

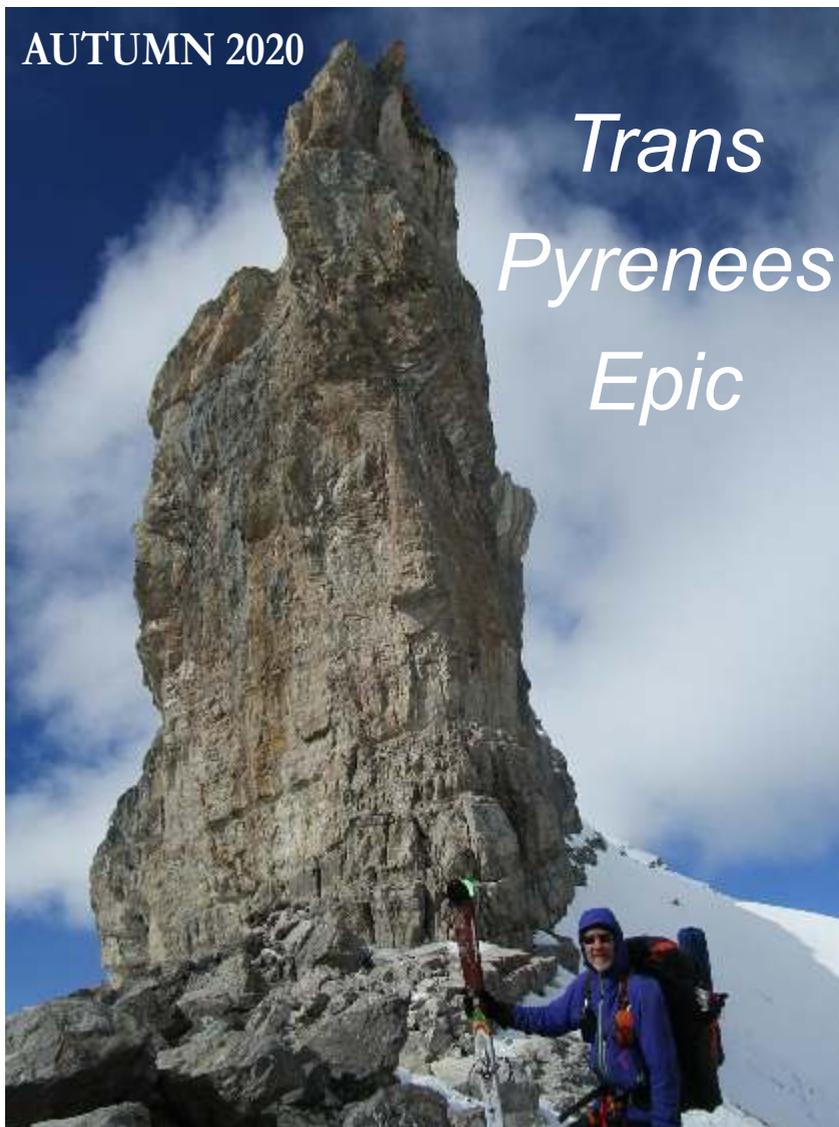
ASC

REVIEW



AUTUMN 2020

*Trans
Pyrenees
Epic*



From the Editor

Articles for the Review

Please do tell us where you have been touring throughout the season. And if you have been somewhere particularly adventurous, then contact the editor to arrange for a longer article, and include some stunning photos.

We are looking for a mix of many standard articles together with a few longer ones for unusual locations.

Copyright and Original

The articles submitted for the review must be copyright of the author and must be an original, unpublished account of the trip. Where trip reports are submitted to multiple organisations, *e.g.* when receiving grants, it is important they are sufficiently different and use different photographs to avoid any copyright issues.

Photographs must be copyright of the named photographer.

Standard articles:

Short and snappy to fill a single page or so, about 300 words with 2 photos.

Long articles (by agreement):

Up to 1500 words maximum and supply a selection of photos.

Photographs:

These must be high resolution (at least 1500×1000 pixels) and include a caption and the photographer in the filename. Single photos may be emailed, but it is strongly recommended that you upload your photos to the Review Dropbox, using the [File Request](#) link in the website Help. Make sure you include all required information – a short caption and the photographer (for copyright) – preferably all in the file name.

We cannot accept photos embedded in documents nor links to large collections. Please send us your small selection of the very best photos.

editor@alpineskiclub.org.uk

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President's Foreword

What a roller coaster this year is proving to be for us, no touring, summer climbing finally opening up in June/July, and all gatherings or holidays up-in-the-air. Covid-19 has made real impact on our lives. I have been in our village since March and am beginning to get “cabin fever”, although I can hear the wildlife in the garden and fields. However, there are some members' trips and achievements to report.

I was very honoured to be elected as President; quite a Club achievement; the first woman. Reviewing our archives over the last fifty years, one reads that several members felt that the ethos of the Club would be changed for the worse, while others favoured the election of women. This finally happened in 1992, largely due to John Harding's efforts, and four women were elected as members. One has resigned but Jay Turner, Sally Westmacott and myself soldiered on. On any trip, I knew that the going would be tough when the word “chaps” was uttered. Since then female membership hovers around 20 and, yes, the Club must have changed but probably for the better. Currently Katie Nurton is our Grants

Manager and Philippa Cockman arranges our Spring and Autumn lectures.

New Year began by finalizing affiliation for insurance. Mountaineering Scotland became the preferred option; this has largely been trouble-free and we have gained new members from this, John Strachan and David Gillen. Since the last Annual Review, over ten people have joined; Harry Putnam brought a significant



number and they would have all been on a tour together in March. Before retiring as President, Nick Putnam, had set up a mentoring scheme and, during the 'Lock-down', it has been moved forward. All new members and all Aspirant members have a mentor. This is well received by mentees and mentors alike; it helps new members to know a face or name within the Club, and some mentors have promised drinks in a pub or days on the hill where possible; all good companionship. If any member would like to offer their services as a mentor, please contact me.

We ran a survey in March with a key aim to find out what events and meets members wished to see the Club run and how much active participation there would be. Bruce Packard won the Cotswold Outdoors voucher for being the first name drawn from all the responses received; well deserved as he spends many hours assembling the Annual Review. From the useful replies, several good points emerged for committee discussion. The key results showed that members were wishing to go on tours, a significant (although small) number were willing to convene a trip, and others said that they would be willing to help. Members were interested in hut-to-hut tours, expeditions, and valley-based day trips. Based on this information, we have three good meets planned for 2021 and, hopefully, a bigger "expedition" in 2022. Of course, all depend on Covid. Our procedures and support for conveners and participants have been up dated and will

be reviewed during 2021. No convener is expected to sort out a trip on their own; the Club has a wealth of members' experience to call on and advice and suggestions have been given freely.

MAF adventure grants were awarded to David Hamilton and Steve Kentish for their Pyrenean traverse which missed the last day or so as they wished to be back in the UK before Lock-down. KSS training grants were awarded to Justine Gosling and Katinka Hunter. Harry Putnam's training trip was cancelled and their KSS grant returned; I hope that they can reorganise this trip next year. Sadly, we also have to report the death of our member since 1969, Jeremy Whitehead; he was a 'real' accomplished mountaineer and his obituary is on another page.

Zoom became a feature, enabling discussion and voting at the Special General Meeting to accept affiliation with Mountaineering Scotland. Zoom continued for committee meetings. David Hamilton reorganizing his very interesting Spring lecture as a Zoom discussion of their traverse and the planning for it. It is expected that the Autumn lecture and AGM will be on Zoom. Sadly, we have deferred our Dinner to be a year later, in the Savile Club on 19th November 2021. Here's hoping that 2021 will be a better year for us all.

Ingram Lloyd. President

Eastern Pyrenees

Chez Graham

Having purchased a second home in the Eastern Pyrenees in early 2019, I was eager to explore the nearby hills, also with a view to ski routes. Luis Puzo travelled up from Barcelona several times, to help with the DiY, to watch the Tour de France go past the house, and to reconnoitre some huts and hills in September.

But by the end of January I had begun to feel like an armchair tourist. David and Steve had started their epic traverse with barely any snow in the region, and I was following every bleep of their Garmin on the laptop. Then the storm came. They holed up here for a week, and I became a roadie for the next stage. I spent a first night with them in a stone bivi, just to check that I still could. Then on my way back I finally grabbed a summit, Pic de Coma d'Or, or more anglicised, "Pic de Commodore" at 2800m, from the Col de Puymorens. Two days later David and Steve traversed this as they headed West.

Two weeks later Chris Birkett arrived for an unwisely short stay; and the weather

shone all three days, such that folks were seen in singlets. Sadly the wind and sun had competed to wreck much of the snow, but we never had to walk. We visited another two peaks from Puymorens, and also explored an astonishing lovely valley



Luis Puzo rock scrambling Photo: Graham Wallis

Tarbesou Photo Chris Birkett



leading to Pic Tarbesou (2600m) in the "Donezan" area.

I skied again in the Puymorens a week later with my nephew George Wallis, on his second sortie on skins. Still a little snow to the car door; and by the time Richard Symes arrived in mid March it looked like Andorra offered the best options, but just after the Puymorens tunnel entrance we hit the back of the 10km snake to the Andorran duty free shopping malls; a rapid change of plan took us back to the Col de Puymorens for my fourth climb up the valley in four weeks. We then made a further visit to Pic Tarbesou, while the weather deteriorated into rain at 2000m.

Three days of bad weather and a long snowy walk and it was Richard's last day here. To his puzzlement I took him to the nearest ski station, Mont d'Olmes, for a

half day on piste; but after discovering good quality snow all around we made a little exploration of the flanks of Pic Barthelemy. This is the most prominent summit to be seen from Toulouse, on the northern side of the valley of Ax-les-Thermes. An hour's skinning reached Col d'Appy. Good snow and an exquisite couloir for the descent into the trees. A dozen other groups were about - no less than the number of skiers on the piste that day.

A week later the weather was looking good for climbing Pic Barthelemy - but at that point France shut itself down and the only men left in the mountains were David and Steve.

Graham Wallis

Luis Puzo, Chris Birkett, Richard Symes

French Pyrenees

A coincidental meeting at Pont d'Espagne

Ski touring in the Pyrenees does not have to be as ambitious as the complete traverse by David Hamilton and Steve Kentish, or as the tours described in John Harding's book about the Pyrenees. This was a trip by 6 senior citizens, half from Austria, half from the UK (including Dave Harmer, another ASC member). We met at Toulouse airport at the end of February, and set off to Laruns, a pretty little town in Val d'Ossau. Our initial accommodation was a self-catering flat over a (good value) Decathlon sports shop.

We knew that snow was scarce, so we started by driving to the highest point accessible by road, the Col de Pourtalet, 1776m, on the Spanish frontier, with a fine

view of the Pic du Midi d'Ossau, one of the symbols of the Pyrenees. There was nearly continuous snow up to Pic du Canaourouye/Pico de Canal Roya, 2347m. It was a popular route, with snow shoes and ski tourers.

The next day we drove to the Anayet parking of the Spanish ski resort of Formigal and set off up Vertice de Anayet, quickly leaving the pistes to traverse a gorge where the snow bridges over side tributaries were vanishing. We got to the Ibones de Anayet lakes at 2250m and were surprised to discover a large encampment of Spanish soldiers. As there was a strong cold wind and low cloud we decided to turn back. We took an alternative descent



Col du Pourtalet Photo: Alex Miller



Descent from Pic Entres des Portes Photo: Alex Miller

to the gorge and had a surprisingly good ski down.

The only other proper ski tour that we managed in the week was from the ski resort of Gavarnie-les-Espècières, 1856m. We bought a ski tourer's lift ticket up to Pic des Tentes and skinned up Pic Entre les Ports, 2476m. We had a superb ski down back to the ski pistes, and then drove back to the village of Gavarnie and strolled up into the Cirque de Gavarnie, the best-known site of the Pyrenees.

Other days we looked for snow at the French ski resort of Pierre St Martin, 1642m, and the Spanish ski resort of Astún, 1700m. We had to put on chains to get to Pierre St Martin, but although there was fresh snow there the weather was so bad that we skinned up the pistes and no further. At Astún the slopes had been swept bare by the wind, so again we resorted to a piste ski tour.

On the final day we drove to the spa town/ski resort of Cauterets. The strong wind and gusts meant that there were very few lifts operating and attempting to ski

seemed pointless, so we drove up to the end of the road at Pont d'Espagne, and were surprised to meet David Hamilton and Steve Kentish on their 60 day ski traverse of the Pyrenees on their way down for a well-earned rest in Cauterets. We walked up past the waterfalls and the cross country loipe markers in the snow free Marcadau valley, then drove to Toulouse, ready to fly home the next day.

We had probably spent more time enjoying French gastronomy than skiing, but in the circumstances that seemed to be the best way to enjoy the trip. Our hired Transit van was ideal for luggage capacity, but hard work for the driver on the narrow mountain roads linking the valleys. Had we known that Corona virus was about to close down all travel, we would have been more appreciative. The plans for a trip to Norway with the same group a month later have been filed for next winter.

Alex Miller

Evolene

Mid March - ahead of the lockdown

In our annual discussions of where to go next year, James always pipes up with "Arolla". Whilst doing the High Route a number of years ago, he had clocked

Arolla, describing it as having similar terrain to Zermatt but completely undeveloped. We ended up not staying in Arolla in the end, but decided Evolene further



Evolene Photo: Nick Silver



Evolene Photo: Nick Silver

down Val D'Herens, was a better base . We stayed in the lovely and very reasonable Chalet Les Criquets, run by a delightful English couple.

Evolene is a totally unspoilt and undeveloped village, which looks as Zermatt must have done in the 19th century. On the first day we warmed up skiing on piste

in Lana - the resort village of Evolene. The skiing was pretty good reds and blacks in the main with ample opportunity to put in some turns between the runs on less tracked snow. Lana is a typical village type resort with a couple of T bars and 2 person chair. There were a few people about in the morning - maybe 30 and by the afternoon the number was down to 6 (we made up half the number). It had a friendly atmosphere and the little cafe was very hospitable.

That evening the Swiss government shut all ski resorts because of Covid-19. Normally we like to incorporate lifts into our tours, but the Val D'Herens hardly has any lifts anyway so we were barely affected.

On the second day we started in La Gouille, on the road up to Arolla, and skinned up to the top of La Roussette (3262m), which took us about 4.5 hours. In typical fashion when we got to the top the visibility went; there was a disorientating wind, it was very steep with deep but heavy snow, and it was our first proper run of the year - meaning I made a total hash of it. Further down La Roussette, it was still steep with cut up snow, before you emerged into a lovely wooded valley, which was pretty tracked. There was a nice bar at the bottom, with people keeping a nervous social distance.

The Second day we started in Forclaz, a very small ski station, walking past the shut lifts up Aiguille de la Tsa (3667m) taking about 4 3/4 hours. The walk up was pretty hot even though we started early. At the

top you had magnificent views, including of the dam de Moiry; which we had skied past a few years back from Grimentz - a wonderful run as I remember. The terrain really is similar to Zermatt, but with no people, lifts or bling. The ski down was perfect spring conditions - in March. Towards the end we had to improvise with some grass skiing.

Last day (Monday 14 March) we drove to Villax above Evolene and walked up to the Col de Torrent. The hillside was south east facing so the snow was pretty patchy and the walk up involved taking off/putting on skis + walking through farm yards and over heather. The hillside was deserted as the lock down was beginning to tighten. As a result the wildlife seemed emboldened and we saw close up lots of bouquetin and chamois. The col was at 2916m.

Though time was scarce as we needed to return to Geneva Airport we concluded there was enough time for a short run down the back side. Fresh tracks in a deserted valley was pretty exhilarating. Alas there was a bill to pay and we had to walk back to the ridge/col to ski down to the car. The snow on the way down had softened a little in the sun which made for an enjoyable descent and even though ascending we had encountered significant bare patches somehow we descended on a continuous ribbon of snow and returned to the car successfully.

Nick Silver

Ski Crete

Hiding from Cronus

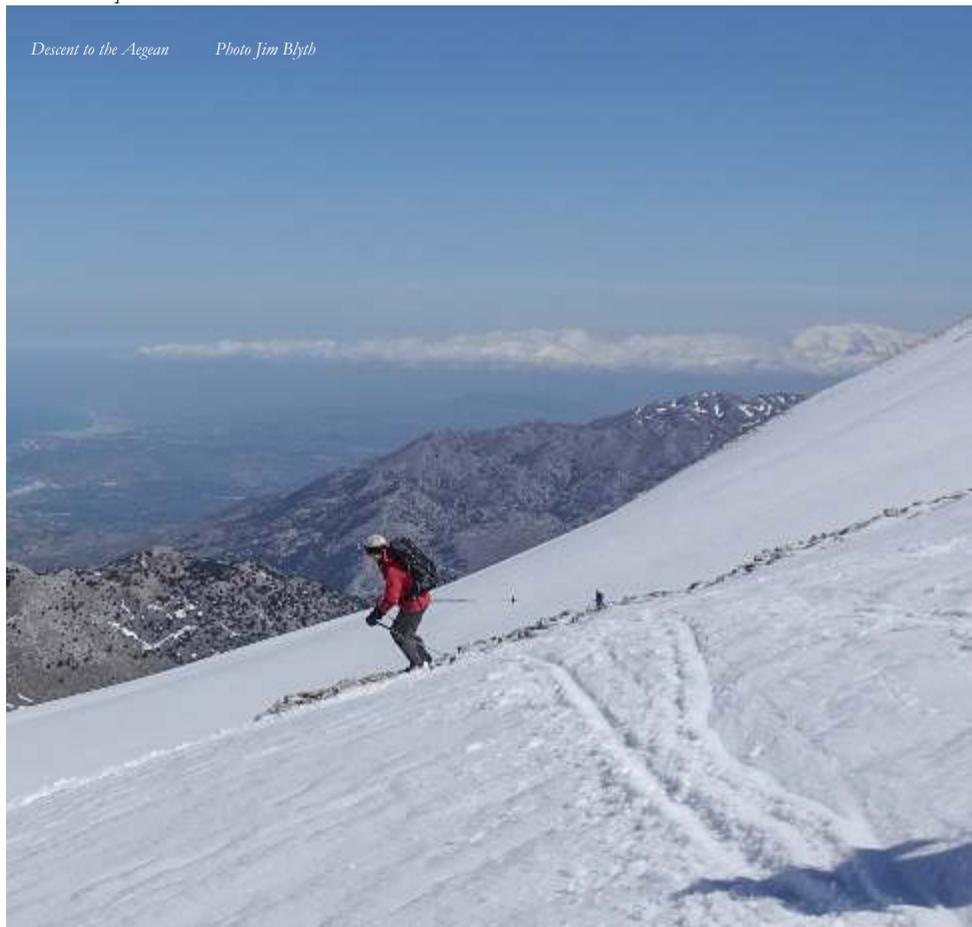
Crete's highest mountain is Psiloritis (2,456 m). The ancient Greeks knew it as Ida, site of the cave where the baby Zeus was hidden from his father Cronus, who took to eating his children after hearing a prophecy that one of them would kill him. A band of warriors, the Kouretes, danced

their wild, noisy war dances outside the cave to prevent Cronus from hearing the infant's crying.

The Kouretes were definitely on guard the day we approached Psiloritis. A whipping wind with flurries of freezing snow blew through thick fog and those of us

Windblown above Mount Pachnes Photo Jim Blyth





who reached the summit were rewarded with no view at all and a very thorough drenching in pouring rain during their ski down. I was not amongst the party.

Fierce wind was a constant and unwelcoming companion on Crete. The evening of our intended arrival at Heraklion our Aegean Airways flight had had to turn back to Athens after five failed attempts to land. This cost us a day, and the chance to climb and ski Mount Spathi in the east.

Very few people know that you can ski on Crete. Even Cretans were surprised to

see our skis. But you can and, despite the wind, we did. The three-day traverse of the White Mountains (the Lefki Ora in Greek) gave us three days of extraordinary skiing on often perfect spring snow.

It is a traverse that has very seldom been done, perhaps partly because the Katsiveli hut is private to members of the Chania Alpine Club or their friends. The hut lies half way along the traverse and allows access to all the major peaks, amongst them Mount Pachnes, the second highest in Crete and (at 2,453 m) just fractionally

lower than Psiloritis. It stands on an exposed col, has no electricity, or water.

The water we used at the hut was in fact rain run-off from the roof which was collected in an under-floor tank directly beneath. At night the surrounding snow-covered mountain slopes shimmer and shine in the light of the moon. There was no loo, but also no light pollution.

Correctly named the Christos Kouliopoulos hut, after the man who inspired and initiated its construction in the face of unremitting apathy amongst his neighbours in Chania, it is a simple place and was filled to the brim by the nine of us (including two ladies), plus Giorgios (guardian of the Astraki hut in Epirus) with his two Cretan friends, Manolos and Lavros. Indeed our stay would have been quite challenging without the translucent alcoholic liquid provided in quantity by Manolos. It was unfortunate that he and Lavros forgot to provide for any breakfast but ... at least there was the translucent liquid.

The terrain surrounding the hut is ideal for ski touring, with snow slopes facing all angles and directions. From the summit of Pachnes, where the wind raged in fury, we had clear views to the south over the Libyan sea and to the north, over the Aegean. The views of the Mediterranean from the high white peaks where there was nobody but us, the descents from Pachnes and lesser peaks, dancing and swooping through perfectly converted spring snow like swallows on a summer evening, are a

lasting visual and physical memory of pure joy.

The traverse consists of three days: the first, after two hours' drive from Chania, was a six-hour day, involving a total climb of 1160 m and a horizontal distance of 15 kms. We had hoped to climb Mount Melidhou en route but high winds and no visibility turned us away after a climb of 750 m. The arrival at the Katsiveli hut was beautiful in golden late afternoon sunlight.

The second day we spent climbing and skiing the peaks and slopes all around the hut.

And the third was again 15 kms, up and down over passes in all directions so that I no longer knew, as we breached the last pass, whether we were looking south, to Africa, or north, to Greece. It was north, and the final descent over pristine spring snow with a view all along the coast led to a long walk-out first on skis, then on skins, then in boots, avoiding (or leaping over) deep and well concealed rocky caverns, and then on skis again before - really finally - boots: a total of 10 hours. We were ready for the vans when we reached them, and for the beer in the café at Asifou village.

Among the party, which was led by Jim Blyth with his habitual good-humoured professionalism and irrepressible appetite for sport, were two members of the ASC: Robert Borgerhoff Mulder and Harley Nott, whose son James was also with us.

Robert Borgerhoff Mulder

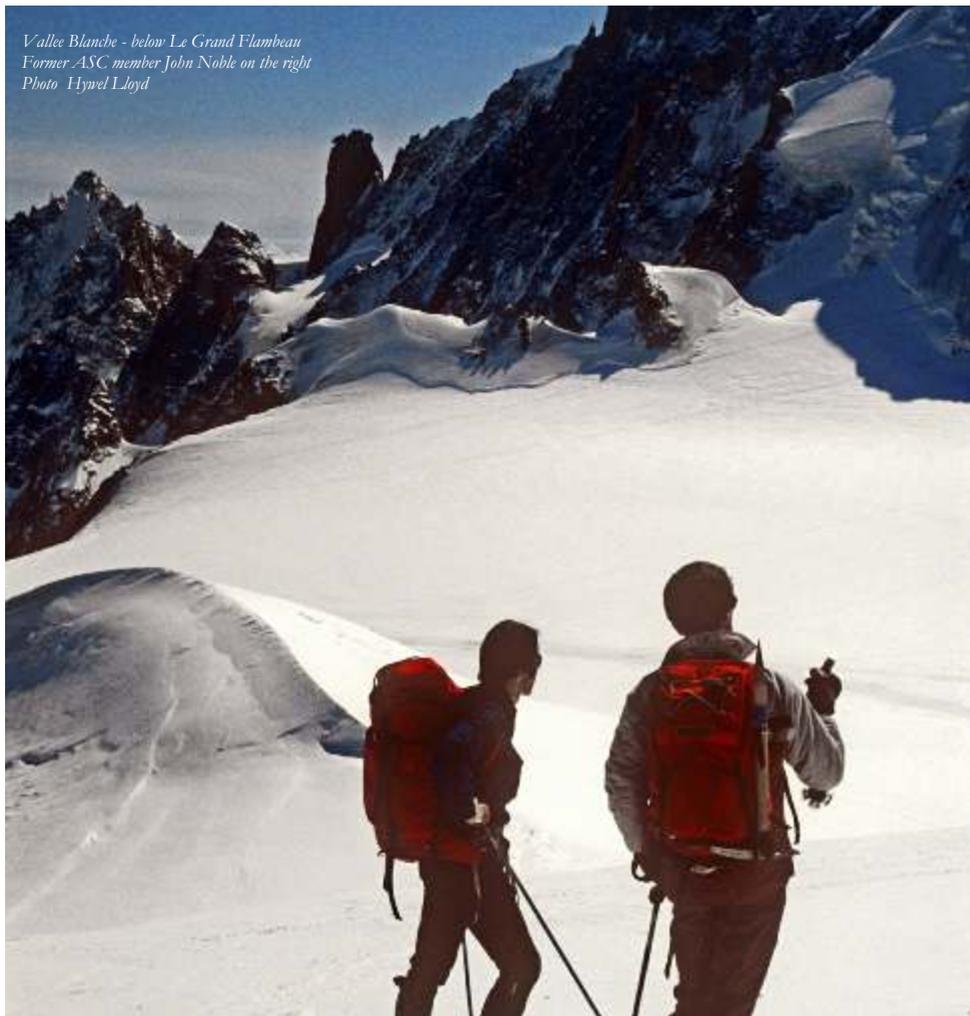
A Day to Remember on Skis

When things go wrong on the glacier...

Below is a reminiscence of a crevasse incident on the Vallee Blanche, written by a former President. The incident happened many years ago, but it is still instructive. Club members are invited to send in "near miss" reports and share knowledge in the Annual Review.

It was a Saturday morning in the early spring and I had woken up in Chamonix, the historic town in the heart of the French alps under the shadow of the mighty Mont Blanc. We were having a rest day and planned to do one of the longest ski descents in Europe, a 20 km run called the

*Vallee Blanche - below Le Grand Flambeau
Former ASC member John Noble on the right
Photo Hywel Lloyd*





Vallee Blanche - below Glacier du Geant and Pte Helbronner
 Photo: Hywel Lloyd

Vallee Blanche. But first breakfast was calling and off we went to the restaurant for our baguette, croissants and coffee. Candidly we never felt that the French quite hit the mark with their breakfasts, but they were just about worth getting out of bed for.

It was rather inconvenient that the main cable car we needed to use to reach the Aiguille du Midi, our starting point, was closed for repairs so we decided to drive our minibus through the Mont Blanc tunnel into Italy and to take the cable car up from that side. Hearing our conversation over breakfast a French mountain guide asked if he could join us, as he too had the day off and would like to ski the Vallee Blanche with us. So we welcomed

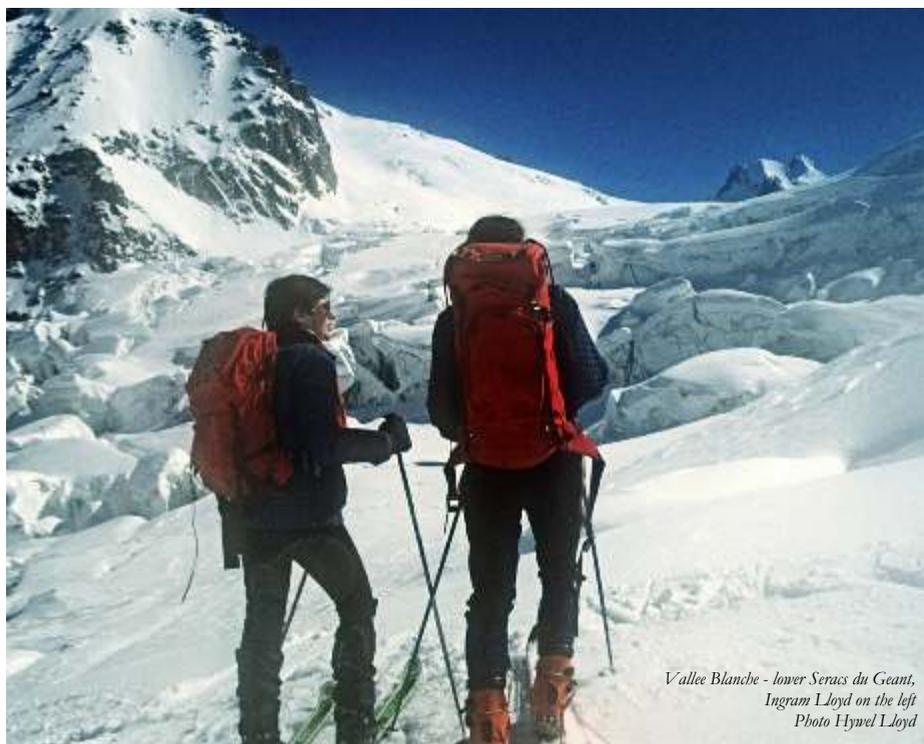
Yves to the party and set off for Italy. We caught the first possible cable car to reach Pointe Helbronner from where we could put on our skis and ski down to join our original route back to Chamonix.

Sadly the weather at the top station was awful, a full white out which is a condition when the sky and snow appear as a white sheet in front of you which makes skiing and navigation really tricky. So we drank the inevitable coffees until it cleared. When it did we shot out of the door to make up for lost time and readied ourselves for this challenging ski descent down a glacier. As we lined up, Yves asked if he might lead us down and we thought that was a good idea as, being a Chamonix guide, he would know the safest route. So he went first,

followed by John our guide who carried a rope, and I skied at the back of the group with a spare rope. We all started off in high spirits.

It was good to be skiing at last. Yves called back that we should follow his tracks as he picked his way between the visible crevasses of the Geant glacier. After a few minutes, Yves and John stopped and we all pulled up, keeping a safe distance between each other. Yves had decided to rope up with John so that if he fell down an unseen crevasse John would be able to arrest his fall with the rope. Being guides they were quick and professional and in a few minutes, someone shouted that Yves had gone. I replied that was fine and we

would follow on shortly. "No - he has really gone!" came the reply. In fact, as soon as he had skied off he had fallen straight down a deep crevasse. John had done a textbook arrest by simply dropping down with his skis at a right angle to the pull of the rope, which otherwise might have dragged him in on top of Yves. I told everyone to stay still and went forward with my spare rope ready to carry out a much-practised crevasse rescue of Yves. First I had to establish a belay or anchor, so I took off my skis and thrust the first one deep into the snow - to my horror the snow, about the size of a table, fell away at my feet and I was staring into a deep ice-cold blue crevasse and I was about to



*Vallee Blanche - lower Seracs du Geant,
Ingram Lloyd on the left
Photo Hywel Lloyd*

fall into it. Quickly I put my skis back on to spread my weight and I moved towards John. A crevasse fall is very serious. It can result in a head injury or broken bones which make extraction more difficult. In the worst case the victim becomes wedged at the bottom, where the sides narrow, and body heat melts the ice which soon refreezes and locks the body to the ice. In this case we knew from his shouts that Yves was uninjured and together we set up a pulley system and hauled Yves out, not without a few Gallic expletives on his part. Alas, he had lost a ski down the crevasse but was otherwise fine; only his pride was hurt. We were lucky to get away so lightly from this potentially dangerous incident.

Shocked as he was he insisted on leading again, now skiing with great skill and balance on a single ski. Amazingly he soon disappeared over the lip of another crevasse, but this time John had him on a tight rope and he did not go far down. Again we pulled him out but we had a long descent to make which on his one ski would have been very difficult. So we made our way to the Requin hut at the side of the glacier where the kindly guardian

gave us coffee and found a spare ski for Yves to use. Our adrenalin reserves were running low - it was good to take a breath.

We were now past the Geant icefall and the crevasse risk was behind us, so we skied down happily as far as we could to a point where the snow runs out. Here we took off our boots and put on the trainers we had packed in our rucksacks for the hike up a steep path, to join a modern metal staircase which had been built to give summer visitors easy access to the glacier. At the top of the steps was the small train station of Montenvers. This was the end of the line for a narrow-gauge railway, using a rack and pinion system, which was built in 1908 for the Victorian tourists. How we wished the service was running that day, but sadly it was not so we set off for the long walk back to Chamonix. Our various diversions had set us back so the sun was setting as we reached the town where we quenched our thirsts with good French beers at the Bar National. It really had been a day to remember.

Alun Davies

Editor's note: I was also in a party on the Helbronner descent of Vallee Blanche where the person going third fell into a crevasse (un-roped - though I was carrying a rope in my rucksack at the time). As she had broken ribs and a head injury we called the helicopter.

Club members should perhaps consider that although the Vallee Blanche / Helbronner feels safe and popular compared to less familiar tours or more adventurous mountains, that this can be

deceptive. There is evidence from the metal stairway up to Montenvers how quickly the glacier is receding and so the route is likely becoming even more dangerous. The perceived risk of this route is low, but given that 2 club members have been involved in crevasse rescue on the same glacier the real risk of the Vallee Blanche / Helbronner is probably much higher than is generally recognised.



Trans Pyrenees in Winter

62 days: from Mediterranean to the Atlantic

The goal was to cross the Pyrenees from coast to coast, Mediterranean to Atlantic in winter, by ski or foot only, no lifts, cars etc. The trip was scheduled for 2019 but had to be delayed to winter 2020, with a reduced team of 2 (Steve Kentish and David Hamilton) from the original 4.

David had completed a comprehensive route planning process, offering several alternatives for various weather and snow conditions. Researching these alternatives proved invaluable as we could adapt our route to the changing conditions. I had studied accommodation options, which we updated as our route altered.

We met up in the NE Pyrenees, where Ian Storey, who helped with supply drops is based, to sort our supplies. We broke the traverse into 9 stages, the first and last being purely walking to and from the respective snow stages. The other supply drops being placed at road heads. Ian made the majority of the deliveries, augmented by using the post to tourist offices or known hotels.

We set off for Banyuls-sur-Mer, arriving the day before and enjoyed the beach in the afternoon sunshine, departing before sunrise the next day, 15th January.

The next 4 days took us through wooded hills of the Pyrenees Orientals. These offered glimpses of the snow topped mountains ahead. However the snowline was depressingly high, well above 2,000m. The weather forecast was however for considerable precipitation over the next few days; Storm Gloria arriving, which caused considerable disruption but for us was a real blessing.

After staying with Graham Wallis, who kindly provided hospitality nearby, we arrived back at Batere to find about 20+cm of fresh snow; now we were in business. We spent a night in the derelict part of the Batere building, putting our sleeping system to test. The system consisted of a foam mat, airbed and 3 season bag, worked well in providing comfort, protection from a rough ground and warmth. The night's sleep was only interrupted by mice.

Enjoying the beach before the start *Photo: S Kentish*



The next morning was sunny and we were off on skis. After the first col, we followed the often elusive path traversing steep slopes, rather time consuming and energy sapping. Progress slowed further when crossing, usually avalanched, streams. The result was an after dark arrival at our first hut, Refuge Cortalets, where the wall graffiti confirmed that we were in Catalonia, rather than Spain!

The next day took us over the first significant mountain, Canagou 2785m. After a short abseil from the summit we had a great ski down to the trees, where forest once again slowed progress and we stopped at an earlier hut at Mariailles.

From here the recent snow enabled good progress over rolling hills, sleeping at the virtually fully buried Refuge de la Portaille de Roth's. After much digging we found

that the door had broken, meaning significant amounts of snow inside the hut.

Our next stop at Refugi d'Ulldeter was excellent till 3 local lads arrived on foot about 10pm very cold planning a party. They were somewhat upset to discover that as the chimney leaked they were unable to warm up. Their party was rather subdued. Fortunately we were tired enough to still get a reasonable sleep.

We continued through fantastic and varied scenery over snow that was firm in the morning but softening in the afternoon sun. The warm weather was having a significant impact on the snow line, which was creeping up, more walking at lower levels than we would have wanted. We were pleased we'd included light walking shoes.



We passed through the Ariege area in France and then through Northern Andorra, before returning to Catalonia/Spain. Virtually all the huts were unguarded with basic facilities and usually required a fair bit of digging out. Our sleeping system enabled a good night's rest, especially as we were generally the only guests so had suitable peace and quiet, particularly enjoyable when we arrived early on sunny afternoons. Our day to L'Hospitalet-près-l'Andorre saw a brief spell of cold, windy and damp weather, almost a relief!

As we left L'Hospitalet-près-l'Andorre we met a team of 4 from Meteo France and they confirmed that the weather in February was due to stay warm and largely dry. We had mixed thoughts as we would have preferred more snow lower down but were enjoying sunny conditions, with the occasional exception, such as Collada dels Menets on route to El Serrat, when windy

conditions blew both of us clean over as we approached the col.

We kept going for 20 consecutive days before having an overdue rest.

On route to Isil, meeting Ian with a supply drop, we met Carles Lluch, who lived in Vielha, our subsequent supply drop. Ian transferred the Vielha drop with Carles, who kindly put us up for a couple of nights as well as ferrying us to/from the south end of the Vielha tunnel.

We then faced a delay as our schedule put us in the 'full' Restanca refuge on a Saturday night. We split the next day stopping at Refuge de Molieres. Again we had late arrivals just after dark, a couple of local lads walking and planning an ascent of the Tuc de Molières the next day. They had started with 2 axes and pair of very light crampons. On the ascent they had lost one axe, leaving them pretty poorly equipped. The following day they sensibly turned back on steep ice.

We arrived at the Restanca on Sunday, out of Catalonia and into Aragon, enabling a quieter ascent of Aneto on Monday. Apparently no-one had summited the day before due to high winds, so we were fortunate to have been delayed by a day. The ascent was relatively straight forward, a prolonged traverse after crossing the Portillon Superior and then the rocky ridge, Pont de Mahomet, with significant drops on both sides making us a little nervous. As well as the highest point in the Pyrenees, 3404m Peak Aneto was roughly half way. We enjoyed the views from the summit. All downhill from here?

Our next night was at the Hospital de Benasque, the most luxurious accommodation of the trip, maybe we'll return for a more relaxing break one day.

We met a couple of Spaniards doing the traverse in the other direction the next day. They were making good progress but they had no walking shoes and were suffering in their ski boots. By now it was warming up and on south facing slopes we found skiing below 2,000m rare. Carles, who had extensively toured and co-authored books in the Pyrenees, recommended that we change our route in favour of a higher, better snow covered and less populated option. Carles was indeed a useful person to have met. Fortunately we had brought the correct maps with us to accommodate the change of plan.

We arrived at our lowest point at Gedre, ironically marking our entry to the Haute

Pyrenees. We were joined for a few days by Ian, who also bought further supplies with him. After a walk to the basic Cabane d'Estaube we continued the next day to the col de Tuquerouye, where we had planned to stop. However with poor weather forecast in 2 days we went straight on to the Refugio de Goriz via Monte Perdido, 3355m, where we enjoyed spectacular views in all directions. The next day saw the weather breaking but fortunately after brewing-up it backed off while we crossed the iconic Brèche de Roland before deteriorating again as the day went on.

We lost a day to weather in Gavarnie before heading for the Refuge de Baysse-lance in a day of mixed weather. Shortly before arriving I had a nasty fall slipping on the ice falling a good distance. It took a while to collect various bits of kit, leaving me shaken but uninjured. We arrived at the hut soon after in a blizzard and were grateful for a fine stove to warm us up. Shortly before midnight a couple of cold and tired climbers arrived. They had spent 5+ hours near the hut but unable to find it in the poor weather with no GPS. We really appreciate the benefits of our GPS to assist in such situations!

We passed to the north of Vignemale enjoying the fresh snow and arrived at the Refuge Wallon Marcadau mid afternoon. The weather report confirmed bad weather approaching so the following day we retreated to Port de Espagne on foot and



then to Cauterets where we found suitable accommodation. Frustratingly we then lost 10 days to the weather.

We did take the opportunity to hire a car and move our kit from Ian's house in the east to the Chalets of Iraty in the west. We also started reading of potential issues with the spread of Covid-19, already deterring Claire from coming out to assist with the walking stage from Iraty.

With better weather forecast and fresh snow down to below 1500m we finally set off for the Refuge de Larrivet. The temperatures soon rose though, rapidly melting much of the fresh snow and setting up a thaw freeze cycle again, with ever greater thaw than freeze.

In the Pyrenees Atlantic, the Refuge de Larrivet was a fine hut with running water. The following day we crossed the Port du

Lavedan, where we saw the largest avalanche on the trip covering the entire approach bowl with significant depth and distance.

We arrived at the Col de Portalet, where our supplies had been posted successfully for the remaining days on snow.

In very warm weather we had spring snow all day to Candanchu before a warm but rather misty day on to Arlet and then another day onto the Cabanes d'Ansabere. Our next stop was the Refuge de Belagua, which we knew to be under renovation, so planned to bivi out or find a hotel in the valley. When we arrived we discovered that the hut was a building site, bad weather was forecast for 24 hours and Spain was in lockdown. We needed 2 nights of indoor accommodation but were unable to move anywhere. A park ranger arrived



and once he realised we had food and a stove suggested that we could stay in a nearby ranger hut on our onward route. This was an ideal solution. As we set off the police arrived who said that we had to 'take our car' and go home or to a hotel. We pointed out that we were on foot and didn't have a car, which did not compute. They talked about making a report, whatever that meant, but then left us. At the ranger's hut we realised that lockdown meant our traverse would end soon. The weather then arrived with vengeance lightning, thunder, hail, snow rain and wind; glad to be under cover.

After 2 nights we set off for the Cayolar d'Ardane Gagnekoa hut. On departure we heard from various people trying to help with our predicament. Graham Wallis told us the French lockdown meant Chalets of Iraty would close that day. He arranged for us to stay that night, but that involved 2 days into one for us. So we then modified the route to go round the base of Pic d'Orly rather than over it. We arrived soon

after 8pm in darkness, tired but pleased we had accommodation and food, thanks to them opening the shop for us. We also had all our luggage, including clean clothes.

The traverse had to terminate here. We had completed, what we believe to be, the first British continuous crossing of the snow/ski section of the Pyrenees in winter. Covid 19 had thwarted the complete crossing.

The following day, 18th March, we were able to get a taxi to Biarritz, waiting a couple of days for a flight to Stansted and home. This was the last UK bound flight from Biarritz with lockdown.

We hope to return to complete the final 5 days walking to the coast.

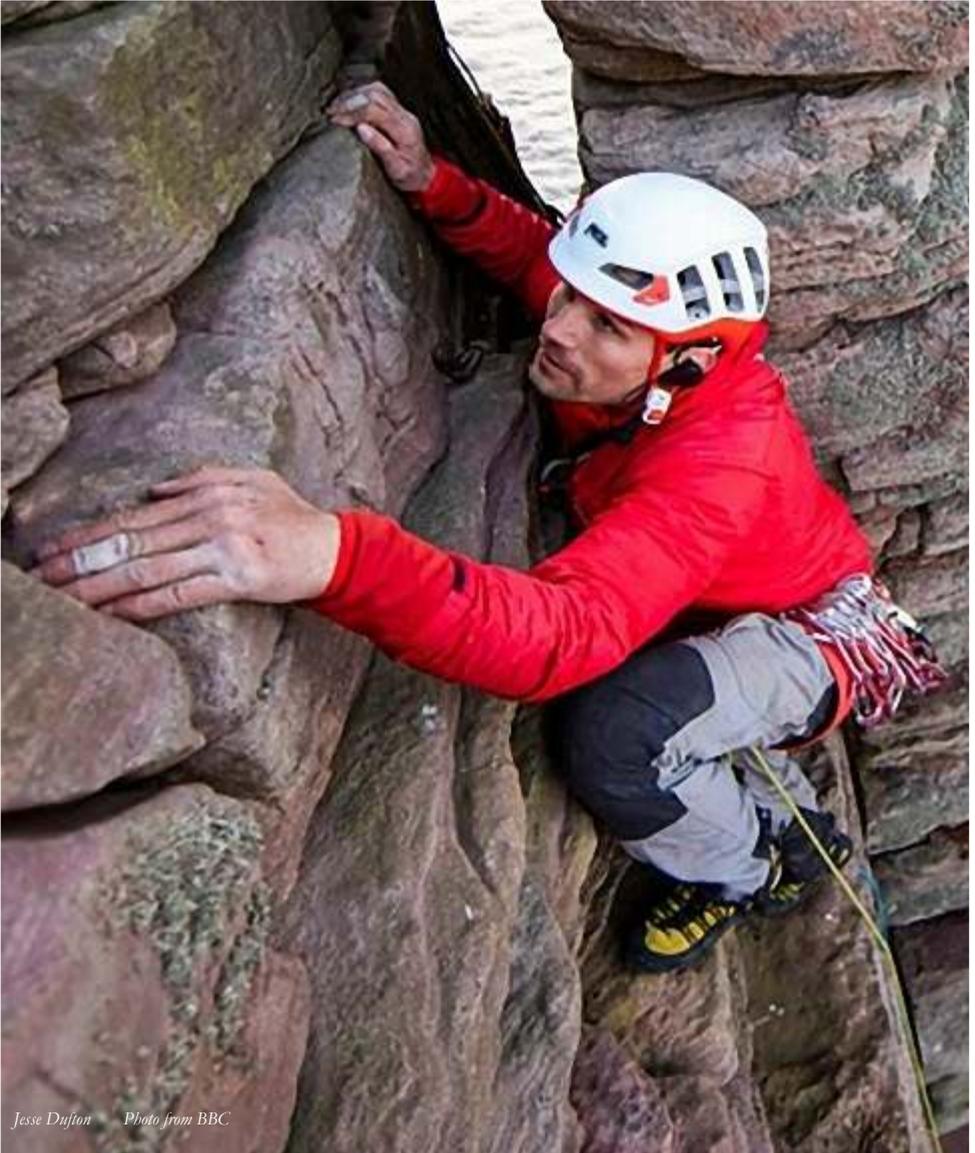
We had moved on 46 days out of 62 days, travelled 783km, climbing 49,094m.

Steve Kentish

Steve and David received a grant from The Alpine Ski Club Memorial Adventure fund.

From Katie Nurton our Grants Manager

Some of you will remember that we gave a MAF grant a few years ago to blind skier Jesse Dufton for an expedition to Greenland and had a great lecture from him afterwards. BBC Four have done a documentary about Jesse climbing the Old Man of Hoy - no skiing but hopefully by the time of going to print it is still available on BBC iPlayer.



Jesse Dufton Photo from BBC

The ASC awarded four grants this year. The MAF award went to David Hamilton and Steve Kentish for their ski traverse of the Pyrenees. We also awarded two Kenneth Smith Scholarships for ski mountaineering training courses, one to Justine Gosling and one to Kitty Hunter. Sadly Kitty's course didn't go ahead but you can read about Justine's in this review. An additional grant was also awarded to a group of six new aspirant members of the ASC towards training in Chamonix, with

the objective of completing a two-day unguided tour at the end of the week. Unfortunately, this also had to be cancelled.

After many years on the Grants Committee, John Kentish has stepped down. Many thanks to John for his very valuable contribution to the grants process. Oliver Vince is joining the Committee to replace John.

Katie Nurton

Off Piste Training in Chamonix

I'm very grateful that I was supported by the club grant to attend Off Piste Performance's ski performance for mountaineers course in Chamonix just before Christmas 2019. I stayed at the catered chalet 'Ski breezy' who were wonderful hosts and went above and beyond to support their guests.

It was great timing to attend such a course as the slopes were quiet and the lift passes cheaper as it was early season. The snow was good on piste, hard for the first couple of hours and then softening up. Due to the lack of fresh snow, the off piste was much the same as the piste, limiting practice and skill development in powder which was what we all really wanted.

Despite the lack of off piste snow, my instructor Alison expertly taught off piste turning skills focusing on weight transfer, positioning of hands and general body position to enable safe and efficient move-

ments, embedded with practical exercises and easily understood personal feedback that she re reviewed constantly. For me, her tips on weight transference during turns was hugely helpful and really changed my skiing. For now, I have to really make myself keep my weight on my toes, but I really a great difference when I do. My biggest take away was that I'm a lot more confident off piste and, with the skills learnt on the course, able to push myself harder and feel more relaxed than I used to, and have greater belief in myself. This was exactly what I needed after a bad ski accident a couple of years ago in which I badly tore my shoulder tendons.

I plan on doing the same course next season, but a level up to consolidate and further my new skills. I really could not recommend Alison's instructing enough.

Justine Gosling

Obituaries

Jeremy Whitehead



Jeremy Whitehead - 2008 Dinner in Murren, Switzerland

his proposer, Jim Roche, was asked to confirm that "the candidate is a strong and steady ski-runner and ... would prove a reliable companion in the High Alps". His reply: "Jeremy Whitehead is a competent mountaineer with a true love and understanding of what this entails". Those of us fortunate to tour with Jeremy, undoubtedly agree. He was truly a "Man of the Mountains".

Jeremy was born in 1931; he had two brothers, but he was very private and we know little about his family and younger days; he never married. He went to Cambridge University and followed a career, teaching Mathematics, with many years at Monkton Combe School, near Bath.

In summer of 1957 Jeremy climbed peaks in the Zillertal including the Grosser Möseler and the Zsigmondy Spitze, and then the Piz Palu traverse and peaks in Bernina. During the next eight years, on trips to the French and Swiss Alps, he climbed the Aiguilles Blatière and Chardonnet, Mont Blanc, the Matterhorn, the Rothorn and Nadelhorn traverses, Monte Rosa, and Dent Blanche. As well as an

When John Jeremy Whitehead applied to join the Alpine Ski Club in November 1968,

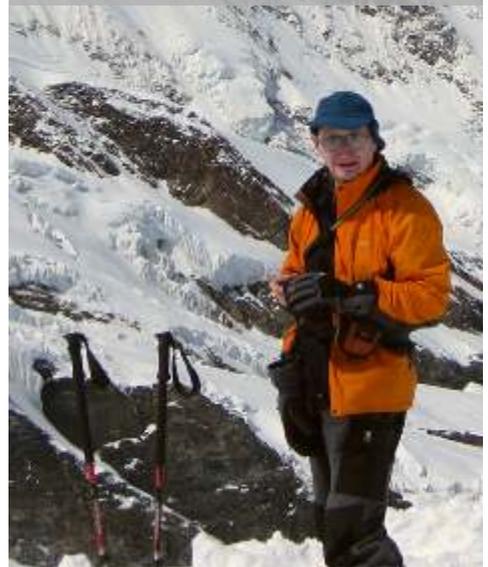
accomplished Alpinist, but also an excellent rock-climber with routes in the Dolomites and Corsica.

Jeremy's first ski tour was at Easter 1959 in the Silvretta (Austria) included Piz Buin. This was followed by tours in Ötztal, Oberland, Ortler, and Zermatt areas; Jeremy skied the Haute Route in 1967. Many tours were with Jim Roche (ASC) and Susan Tuke (ESC). For the Ski Club of Great Britain, he led tours on part of the Haute Route in 1970 and across the Haute Maurienne in 1976. Jeremy went ski touring virtually every Easter school holiday. In 1975, he was granted special leave for a school term to visit mountains in New Zealand. Even after retiring from teaching, Jeremy continued to tour, often with ASC members. He was also a member of the Climbers' Club, the Alpine Club, the Fell and Rock Climbing Club, the Preston Mountaineering Club, and the Eagle Ski Club,

From high above Chamonix, one could look west to the mountains of the Dauphiné which, in the 1960s, very few climbers had visited. However, they intrigued Jeremy, who made, with Jim Roche and Charles Shepherd, a ski tour across them in 1968. His report, in *The British Ski Year Book*, described how there were very few people about and they had the mountains to themselves; but that information on routes, likely conditions high up, and locations of shelter or huts, was very difficult to come by. This was our inspiration to visit these less-well-known regions of the Alps.

During the decades, many of our members have met with Jeremy - and his two stalwart frequent companions, Nigel Edwards and Don Henderson - on ski tours: many in the Dauphiné, Queyras, and Gran Paradiso. Jeremy studied maps meticulously and almost always knew the area; he would share his knowledge with newer members. Jeremy inspired trust in any party he joined;

Towards the Allalinhorn, above Saas Fee, on the day of Jeremy's 85th birthday, 2016 Photo: Simon Duvivier



interestingly, he also believed in travelling as light as possible. But it was certain that Jeremy weighed-up the nature of the trip and weather, and selected gear accordingly; he always carried an ice-axe, shovel, and harscheisen, to which he chose to add light-weight crampons that he recalled had often helped him out of trouble.

Even in his later life, Jeremy continued to ski and climb. Nick Danby recounts how he joined Jeremy to celebrated his 80th birth-

day in 2011, ascending Vincent Pyramid, a summit of Monte Rosa, after which Jeremy received a standing ovation in the Mantova Hut. Roger Birnstingl tells of climbing a Via Ferrata, and then the Riffelhorn with Jeremy in 2015, during Zermatt's celebrations of 150 years since Whymper scaled the Matterhorn. Simon Duvivier joined Jeremy to ascend the Allalinhorn on his 85th birthday, but 60 kph winds drove them back before gaining the summit. Last summer, Nigel Edwards describes vigorous walks with Jeremy during a meet in Langdale.

In 1992-1998 Jeremy wrote a two-volume set of guide books covering 1) Mont Blanc to Vanoise, to Gran Paradiso and 2) Dauphiné (Écrins) to Queyras, to Alpes Mari-

time, describing over 500 routes. These were typed by him, photocopied, cut into A6 pocket-sized pages, and bound with clips so pages could be taken out for a particular tour. Many of us are proud to have copies of these limited-edition, hand-produced ski guides; they allow us to follow tours well away from large downhill resorts and over-popular glaciers; into what Jeremy called "Middle Mountains", areas much more to his taste. Simon Duvivier sums up by saying "Jeremy lived a full life in the mountains; he will not be forgotten". His pocket ski-tour guides are Jeremy's legacy to ski tourers.

Hymel Lloyd

Lt. Commander Richard Brooke RN

Richard Brooke who died on 29 June 2020 aged 93 was an outstanding polar explorer and mountaineer. After Dartmouth, he saw active wartime service on HMS Warspite before joining HMS Norfolk on its secret mission to return King Haakon to Norway. Here he developed a taste for Langlauf and in Greenland honed dog-sledging expertise. Both skills were put to the test in Antarctica when he was assigned to Sir Edmund Hillary's NZ team as part of Sir Vivian Fuchs' successful 1957/8 Trans-Antarctic expedition. Richard was awarded the Polar Medal and Antarctic Clasp and had an Antarctic mountain named after him.

Elected to the Alpine Club in 1950, Richard was already an accomplished moun-

taineer when in 1958 he joined Mike Bank's successful Rakaposhi expedition. In 1966, realising that his roving sailor's life must take second place to marriage and mountaineering, he took early retirement from the Royal Navy and embarked on a civilian career in engineering. He continued serious alpine mountaineering into late middle-age, chalking up an impressive list of great classic routes including the Peuteret Ridge and Route Major.

Richard had been a loyal and long-standing member of the ASC when he proposed me for membership. We did some good climbs together in North Wales and in 1969 had our Haute Route cut short as a result of injury and avalanche. Richard, always

regarded ski mountaineering as an adjunct to general mountaineering, but was ever generous in sharing his expertise and experience. When in 1978, Beryl Wilberforce Smith was left a widow before completing the ninth and final stage of the historic Alpine ski traverse that she and her husband Peter had begun in 1970, Richard and Fred Jenkins volunteered to lead her party to its successful conclusion. This was effectively Richard's ski mountaineering swan-song, for although climbing and marathon walks took him into his ninth decade, he was never one

to live on past laurels and quietly retired from the ASC.

Courageous, imperturbable and utterly dependable, Richard's innate modesty was exemplary. He was one of the finest men I have had the privilege of sharing mountain adventure with.

JGR Harding.

[Note: Fuller obituaries have been published in The Times of 6 August 2010 and The Alpine Journal 2020]

Peter Kirstein

I randomly "bumped into" Peter Kirstein on many occasions throughout my working life. We were both on the staff at CERN Geneva during the early 1960s, and we both returned to the UK spending most of our subsequent careers as members of academic staff at University College, London. Although we pursued different disciplines, he as a computer scientist specialising in packet-switched networks, me as an elementary particle physicist, our interests overlapped sufficiently for us to find ourselves from time to time working on the same committees. This was where I first came to appreciate his expertise and great enthusiasm for his work during the exciting days covering the development of computer networking and the internet.

I joined the Alpine Ski Club in the 1970s only to find that Peter had already been a member since his student days in 1953

having been introduced to ski touring by his father, Walter Kirstein, a very prominent and long-standing member of the Club. I wonder whether Peter's 67 years membership of the ASC is a record? Here again Peter and I merely seemed to bump randomly into each other at ASC social gatherings rather than actually meeting up on the snow. The nearest we ever came to the latter was a chance encounter at Geneva airport when we were both carrying, although not wearing, our skis.

I shall thus remember Peter more as an inspirational colleague at work rather than as a companion on skis. I am saddened both by the departure of such a gifted and enthusiastic person, and by the fact that we had so many opportunities to tour together, but which we never seized.

Mike Esten

Sidney Vaughan Gaskell

Active tourer and club member since 1990 Graham Elson writes about their trip to Morocco:

Vaughan joined my ski-mountaineering parties in the High Atlas, Morocco in February 1983 and 1984. The tours were not for the faint-hearted; involving routes of 6 to 10 hours. We carried food, fuel and sleeping bags in addition to ropes, ice-axes and crampons. Refuges were often basic, with squat loos.

Our routes began at Oukaimeden, TiziN'Eddy, Tachdirt, Imlil, Asni, Neltner Hut, Lepinay Hut , Tizi Mzik and down to Imlil and Asni. Summits included Andrar

Oukaimeden (3273m), Atar Tisrafene (3246m) , Angour (3616m), Bou Igenouane (3882m), Toubcal (4167m), Ras n'Ouanoukrim (4083m) and Afella (4085m).

Returning to Marrakech we visited a night-club. We laughed at Vaughan's feigned alarm when a cabaret artiste nearly slid into his lap !

Vaughan was a high spirited, generous and amusing companion.

Graham Elson



Vaughan Gaskell skiing

Book Review

South Georgia 1989-2019 – Stephen Venables



book is largely a photographic natural history of South Georgia, made magnificent by his mountaineer's perspective.

As a place for long-term exploration, the island is hard to beat. If we could take a 100-mile chunk of the central Alps and drop it in Antarctic waters, we'd get South Georgia; there are mountains

Perhaps the Alpine Ski Club should pick an area of the world and make it our own, for long-term exploration. In a very real sense, this is exactly what our Patron, Stephen Venables has done with South Georgia. Over the last 30 years he has made nine expeditions to that remarkable, south Atlantic island. Getting there once is an achievement but Stephen has become a recognised South Georgia specialist with many first ascents to his name. His latest book commemorates these exploits and records them through his stunning photography. Members will be familiar with Stephen's prolific writing. Perhaps of less renown is the quality of his photography. The new

on a similar scale, allowing for the sea-level start, with extraordinary wildlife and wicked weather. Many first ascents are still to be made, though Stephen and his companions have by now knocked off most of the truly eye-catching climbs, including South Georgia's 'Matterhorn', Starbuck Peak.

In fact, the Alpine Ski Club has a long history in South Georgia. Patrick Fagan and the late John Peacock were part of the Joint Services Expedition of 1964-65, which repeated Shackleton's historic crossing from King Haakon bay to Stromness and also made the first ascent of the highest mountain in British sovereign territory, Mt. Paget (2935m).

Stephen Venables on the summit of Starbuck Peak, 2016. Mt Paget is in the far distance on the left



I was privileged to join Stephen for his first ascents of the Trident peaks, Poseidon, Tethys and Thalassa, the first of which we managed on one of the rare, windless days

South Georgia occasionally provides to compensate for the countless, impossible storms that make travel, let alone climbing or skiing nigh on impossible. Standing on

the summit of Poseidon, we could gaze upon most of the mountains of the island, all of them reaching up through a sea of low cloud that kept the winter ocean out of sight.

Memories are all the more vivid for the complex struggle through hurricane force winds, ice and snow to get there. So I didn't hesitate to order my copy of Stephen's book, through on-demand printing by Blurb. It's eminently worth it, with the quality of the production high enough to justify the price demanded by the publisher. I do concede it's an indulgence that will seem extravagant to those unfortunate enough never to have made it to South Georgia themselves. Take heart, though. As a vicarious trip through the island on the back of Stephen's expeditions it is certainly an easier armchair ride than suffering five days each way through the Southern Ocean. Seen from that viewpoint the book is extraordinarily good value. We might all have to get used to virtual travelling so we should be grateful to Stephen and fellow explorers for taking the time to record the real thing so effectively. We should also thank Stephen because the weather can be so foul that it really does take about thirty years to see as much of the island, with such colour and clarity, as recorded in the book.

Several of Stephen's expeditions have repeated the island crossing at the conclusion of the 1914-16 Imperial Trans-Antarc-

tic Expedition. Shackleton and five others sailed 850 miles in an open boat to fetch help for the stranded main party. Sir Ernest then entrusted Tom Crean and Frank Worsley to accompany him on foot from their arrival point at King Haakon Bay to the whaling stations on the opposite coast. Though I have tried to understand the route taken by the three men, I had never quite worked it out until I saw Stephen's careful diagram and pictures. The infamous blind toboggan run looked every bit as desperate as that described in the various accounts.

And these other accounts are useful complements to Stephen's wonderful pictures. I thoroughly recommend Stephen's first book on South Georgia, 'Island at the Edge of the World', which combines mountaineering with other perspectives, notably the whaling industry and unique natural history. Tom Crean is one of the truly remarkable characters of polar exploration and so Michael Smith's book 'An Unsung Hero' is on my South Georgia reading list. Finally, Frank Worsley's book, 'Shackleton's Boat Journey' is a fine account of the whole Antarctic expedition and especially of the remarkable boat trip from Elephant Island. Worsley writes with a wry sense of humour, making light of the extreme hardship they all faced.

Nick Putnam

So for those wishing to join our armchair exploration of South Georgia, these titles along with Stephen's new book are the way to get going. The new book is available through Blurb at: <https://www.blurb.co.uk/b/10183926-south-georgia>

zoom



... in 2020, the Club continues on Zoom

AGM

Lectures

Committee meetings

The Alpine Ski Club Review 2020

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