friends, he set up the Boor Boys mountaineering club using primitive equipment such as a 'borrowed' washing line for rope. It later became the Corroul Club, which Tom Patey described as 'a motley collection of ex-grammar school-boys, "brigands of the bothy", who enforced a regular reign of terror on a community where misanthropes and ornithologists were rife.'

His most famous climb from this period was the first winter ascent of *Zero Gully* on Ben Nevis in February 1957 with Tom Patey and Hamish MacInnes, described as 'one of the greatest achievements in Scottish winter climbing.'



The summit of Kommunizma, August 1962. Ovchinikov, Alchutov, Brown, Nicol, Malachov, Gippenreiter, McNaught-Davis. (*Malcom Slessler*)



Graeme Nicol, right, with Norman Tennent. (*Tom Weir*)

It inspired the classic essay, 'The Zero Gully Affair' by Patey in the 1958 *SMC Journal*. During vacations he also made a number of visits to the Alps.

Qualifying as a doctor in 1958, Graeme was of that last generation required to do national service. Following officer training with the Royal Army Medical Core (RAMC) he volunteered for service with airborne forces. Having completed parachute training, he went to Parachute Field Ambulance and then 2 Para. The SAS then asked him to apply, eager to boost their mountaineering resources, and even offered to waive the punishing application process. Graeme insisted that wouldn't be necessary and after passing he became their medical officer. He completed his free-fall course with French special forces at Chalon-sur-Saône and Pau and then served in Oman and Libya.

For the rest of his life Graeme retained a great pride for his service in the airborne forces and strong friendships stemming from his time with them. He continued to hold Territorial Army appointments, reaching the rank of colonel. After military service, Graeme returned to Aberdeen and completed a PhD in hypothermia before holding appointments in the medical school as an academic pathologist.

Following a largely successful visit to the UK by Russian climbers in 1960, both the AC and SMC separately applied to the Soviet authorities to visit the Pamirs. After a lengthy delay, an invitation was received from the Soviet mountaineering federation for a single group of 12 from the two clubs to visit the Pamirs in July and August 1962. Malcom Slessler, the leader of the SMC contingent, described the notion of the joint party as: 'a bit like proposing that North and South Korea should co-operate on making a nuclear bomb.' On arrival in Russia, John Hunt was appointed leader of the whole expedition. Animosities between the various nationalities, ideologies, customs and practices ran deep: Scots against English, both against the Soviet Union, communists against capitalists, competing ideas on fitness,



A medal struck by the Russians to commemorate the 1962 expedition. This remained on Nicol's desk throughout his career.

*AJ* 1963. Graeme suffered from a gut infection but, as McNaught-Davis explained, he wasn't going to back down. 'Graeme, who looked grey with fatigue, stated emphatically that as long as he could put one foot in front of the other, he was going upwards.' On the way Graeme treated one of the Russians who'd suffered a suspected heart attack, which at least allowed them to catch up with the Soviet contingent, who had gone to the top without them. Graeme had a Saltire tucked in his rucksack that he flew from the summit. If 'the climb was rarely pleasurable,' McNaught-Davis concluded, 'it was nevertheless unforgettable.'

Slesser's book *Red Peak* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1964), chronicled the expedition, warts and all. His account should be weighed against Hunt's more measured tones in, for example, the *Alpine Journal* for 1963; in the Cold War context of the early 1960s any activities that brought men together to tussle with the forces of nature must have been useful bridge building. Kommunizma was the apogee of Nicol's mountain career, although he continued to climb important new routes in Scotland (see below).

At a party in the summer of 1965 he met Christine Walker, a student midwife, and they married the following year, with their first child arriving in 1967. Ten years later, with oil fever gripping Aberdeen and restless in his job, Graeme left academia to become an occupational doctor with BP and was seconded to Abu Dhabi as medical officer for the Abu Dhabi Petroleum Company. In 1983 he joined BP's head office in London, eventually becoming the company's senior medical officer, a role that took him all over the world.

After retiring from the oil industry Nicol became a lecturer in occupational medicine at the University of Al Ain in Abu Dhabi. The post was intended to be for a year but he stayed for seven, during much of which he and Christine lived in the Hilton Hotel. Finally returning to Aberdeen around 2003,

diet, smoking and drinking, discipline, climbing to a sports plan and so on.

Early in the expedition, Robin Smith, still only 23 but already a force, and the more establishment figure of Wilfrid Noyce, veteran of 1953, were killed descending from the summit of Mount Garmo (6595m). Following a strong debate, Hunt returned to the UK but the expedition continued. A team of four UK climbers (Nicol, Joe Brown, Slesser and Ian McNaught-Davis) and four Soviets reached the summit of Kommunizma in a sort of strenuous alpine-style push.

Their ascent was wittily described by McNaught-Davis in his article for

he once again sought pleasure in the Scottish mountains as a member of a hillwalking club known as the Galloping Geriatrics. He also reconnected with a couple of the Russians from the Pamir expedition, remembering them at least as fondly as some of his British colleagues. He became an enthusiastic sailor.

Graeme died aged 88 of complications from Alzheimer's disease and bladder cancer. His wife Christine survives him with their three children: Andrew, a barrister, Stuart, a venture capitalist, and Patricia, a *Sunday Times* journalist.

*Roderick A Smith*

*Simon Richardson writes:* Graeme Nicol met Tom Patey on a Lairig Club meet during his first term at Aberdeen University in November 1952. Although Nicol was only 17 years old, Patey was quick to recognise Nicol's youthful strength and ambition, and two weeks later they made the first ascent of *Scorpion* (V,5) on Carn Etchachan in the Loch Avon basin with Mike Taylor and Ken Grassick. This challenging mixed climb was at the vanguard of a new era of Cairngorms winter climbing, and the route, with its notorious stinging in the tail, is still highly respected today.

In February 1957, Nicol visited Ben Nevis with Patey. Together with Len Lovat they climbed *Cresta* (III) the first route on the Little Brenva Face and nowadays an established classic. Patey and Nicol upped the pace two days later when they joined forces with Hamish MacInnes to make the first ascent of *Zero Gully* (V,4). *Zero* was the first V on the Ben and had been a long sought after objective for over 20 years. Modern ice tools have tamed the route but 65 years ago it was a step-cutting tour de force, heralding a new era of classic ice climbs on the Ben.

That December, Nicol concluded a very successful year by making the first ascent of *Sticil Face* (V,6) on the Shelter Stone with Ken Grassick. It was the first winter route to tackle this awe-inspiring cliff and arguably Nicol's finest mountaineering achievement. Before the building of the Cairn Gorm ski road in the 1960s, climbing on the cliffs in the Loch Avon basin was very serious and entailed a four-hour approach from Derry Lodge to the south.

Other new routes followed such as *The Great Rift* (V,4) on Braeriach with Jerry Light in 1964, but Nicol's technical highlight was the first winter ascent of *Pinnacle Face* (VI,7) on Lochnagar with Light and Grassick in 1966. Climbed wearing nailed boots it was the most difficult mixed route in Scotland at the time but it was to prove to be the 'swansong of the Tricouni Tricksters' with the curved axe revolution just three years away. *Scorpion*, *Zero Gully*, *Sticil Face* and *Pinnacle Face* all feature in the book *Cold Climbs* and Graeme Nicol's Scottish winter legacy will continue to inspire climbers for generations to come.

## David Melvin Pownall 1946 - 2023



David Pownall, Kutwal valley  
Karakoram, 1985 (*Lyn Noble*)

Dave died on 8 January 2023 after many years struggling with increasingly complex and debilitating health conditions. His climbing career and love of wild places started in the scouts and in 1966 he became an enthusiastic member of the Mynydd Climbing Club. One of his climbing partners was a young Pete Boardman who wrote in his famous book *The Shining Mountain*: 'Life has many cruel subtleties that require far more courage to deal with than the obvious dangers of climbing.' This could have been written for Dave, one of

the bravest and most determined people you could ever meet; courageous and optimistic to the end, refusing to let his deteriorating health get in the way of the activities he loved.

Dave was born in Chingford, Greater London. The family moved north to Hazel Grove where he attended Hazel Grove Secondary School and joined the scouts. Dave and Pete climbed together at home and abroad until 1977, often with the Mynydd Climbing Club. After leaving school he served an apprenticeship as a stereotyper in Manchester, the start of a long career in printing.

Regular climbing in Snowdonia and the Peak District followed, with early repeats of the test pieces of the day. Horizons widened with a truck-based expedition in 1967 to Cilo Dağı in Turkey and regular trips to the Alps. Dave wasn't just a rock climber; he was a mountaineer and loved an adventure: Scottish winter routes, primarily on the Ben, or long challenging days in the hills.

Dave joined the Alpine Club as an aspirant in 1975 and as a full member in 1979. Night shifts printing the Express and Mirror newspapers in Manchester together with my own weekend work pattern meant that most weekend meets were out of the question. However, midweek days off meant we often had the crags to ourselves.

His pride and joy was a VW camper van that became our mobile base camp for routes on Shelter Stone and Gogarth and also for Scottish skiing (or trying to). By 1980 he had built up an impressive record of climbs including *Red Wall* and *The Sind* on Gogarth and the Brenva spur and north-east face of Les Courtes; all done in a quiet unassuming manner that belied great competence and, gave great confidence to his partners. In 1985 the Buxton branch of the AC, Herbert Hartley, Ted Hanson, Dave and myself, joined an Alpine Club meet in the Karakoram. The joining instructions said 'meet

on the left bank of the Chogo Lungma glacier'. We did, and had an exciting traverse of the Haramosh La and out via the Kutwal valley.

The following year was a classic in the Oberland and Valais with traverses of the Fründenhorn and Blümlisalp followed by the north faces of the Doldenhorn and Obergabelhorn and a traverse of the Finsteraarhorn. We always remembered struggling to pitch the tent in torrential rain and being rescued by two Italian families with a giant tarpaulin stretched between their vans and a seemingly endless supply of bread, cheese and wine. Their sons, at the scout jamboree in Kandersteg, would have approved.

As his condition deteriorated, damage to Dave's vocal cords and windpipe caused difficulty breathing and speaking. He described it as trying to breathe through a straw. A climbing friend once told us: 'I can't believe how you two climb together. Dave can't shout and you (i.e. me with hearing aids) can't hear!' Even a tracheotomy didn't stop him; a few days after the operation he insisted on a trial run to Cwm Idwal linking rock climbs from the *Tennis Shoe* to *Grey Wall* and finishing on the Glyders. My son remembers him stopping occasionally to clean out his tube.

Dave was an avid collector of mountaineering books, particularly those shortlisted for the Boardman-Tasker Award. Shelves creaked under the weight of Alpine Club and Rucksack Club journals together with meticulous records of all his adventures ranging from Crafnant to Mont Blanc and the Karakoram. Dave never lost his crystal-clear memory and could always be relied on as a first port of call for dates and details of things I had forgotten. Everything he did was tackled with the same understated energy and enthusiasm, well illustrated during his captaincy of Cavendish Golf Club. He became so involved in course management that some members thought he was the professional green-keeper.

Whatever he did there was always a twinkle in his eye, a little surprise or a self-deprecating comment that could defuse the most gripping situation. I fondly remember a trout meal at the Hotel Engilberge in Ailefroide. At the end Dave scraped all the fish heads and tails onto one plate (we thought he was just being tidy) then poked out the eyes and ate them: consternation, then laughter around the room.

Above all else, Dave was a family man and a dear friend to all who met him. Our children had their first Alpine adventures on joint family holidays. Alpine novices from White Hall Centre were encouraged by his gentle support. In exchange, he received love and unstinting support from his wife Joan, his sisters, brother, daughters and grandchildren. Dave was so proud of them all.

Dave remained a mountaineer until the very end, always wanting to know where the Wednesday walkers had been and, although barely able to walk, always asking: 'Are we off up Kinder then?'

Lyn Noble

## W G Roberts 1931 - 2022

For Bill Roberts, mountains and mountaineers were an integral part of life. Arriving at Exeter College, Oxford to read English in 1952, Bill had already established a love of hillwalking and climbing during ventures from home in London to the Lake District. It was then as an active member of the Oxford University Mountaineering Club that his climbing took him to overseas ranges. In 1955 he was part of the OUMC expedition to Oksfjord with Ted Norrish (*AJ* 2022, pp361-3), where they ascended many previously unclimbed and indeed unnamed peaks in the far north of Norway. Then in 1958 on an OUMC expedition to Chitral, Pakistan, led by Ted Norrish, he was in a party attempting the unclimbed peak of Saraghrar (7349m) when Peter Nelson fell to his death. The demoralised expedition determined to take no further risks and retreated, leaving Saraghrar to be climbed by Fosco Moraini, who acknowledged 'much helpful information' from the British in his classic book *Where Four Worlds Meet*. He was elected to the Club late in life in 2019. On his application papers, to the question 'How long have you been climbing?' Bill was able to answer: 'Over 60 years.'

In 1960 Bill spent two weeks in a coma before having a major heart operation. It was characteristic of him that a few months later he ascended Mont Blanc with university friend Gilbert Murray to check that the operation had been a success. He had another unnerving experience in 1961 with a fall whilst climbing Mount Assiniboine, again with Ted Norrish. In recent years Bill recounted the incident:

*I made a careless step and was off, out of control. I started sliding and took some time to get my ice axe into the snow. It started to slow me down, but then I was off again, faster than ever. I bounced on the snow, turned over and shot off down, headfirst. I remember feeling the speed, worrying about hitting the walls of the couloir, thinking of Peter Nelson, and about how he was killed; thinking, incredibly slowly, about what I had to do. There was no sensation of danger...*

He also wrote about his interest in 'what happens as you die. The lack of fear, the slow and careful ratiocination when faced with a problem of how to stay alive.' On a lighter note, he recalled climbing back up 100m to re-join



Bill Roberts on the Strahlhorn in 1981.  
(Gilbert Roberts)

the party with an American companion commenting, 'Gee Bill, that was some fall.' Despite Bill considering giving up climbing they went on to climb Mount Robson.

Tragedy struck in 1963 when climbing partner Gilbert Murray was killed in a rockfall as they slept at the Pioneer hut high in the New Zealand Alps. Bill had an overnight walk down the Fox glacier in search of help for a companion with serious injuries and had to return to bury his best friend in a crevasse: 'That was the tradition then, that you left the dead climber where he had fallen.'

Returning to England, doubtless shaken by the experience of losing climbing friends, Bill settled into teaching at St Bees School. Together with Eskdale Outward Bound, this provided opportunities for him to introduce young people to climbing in the Lake District at venues such as Pillar Rock.

He married Anne at Frizington in 1964 and they had two children, Gilbert and Elizabeth. He wasted little time introducing them to alpine skills: practising cramponing whilst aerating the back lawn, prussiking from a branch of the apple tree and performing ice-axe arrests down snow slopes on High Pike. Now deputy headmaster at Nelson Thomlinson School, Wigton, he gave his family some of the most formative experiences of their lives, leading 12-year-old Gilbert up the Pigne d'Arolla in 1977 followed by several other ascents of F and PD classics such as the Weissmeis and Breithorn. These and a family ascent of the Allalinhorn, I might add, were before the construction of lifts made them into one-day altitude training peaks. A memorable morning on the Pigne de la Lé saw the family caught in a thunderstorm, ice axes 'pinging' from the all too close lightning.

Bill retained a deep respect for mountaineers, characteristically spotting Noel Odell in the streets of Saas Fee en route to the ABMSAC's 75th anniversary at the Britannia hut in 1984 and asking: 'Sir, may I carry your case?' He also retained contact with Outward Bound and OUMC friends, climbing the Petite Dent de Veisivi with Eric Plumpton and the Portjengrat

Following early retirement, Bill devoted himself to academic research, taking an Open University master's degree and then a doctorate from Newcastle University. He became an author, writing several books including *A Dawn of Imaginative Feeling* (1996) and *Thomas Gray's Journal of his Visit to the Lake District in October 1769* (2001). In these, he contributed to our knowledge of how mountains that had been once been considered 'rude and awful' became admired and appreciated. Yet, as he wrote: 'There is an underlying anxiety that we have lost the awe and magic that Gray found, and a belief (that is part hope) that it is still there to be retrieved, if you know where and when to look.' Bill was also a prolific writer of poetry, dedicating many to close friends and family, whilst also taking inspiration from the natural world. Meanwhile he indulged his love of the Northern Fells, a passion shared with distinguished mountaineers, logging over 300 ascents of High Pike.

A diagnosis of heart failure provided a welcome impetus for a solo train journey back to Saas Fee at the age of 86 to walk from the Felskinn to the

Britannia hut. Through 'grit or just cussedness' he battled through wet snow, railing against W H Auden's idea from 'Hymn to St Cecilia': 'That what has been may never be again' and seeking to re-capture the past. As he wrote in a 2018 poem about the outing:

*Heart pounds, lungs work overtime, now knowing  
This is the spirit's stamina, keep on going!*

*Gilbert Roberts*

### **F A Smith 1926 - 2022**



Fred Smith



Fred Smith, left, climbing at Peñon Ifach in Spain in his 80s.

Few mountaineers, when asked about their achievements, could ignore their considerable successes when climbing and instead say, 'I founded a climbing club.' Yet that, in the years to come, is what the many grateful members of the Merseyside Mountaineering Club will associate with Fred Smith, long after his climbing career has been forgotten.

Fred was born in Bebington, Wirral, to Arthur Smith, a technician at Lever Brothers and Ada (née Peers), a nursing sister. He left Bebington Secondary School at 14 to take up an apprenticeship at the shipbuilders Cammell Laird, the first of several jobs that provided a background in all things practical. Fred had joined the Wayfarers' Club in 1948 and became an active and popular member. He was a strong rock climber and made several new routes in the Llanberis Pass partnered by Peter Harding, Dennis Davis, Johnny Lawton and others. Through the 1950s and

1960s he was a regular visitor to the Alps, and climbed many traditional mixed routes, including the Zmutt ridge of the Matterhorn, the Teufelsgrat on the Täschhorn and the Kanzelgrat of the Rothorn. He was particularly proud of an ascent of the *Brioschi* route on Monte Rosa's Nordend, in the company of Ray Colledge and Dennis Davis, completed in poor weather.

He was originally a member of Alf Gregory's 1955 expedition to the Menlung glacier area of the Himalaya and had done much of the planning, before a knee injury prevented his participation.

Back in Liverpool, the local education committee, in conjunction with the Mountaineering Association, ran winter evening classes for would-be climbers. Fred became the tutor, teaching novices basic rope work and navigation and leading them on occasional trips to north Wales or the Lakes. Several of these beginners became so enthused that they sought to join a club. But a problem arose because some of Fred's acolytes were young women and the 'Wayfarers', in common with many clubs in those days, was strictly men only. So, with the cooperation of his new friends, in 1958 the Merseyside Mountaineering Club (MMC) was born with Fred as the first president. A hut, on the rather unlikely wilds of the Denbigh Moors, was acquired, later to be exchanged for the MMC's permanent home Cae'r Fran, situated just above Llanberis. Since then the club has flourished and now boasts over 150 members.

Meanwhile Fred had met, while working as a draughtsman at Liverpool Telephone Exchange, the love of his life, Elizabeth Walker, known as Bett. It was the happiest of marriages, producing a son, Ian, and daughter, Christine, and lasted from 1956 until Bett's death in 2020. With Bett's encouragement, Fred decided to abandon his career in industry and use his undoubted powers of persuasion to become a salesman, initially for the import-export agents McConnells as their man in Malawi, where the family joined him for several years. It is necessary, for an honest assessment of Fred, to touch upon his enthusiasms, sometimes for products on sale, which did tend too often to tip over into exaggeration. Those who knew him best came to accept this trait, realising that no malice was ever intended. We learnt, with good humour, to put the wilder claims through the 'Fred filter'.

On returning to the UK, Fred joined the staff of the BMC and was the initiator of their quest, eventually successful, to supply accident insurance for climbers: a huge benefit to the climbing community ever since. He was also administrator, for a time, of the Mountain Leadership Training Board, responsible for the certification of schoolteachers and the like taking novices into the hills.

In 1975 Fred joined the equipment supplier, Karrimor, as marketing manager. This involved close contact with major retailers and suppliers in the UK and Europe. His experience gave Fred the confidence to leave and set up, with Frank Bennett, a new agency for importing and distributing climbing gear, Sanctuary Mountain Sports. The company enjoyed mixed fortunes until the partnership split and then evolved into a new enterprise called High Places, which Fred ran alone until joined by his son Ian as partner. The modest success of this venture was suddenly enhanced when, after some years of evaluating samples, the MOD suddenly placed an order for no fewer than 245,000 pairs of sand-coloured socks. The government's military adventures in the Middle East remain highly controversial but produced a silver lining for Fred and Ian.

During all this time, Fred never stopped climbing. He was elected to the Alpine Club in 1976 and the following year visited Ladakh as deputy leader of the 1977 Merseyside Himalayan expedition. He led many MMC parties to the newly fashionable Costa Blanca for climbing in the sun, was a habitu  of indoor walls and celebrated his 65th and 70th birthdays by climbing the Anglesey classic *Dream of White Horses*. Later, he discovered the joys of climbing via ferrate in Bavaria and in the Dolomites, an activity that had the great benefit of being accessible to his wife Bett and daughter Christine. Across the years Fred continued to go to the mountains whenever he could. He was rock climbing in southern Spain into his eighties and climbed in Austria and the Dolomites when he was 87. At the age of 93 he still enjoyed gentle walking with Christine in Alpine areas he had not previously visited. His short story, 'Well, Now There's Posh for You!' is well worth digging out from *Loose Scree* (see obituary for *Barry Imeson* in this issue).

Eventually, cardiovascular problems curtailed his activities and in August 2022, aged 96, a series of strokes brought him down where gravity had previously failed. After a long life in the mountains, Fred will be remembered warmly by his many friends.

*Ben Stroude and Paul Davis*

### Maryke Tilman-Deelen 1925 - 2022



Maryke Tilman-Deelen

Maryke, my mother, was born in the Netherlands on 6 March 1925 to Frederik Adriaan Josef Deelen and Catharina Leonarda Josepha Deelen (n e Jurgens). Both parents were Alpine climbers but her mother, Rini Deelen-Jurgens was one of the first, rather expert female alpinists in the Netherlands. Because my grandparents went to the Alps every year both in summer and winter, my mother was taken along from an early age and so learned about climbing.

The family frequented Zermatt and the Dolomites. As part of her Alpine education Maryke had to walk up to the huts to reserve a bed for her mother's tours. Slowly but surely she was allowed to accompany her mother with her guide and became a good climber herself. She was elected a member of the Ladies' Alpine Club in 1949, whilst in her early twenties.

My mother was a volunteer in the Second World War, driving lorries with food to the north of Holland in the last year of the war. She studied law in Amsterdam but did not finish her studies because of her marriage to Eug ne Raymond Tilman in 1949. She remained an ardent climber for some time but with the arrival of four children, time was precious and slowly but surely her climbing diminished.

Her love for the mountains never abated, however, and the whole family went to Switzerland both in summer and winter. Up to a late age my mother went for hiking tours in the east of Switzerland. She instilled a love for the mountains in all of her children and grandchildren and they still all go to Switzerland as often as possible. With her passion for nature, she turned to shooting in her fifties and apart from the Netherlands went shooting quite frequently in the UK as well. This sport she practiced till she was almost 90.

She died on 9 December 2022 at the age of 97 after a long and fulfilling life. Until the end she was mentally alert, played bridge, looking after her garden and drove her car till a few weeks before her death. She read much, inter alia on mountains, and she was very happy with the books from the library from the Alpine Club and the *Alpine Journal*. During her funeral some texts, about the mountains she loved so much, were read and one of her last wishes was that her ashes would be dispersed in the Alps.

*Frans Tilman*

### Francis Alan Wedgwood 1937 - 2002



Alan Wedgwood on the Blinenhorn.  
(Janet Wedgewood)

Dr Alan Wedgwood, a scion of master potter Josiah Wedgwood (1730-85), excelled in everything he applied himself to, as a Harwell physicist, engineer, craftsman, director of Wedgwood Porcelain and all-round mountaineer.

Born on 16 May 1937 at Eccleshall, Staffordshire his early childhood was spent at the family's rambling house at Barlaston Lea, built by his maternal great-grandfather James Rendel (1799-1856), the distinguished hydraulic engineer who constructed numerous canals and the Holyhead and Portland harbours. During the war, the house became a haven for arms engineers working at Swinerton, naval officers from Canada and New Zealand and peripatetic family members who were all seamlessly catered for by Alan's mother Sally.

An inspirational governess Miss Greatorex had encouraged Alan's bent for mathematics before he went to a remote preparatory school on Dartmoor and then to Marlborough and Worcester College, Oxford where he got a first in physics and later his doctorate.

When his father Tom died in 1950, Alan became official head of the Wedgwood family. On leaving Marlborough in 1955 his cousin Josiah Wedgwood V, managing director of Wedgwood, urged him to join the family firm at Barlaston, which he did as a temporary apprentice, turning his hand to potting and decorating. In 1956 he joined the Royal Navy for national service and was commissioned as a submariner: rare for a national serviceman. By then he had decided that science rather than manufacturing was to be his career though in 1965 he joined the board of Wedgwood as a non-executive director, retaining the post after Sir Tony O'Reilly's ill-fated Waterford-Wedgwood merger in 1987 and remaining on the board until early 2009. Alan also played a vital role in saving the Wedgwood Museum at Barlaston from bankruptcy to preserve his family's 200-year artistic heritage.

After graduating from Oxford in 1962, Alan took up an appointment at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for post-doctoral research. On returning to England in 1965 he joined the Atomic Energy Research Institute, Harwell as a research scientist and in 1966 married an Oxford undergraduate contemporary Janet Merer. They brought up their three children at Blackalls Farmhouse, Cholsey. The rest of Alan's professional working life was spent at Harwell. He became head of the Non-Destructive Testing Centre at AEA Technology from 1988 until his retirement in 1996 when he and Janet moved to Cumbria.

This synopsis does little justice to the wider dimensions of Alan's multi-faceted life in which mountaineering played a crucial part. The family had always enjoyed hillwalking, climbing and the mountains. His father Tom, a former Trinity College 'night climber', had taken him to the Lake District as a child and when Alan was six they climbed Helvellyn and Scafell Pike the following year. There were also family holidays in Switzerland and Scotland though without serious mountaineering as Tom was already suffering from the brain tumour that eventually killed him.

Alan was sent to Marlborough because a distant cousin had financed the school's playing fields. Serendipitously, the school had a proud mountaineering tradition with three members of the 1953 Everest expedition – Hunt, Ward and Wylie – being old boys. In Alan's time it also had an active mountaineering club that included four boys who were to take part in the successful 1957 Pumasillo expedition: Simon Clark, its joint-leader, Kim Meldrum, Mike Gravina and Ronnie Wathen.

Alan was a couple of years younger but found the club cliquy and never became a member. He felt the rebuff keenly and during his national service,



Alan Wedgwood. (*Janet Wedgwood*)



Wedgewood on Heughscarth with a view of Ullswater and the Dodds.  
(Janet Wedgewood)

when his ship docked briefly in Sicily, he persuaded five seaman to join him to climb Etna (3357m): eruptions and a blizzard forced them to turn back at 3,000m. Going up to Oxford in 1958, he was determined to get into 'proper climbing' and joined the Oxford University Mountaineering Club (OUMC), then particularly active with the likes of Pete Crew and Colin Taylor. On an OUMC meet at the Avon Gorge he roped up for the first time and thereafter went climbing most weekends. On one of them he met his future wife and fellow mountaineer Janet. In his last year he became the OUMC's president.

During his four years at Oxford, Alan's climbing record was exceptional for an undergraduate. On his novice Alpine season in 1959 his six climbs included the Dent Blanche and the Badile's north ridge. In 1960 seven routes included the Piz Bernina's Biancograt followed by two grade IV, one grade V and one VI in the Dolomites. The following year he did a TD on the Aiguille de l'M, eight Dolomite classics including three grade IVs, one VI (the *Tissi* on the first Sella Tower) and the Marmolada's south face. His last year at Oxford 1962 was also his most successful alpine season when with Colin Taylor they did three classic Oberland traverses and another four around Zermatt. Moving on to Chamonix they climbed the Peigne north ridge, the Grepon's Mer de Glace face, the Grand Dru traverse and the Petit Dru's north face in a single day to make this its second British ascent (see *AJ* 1962).

Before taking up his MIT appointment in 1963, Alan went to Kenya with his brother Steve and Hamish Nicol. On Kilimanjaro they climbed Mawenzi and Kibo via the Great Notch Wall and on Mount Kenya traversed Tereri and Sendeyo by a new route, put up another on Pt Peter's north-west ridge (V+) and finished with Batian's north face by the *Firmin Hicks*. Arriving at MIT later that year, Alan initially found the mores of its climbing community uncongenial and likened its club's grading system, tests and examinations akin to that employed by the Russians. Nonetheless, he soon qualified as a 'leader' and after teaming up with his roommate and fellow rebel Phil Nelson climbed most weekends, often with John Reppy (whose predilection was for hard routes in extreme winter weather), Sam Streibert and fellow Brits Mike and Sally Westmacott.

Although the Americans headed west to the Rockies, Yosemite and Alaska for serious climbing, there was endless virgin rock within a 600km radius of Boston. The 2,000m White Mountains offered a wealth of granite cliffs; Mount Washington's hazardous winter climbing; Cannon Mountain had a half-mile long 350m cliff; and the Shawangunks an 8km-long escarpment

of quartz conglomerate. Alan recorded a bewildering tally of routes including half a dozen new ones mostly graded 5.7-5.9. Memorable was *Sam's Swansong*, a new route done in two stages, first with Alan and Sam Streibert who had to take a break halfway to get married, then the rest with Phil Nelson and the Westmacotts, completing 'the best alpine-style route in Eastern USA'.

In 1964 Alan journeyed out west with Phil Nelson. In the Tetons they climbed both Grand and South Teton before the much harder *Irene's Arete* on Disappointment Peak. At Boulder, home to both Phil and Layton Kor, they climbed the Maiden with its spectacular 30m abseil off the summit. In June the following year, Alan and Phil drove to Yosemite for 16 action-packed days climbing with Sam Streibert and John Reppy. Their 14 routes included El Capitan's 650m *East Buttress* in 12 hours, Chouinard's *MM Slab and Moby Dick*: both 5.9s. On the way back to Boston they nipped up Mount Whitney (4418m) the highest peak in the contiguous United States.

Returning to Europe in 1965, Alan teamed up again with Colin Taylor to do the *Bocalette* on the Aiguille de la Brenva. Moving on to the Vercors they laid siege to Mont Aiguille, chalking up two TDs. He and Colin also climbed the *Fissure en Arc de Cercle* on where, as Colin let slip when they were already fully committed, Lionel Terray had fallen to his death. Tragically, Colin, a fellow physicist who so closely shared Alan's climbing philosophy, was killed on the Obergabelhorn's south face in 1974.

Alan's marriage to Janet and the responsibilities of family life marked the end of serious climbing though in no way curtailed mountaineering. On their first Alpine season together, they traversed the Zinal Rothorn, climbed the Jungfrau's south-west face and traversed the Wetterhorn from Kleine Scheidegg to Rosenloui. Family holidays were now centred on their cottage in Glencoe with AC family meets at Bosigran and skiing in the Alps. In later years, there were family climbing expeditions to the Wind Rivers range in Wyoming, the Selkirks and Vancouver's Coastal range.

In the mid 1970s Alan and Janet turned their focus to ski mountaineering. In 1976, with the Westmacotts and Jim Milledge, Alan and Janet completed a ski traverse of the Oberland from Andermatt to the Wildhorn climbing the Balhorn en route: a fine achievement. The following year Alan led a party that included Janet, Sally Westmacott, Sarah Baker and Pip Hopkinson for a week's ski touring from Andermatt and back, taking in three peaks en route including the Gross Leckihorn (3065m). In 1978, Alan, his brother Nick and Richard Morgan joined me to attempt a guideless ski traverse through the Central Pyrenees from Urdo to Cauterets. We eventually completed a 12-day epic despite atrocious weather, avalanches and the loss of Richard halfway through from a strained back. Emboldened by success, Alan became the anchorman for three further stages of the Pyrenean High Route in 1980, 1981 and 1983. In between thrills and spills, accident and incident we climbed 10 peaks and pushed the route as far as Luchon. Alan, ever his own man, preferred the Swiss Alps where several attempts to ski from Andermatt to Zermatt (the Tour de Soleil) had been foiled by bad

weather and high avalanche risk. Eventually, the weather relented and with Janet, the Westmacotts, Jim Milledge and Sarah Baker the route was completed Zermatt to Andermatt in 1984: Alan's final triumph.

Since 1983, Alan and I had seen all too little of each other but in 2001 I persuaded him to join me for a ski circuit of Monte Viso with Rupert Hoare. This was intended as a Pyrenean High Route reunion (Alan having done four of the early stages and Rupert Hoare the last three) but also to settle the contentious question of where exactly Hannibal had crossed the Alps. It became clear from our first day's strenuous ascent to the the Quinto Sella hut in Rupert's slipstream that Alan was far from fit, yet he insisted on carrying on. Early next morning, 1 April 2001, barely 10 minutes after leaving the hut, I happened to glance round to see Alan lying prone under a rock outcrop. His skis had severed a main artery in a fall that shattered his pelvis, ruptured his rectum and punctured his bowels. Without Rupert's frantic race back to the hut for help, the Italian helicopter rescue service's immediate response and Savigliano Hospital's intensive care unit, Alan would not have survived his terrible injuries and the loss of eight litres of blood. He was flown back to England a week later and had his pelvis reset. Within a year he was skiing black runs but the injuries sustained never fully healed and in 2013 his damaged leg had to be amputated.

It was typical of Alan's courage, determination and stoicism that he adapted to this handicap without remorse or self-pity, busying himself in his workshop and scaling hills in a wheelchair bolstered by Janet's love and unwavering support. He combined a scientist's clarity of mind and an engineer's ingenuity with the creativity of an artist. In the mountains, he was a natural leader whose strength seemed limitless and whose judgement never faltered. Those who had the privilege of knowing Alan will never forget him.

*J G R Harding*

### **Andrew M Wilkinson 1976 - 2022**

Andrew Wilkinson died on 11 September 2022 when a large boulder being used as an anchor point on the Aiguille Noire de Peuterey gave way, resulting in a considerable fall. It seems likely that Andrew, who had a reputation for safe and secure climbing, was an unfortunate victim of the crumbling of the Alps accelerated by climate change.

Known as Wilki to his friends, Andrew started climbing with Durham University Mountaineering Club. Following five years' service with the Royal Marines, including operational deployments in Afghanistan, Andrew qualified as a secondary schoolteacher. His main role, at various schools, was as a pastoral leader to teenage pupils, looking after their welfare and wellbeing and encouraging positive choices in all areas of their school life and beyond. He taught modern languages and ran a range of Combined



Andrew Wilkinson at Everest Base Camp.

Cadet Force and rock-climbing activities. He took students on many adventurous trips to north Wales, sea-cliff climbing on the south coast and backcountry skiing and snow holing to Arctic Norway.

His mountaineering achievements were impressive. He climbed Cho Oyu with a military team in 2006 and Everest via the south-east ridge the following year. In 2012, he climbed both the classic Matterhorn north face and the north wall of the Eiger by the 1938 route. His partnership with Finn McCann on several of these climbs later led to episodes

of speed flying, a hybrid of paragliding and parachuting, although in 2015 Wilki pulled out of a flight from the Aiguille Verte with the explanation that 'I'm getting married in three months time.'

With his wife Sarah he made a nearly 3,000km kayak trip down the Yukon river, then an east to west crossing of Greenland by ski. He left teaching and founded Dynamis Adventures, a charity which delivers mentoring and adventurous outdoor activities for young people to build character, unlock potential, raise aspirations and encourage positive life choices, activities deeply rooted in Wilki's strong Christian faith.

He was elected a member of the Club and the Alpine Climbing Group in 2021. On his application form he wrote: 'most of my climbing partners have lost their mojo or given up because their bones are creaking and family life is demanding, I don't want to give up.'

Writing in *The Spectator* in November 2022, Anthony Seldon, former master of Wellington, wrote how his former pupil had come back from Afghanistan, the north face of the Eiger and Everest, 'but not this time from his beloved Alps. Teacher, soldier, adventurer, he left the comfort of Wellington to set up the charity Dynamis Adventures, to help underprivileged children develop and flourish through outdoor adventure. Magnificently brave and tirelessly loving, his Christian faith was his core. Most saw his selfless service, but few its wellsprings.'

The Club offers its deepest sympathy to Sarah and their three young daughters.

*Roderick A Smith*