

# ASC NEWS



AUTUMN 2015



*Photo: Roger Upton*

# President's Foreword

The year got off to a great start in January, with the outgoing secretary's meet in Ochsengarten, Austria. It was pleasing to see so many people come from near and far, to what is a hidden gem of a resort. If the club is not going to become a dining club, but remain active in the mountains, we will need to rely on members to organise trips and meets. So thanks to Ingram for setting a high standard and showing us how successful a meet can be.

Further afield we had two trips to different continents. Jonty Mills' trip to the Homathko icefield in British Columbia, which should make a great talk at the autumn lecture. Nick Putnam's relationship with the Southern Ocean continues to blossom, but this time to South Georgia with Stephen Venables and Skip Novak. This meaning in two years we have had trips to the Georgian Caucasus, and South Georgia. Sadly I don't anticipate anyone trying to organise a trip to Atlanta Georgia for skiing being successful.

Venetia Wingfield and David Hamilton's Alpine Traverse, from the Maritime Alps to Mont Blanc repeated a challenging trip done the previous year. All credit to them for sticking at it, and to David for coming up with the original idea

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for the trip. Meanwhile Alex Miller and Dave Harmer were not put off by conditions in Kosovo and Albania last year, and have been back to Eastern Europe, this time to Bulgaria.

I am very impressed that Jeremy Whitehead has bought a new pair of skis. He writes in his report that he expects the skis to last for 10 years. This would suggest that he intends to keep touring at least until his mid 90s. Jeremy also makes some good points on safety, on the importance of practising transceiver searches and the



Ochsengarten Photo: R Upton

group staying reasonably close together – rather than becoming too spread out across the mountain.

Staying on the theme of safety Nick Putnam has written up a “near miss” report on Chardonnnet – Saliena. His account shows that even an experienced party on familiar ground can make mistakes. However, there was good decision making which prevented mishap from becoming serious, with only an unplanned bivvy.

The committee spends a lot of time discussing legal liability, insurance issues, and safety generally. We are very conscious that if club members organise trips, and something goes wrong, this will be serious not just for those directly affected, but could well have repercussions for the entire club. The best way to prevent something going wrong is to recognise that ski touring is a risky activity, and be prepared for the challenges of enjoying ourselves safely in the mountains through constant learning, feedback, improvement and good habits. Then even if something does go wrong, hopefully we can demonstrate decision making that looks conservative even in the harsh perspective of hindsight.

Thanks to members of the committee, who have all worked hard. Particularly the secretary and treasurer. I would also like to thank Nick Putnam, whose friendship with Rodrigo Jordan has provided us with a very high profile speaker at this year's Annual Dinner. In 1992 Rodrigo led the first successful South American expedition to Everest, making the second ascent of the Kangshung Face, first climbed by the Venables team. I am looking forward to this, and seeing many of you there as well on the 20th November.

*Bruce Packard - President*

## Forthcoming Events

The Club events are organised by member volunteers. We are always looking for new faces to help run the Club trips. Contact [meets@alpineskiclub.org.uk](mailto:meets@alpineskiclub.org.uk).

### 2015

#### **AGM and Annual Dinner**

**20<sup>th</sup> November**

Savile Club, 69 Brook Street,  
London

### 2016

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Week of February**

Le Devoluy massif, south of Grenoble.

#### **28<sup>th</sup> February - 6<sup>th</sup> March**

Ramsau am Dachstein, Austria.  
Valley based touring for members and their families.

#### **6<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> March**

Benasque, Spain. A mix of valley based ski touring and visits to huts.

### Later in the year ...

#### **Spring Lecture and Buffet**

Mid-May @ Alpine Club,  
London. Speaker & date tba.

#### **Next year's AGM weekend**

November. In the country.

#### **Ski Symposium**

November, Plas-y-Brenin. In conjunction with the Eagle Ski Club.

# Tours in Remote Regions

## Homathko Icefield Expedition 2015

### ASC Expedition

The radio crackled to life through the headset. It was the chopper pilot: “This is the Klattasine Glacier, I’ll set you down here”. Looking out of the window at the heavily crevassed, chaotic glacier below us we all suddenly felt nervous. Fortunately I had my GPS to hand, which was telling me this wasn’t where we wanted to be. “Um, are you sure? I think this is the lower Jewakwa not the Klattasine?!”. We need to head North? “OK, you’re right!” I’ll drop you there”. Phew! At least we had started in the right place! As the chopper lifted off there was a sudden feeling of transition. Now the trip felt real, with two weeks of icefield skiing ahead to get back out to civilisation.

The trip had been over a year in the making. Having had our appetite whetted by a visit to the Coast Mountains, British Columbia in 2013, Alex Cowan and I were keen to return for a main course, and plumped on the traverse of the Homathko Icefield as offering everything we were looking for -- wild, lonely country with spectacular terrain i.e. an adventure. Fortunately Roger Upton and Luis Puzo Mur, two other ASC members, are equally mad, so the ASC Canada 2015 trip was born. The plan was kept simple. We would be dropped off by helicopter at the far

western edge of the icefield, and work our way across to a pre-arranged pick-up by boat at the head of Franklin Arm on Chilko Lake, a large interior lake. Thus it was that after months of gradual work on logistics, including flights, helicopter transfers, boat pick-up, food and equipment, the four of us found ourselves setting up camp in the evening sun, as the sound of the helicopter faded to nothing. Silence.

The first day of the trip was a rude awakening. Getting on to the glacier (fortunately a much friendlier looking beast now we were in the right place!) involved a best forgotten wade / slide/ stumble down snow covered moraine to reach the valley bottom. In weather that it would be generous to describe as “dreich”, we started the slow, slow pull up onto the glacier. Although we had pre-placed a cache of food at approximately the half-way point of the traverse, our rucksacks were still enormous with all our kit. Fortu-

*Climbing on to the ice field. Photo: J Mills*



nately we were all splitting the load using haul bags or crazy carpets, which made things manageable. Camp that evening was memorable—the clouds cleared giving grand views over giants of the Mount Waddington range, with the sound of new snow avalanche sloughs reverberating on the steep peaks high above. The following days of the first



*Camping on the ice field. Photo: J Mills*

week saw us slip into an easy routine of early starts and early finishes, as we were now fortunate enough to be contending with blue skies and hot sunshine. Memorable sections included a tricky descent down the steep Eastern section of the Klattasine Glacier onto the flat upper Jewakwa where it abutted the main icefield (named Konkordia by us with astonishing originality). Near the bottom of this descent we were skiing unroped down a gully which



*The ice field stretches on in front of us. Photo: J Mills*

we thought must be unglaciated. This proved not to be the case as I proved by falling into a crevasse, fortunately only a couple of metres deep! The scenery on this section was fabulous, with vast expanses of snow and ice in all directions. Taking a

break from heavy loads we enjoyed a day trip up a nearby peak of around 2200m in height: insignificant perhaps, but fun, with a scramble to finish, to ensure that axes

and crampons weren't carried for show! The weather deteriorated as we summited, ensuring that our dreams of swishing down powder on the descent turned to survival skiing (very enjoyable for myself, an aficionado of Scottish ski-mountaineering); then following GPS tracks carefully back through crevasses to reach the safety of the tents. The poor weather continued for the next few days, initially with some breaks to allow slow progress, but then deteriorating into a full-on snowstorm that trapped us at our high camp for three days.

Here we were just short of the highpoint of the traverse, the Sasquatch Pass. Boredom set in quickly for Roger, but this did mean the rest of us were able to enjoy the magnificent igloo that was the fruit of his labours. We christened it with whisky and Christmas cake, before it was turned over to a different use as the sanitary block!

We had been getting intermittent weather forecasts from home, using the Club's new Yellowbrick satellite messaging

*Roger & Luis photo: J Mills*

some fabulous, fast skiing down spring snow, before the contours ran out and we slid to a halt, feeling like we were almost there.....

Wrong. What followed was three days of the toughest bushwhacking any of us have ever experienced.

device (see article from Roger), and were hoping for the return of good conditions. We learnt that there would be a good weather window, but only just enough to get off the icefield and down our long exit route (Nine Mile Creek) before a significant deterioration with more snowfall would effectively make any escape highly dangerous and difficult. Thus, when the sun reappeared, we reluctantly decided to abandon our plans of doing some of the lovely looking peaks and ski descents that we could see from the tents and instead make all speed to get off the icefield and down to the timber line. In retrospect, this was a good plan, as it took us three full days of some of the hardest work so far to get down to Nine Mile Creek, including roped skiing down the Alph Glacier, then a steep climb on axe and crampons to surmount the final ridge that lead to Nine Mile Creek. To get into the creek however we had to descend complex, serious terrain using defensive travel, counting our blessings for stable weather and snow for this section. Once into the creek we enjoyed

And Roger has done some bushwhacking in his time! At many points we were literally crawling under bushes and over trees, so dense was the bush. The end of the second day found us far short of our intended finish, fighting thick bush at a pace that bordered on something negative km/hr, so convoluted was the back and forth route we had to navigate. There being no open space large enough to pitch a tent, we found some flatter ground amidst the damp forest and laid down our mats to bivvy. Fortunately, we managed to get a good fire going, which turned what would have been a miserable night into something much more pleasant. Roger and I took turns to stoke the fire, keen not to lose its warmth or bear-deterrent properties!

Realising we were not going to make the pick-up point at this rate, we tried a new tactic, and dropped south into the parallel Deschamps Creek. We had previously planned to avoid this as John Baldwin, the guru of these mountains, describes Deschamps as “bushy and not recommended”!

*Remote Regions*

It couldn't be any worse though! Thankfully it was much better (so much for gurus), with animal runs through the bush providing much easier going. Eventually we burst out of



*Team photo J Mills*

the bush onto the huge gravel flood plains of Nine Mile Creek. We could almost smell the lake---so close yet so far! Weary stumbling along the riverbed, including some wading (what's wet feet when this close to the end), and through more bush and we popped out onto sand bars at the head of Franklin Arm. Despite scanning the horizon, there was no boat waiting for us. On the verge of collapsing into the sand, my eyes picked out something on the far shore---was it a boat? Yes, it was moving towards us---hooray! Having negotiated the sand bars, we eagerly said hello to the skipper Roland Class (a bear of a man with a penchant for stories), and deposited skis, bags, sledges and ourselves in the boat. Bliss. As we sank back into the seats of the boat, and looked at the views of lake and mountain around us, it was with deep satisfaction. All the pain and hardships of the last two weeks were worth it. We had

come to lose ourselves in an adventure, and had most definitely succeeded.

*Jonty Mills*

The team members would like to thank the Alpine Ski Club and the Memorial Adventure Fund (MAF) for their generous support.

Team: Jonty Mills, Luis Puzo Mur, Alex Cowan, Roger Upton

Guidebook—Exploring the Coast Mountains on Skis 3rd Edition, John Baldwin.  
Canada Topographic Maps 1:50, 000  
92K/15, 92 N/1,2,8

Helicopter: <http://www.whitesaddleair.com/>  
Boat: [biglake@xplornet.ca](mailto:biglake@xplornet.ca)

A video of the trip is available to see at <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=rS42L-BSi0s>

## First Ascents in South Georgia Winter 2014

*The Alpine Ski Club has notable connections with South Georgia. Patrick Fagan and the late John Peacock explored the island in the mid sixties, making the first ascents of Mt. Paget, the island's highest, and several other peaks. They also repeated Shackleton's historic crossing.*

After enjoying the extraordinary beauty of Antarctica in 2013, with the generous help of an ASC grant, I was keen to visit South Georgia when Stephen Venables and Skip Novak invited me to join them again. I admit I was much less keen on the voyage required to get there. South Georgia is difficult to reach, taking five days sailing from Port Stanley against the infamous storms of the Southern Ocean. Nevertheless, the prospect of virgin territory, unclimbed peaks and more exciting travel in the company of our Antarctic team was irresistible.

“Are you sure we have to go in winter?”, I asked Stephen:

*Photo: Nick Putnam*



“Safer glacier travel, icier summits and more stable weather, potentially. Yes”, came the reply. We would at least have the island more or less to ourselves and beat a

rumoured French party to our virgin summits. So I got suckered in for a departure in mid August, 2014.

As we approached the island on our fifth day out in Pelagic Australis, the whole of the deck and rigging was plastered in ice. The sea temperature was  $-2^{\circ}\text{C}$ , so every time a wave broke over us another coat of ice was added; falling overboard was not an option. Worse still, in the Force 8 gales (35 knots), we would not be able to land at our chosen access point at Trolhull, on the south west coast. We needed to reach the Philippi Glacier in order to access the Salvesen range and our primary target, Mt. Baume (1912m).

The mountains of South Georgia are not exceptionally high and it is no further south than Scotland is north. However, these bare facts may be misleading. South Georgia lies within the Antarctic Convergence Zone and is right in the path of the winds howling through the Drake Passage. And because the island is nowhere more than about 20 miles across, the peaks rise dramatically from sea level. The landscape has been described as no less spectacular than if a hundred mile slice of the Alps were to be ‘plunged recklessly into the tempestuous South Atlantic’. As we sailed down the more sheltered north eastern coastline we could begin to understand the scale of the task ahead, even as we chipped away at the ice on deck.

Anchoring at Husvik, near one of the old whaling stations, enabled us to get sorted out for a revised landing. It was also an opportunity to take in more of the extraordinary history of this isolated outpost. Sailing further south, we put in at Gold Harbour to observe a huge colony of king penguins and several impressively large elephant seals. South Georgia's wildlife is astonishing.

Eventually the sea calmed down enough for us to sail towards Cape Disappointment, where Captain Cook realised he had not found Australia. We took shelter in Larsen Harbour, a remote, steep-sided fjord, and set about trying to haul our gear up from the head of the bay onto the glacier above. It was steeper, harder and more unstable than we had imagined, so on the first attempt we simply cached our gear and a fortnight's supplies halfway up. In the morning, someone drily joked that Plan C was now in operation, which would require taking everything up to the top, returning unladen to the boat to await an improvement in the weather sometime next month and finally climbing back up to retrieve all the gear in time to sail home. As the morning wore on it looked increasingly as

though the jester had spoken the truth so we reluctantly brought everything down and retreated north.

Gold Harbour: Are huge colony of king penguins



Photo: Nick Patnam

On the way back up the coast we finally got the chance to climb something properly, making a delightful ascent of Black Peak from Ocean Harbour. Taking a shortcut to Cumberland Bay

across the peninsula enabled the boat to pick us up and sail on up to Grytviken, where we moored alongside the old whaling ships at the original jetty. At last the wind dropped and we enjoyed perfect conditions the following day for an ascent of Petrel Peak, up behind the harbour.

I have been fascinated by Shackleton's story, another good reason to visit South Georgia. The old whalers' cemetery, where The Boss is buried, is in Grytviken so everyone was keen to make the short pilgrimage around the bay. Fortunately, we had some of his own whisky with us, ready to raise a toast. This had been created from a sample of the hoard found a few years ago under Shackleton's bunk at Cape Royds during restoration work on his 1907 base.

The forecast for the coming days in the Allardyce Mountains, further north, promised reasonable conditions. So we re-provisioned for a week on shore. With luck we

would be able to ascend the Briggs Glacier, cross the Kohl Plateau and descend to a rendezvous at Fortuna Bay. With several unclimbed peaks along this route we should have scope for multiple changes of plan along the way.

Our Zodiac landing at Possession Bay, scene of Cook's first landfall, was a fine test of determination. A katabatic wind was howling down from the Shackleton Gap making it hard work to land on the ice, get our sledges rigged properly and find a way up the glacier,

on crampons. As we climbed higher there were several steeper sections and at one point I found I could either fight the wind or drag the sledge up the gradient, but not both at

once. Once or twice I had to wait for a lull to make progress. Skis were out of the question for the time being.

Eventually we decided to stop for the night, having made an irrevocable escape from the comfort of the boat. It took us about four hours to build snow-block windbreaks and to erect our camp, but eventually we established some shelter and comfort. The following day was much improved and we skied up the Briggs glacier

to set up camp below the unclimbed Trident peaks.

Our third day was clagged in and windy again, so we stayed in camp. However, dawn on the fourth day cracked open in bright sunshine with no wind, so we hurried out to take advantage. The central peak of the Tridents is the highest (1337m) and looked the most interesting, so we aimed for that. It gave us everything we needed for a perfect day out; a beautifully curved ridge leading to an exposed snow slope and

an impressive summit cone. An exciting gully, in ideal condition, led to a short, awkward step plastered in loose rime and then an airy ridge to the top. We clambered up feeling ridicu-



*First camp on the Briggs Glacier, looking down to King Haakon Bay*

*Photo: Nick Putnam*

lously pleased with ourselves after so many days battling disappointment and South Georgian winds. The views were spectacular; the entire island below about 300m elevation was shrouded in mist but all of the wonderful mountains were gleaming in the sun, above the inversion. Unforgettable.

Careful abseils returned us to the col. For once I was pleased to be climbing down slowly, completely absorbed in the spectacular views, rather than on skis. The final run

over the glacier, back to camp, provided some gentle and enjoyable skiing.

Each night we were in touch with the boat by satellite phone to seek the forecast and report in. Our core, professional crew of three was supplemented by five experienced sailors who had joined us to see South Georgia and for the sheer fun (sic) of sailing the Southern Ocean. We learned they had been in cloud all day but they sportingly shared the jubilation at our first ascent.

The following day was also clear and bright at first, although mists had started to blow over some of the peaks. Fearing a

managed to get everyone up before the cloud wafted in.

By the third day the weather had reverted to type so we also had to return to a reliance on grim determination rather than pure enjoyment if we were to complete our set of three Trident peaks. We knew where it was and roughly what it looked like from the photos we had taken already, but the climb would have to be in a whiteout. Fortunately we had tackled the more difficult summits first, so this was merely a question of picking our way up the main face to the top and then carefully reversing our route without dropping into the awk-

wardly placed cracks.

After another night in camp, we awoke to stronger wind and rain. Crossing the Kohl Plateau would run the risk of us being stranded on the König Glacier. Winds were forecast to increase dramatically and we reluctantly decided it would be foolhardy to continue. Survival might not be in doubt, but making it back to Port Stanley in time to catch planes would be under

*Highest of the Trident. Our route followed the skyline from the col*



*Photo: Nick Putnam*

change, we hurried up to the most southerly of the Trident peaks to claim that one too. An easy snow shoulder led to a more exposed and steeper pyramid, coated in fragile rime. We took it in turns to mount the small tower on the summit and just

threat if we got stuck. So we skied back down to Possession Bay and made camp once more to await collection by the boat.

A planned attempt to ski the final stage of the Shackleton Traverse finally had to be abandoned as well. The easterly wind that had brought rain and rising temperatures

began gusting at almost 70 knots, hurricane force. Against this quality of opposition, even the engine on Pelagic Australis could not compete. At least any lingering doubts about our decision to return the ‘easy’ way to Possession Bay were removed. With no realistic hope of being able to achieve more on land, we made a run for the natural

harbour at Elsehul. By morning the wisest choice was to capitalise on the wind direction and head back to The Falklands in time to fly back to Punta Arenas on 20th September.

South Georgia is beautifully remote. And if this was the ‘better weather – potentially’, I’m very glad we didn’t go in summer.

*From Trident. Briggs Glacier looking down to King Haakon Bay, Shackleton’s landing place.*



*The camp on the glacier is just visible Photo: Nick Putnam*

*Nick Putnam*

Climbing and skiing:  
Mark Dravers,  
Rodrigo Jordan,  
David McMeeking,  
Skip Novak,  
Nick Putnam (ASC),  
Stephen Venables  
(AC).

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## Grants

This year’s grants section is very short. Jonty Mills applied for and received a MAF grant for his expedition to Canada. He has written up the trip which is the first article in the newsletter.

There were other applications made, but rejected because they did not fit the criteria (for instance climbing expeditions using touring skis to make the initial approach).

Last year we had so many applications that did meet the criteria that the grants sub committee had to think seriously about how they might allocate the funds fairly.

We still top the Google search for “ski touring grant”, “ski mountaineering grant” and top the page in the BMC for “expedition grant” searches.

# ASC Meets

## Ochsengarten - January 2015

Over 20 members met in Ochsengarten (Kühtai, near Innsbruck) in January this year. The Meet was organised by Ingram, as a valedictory event for her decade serving as Club Secretary. Given that we had so many members, all doing diverse outings, it is impossible to list them all. John Moore kindly provided several pages of suggested tours, which came in very useful for the whole group, who did different variations on different days.

Ingram kindly provided ASC branded hats in a variety of colours. Different coloured hats were being traded throughout the week, with some more fashion conscious members swapping several times until they found their favourite colour.

Although the guides office / ski school told us many of the routes we intended to do were not in conditions early in the season, Ochsengarten provided enough bad weather alternatives. For instance, through the trees to the Faltergartenkopf (2188m) and Die Mute (2395m). On better days the highlights included an ascent of Wetterkreuz (2591m) by

Caerwyn, Roger, Bruce and Luis. Various attempts on different mountains which were forced to turn back due to poor conditions, on the Pirschkogel (2828m) and Mittetal / Wechnerwand (2855m). The Lloyds and Hendry's had a pleasant tour to Satelais, via a Café. There were also days spent snow shoeing, pulk pulling and piste skiing (the latter have asked for their identities to be kept secret, under EU data protection and "right to be forgotten" legislation). Several long standing club members quietly admitted that they were eligible for a free lift pass, but they preferred to get into the mountains under their own steam.

The list is not exhaustive, and was taken from the "log book" which Ingram kindly provided. Some members were notably less diligent at recording their plans for the days' activities. All members are experi-

*Luis Puzo Mur and Bruce Packard Photo: R Upton*





*Beanie hat parade - ASC hats in a variety of colours*

*Photo: R Upton*

enced, and many have been to parts of the world that are considerably more challenging than Austria. However it is important to develop good habits, such as making sure that others know where you plan to be on the mountain, and who you are with, particularly when coalitions were forming and disbanding on a daily basis.

A more popular attempt of best practice sharing was – “Cock up of the Day.” This was a light-hearted attempt to share and learn from mistakes over the dinner. Originally developed by a member for his day job as surgeon, because health professionals (unlike pilots) had no formal way of anonymously recording “near miss incidents”. CuotD was hugely popular, so much so that other tables in the hotel restaurant fell silent so that they could also

enjoy listening in to us share our tales of ineptitude. Other convenors of meets might consider adopting this as a fun, but useful way to avoid the silly mistakes we all make.

Other highlights of the trip included several locally based members Birgitta Reuter, Martin Kosina, Alex Miller and Helgard and John How joining us. “Locally” – actually meant driving for several hours to join us at Ochsengarten, and their presence definitely added to the event. Particularly Birgitta and Martin, who introduced John Moore to Ochsengarten. Without them we probably would have had an expensive week in Andermatt. While we were on the trip, the Swiss Central Bank decided it could no longer hold the currency peg with the Euro and

hence the Swiss Franc appreciated 30% immediately. We were relieved to be in Austria where a half litre of beer cost €3, and there was some reminiscing about when the Swiss exchange rate had been 12 Swiss Francs to the Pound.

We were very well fed and looked after by the Scheibers, who could accommodate us across two family run hotels. Ochsen-garten is a hidden gem in the Austrian Alps, and many members suggested returning in future years. Although the

weather conditions were not perfect, there was enough variety so that most people could attempt a different objective every day, and the trip really gave people a feel for the potential in a less well known resort. To me that is one huge advantage of the club, versus merely skiing with a small group of friends. Once again, hats off to Ingram for a wonderful meet, everyone who attended was grateful for her efforts.

*Bruce Packard*

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## Joint Meet with AAC to the Dolomites March 2015

On the initiative of our recent President John Moore, the ASC joined forces with the AAC (section Britannia) to build a joint meet in March. In the event, all the eight participants were AAC anyway, due to their choice of insurance provider.

The tour was based around two Rifugi in Süd Tirol, the Fanes and Sennes. These are up the hill from the St Vigilio di Marebbe road head. “Refuge” would be a very misleading translation of “Rifugio” – they are very well appointed, with fabulous food, delightful wardens and stunning views. The huts provide Rattrak access from the road head, saving us from the walk in. Moreover, kit bags are transported between huts whilst we made the transfer on ski and skin. They even provide toboggans for the final descent at the end, but more of that later.

Each hut is at the centre of a large mountain bowl, offering a range of summits with ~1000m ascent with faces in all directions to suit prevailing snow and weather conditions. None are particularly demanding of technique, but nevertheless provided relaxed ascents and enjoyable descents. A significant fraction of the visitors were on racquets; but in the good snow conditions I think that we skiers had the better of it.

We climbed two peaks from each hut, with a midweek transit between the two (Fanes to Sennes). This involved the ascent of two successive cols, with gradients providing the opportunity to exercise kick turns in spades. At this point I have to mention my strong preference for ‘down-hill’ or ‘outside’ kick turns, as they now seem to be called. When I learned them,

there was no ‘uphill’ version – perhaps it is the reduced length of skis these days which make this possible, but I remain convinced that it takes more energy and stretches the parts that other manoeuvres don’t reach. But I signally failed to convert any of my companions... Somewhere near the end of the route it dissolved into a set of ravines in deep soft powder in the woods; some of us were lucky in route finding. Two were obliged to employ deliberate gravitational tactics to extract themselves. On arrival at the Sennes hut our baggage was waiting for us.

On the second day we had managed in our enthusiasm to overshoot a fork in a downhill track and found ourselves skiing a beautiful valley which would have led out towards Cortina. As the weather was poor we decided to abandon the original goal, to make the most of forest skiing in falling snow, and then skinned back out again. Early return to the hut allowed us to put more than the usual time into practice with the avalanche rescue devices, with enough energy to try speed digging, multiple burials and discover the benefits of assigning one member to manage the rescue. On the other days the weather varied from good to perfect and all targets were achieved, with an extra peak thrown in for good measure by three of the party on the last day.

Jeremy Whitehead amazed us all by his speed and robustness in his eighties. Chris Rowles, the AAC tour leader, had completed the AAC Leader Training course

the year before, and proved the best that I have toured with. His skiing was pretty good too – he was previously the Mark Warner ski pin-up. All members of the party were most agreeable. The ski domain was well suited to intermediate day tours on ski, and would also be great for summer walking. Italian, German or English will get you by, and the locals have an extraordinary hybrid language too.

As our stay came to an end we had noticed many folk taking toboggans down the road from the Sennes hut to the valley, and enquired whether we too could make our final descent this way rather than using the Rattrak, or skiing until the snow ran out. But we had not factored in the time of day. Our morning descent began with hilarity, and not a little competition, but as we lost height and the surface turned from snow to unsoftened ice and occasional grit, the braking became more desperate. Eventually one of our number overshot a hairpin bend and wrapped himself around the proverbial tree trunk, and we were reduced to delicate steps in ski boots to the valley bottom. Although we suspected a broken rib, John was pronounced sound on inspection in hospital. It is obviously a wonderful descent in the late afternoon...

Party: Graham Wallis ASC, Jeremy Whitehead ASC, Chris Rowles, Claire Pigott, John Coulsting, ‘JC’ Hardwick, Jonathan Coutts, Pat Ingram

*Graham Wallis*

# Members Trips

## Alpine Traverse: from the Med to Mont Blanc

We were the second ASC team in as many years to traverse the Alps from the Mediterranean to Mont Blanc but, at least before we set out, the journey felt enormous nonetheless. In the event, getting started was the most difficult part: after dipping our toes into the sea in Menton we quickly found our rhythm.

Our aim was to reach Mt Blanc without using mechanical

uplift so we generally stayed high and the journey split into four or five main sections.

The route from Menton to Isola mostly followed the GR54 and gave us two warm-up days walking before we put on our skis at Col de Turini. This allowed the vast quantities of snow that had fallen over the southern Alps to settle and we went on to enjoy bright sun (plus one blizzard) and sometimes complex navigation in the micro mountains - steep, if not particularly high, and a good early test for ourselves and our equipment.

The next section, from Isola to Larche, was the most technical with several steep and exposed ridges and no real escape routes. We were sorry to lose Patrick Bird from the team after a bad weather pause

in Isola derailed the schedule - he'd come specifically for the 'difficult' leg but had only one (fabulous) day in deep powder crossing into Italy and down to the excellent San Bernolfo refuge. Bad

weather then

delayed us further and we had five nights (and four days of food) in the unguarded Rabuons and Lac de Vens huts waiting for a window to move on. I was undoubtedly anxious about this section, especially with only two of us, but it was a highlight of the journey: remote, potentially difficult and ski mountaineering at its best.

From Larche we aimed for Montgenevre, criss-crossing the border ridge with Italy and travelling through the Queyras. After the delays of the previous section we were able to make good speed with lightish packs, bypassing the inhospitable bivouac



*Photo: V Wingfield*

Barenghi and heading directly for Maljasset and then on to the refuge Angel and Abries: two long days, and finally a short one, with weather that didn't quite allow us to enjoy our surroundings. The push to Montgenevre was the first of the really long days (bypassing an open gite in Les Fonts) and also gave us our first taste of worry about wet snow.



Photo: V Wingfield

After a rest day we set off on what turned out to be a single section to Mt Blanc (Courmayeur). Skinning up the piste (!!) above Montgenevre we were ambushed by Katie Nurton and Dominic van Essen bearing birthday cake and, after cake on the col, we drank champagne in the afternoon sun in Plampinet in full holiday mode. From there we went through the Etroite valley - a corner of Italy that is in fact France - and in an icy gale descended to Valfrejus before walking across the Maurienne valley to Aussois. Our original hope had been to get as far as Val d'Isere before David had to leave, and I was to be joined by two friends to complete the journey. However by Aussois there was a realistic possibility that we could get all the way to Mt Blanc in settled weather as long as we didn't keel over. So, after a short

climb to the Dent Parrachee refuge, we sped across the Vanoise glacier to the Col de la Vanoise refuge and then on to Val d'Isere and the unguarded Mario Bezzi refuge. The hot conditions made for some horrible and tricky snow, despite our early starts, and the descent from Mario Bezzi to Bonne was strewn with gigantic avalanches. Not one for the late afternoon. The biggest

single ascent of the journey was from Bonne to the col de Rutor and, after an inhumanly early start and 1600m or so of climbing, we were slightly surprised to meet the Household Cavalry coming the other way. We seldom had a track to follow but we were very grateful for the one that they had cut through what can only be described as an unskiable gorge down to La Thuile. By the final day we were a well oiled machine: an early start and walk along the road in the dark, and 1400m of ascent before zooming down a steep gully to Val Veny, was a lark.

The pleasure of it all was the journey itself: from the steep peaks of the Mercantour to the wide open valleys of the Vanoise the Alpine chain was far more varied than I had anticipated and sometimes the landscape changed dramatically



Photo: V Wingfield

from one side of a col to another. When we set out the days were short and the weather wintry but by the time we finished it was spring and we started before dawn to avoid what we could of the hot slopes. Much of the journey was also remote: the unguarded huts were an adventure all of their own and we saw other skiers only intermittently, and not at all in the Mercantour. Parts of the route were committing in winter - inaccessible and with few, if any, escape options. This made for hard work route finding and breaking trail but was all the more rewarding for that.

So what did we learn? Although a team of two is clearly not ideal from a safety point of view, we were efficient - not just on the mountain and on the move, but also in our routines more generally. As long as we ate, drank and slept enough we stayed in reasonably good shape: we both felt we could have continued far beyond Courmayeur without too much difficulty. In addition to the normal safety equipment,

we made a significant effort to get regular weather and avalanche information. The weather forecast was helpful - if not always accurate - but we found that the worst snow we encountered was

on a day when the avalanche risk was published as 1 and there was no real substitute for assessing what we could observe happening day by day over the course of our travels. We also carried a SPOT beacon with an SOS function: friends (particularly the birthday ambush team) followed our progress enthusiastically but thankfully its primary function remained untested. I jettisoned my airbag after the first week because of its weight but, although I got away with it, this was not an easy decision. We didn't have helmets but, although this too was fine in the event, there were times when it felt a bad decision. Next time I will bring one.

Unsurprisingly preparation was key. David's exceptionally detailed route planning, and some tips from John Kentish's 2014 team, were invaluable, especially on long days or where route finding was not obvious. Planning on the fly would have been extremely difficult and there was seldom time for a detailed discussion of the following day's route in the evening.

We didn't use it often but the GPS - loaded with tracks as well as waypoints - was essential. We were lucky too that several supposedly unguarded refuges turned out to be guarded, catered and convivial. In short: it was a blast. I'd do another long journey in a flash.

*Venetia Wingfield*

Statistics: 9<sup>th</sup> Feb to 12<sup>th</sup> March. 32 days (including 8 bad weather days); 486km, 29,207m ascent and 27,800m descent.

Party: David Hamilton and Venetia Wingfield

Star appearances: Nick Hellen, Patrick Bird, Andre Axelrod (SAC), Katie Nurton & Dominic van Essen.

Support driver: Claire Marvin

I would also like to record my thanks to RAB. They kindly supplied me with warm clothes and a rucksack which I wore day in, day out for 32 days.

Day	Time	Distance (km)	Ascent (m)	Descent (m)	Route
1	7:11	18.70	1529	1186	Menton to Sospel
2	8:30	24.70	1941	492	Sospel to Col de Turini
3	8:00	17.10	1047	651	Col de Turini to Ref des Merveillies
4	6:45	12.40	832	700	Ref Merveillies to Ref de Nice
5	6:45	17.70	837	1548	Ref de Nice to Le Boreon
6	7:50	21.30	1170	649	Le Boreon to Isola 2000
11	8:33	21.70	1247	1469	Isola 2000 to San Bernolfo
12	7:32	12.10	1302	463	San Bernolfo to Ref Rebuons
15	9:10	15.00	1037	1128	Ref Rebuons to Ref de Vens
17	8:10	23.00	1023	1694	Ref de Vens to Larche
18	10:15	27.10	1925	1739	Larche to Maljasset
19	9:37	21.09	1266	593	Maljasset to Ref Agnel
20	4:52	17.80	536	1564	Ref Agnel to Abries
21	11:10	26.20	1874	1649	Abries to Montgenevre
23	6:00	17.40	822	1156	Montgenevre to Plampinet
24	6:15	14.29	813	549	Plampinet to Ref de I Magi
25	8:30	31.90	1334	1651	Ref de I Magi to Aussois
26	3:50	7.10	1094	50	Aussois to Ref Dent Parachee
27	9:00	23.20	1398	1374	Ref Dent Parachee to Col de la Vanoise
28	8:00	22.70	857	1537	Col de la Vanoise to Val d'Isere
29	11:15	24.40	1860	1430	Val d'Isere to Ref Mario Bezzi
30	3:00	12.00	203	705	Ref de Bezzi to Bonne
31	13:50	30.00	1848	2166	Bonne to La Thuille
32	8:00	27.00	1412	1657	La Thuille to Courmayeur
TOTAL		485.88	29,207	27,800	

## Bulgaria February 2015

Four ASC members went to the Rila and Pirin mountains in Bulgaria. We were an international team – the organizing guide, Jim Blyth (Scotsman living in France), the local Bulgarian

guide (Ivo Stolikov), a Bulgarian driver, the ASC members: Robert Borgerhoff Mulder (Dutch), Harley Nott

and Dave Harmer (English), Alex Miller (elective Austrian); and the other team members: an American, an Irishman (sadly no Welshman), a German and three English. We met in Sofia airport, but unfortunately three pairs of skis failed to make the rendezvous, thanks to BA and Lufthansa. This was no problem for the resourceful Ivo, who took us to a ski rental shop in the back streets of Sofia, where the unfortunates were kitted out, and the missing skis all caught up with us in a day or two.

The next day we ascended the highest mountain in the Balkans, Musala, 2925m (mountain of Allah) from

Borovets with a little mechanical help, finally cramponing up the summit ridge holding onto the handrail. We were rewarded with a clear view (something to be repeated only once in the week) and sheltered in the weather and cosmic ray research station to have lunch. We refreshed ourselves in the busy resort after skiing down a long pretty piste through the forest.

The second day we drove to a small ski area of Maljovitsa, spurned lifts and aimed for the peak of the same name, the centre of Bulgarian mountaineering. We crossed a French group on their way down. On arriving at the ridge and ski depot, the weather had deteriorated so we decided to retrace our steps rather than go to the summit and do a traverse skiing down to

Rila monastery as planned. When offered a choice of visiting the monastery at the end of the day or having a beer, we postponed the monastery.

We then transferred to Bansko, an amazingly over-expanded but un-landscaped ski resort where the old town had



Photo: Dave Harmer

Cramponing up the ridge to Musala 2925m



Photo: Dave Harmer

Skinning up through the pine forest to Dautov Vrah

been submerged. We did a little known peak (Dautov Vrah) from Kulinoto, a small ski area where Ivo persuaded the operators to start up the one main drag lift and then skinned up through a beautiful forest of Macedonian pines. The



*Skinning up to Malka (small) Todorka. Photo Dave Harmer*

The younger members did a second ascent as the snow was good, while the seniors waited in the bar at the foot, having avoided slalom race trainers on the main piste and school kids on the bottom nursery slope. The next day we went to another one piste ski area at Gotse Delchev. The chairlift was sufficiently unpleasant that we needed resuscitation in the Bezbog hut at the top. We then set off to traverse Polezhan to the Demyanitsa hut. We met the French retreating. Feeling morally superior, we continued, but when we reached the ridge, the weather was so bad and the navigation so complex that we too turned round, climbing en route the peak of Bezbog (Without God), curiously with a summit cross. There was an excellent ski back to the ski area, followed by a drive round and a skin up to the Demyanitsa hut.

The next day was the longest day, climbing Malka (small) Todorka, Hvoyanarti Vrah, and an attempt at Vihren, the highest peak in the Pirin range. The three oldest members turned round at various stages, and the younger members turned back 300m below the summit in bad weather.

The ski down was 'varied', ending directly back at the hotel in Bansko. The final ski day was another planned traverse, nearly thwarted by the police who closed the road for the FIS women's races. However Ivo worked his magic again and we were allowed through. After a surreal ascent to the Banderishka Porta col where the group members vanished into the mist one by one, we gratifyingly achieved the traverse, especially memorable for combat skiing in the forest down to Popina Laka. We then transferred to Melnik, a pretty village not far from Greece. We celebrated the successful trip by sampling the famous local wines and enjoying the locals singing Bulgarian songs.

The next day was monastery day (Rozhen, very quiet) and Rila (UNESCO world heritage and the top Bulgarian tourist site), then a drive to Sofia, a final evening together and return home.

*Alex Miller*

## Sarntal, Süd Tirol, Italy. Jan 2015

Sarntal is an unspoiled valley north of Bozen/Bolzano. In summer it is a through route to Sterzing (Vipiteno) on the Brenner Pass road but in winter the Pensjoch is closed and the valley is quiet. The ASC party arrived at Astfeld near Sanrtheim by Landrover, train/bus and car to find no snow on the green hills of Tirol. About 25cm fell during the night and we awoke to a windy and wild day. Our first outing was to get our 'ski legs' at Reinswald/San Martino, the only lift station in the valley but one with reasonable off-piste skiing.

Overnight it snowed again and slippery roads took us to Pens whence we made an energetic ascent through dense woods towards the Schönjochl. Following a steep, narrow footpath on skins can be tedious but nothing like as frustrating as trying to ski down it again, as we later discovered. Higher up as we followed newly-made tracks on steepening slopes with frequent kick turns, in half a metre of heavy, wet new snow, doubts about safety began to grow. These culminated when we encountered the three Italian track makers in process of quitting. Common sense prevailed and with aching knees and fraying tempers, we descended to a warm welcome at Gasthof Stern in



*Simon Duvivier shredding the gnar gnar. Photo John Moore*

Pens. Refreshed and pleased with our decision making (several tourers had been killed in avalanches in South Tirol that day amid dire public warnings issued by the chairman of the rescue organisation), we drove back to the usual excellent supper.

Next morning was again unsettled and we used the Reinswald lifts to help us towards the rocky SW ridge of the Plankenhorn which we followed to a cold, windblown summit at 2473m whence a



The view North towards Zingeler, Hynel Lloyd, Simon Duvivier. Photo John Moore

careful descent through powder and rocks - Roger's shin and relatively new skis suffered - followed by fields, trees and fences brought us to Glühwein.

Tuesday was bright and clear and again we started from Pens, initially up the snowed-up Pensjoch road then by steeper slopes to the Astenberg – a broad and 'safe' peak with views eastward to the Marmolada and north to the Brenner and Stubai hills. A memorable descent in perfect powder on the upper slopes completed a wonderful day.

Our next outing took us on a 45 minute drive to the Rittnerhorn lifts above Bozen. From the wild and bleak, Cairngorm-like summit station we followed a broad ridge, with occasional glimpses across the valley to the spectacular Rosengarten/Catinaccio Dolomites to the Sattelberg. Little persuasion in a developing blizzard, was needed to start us on the tedious return journey in weather more appropriate to Scotland than Tirol.

A glance outside next morning persuaded us to go shopping, drink coffee and visit the excellent Ötzi museum in Bozen. The week ended with an enjoyable half-day tour from another snowy road at Aurerneralm to the Stoarner Mandl. We

left in sunshine and of course immediately after our departure the weather improved!

To keep a party in collective good temper, care is needed in choice of routes which don't have the narrowest of forest footpaths or lengthy ski carrying on loipe tracks. I am also pleased to report that an aspirant Rechabite\* kept his resolution to avoid the demon drink for two weeks – an example to us all!

Sarntal is an excellent area for off-the-beaten-track, easy touring. We were pleased to achieve as much as we did in the conditions we encountered which required good collective judgement of local avalanche risk. Not conditions for the faint hearted.

\* Jeremiah Ch.35. vv5-6

*John Moore*

ASC Party: R Birnstingl, N Danby, S Duvivier, A Hargreaves, H & L Lloyd, J Moore, A Strachan

## Stubai, March 2015

The group arrived in Austria, with no definite plans. Lack of open huts discouraged touring in the Ratikon Alps, so we headed for the Stubai Alps, staying overnight in Romedihof Hostel, in Imst.

We ascended to the Franz Senn Hut, the last part, up a narrow icy path. In fine weather, next day we set off for Wildes Hinterbergl. A long valley ascent, with some steeper sections, led to a side valley, steepening to a crampon ascent of Turmscharte. An easy skin led to the summit. Returning, we descended nice snow down the Turmferner. Low down a steep, narrow descent required side slipping. Lower down, the snow cover was thin, with rocks protruding.

After a second night in the hut, we set off for the Ruderhofspitze, once again heading up the Alpeiner Ferner, almost to its end, before bearing left to the Obere Holtalscharte, an easy col, on an otherwise rocky ridge. There followed a narrow, mainly snowy ridge, leading up to the summit, a considerable way away. A cold wind at the col gave way to more comfortable conditions above. Once again, we had magnificent views from the summit. Returning to the skis, we had a gentle ski down, before heading up the Wildgratscharte. Crossing the col required boots and crampons. The far side also required descent on foot, before a long ski down the Schwarzenbergferner. Lower down, the snow condi-

tions were awkward, before arrival at the Amberger Hut.

On Wednesday in poor weather, the group ascended the Sulztaferner, to the cloud line. Next day we climbed a snowy peak near the Schrankogel. Steve broke trail, with many guided parties behind. The summit quickly became crowded. On descent our party separated, with members crossing the Wildgratscharte and Schwarzenbergjoch, before all returning to the Franz Senn Hut, for the next two nights.

Next day we climbed the Ostl Seespitze, heading up the Alpeiner Kraulferner, a steep, fairly uniform glacier. Easy at first, it became, much steeper and very icy. Tenuous skinning with Harscheisen, gave way to booting, then crampons. Carrying skis up, we viewed the descent with trepidation. We summited after a final rocky ridge. The first part of the ski down felt very insecure, with huge icy drops beneath, sometimes with only millimetres of snow covering the glacier ice. Once lower down, we had some lovely skiing down to the main valley.

Saturday was once again a nice day, with most of the party climbing the Kraulcharte, before coming over the Oberisserscharte, down to the valley.

*John Kentish*

Party: John Kentish (ASC), Steve Kentish (ASC), Ken Davies, Harvey Lyons

## Ambling and Rambling with Jeremy

Mid January I arrived at Scuol amongst green fields and pouring rain, but awoke to the sound of the snowplough and heavy snowfall. An uphill afternoon walk and a day's skiing helped to toughen the leg muscles before I moved to the Stubaial. Two factors governed this choice. First, the Stubai valley lift pass is



Senes Hut 2116m Photo Cedric Hardwick

free for the over 80s, and second, there is a specialist ski touring shop in Innsbruck. It is my experience that 10 years is a good life for a touring ski, and my K2s were that old and too narrow by modern standards, and I also needed to reduce the weight on my feet. So, after hiring some skis for a day's trial to see how I got on with tech bindings, I made a trip to Gramshammer and returned with a new pair complete with skins, 16 mm wider and with Dynafit bindings, so saving a pound's weight off each foot, and also 250 euros off list price. Will these see another 10 years service?

So I arrived at Ochsengarten ready to try them out on real touring. A good first day up the Schafzoll proved their worth, and

a lift-assisted ascent to the Grieskogel-scharte, with 'young' Simon to break the trail, and two ambles up the Langental and Mittel-tal were all the touring I achieved there.

After Ochsengarten Simon Duvivier, Mike Esten and I spent five nights at the Lizumer hut. This lies at 2019m in a military training area, and live firing may restrict access to some parts of the area. With snow tyres

you can drive to the entrance of the training area, whence a taxi will take you up to the hut, but we had to use a rather expensive taxi all the way from Wattens. We were greeted as 'Poms' by the well-travelled warden Anton, who with his Taiwanese wife looked after us well at this comfortable hut, which is much used for ÖAV instructional courses. We were able to make a number of unremarkable ascents, suitable for elderly gents, of 400 to 650m height gain.

It was with a certain amount of trepidation that I had signed up for Graham Wallis's joint tour with the Austrian Alpine Club, as I knew I would be the slowest person on the uphill. But the Sennes – Fanes area of the Dolomites is one I had wanted to visit,



*The sun rises over Ochsengarten Photo Roger Upton*

and transport of people up to the Fanes hut, and baggage between the huts, was a great attraction. The Fanes and Sennes huts are superb, and the area offers plenty of objectives for the elderly ski tourer, particularly around the Sennes hut. No doubt Graham has given some details of our doings, so I will restrict myself to some comments.

I was always taught that in ski touring, as in all other mountaineering and hillwalking, the speed of a party is the speed of its slowest member. In ski touring in particular, where in case of an 'incident' the party must act together as a unit, the accepted doctrine always used to be that the group members stay reasonably close together. But increasingly nowadays the view seems to be that everyone goes their own pace, whether it be

Everest, a ski tour or a Lake District hill walk.

I was also surprised that a proper transceiver search practice was not conducted at the start of the week, so I for one had no idea how competent my companions might be should an incident occur. A search did take place, on the final afternoon, which did not seem to be a lot of use.

These reservations aside, the trip was a success. Perhaps we were lucky though. I should add that Graham did keep an eye on me, particularly on the transfer day between the huts, when I was very slow on the long steep uphill, where the party became split into two very distinct groups.

*Jeremy Whitehead*

*President's note:* I wholeheartedly endorse Jeremy's observations about safety precautions, such as timely transceiver practice and not letting the group become too spread out.

## Mussorgsky Moments on the Haute Route

*This article looks at lessons learned from an unplanned bivvy. It shows that even an experienced, well prepared party on familiar ground can make mistakes. But fortunately the situation was resolved without danger. Things did not spiral out of control, but reading Nick Putnam's account below, it is easy to see how they might have done, if they had made the wrong decisions.*

The weather at the end of March was “mixed”, at best. On Weds 25th we slipped out of the Argentiere Hut with our two companions bound for the Col du Chardonnet. Armed with advice on conditions from local guides and the hut guardian, we were both pleased and surprised to find ourselves climbing alone. The weather was clear and the forecast was good enough, at least until evening.

At the top of the Col du Chardonnet we had a decision point. The visibility on the far side looked good and there were no obvious difficulties in descent, especially as we had the extra rope that a late dropout was supposed to have been carrying! This was familiar ground, so we knew there is no easy descent directly from the Saleina Glacier below. Nevertheless we plunged on. It would have been churlish to go back.

The climb up towards the Grand Lui and the Col de Saleina was straightforward at first, albeit with deepening snow that made trail-breaking hard work. However, as we approached the final ascent to the Col, now tantalisingly close, the snow became deeper; about 60cm and loose-packed. With more than 200m to climb at over 45 degrees, this

was not going to be sensible. Neither was it remotely as advertised by the advice we had carefully sought. Local knowledge expected the climb to be in perfect condition. Reluctantly and with difficulty in the swirling mists, we turned around and retraced our steps back to the main glacier. At this point we realised our best bet was to make for the unmanned Dorées bivvy hut on the far side of the glacier. We identified it, GPS'd it and photographed it carefully from a distance: recent experience came to the fore. Sadly, crevasses and a large rognon lay on our direct route. By the time we had negotiated that lot, the light was fading and close-in route finding was becoming difficult in the mist and gloom. We found ourselves on steepening ground and it always seemed easier to go up rather than retrace our steps yet again. Eventually we reached level ground, although we were surrounded by steep, icy slopes and loose, gravelly moraines studded with teetering boulders. We knew we were less than 400m from the hut but that was as the crow flies. Without wings, we were safer to stay put, bivvy and wait until daylight, even at 3000m and -8° deg C. Inadvertently we had helped ourselves to a night on the bare mountain.

Of course, we were properly equipped with emergency gear, although for the first time in 40 years I had left out my ancient duvet jacket in favour of a lightweight down waistcoat! Nevertheless, we shared out our remaining hot drinks and chocolate, divided the ropes up for ground insulation and settled down to

wait for morning. Although there were a few flakes of snow, by good fortune there was very little wind, otherwise we would have needed a Plan C. I'm pleased to report that we managed to chuckle our way through the night, with just the odd moment of idle wondering about our prospects for the morning.

By first light, as expected, the route out of our predicament was obvious. So we lowered ourselves down to easier ground and popped over the Aiguilles Dorées towards the Trient Hut and a well-deserved brunch, 30 hours after leaving the Argentiere Hut!!! We downed six litres of tea between us and double Rosti with all the trimmings before accepting our fate and skiing down the Val d'Arpette to Champex for the rest of our journey.

Most of our important decisions were correct. And several lessons emerged from this experience.

1. Everyone should spend time studying the route and understanding the options before we set out. It saves time if conditions change and, more importantly, helps avoid

the inevitable mistakes if anyone starts guessing which way to go.

2. Lead patiently with map and compass. GPS is excellent for verification and for supporting the map work, but in difficult terrain it can lead to serious mistakes.

3. Always fix a precise location before setting foot on rising terrain in the dark, just on a GPS bearing. The ground may get steeper and looser.

4. Some form of satellite communication would have helped avoid anxiety at our hotel in La Fouly. We had no phone signal and couldn't get in touch until the following afternoon. We were carrying an EPIRB, but our predicament never justified calling for emergency help.

The picture shows where we should have been and where we ended up. I know it's hard to see how our mistake could be made. Bring in the mist and nightfall, steeping ground, enormous loose boulders. How easy is it now?

One final tip: Rush out NOW and buy a SOL (Survive Outdoors Longer) Emergency Bivvy, tiny and just 108g. I got mine at the last Ski Mountaineering Symposium at Plas-y-Brenin. Stick it in the bottom of your rucksack and leave it there just in case, as I did throughout expeditions to Antarctica, South Georgia and for the last several years. It's especially useful if you're stupid enough to leave your duvet jacket at home in a bid to save weight!

*Nick Putnam*

Party: Phil Budden, Rob Davis, John Hollott and Nick Putnam.

*What could possibly go wrong? 400m from where we should have been. Photo N Putnam*



# Technology Review

## Navigation and Safety devices

Demand for hiring transceivers has reduced over the years, as more and more people buy their own. In light of this, the Club has sold off a small stock of transceivers and purchased some other bits of equipment for ASC members' use. Following some excellent research by Jonty Mills and Graham Wallis, the Club has acquired a Yellowbrick satellite tracking device and two Ocean Signal rescueMe PLB1 personal locator beacons. These devices serve complementary functions.

## YB3 (Yellowbrick)

The YB3 is a satellite tracking and 2-way communication device, which uses the Iridium satellite network. Iridium is the most extensive and reliable satellite network available and is generally regarded as far superior to the alternatives for world-wide use. Our experience was that it connected to Iridium & GPS within ~10 seconds and sent/received SMS messages flawlessly. The YB3 weighs 303g and measures 16.5 x 7.5 x 3.7cm (including aerial). Battery life is excellent, estimated at 2-3 months when tracking hourly.

For the recent trip to the Homathko Icefield in Canada, we configured the YB3 so that it tracked our progress at a rate of 1-point per hour while we were moving and it was manually disengaged overnight.



*Yellowbrick*

The track is at <http://my.yb.tl/alpineskiclub> (Homathko). This page was replicated on the News page of the ASC web site during the trip so that interested parties could follow us. This proved to be very popular with all concerned.

The messaging from the YB3 uses a list of pre-set (definable in advance) messages and it is possible to create a free text message though this is a bit clunky. Registered contacts were able to send/receive short messages via email. For the more techie types, the YB3 standard model is also able to connect to Android and Apple smart phones via Bluetooth - this provides extensive control and more fluent communications.

Although the YB3 is not an emergency device, it does have an emergency button which will send an alert to a list of pre-configured emergency contacts.

## PLB1

The rescueMe PLB1 is an emergency personal locator beacon. When activated it will transmit its emergency signal for 24 hours on the international standard 406Mhz frequency. It is a very small, lightweight unit, weighing 115g and meas-



uring just 7.5x5.0x3.2cm, making it ideal for ski touring.

Our experience on the Canadian trip is that we didn't have to use it. But it was very reassuring to have it and it was not considered a burden.

## Hire of Equipment

The YB3 and the PLBs are available for use by ASC Club members, free of hire charge, though users will need to pay postage and running costs. The PLB has no running costs. The cost of using YB3 consists of a monthly rental fee (£8) and a cost per tracking point or short message of up to 51 characters for 10p.

Refer to the new Equipment Hire page on the ASC website for details.

*Roger Upton*

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## Dropbox

I was struck when I attended the meet in Ochsen Garten how many people were still going through the tiresome ritual wanting the same group photo on THEIR camera. Sharing technology on “the cloud” has improved enormously over the last couple of years, so that it is now possible to share photos (I use dropbox.com, but Microsoft also have onedrive).

This is a very useful technology, and it would be remiss of the technology section not to alert members to the benefit of sharing photos over “the cloud.”

It is possible to upload photos to a folder in dropbox in a matter of seconds. If anything, we have found that the technology creates too much to be shared. So after one trip, we agreed that each party member would only share their 100 best photos, and to focus on pictures with others in, rather than scenery landscape. If you haven't tried using “the cloud” to share photos after a trip, I would very much encourage you to give it a try.

It's also the best way to send us your photos when submitting your newsletter articles.

*Bruce Packard*

# Members News

## Births

### Congratulations!

Theodore Frederick Silver was born on 5 December 2014, and is now aspiring to be a member of the Alpine Ski Club. He likes laughing, eating but is not too keen on sleeping. He has not yet expressed any interest in ski mountaineering, but his parents, Nick and Carly hope that there is still time.



*Nick Silver*

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## Obituaries

### Richard Morgan

Richard's alpine climbing career spanned the years from about 1952 until 2004 thus covering the period from the post-war explosion of British climbing with minimal climbing gear to essentially modern times. He collected a very impressive list of quality alpine climbs to his credit including an early British ascent of the Comice route on the N Face of the Cime Grande, the Zmutt on the Matterhorn, the Guggi on the Jungfrau, and the long Schreckhorn-Lauteraarhorn traverse. Richard was also an enthusiastic and determined ski tourer. He did the classic Chamonix-Zermatt HLR in 1959 which, if it was unguided, may well rank as the first British unguided. Arguably this prowess in the mountains was foreshadowed as a student by his 1953 Coronation ascent of Kings College

Chapel, Cambridge in order to raise the Union flag on a spire!

Professionally Richard started out in accountancy, spent some time as a management consultant and ended up as finance director of various public companies. It was this wealth of experience that he so willingly shared with various mountaineering organisations having served, *inter alia*, as Chairman of the AC Finance Sub-Committee for 15 years, Treasurer of the CC, on the Management Committee of the BMC and eventually dying in harness after 25 years as Treasurer of the MEF. He took evident pleasure in doing these jobs successfully, despite the hard work involved. He was an enthusiastic member of the Alpine Ski Club but remarkably, as far as I know, this must have been one of the few clubs to which



he belonged for which he never served as an officer

I only got to know Richard in the late 1980s, by which time we were both well past our first flush of youth. We met initially, not through ski touring or mountaineering, but through our joint committee work for the Alpine Club. Given Richard's mountaineering CV, I was surprised when he proposed that we should climb together in the Alps. Later I realised that a stroke a few years earlier had left him relatively unharmed but for a slight lack of control in one hand and that he was presumably looking for a climbing partner of much more modest ambitions and ability than hitherto! From our climbing sorties to the Alps and Andes I came to appreciate at first hand that Richard was a very dedicated climber to whom it was extremely important to succeed on a climb, and in reasonable style too.

It was in ski-mountaineering that he and I spent our most successful time in the hills together. Although Richard was an enthusiastic member of the ASC we did most of our tours not on Club meets but in small parties comprising about 4 or 5 ASC/AC members. We made some interesting tours, mostly 10 days or so in length, including the Gran Paradiso traverse from Champorcher to La Thuile, the classic Oetzal, Ortler and Silvretta traverses and a rather purist line from Andermatt to Zermatt with most huts unguarded. The last such tour that Richard and I made together was in 2006. We did the Urner HLR in Central Switzerland from Realp to Engelberg using unguarded huts and where, at one point, we had to lower skis down over a cornice before making a significant jump down to the glacier below ... quite an achievement for a 77 year old.

I will always remember and be deeply grateful to Richard for our time in the hills together, and for his friendship. The mountaineering community at large is indebted to him for the dedicated service which he so generously gave on financial and organisational matters.

*Mike Esten*

## Les Swindin

Les Swindin, an ASC member since 1978, also passed away this year.

## Tail Piece

### The Black Smoker

Many ski tourers of a certain age will remember with nostalgia if not fondness, the late, lamented Black Smoker, a ski touring legend. The Smoker was an aged 'green wellie' Volvo Estate which, like its regular crew, was past its prime but for many years voyaged to and from the Alps in the hard months of winter, outbound with touring kit and duty-free gin and returning with a full cargo of Alsace wine. The vehicle acquired its sobriquet from the impenetrable, oily, noxious smoke pall, emitted on cold starts in alpine car parks, was anathema to 'greens' or indeed anyone with any feeling for the environment or public health. The Smoker brought a new meaning to the term of 'carbon footprint'. Those caught in the fallout zone when she was 'fired up' on a cold morning will know that real carbon footprints are those left on hotel carpets by anyone returning indoors after the dramatic event. The Black Smoker is believed by some to be the rationale for establishment of Eagle Ski Club's 'Climate Care' group.

The Skipper, a mildly-eccentric, reticent, retired medic was usually accompanied on his alpine voyages by a crew of three, comprising as mate and co-driver, a euro-sceptic Yorkshireman, a navigator with encyclopaedic knowledge of the hills of the world and a randomly selected 'cabin boy' – characters surprisingly similar to

those of the crew of the puffer 'Vital Spark' in Neil Munro's lighthearted stories of adventures around the Firth of Clyde. Journeys were occasionally completed under the Smoker's own power but more commonly, chained to a flat-bed rescue truck. Engineering support came with monotonous regularity from EU and Swiss automobile clubs, together with Volvo agencies across a swathe of Europe.

Breakdowns on French autoroutes were so frequent that at least one cabin boy found them sufficiently routine that he was still sleeping on the back seat when he awakened, startled, to find himself being winched on to the usual French rescue truck.

Never one to waste unnecessary time in filling stations, the Skipper maximised fuel usage before re-filling – sometimes with frustrating results on dark, cold nights at random spots on the autoroutes of France or within a few yards of a Channel ferry boarding ramp. A highlight of fuel management took place in a Dolomite hotel car park one morning at a temperature of -25°C. The Smoker had last felt the satisfaction of nozzle insertion some 500 miles away, far beyond where 'winter diesel' is the norm. The residual half pint had the consistency of golden syrup and radical action was needed. The Skipper poured a gallon of equally viscous diesel from his

emergency reserve, without success and then was whisked 20km to the nearest garage for a can of low temperature additive which was poured into the tank, after which half a dozen people rigorously rocked and shook the old girl to encourage fuel and additive mixing before all ended happily in the familiar warm, oily, carcinogenic particle-filled, impenetrable smoke-screen as yet another ski touring day began.

The 'Smoker' was not in what 'Car Buyer' describes as A1 condition. The driver's seat had completely lost its support springing and was enhanced with a block of 4 inch thick styrofoam to allow a driver of average height to see over the steering wheel. She regularly shed various inessential external fittings including wing-mirrors and bodywork against gateposts and passing Swiss lorries. Undeterred, these were restored by the proud Skipper, using prodigious amounts of aluminium-coloured gaffer tape.

At the end of my only journey as 'cabin boy', in accordance with Skipper's instructions about unloading gear, I wedged open the rear door with the ski stick provided

for the purpose, Volvo's own system having failed some considerable time previously. Inadvertently, I placed the stick point down, only to find later that the stick tip had drilled its way through the boot floor. I discreetly covered the hole with an old rug. My offence was not mentioned but I was never again invited to join a Smoker crew

Shortly after his firm went out of business, a Saab employee expressed deep regret at the Skipper's choice of Volvo. As the Saab man said – the Skipper had, by his contributions in spare parts alone, kept Volvo afloat as its rival failed.

It is with sadness that I record the Smoker's passing but readers can take heart - all is not lost - the Skipper is breaking-in, literally, yet another ageing Volvo. Let's hope that this does not completely destroy the morale of the ESC Climate Care team. The climate needs all the care it can get.

NB This report is partly based on eyewitness accounts – some of which are reliable.

*John McM Moore*

## From the Editor

### Articles for the Newsletter

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.

#### **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 for collections of photos, it is recommended to send us a Dropbox (or similar) link.

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