

## Foreword

A few years before the Great War, the Austrian-born philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein spent a few weeks flying kites on Kinder Scout, research for a doctorate in the exciting new field of aeronautics.<sup>1</sup> He never completed his work. Solving engineering problems was replaced instead with ideas about how we think. Wittgenstein had a fascination for language and what he termed *Sprachspiel*, or 'language games', and thought a great deal about games in general. 'If there are no rules,' he once told his students at Cambridge, 'there is no game.'

Where does that leave alpinism? Our recent president Victor Saunders, whose valedictory speech appears in this year's *Alpine Journal*, tells me that alpinism must be a game because of the constant accusations of cheating. Yet even Wittgenstein wasn't sure that all games are played according to rules. Towards the end of his life he argued there are games we 'play aimlessly' or where we 'make up the rules as we go along.' There are also 'games with concealed rules', which players only discover after they start playing. That rings true for mountaineering. Then there are games that only pretend to be games. An obvious example, featuring on the radio comedy *I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue*, is 'Mornington Crescent'. Perhaps climbing mountains is like Mornington Crescent?

One way to get round these questions is to say that mountaineering is more a question of style. A good example is the recent achievement realised by the Norwegian Sámi former cross-country skier Kristin Harila and her climbing guide Tenjen Sherpa. In a shade over three months these two climbed all 14 8,000m peaks, shattering the putative record of seven months held by Nimsdai Purja set in 2019. I say 'putative' because it became apparent that Purja had not actually been to the geographical summits of Manaslu and Dhawalgiri, omissions that he said were a consequence of ignorance and were later corrected. Trouble is, once you define your game as reaching the summit, then them's the rules.

Both Harila and Purja came to climbing comparatively late, both made extraordinary sacrifices to realise their ambition, selling or mortgaging their homes to meet the huge expense of their endeavours. Both used fixed ropes and oxygen and relied on helicopters to get them from one mountain to the next. Harila said she spent half a million dollars on her first 8,000er attempt in 2022, thwarted only by Chinese intransigence that denied her visas for Shishapangma and Cho Oyu. Goodness knows how much the successful round cost; it must be comfortable over a million. Both climbers, however, saw opportunities to recoup those costs. Purja has written a best-selling

1. His supervisor at the meteorological station above Glossop was Arthur Schuster, Ernest Rutherford's predecessor at Manchester and the older brother of Felix Schuster, a notable Alpine Club member and related to the Club president Claud Schuster.

account of his life and was the subject of a feature film. He is a social media star, earning a fortune from endorsing products.

Many will shake their heads at such profligacy and point out that jumaring ropes is not climbing. That may be true, but it's *something*. And if that 'something' isn't a game many alpinists admire, the public begs to differ. Although some commentators have detected a greater willingness to criticise the Norwegian woman than the Nepal-born man, which fits a well-established pattern in climbing of female ascents being marginalised for reasons that are overlooked when it comes to men, another subject that also features in this year's *Alpine Journal*. Purja climbed pretty much the same way as Harila but hasn't yet faced the same scrutiny.

The thing about style is that we have the tendency to turn it into a moral question rather than a kind of regulation. We speak of good style and bad style. It's not too much of a leap to start thinking of climbers who practice 'bad style' as being 'bad people'. They're not, or at least, not necessarily. (Bad style can lead to exploitation of high-altitude workers, even their deaths, like that of Mohammad Hassan on K2 during Harila's ascent.) They just play a different game. Perhaps it's better to think in terms of creativity. Jumaring ropes on a trashed route and flying away in a helicopter might be judged by some an achievement but it's not imaginative.

On the other hand, having deep experience, a sense of fun and a creative mind can, deep into the second century of alpinism, produce innovative ascents that just make you smile. There is a good example reported in this year's *Alpine Journal*, featuring the first ascent from Will Sim and Fabi Buhl of Gulmit Tower whose base they reached by paraglider, getting around the dangerous approach that would have put any porters they hired at risk. It didn't make the headlines, but it made my day.

After nine years as editor, to go with five more I served at the turn of the millennium, I am stepping down from the *Alpine Journal*, although I will be supporting the new editor Adam Butterworth in his first year as he settles into a job that has been for me an absolute pleasure. There are other changes too. Rod Smith, who has edited the Alpine Club Obituary since the 2018 edition, also steps down, to be replaced by Suzanne Strawther. Robin Campbell, who has researched the frontispiece artworks for much longer, has also chosen this moment to put down this task. William Mitchell has kindly agreed to take over.

I would like to thank them and all the other volunteers who work towards making the *Alpine Journal* what it is. No doubt it will evolve in the years to come and I very much look forward to seeing that.

*Ed Douglas*