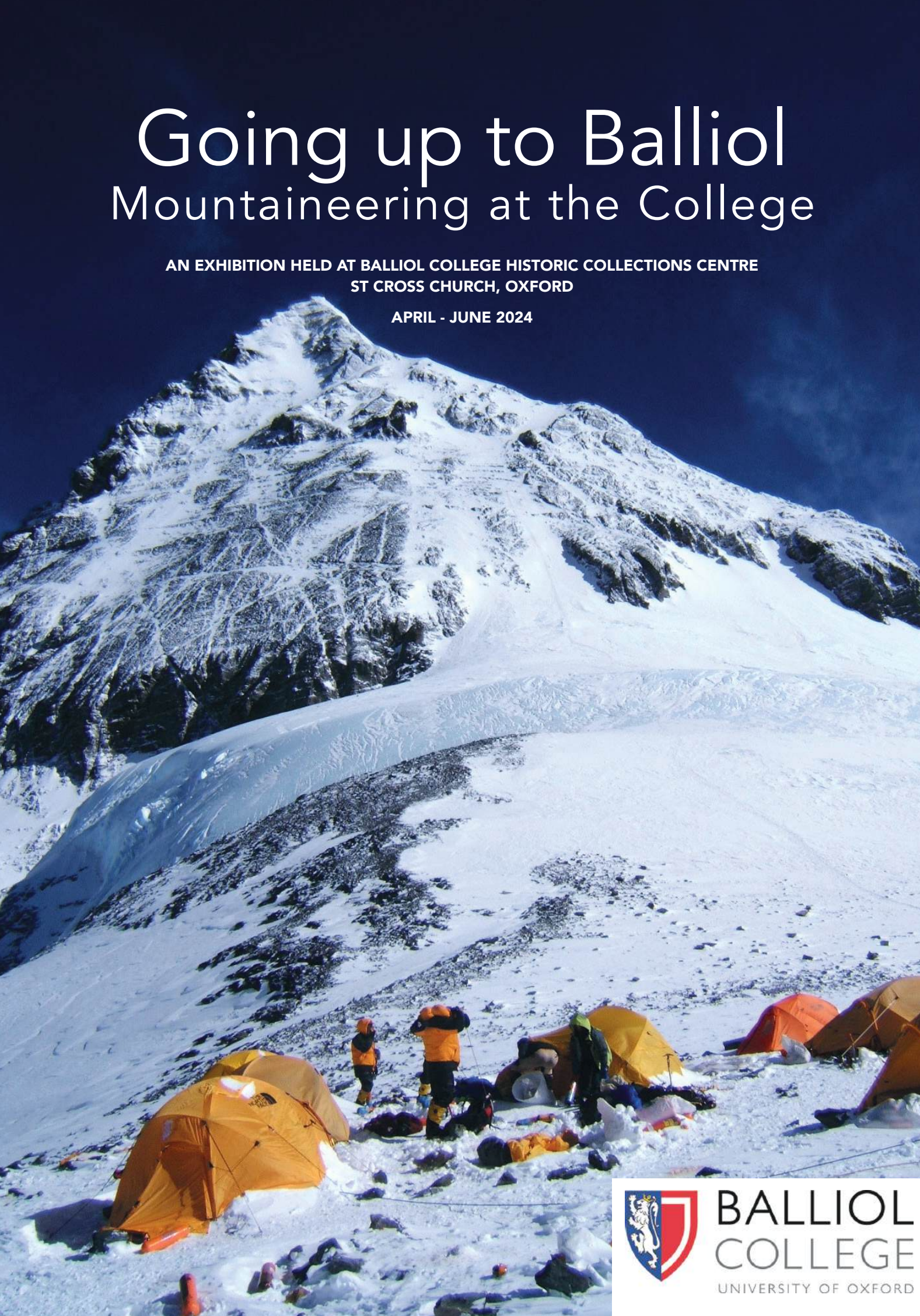
Going up to Balliol
Mountaineering at the College

AN EXHIBITION HELD AT BALLIOL COLLEGE HISTORIC COLLECTIONS CENTRE
ST CROSS CHURCH, OXFORD

APRIL - JUNE 2024



BALLIOL
COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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We're thankful to the Alpine Club for their kind loan of Tom Bourdillon's artefacts, as well as the historic photos from their photo library.

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Introduction

The word ‘exploration’ often conjures images of the Poles and Africa, of ice caps and deserts – vast distances being essential. Yet, right in the middle of Europe, the Victorians ‘discovered’ a wilderness which was barely mapped: the Alps. Historically these mountains had been surrounded in myth and superstition. A respected scientist, Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, in the 18th century enumerated the species of dragon which were reported to be native to them. It wasn’t even known if humans could survive at such altitudes.

Mountain-climbing in Europe is recorded from the 14th century, when ascents were made for religious or meteorological purposes. 1492 saw the first ascent of a mountain for its own sake conducted by Antoine de Ville, chamberlain and military engineer to Charles VIII of France, who led an expedition to Mont Aiguille. This exhibition, however, will investigate the growing interest in mountaineering from the 18th century onwards when scientists and natural philosophers began their explorations.

In 1760, a Swiss scientist, Horace-Bénédict de Saussure, offered a prize for the first person to reach the summit of Mont Blanc, the highest peak in the Alps. Posting notices in every parish of the valley, he also offered recompense to anybody for an unsuccessful attempt. In the following years he repeated the offer, eventually sparking a renewed interest in mountaineering, and in 1786 Jacques Balmat and Michel-Gabriel Paccard successfully made the ascent. Saussure himself only undertook the venture in 1787 with 18 guides, food and wine, scientific instruments, a parasol, changes of clothes, three pairs of shoes, two nightshirts and a bed with ‘mattresses, sheets, coverlet, and a green curtain’. Very far from the lightweight ethos of modern alpinism.

Following these beginnings, in 1909, the Oxford University Mountaineering Club was founded by Arnold Lunn (Balliol, 1907) and undertook many first ascents around the world. Notable members include Charles Evans in the first successful expedition to Kangchenjunga in 1955, Tom Bourdillon (Balliol 1942), who climbed many hard Alpine routes in the 1950s and was a member of the Everest expedition in 1953, and Stephen Venables, the first British climber to summit Everest without the use of an oxygen cylinder. As you follow the exhibition round the room you will discover the Balliol people involved in some important expeditions, scientific innovations, and adventures. They are by no means the only mountaineers connected to the College, there are many more in the past and there’ll be many in the future, but these are just some of the stories we can tell about Balliol and the mountains. An important link between Balliol and the Alps is the Chalet des Anglais, located on the west slopes of the Prarion, one of the foothills in the Mont Blanc massif. Students from Balliol and other colleges have attended summer reading parties here since 1891, when Francis ‘Sligger’ Urquhart (Balliol 1890) opened his family’s summer retreat to other students. He led reading parties as a Balliol Fellow (1896-1934) until his death in 1934.

Figure 1: ***Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1672–1733). Schuchzer made annual journeys to the Alps. These journeys took him all over Switzerland. In 1705 he went to the Rhône Glacier and provided an account of other glaciers as they were then known. In 1706 he added reports of the dragons seen in Switzerland. Author's portrait from*** **[Ouresiphoitēs] Helveticus, sive, Itinera alpina tria: in quibus incolæ, animalia, plantæ, ... exponitur, & iconibus illustratur** [Balliol College Library, Arch A 18 11]



Why do people climb mountains? This is the question non-climbers always ask. There are many reasons, and each climber has nuanced and personal motives, but some of the reasons are as follows.

- Mountains are awe-inspiring. They are towering, majestic, and look as though they touch the sky. They can evoke a sense of wonder, making us feel small and insignificant in comparison.
- Mountains are challenging. Climbing a mountain is a physically and mentally demanding activity. It requires a great deal of effort and determination, and it can be a very rewarding experience.
- Mountains are beautiful. The variety of their landscapes offers a feast for the eyes, from snow-capped peaks to lush forests to craggy cliffs.
- Mountains are mysterious. They are often shrouded in clouds or mist, and they can be home to a variety of wildlife. They can be a source of mystery and adventure, and they can spark our imaginations.
- Mountains are sacred. In many cultures, mountains are considered to be holy places. They are often seen as a bridge between the human world and the divine world.
- Mountains are places of solitude and reflection.
- Mountains are a source of natural resources.

Mountaineering developed through the 19th and 20th centuries into various distinct disciplines, including rock climbing, scrambling, bouldering, and alpinism, the focus of this exhibition. The practice of alpinism, designated as 'intangible cultural heritage' by UNESCO, involves moving through mountainous terrain smoothly and efficiently, lightweight and in small teams. Alpinists utilise a wide range of skills, including rock and ice climbing, snow climbing and glacier travel, navigation and survival. The sport requires self-reliance as the areas are remote and rescue can be unavailable: alpinists must be self-sufficient and able to handle problems as they arise. These might be weather changes, injury, or equipment malfunction. The rewards of alpinism are many, including personal development, satisfaction, and a deep connection with the natural world. It's not just about reaching the summit but *how* you get there.



Figure 2**: *Illustration (fig. VIII) depicting a mythical 'Alpine dragon' with two forelegs, reported to Scheuchzer by Johannes Egerter from the village of Lienz. It was black with yellow stripes, and had a gold-coloured belly.***



Figure 1: ***Frontispiece to* The Story of Mont Blanc *by Albert Smith showing De Saussure's party ascending Mont Blanc*** [Balliol College Library, Mountaineering Collection]

Fear and Fascination

Mountaineering may often seem useless, but sometimes useful discoveries occur, or useful things are invented because of it…

A little way from Balliol's Chalet des Anglais is the Col du Géant. Here, Horace-Bénédict de Saussure (1740–1799) camped in order to carry out observations of the weather, becoming the first person to see exactly what was going on in the centre of a thunderstorm. Sometimes a storm contains hail, frozen droplets of water and dust that form at about 15,000 feet and are then tossed by updraughts until they have collected a heavy layer of ice, and then plummet to the Earth. In addition, there's lightning. As a thunderstorm passes it casts a positively charged electrical shadow on the ground below. The storm itself is negatively charged, and when high ground brings storm and shadow into proximity the result is explosive. Contrary to popular belief, the visible part of lightning does not come from the sky but leaps up from the ground, stretching as much as five miles yet only the thickness of a twig.

Up on the Col du Géant, Saussure was experiencing and recording what was going on at the epicentre of an extreme weather event:

Calm moments were succeeded by blasts of an indescribable violence; double blows like discharges of artillery. We felt even the mountain shake under our mattresses; the wind penetrated through the cracks in the wall of the hut.

[Saussure, H. (1786) *Voyages Dans Les Alpes.* Vol IV. Geneva: Bard, Manget, page 222.]

Down below, however, the village of Courmayeur was suffering a drought, and the obvious cause (as far as the villagers were concerned) was the 'magician' camped on the mountain. His experiments came to an end when his guides, who had toiled down the mountainside with letters and back up again with coal and food, could take no more and ate his supplies. But for a time, he had been 'a neighbour of heaven'.

WAR – WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

During the Napoleonic wars (1799–1815) visitor numbers to the Alps were drastically reduced. Most Britons stayed safely at home and made do with local landscapes and spas such as Matlock Bath in the Peak District. After the Battle of Waterloo brought an end to the fighting in 1815, Britain found itself in a new world. It had been at war for almost a generation and during that time its Empire had expanded across the globe, and construction of modern infrastructure, such as railways, had vastly changed society at home.

Most people couldn't follow in the footsteps of the grand expeditions to the Northwest Passage, which involved years away from home and eating pemmican. The next best field of adventure was the Alps.

Thus, people began to appreciate the mountains. In art, poetry and music, the Romantics looked beyond the view – the wildness was tameable, the sublime attainable.

Benjamin Jowett (Balliol 1857), Balliol's great reforming Master, went on a railway journey to visit the Alps in 1871. He travelled with E. Lyulph Stanley (Balliol 1857), who wrote to Evelyn Abbott (Balliol 1862) on 1 Jan 1895 about this trip. Stanley gives the following account of the excursion:

I was with Jowett in 1871. We left England by Paris and went to Geneva by rail. Thence we went on up the Valais and up to Zermatt and the Riffel; we then went up to the Eggischhorn, and thence to Brig. Jowett walked the whole way from the Eggischhorn to Brig.

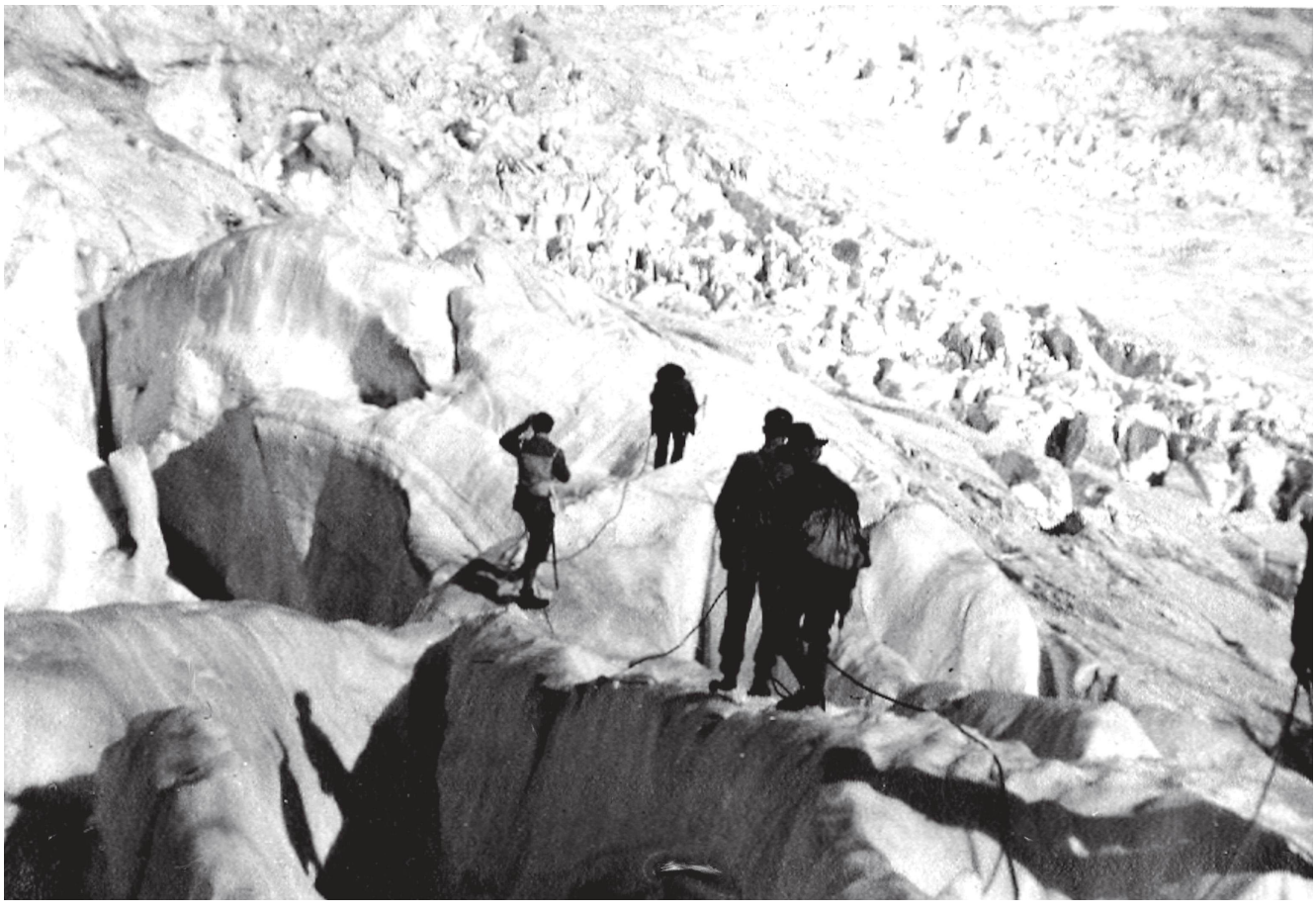


Figure 2: ***Chalet party crossing the Géant Glacier in 1921*** [Balliol College Archives, Chalet Book 1].
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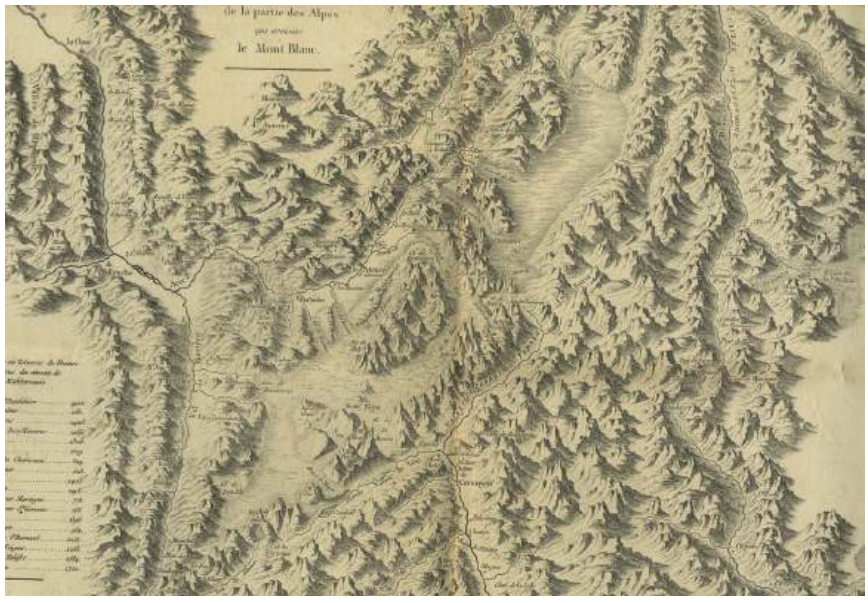


Figure 3: ***Detail of the area around the Prarion and the Chalet from an undated (probably mid-19th century) map in the chalet collection*** [Balliol College Archives, Chalet Collection: Box II]

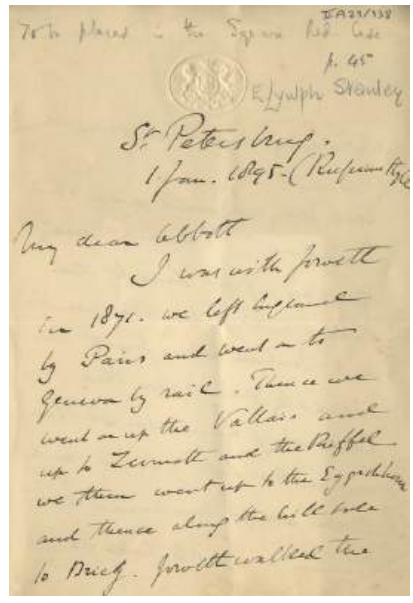


Figure 4: ***First page of a letter from E Lyulph Stanley about an Alpine trip with Benjamin Jowett*** [Balliol College Archives, Jowett Papers II A21/138]

AVALANCHE!

The Alps were dangerous, but often those dangers were underappreciated and disregarded. In August 1820 Dr Joseph Hamel became the first recorded climber to be hit by an avalanche, along with M. Selligue, a Swiss engineer from Geneva, and two Englishmen from Oxford University, Mr Joseph Dornford (Wadham) and Mr Gilbert Henderson (Brasenose). They aimed to climb Mont Blanc to see if pigeons could fly in the thin air. Twelve guides were hired. They were caught in bad weather for two nights and then had to sit out a thunderstorm. Hamel then pushed on, feeling confident. Joseph-Marie Couttet, one of the guides, pointed out that fresh snow had fallen, and that the wind was now in the south, thereby increasing the risk of unstable layers sliding down the north face, which they were climbing. Hamel dismissed his concerns. They crossed a crevasse and took off their ropes, which, in Dornford's words, were 'utterly useless'.

The avalanche was small, dropping some 600 feet according to Couttet, but it was still strong enough to cover Hamel up to his head, nearly asphyxiating him in the process. The three leaders – Pierre Balmat, Pierre Carrier and Auguste Tairraz – were thrown into the crevasse they had crossed less than an hour previously, followed by tons of snow.

The survivors, including Dornford, Henderson and Hamal, slunk back to Chamonix. It was the worst disaster the village had experienced. There was widespread dismay that the bodies would never be recovered. For further information on this tragedy and the early ascents of Mont Blanc see *Killing Dragons* by Fergus Fleming, and *The Annals of Mont Blanc* by Charles Edward Mathews.

GLACIER SCIENCE

James David Forbes was a leading Scottish physicist and glaciologist during the 19th century. He conducted ground-breaking research on glacial movement, temperature changes, and the physical properties of ice. Forbes' work focused on understanding the flow and behaviour of glaciers, establishing key principles that laid the foundation for our understanding of glaciology today.

In 1858, during his last visit to Chamonix, Forbes had calculated that if his measurements of the various glaciers' speeds were correct, the bodies of Hamel's guides would emerge between 38 and 40 after the accident.

He was only one year out.

On 12 August 1861 a panting guide arrived at the Chamonix town hall with a sack on his back. It contained a number of items he had found in a crevasse at the bottom of the Glacier des Bossons. His findings included skulls with tufts of hair, a forearm with the right hand missing only one finger, one left foot, flesh undecayed, various pieces of clothing, and a pigeon wing with black feathers. The

blond-haired skull belonged to Pierre Balmat. The other was that of Pierre Carrier.

Bit by bit, and lower down the valley with each passing season, more body parts emerged. The relics were handed to the great-niece of one of the guides, in whose home they were displayed in a coffin for the attentions of tourists. Such was the demand that her door was open 24 hours a day. The remains were finally buried in a communal grave – except the foot, which was placed in a glass case by the Department of Museums at Annecy.

As a result, people began to rope up properly – some of the time.

CHALET DES ANGLAIS

David Urquhart was a Scottish diplomat, writer, politician and Member of Parliament from 1847 – 1852, and he was also a Turkophile who reintroduced the Turkish bath to Britain. His wife, Harriet Urquhart, was his collaborator in everything, and championed rational dress for women, and eventually started a shirt factory. In 1864 David and Harriet Urquhart decided to live abroad, ostensibly for health reasons, but, considering their attacks on the British establishment, their move may have been political. They moved first to Geneva and later divided their winter residence between Montreux and Nice. For the first year they restored their health with regular trips to the Alps, discovering mountain walking. This was at the height of the Golden Age of Alpine exploration.

The educated classes of Britain had first become aware of the Alps in 1741 after William Windham, a young aristocrat, made an excursion into the Chamonix area whilst a student in Geneva. He privately published his observations and adapted the term 'alp' to describe high meadows of snow, from its original meaning of mountain meadow. Mont Blanc was climbed in 1786 and alpinism began to root as climbers published further accounts of their adventures and Romanticism also contributed to the interest. Consequently, Alpine villages expanded to make room for visitors, and roads and railways were built; by 1863 Thomas Cook was able to run its first tour to Geneva and Mont Blanc.

David Urquhart became convinced that the brain worked better at higher altitudes, a conviction based on perceived changes in his own and his companions' endurance, quality of conversation and speed of thought. Ignoring other factors, he built a summer home at 6,000 feet, the height at which he believed benefits began.

Edward Cadogan, a member of the 1901 chalet party 'Climbed the Col de Géant' (where Saussure was camped observing the weather), which is 11, 000 feet 'in a little over five hours. The view from the cabane where we spent the night is I suppose one of the great views of the world.'

David's son, Francis 'Sligger' Urquhart, was a Fellow at Balliol who took groups of students and friends to the family's Chalet annually from 1891 onwards. From around 1892 Francis Urquhart was known as 'Sligger', which was derived from 'sleek one'. He insisted that the members of a party should acquire an understanding of their surroundings. Whilst the atmosphere inside the Chalet was convivial, outside he discouraged conversation on walks, regarding it more important that walkers should learn from what they were seeing. He expected them to learn the names of the leading features of the Alps and to leave with some knowledge of Alpine plants and animals such as the mountain marmot and the chamois.

Sligger had an acquaintance with Everest pioneer George Mallory recorded in Sligger's albums shown below.

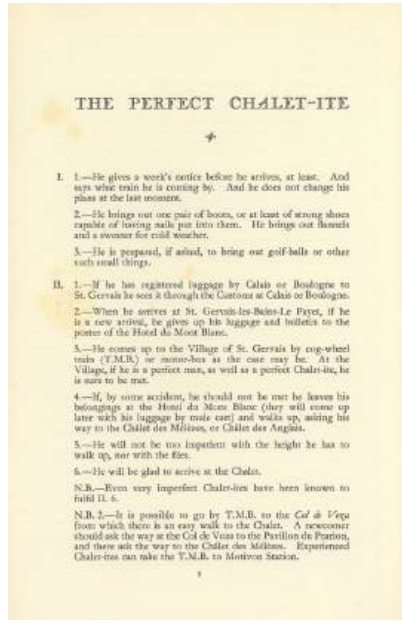
Mallory visited Oxford in May 1911 and Sligger took him rowing on the Thames. Stephen Golding, author of *Oxford University on Mont Blanc,* has found that a similar visit took place during the Easter vacation of 1913: one of Sligger's photographs shows a thoughtful Mallory sitting in the bay window of Sligger's room at Balliol. He knew how to perform and pose, as he had done for Duncan Grant, the



Figure 6: ***Photograph of the Chalet in 1893*** [Balliol College Archives, Chalet Book 1]. Reproduced by kind permission of the Chalet Trust



Figure 7: ***Photograph of the rebuilt chalet*** [Balliol College Archives, Chalet V-1-2-3 1909-1910]



THE PERFECT CHALET-ITE

I. 1.—He gives a week's notice before he arrives, at least. And says what train he is coming by. And he does not change his plans at the last moment.

2.—He brings out one pair of boots, or at least of strong shoes capable of having nails put into them. He brings out flannels and a sweater for cold weather.

3.—He is prepared, if asked, to bring out golf-balls or other such small things.

II. 1.—If he has registered luggage by Calais or Boulogne to St. Gervais he sees it through the Customs at Calais or Boulogne.

2.—When he arrives at St. Gervais-les-Bains-Le Fayet, if he is a new arrival, he gives up his luggage and bulletin to the porter of the Hotel du Mont Blanc.

3.—He comes up to the Village of St. Gervais by cog-wheel train (T.M.B.) or motor-bus as the case may be. At the Village, if he is a perfect man, as well as a perfect Chalet-ite, he is sure to be met.

4.—If, by some accident, he should not be met he leaves his belongings at the Hotel du Mont Blanc (they will come up later with his luggage by mule cart) and walks up, asking his way to the Chalet des Mélèzes, or Chalet des Anglais.

5.—He will not be too impatient with the height he has to walk up, nor with the flies.

6.—He will be glad to arrive at the Chalet.

N.B.—Even very imperfect Chalet-ites have been known to fulfil II. 6.

N.B. 2.—It is possible to go by T.M.B. to the *Col de Voza* from which there is an easy walk to the Chalet. A newcomer should ask the way at the Col de Voza to the Pavillon de Pration, and there ask the way to the Chalet des Mélèzes. Experienced Chalet-ites can take the T.M.B. to Motivon Station.

Figure 8: ***The first page of The Perfect Chalet-ite, a guide to how to behave, what to expect, and where to go when at the chalet*** [Balliol College Archives, Chalet Collection: Box IV]

artist, in 1912. Golding also found that Sligger spent a weekend, in June 1915, at Mallory's house near Charterhouse School, where he was then teaching.

Again, during Easter 1911, Mallory stayed with Sligger at Balliol after climbing in Snowdonia and had a taste of rowing on the Thames.

Golding found one other link, which is rather mysterious: the Chalet library contains a number of books owned and signed by Mallory's early climbing partner Cottie Sanders (later Lady Mary O'Malley and the novelist Ann Bridge). Some of these date from after Mallory's death so they must have found their way to the chalet through someone other than him.

Another Balliol person associated with the mountains is the botanist Reginald Farrer (Balliol 1898). Born in London in in 1880, he was the elder son of James Farrer (Balliol 1867), who inherited the Ingleborough estate at Clapham in Yorkshire. There Reginald explored the flora of the limestone fells, and by the age of fourteen had published a note in the Journal of Botany on the occurrence of the sandwort *Arenaria gothica* at Sulber Nook. He graduated from Balliol in 1902, having contributed to the Revd. H. J. Bidder's rock garden in St John's College.

It was during his years at Balliol that Farrer first visited the Alps, in the company of Gerard Collier (Balliol 1897), with whom he stayed at Rosenlaui in Switzerland in 1899 and 1901. Later his brother Sidney (Balliol 1907) accompanied him in the Dolomites. In 1903 he travelled with his friend Aubrey Herbert (Balliol 1898) to Japan, from where he visited Korea and China. During a visit to Ceylon in 1908 he became a Buddhist.

Farrer aspired to be a novelist, poet, and playwright, and his literary endeavours included two dramas and five novels. But he had little success, and botany remained his passion. In most summers from 1899 to 1913 he explored the Alps, collecting plants for propagation in his nursery at Ingleborough, which in 1912 won a first prize for Alpines in the Royal International Horticultural Exhibition at Chelsea. He published many articles on Alpines in garden journals, and several books on Alpine gardening.

His experience of collecting plants in Europe made him to want to go further afield, and in 1914 he embarked on an expedition to the borders of China and Tibet, where he made plant discoveries such as *Gentiana Farreri*, 'which burned in the Alpine turf like an incandescent turquoise'. On his return to London, he served under John Buchan in the Ministry of Information in 1917-18, and was sent as a war correspondent to the British, French, and Italian fronts. As soon as the World War ended, he went to hunt for plants in the mountains of Upper Burma, where he died in 1920.

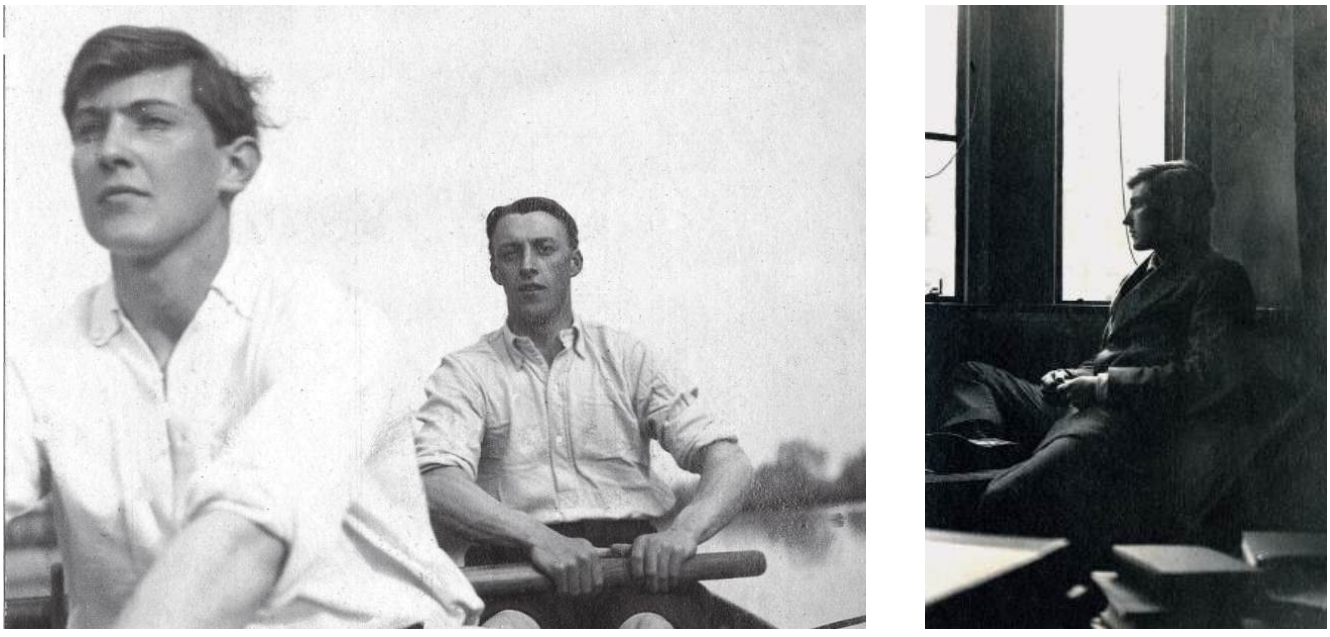


Figure 9: ***George Mallory rowing in Oxford during his visit to Sligger. Mallory posing for a photo in Sligger's rooms at Balliol*** [Balliol College Archives, Francis Fortescue Urquhart Photograph Albums]



Figure 10: ***Illustration of 'Marmolata, from very high above Canazei' by E. Harrison Compton from Reginald Farrer's*** **The Dolomites: King Laurin's Garden** [Balliol College Library, 1 b 17]

Graham Avery
(BALLIOL 1961)

My passion for walking in the hills and mountains was kindled in the Easter vacation of 1962 when Michael Reeve (Balliol 1960) led me and others on a tour of the English Lake District. The weather was wet, and there was snow on the tops, I was badly equipped, with only a plastic raincoat for protection, and we stayed in crowded Youth Hostels. But we were young and undeterred.

Since then, I have walked with Michael and others in the British hills and in continental Europe. When I could escape from office work in London and Brussels, my favourite summer recreation was to explore the Lake District, or to walk in the Alps. When I ask myself 'which do I prefer?' the answer is 'both'. In the Lakes the landscape is majestic, and one can reach several tops in a day; in the Alps the scenery is grandiose, and the flora is spectacular.

In the Lakes I often stayed in Wasdale at Burnthwaite Farm (on the way to Sty Head). I took each of my three sons to the top of Yewbarrow (628 m), my favourite mountain, and in Mosedale I introduced them to the acrobatic Y-Boulder. In Wales I explored Snowdonia, the Carneddau, and Cadair Idris, and in Scotland the hills of the West Highlands and the Isle of Arran.

My first experience of the Alps was in 1974 in Austria, where my retreat from a risky cornice above the Lechtal was compensated by finding a fine colony of *Cypripedium calceolus* (Lady's Slipper Orchid) on the way down to the Großwalsertal. In the years that followed I visited many other Alpine regions, and pursued my interest in the flora. In the visitors' books of Alpine huts, Michael Reeve and I wrote entries in Latin; in the Engadine we explored the mountain landscapes painted by Giovanni Segantini; as we approached the summit of the Gran Paradiso (4,061 m) we were greeted by thunder and lightning.

I twice made the Tour du Mont Blanc, the long-distance footpath which involves 10,000 m of ascent, more than the height of Mount Everest. I made the Tour de l'Oisans in France and the Grande Traversée des Alpes from Lake Geneva to the Mediterranean. I was marooned by a blizzard in the Refuge du Col de Vanoise, and I traversed glaciers on the Haute Route from Mauvoisin to Zermatt. In Norway I walked in Jotunheimen in the footsteps of the British climber A.W. Slingsby (1849–1929). In Italy I explored the Dolomites, where among the rich flora I found *Lloydia serotina* (Snowdon Lily) named after the Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum (Edward Lhuyd) who discovered it in Snowdonia in 1682. In Maine in the USA I climbed Mount Katahdin (1,606 m), and in the South Island of New Zealand I climbed Mount Oxford (1,364 m), named after the Bishop of Oxford (Samuel Wilberforce) who supported the Canterbury Association's settlement of the island in the 1850s.

In the Alps I followed in the footsteps of Reginald Farrer (Balliol 1899), who botanised in many places, including Switzerland with his friend Gerard Collier (Balliol 1897), and the Dolomites with his brother Sidney Farrer (Balliol 1907). In 2014 Michael Reeve and I found the rare *Eritrichium nanum* (King of the Alps) on a pass in the Swiss Valais in the same place that Farrer found it more than a hundred years before.

I first discovered Farrer's writing when I bought his book 'The Dolomites' (1913) in a second-hand bookshop in Oxford. In 'Among The Hills, A Book of Joy in High Places' (1911), Farrer describes a tour of the Maritime Alps, in which he dissimulates the names of plant-locations and people, thus creating a series of riddles, which I have now solved.

Later, Farrer hunted for plants in the mountains of

China (1914-16) and Burma (1919-20), and in 1917 he published a pioneering study of the novels of Jane Austen [*Jane Austen, ob. July 18, 1817* in The Quarterly Review, Vol. 228, July 1917, pages 1-30]. Describing his preparations for expeditions in Asia, he writes:

'The mind of a Napoleon is required to weigh up accurately beforehand all that is essential and all that is omissible in a voyage of two seasons; to my own thinking, almost everything is omissible once one makes up one's mind to it, and it is wonderful how simple life can become when resolved into the bare essentials. In my own case, I find it reduces itself to the materials of washing and the works of Jane Austen; of the two, at extreme need, it would be the washing materials that I should jettison' [*On the Eaves of the World* (1917), vol.1 page 16].

Farrer's enthusiasm shines through his descriptions of the flora. His accounts of his spiritual and philosophical experiences in the mountains are influenced by his Buddhist beliefs. His favourite themes are the clarity of the mountains, their solitude, the tension that they create between sound and silence, and the idea that in the high places one may escape from everyday concerns, unworthy thoughts, and the unrealities of earthly life.

Of an excursion to the Plan de Bertol in the Swiss Alps he writes:

'To be alone in wide, great places is sometimes too terrible a thing for little mundane man. In the high valleys of the Alps, where the silence is so vast that it seems as if a single uttered word would shatter the roof of the world, the nearness of the Gods is either purifying or appalling, according to one's strength of mood'

Of the Passo d'Antermoia in the Dolomites he writes:

'It is almost impossible to speak up there, so wonderful and awful is that enormous calm in the core of the Dolomites. It seems either as if one's mortal voice could not be heard among those other tremendous utterances so vocal in the great stillness; or as if one's chirp would shatter beyond hope of repair something gleaming and holy and incomprehensible. Each soul can render only to itself alone the particular mystery and sacrament it gathers from such a scene; for myself, I know no place where one can draw deeper breaths of enlargement and purification than among the crowded presences, the vibrating breathless emptiness of the Antermoja, so full of awe, so unimpeding to the winged expansion of the spirit' [*The Dolomites*, page 201].

When I reached the pass myself in 2012, I read this passage aloud.

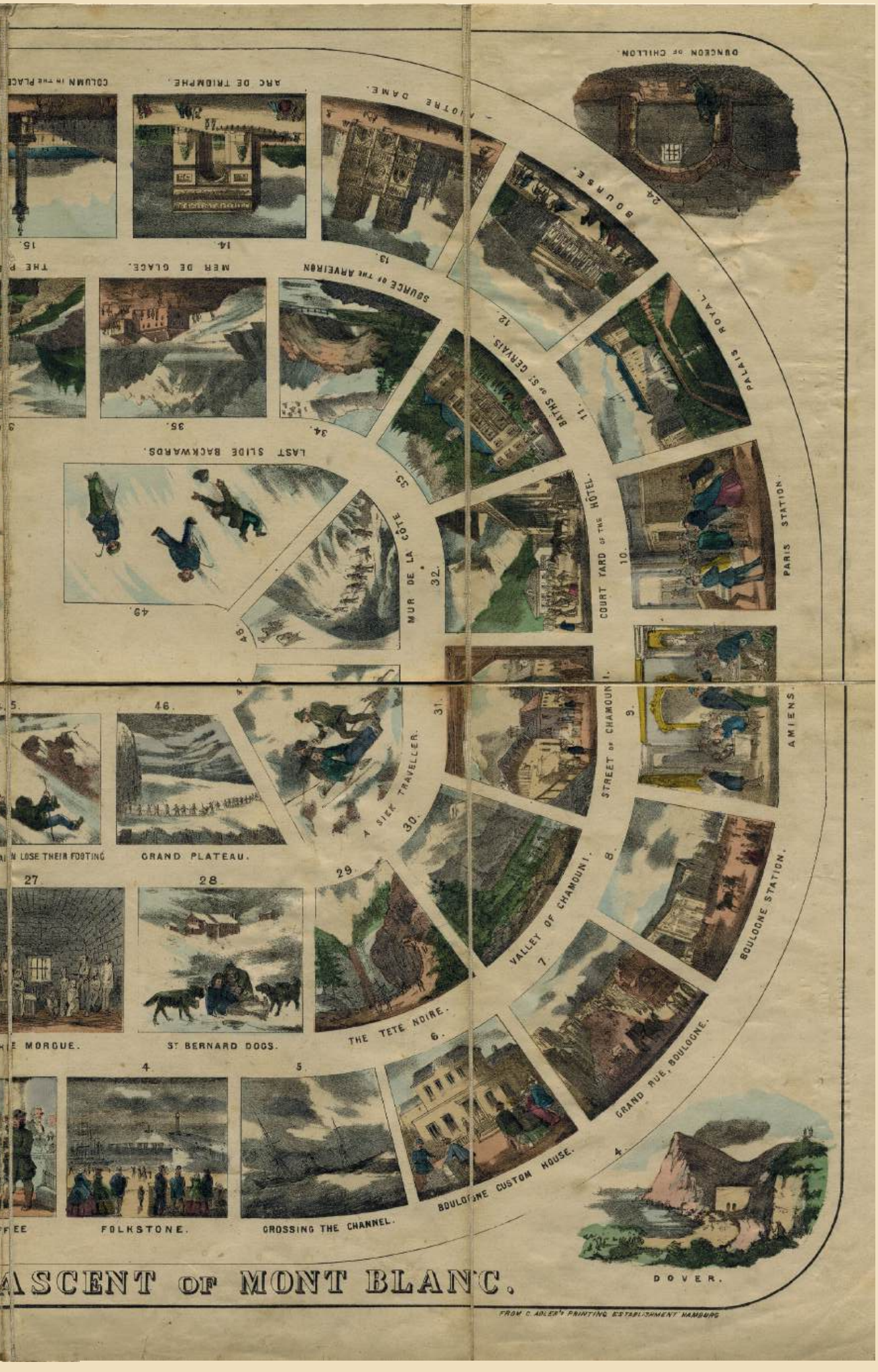
Farrer's descriptions of the mountains are irresistible, and he enjoyed writing them:

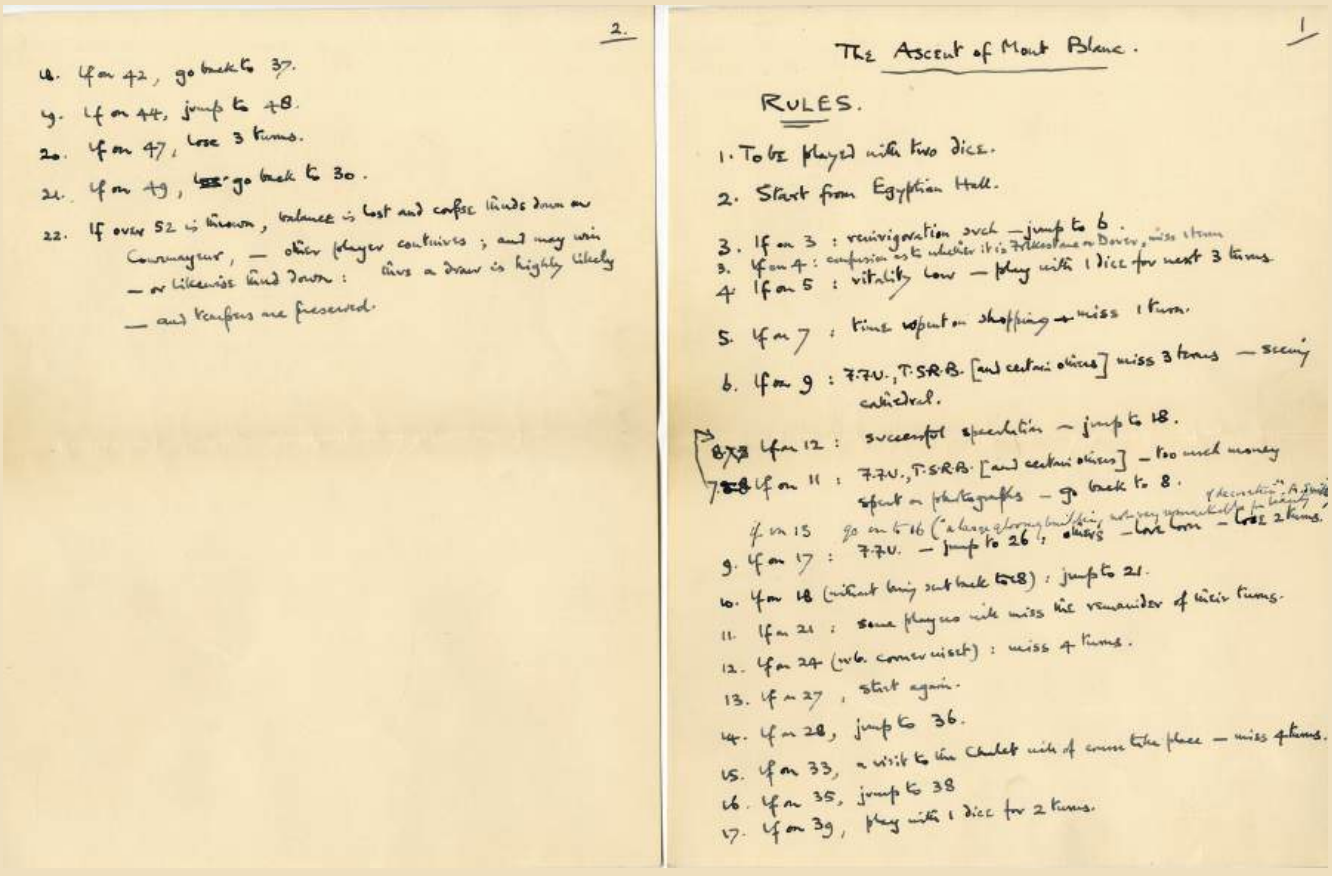
'To write of things one loves for the benefit of those who love them too, is a pleasure beyond most other pleasures. Short of being among the hills themselves, there is no joy keener than to be taken back to them by memory' [*The Dolomites*, page 203].

For more on Reginald Farrer (1870-1920) see my articles in the Balliol College Annual Record (2017, pages 42-7, and 2020, pages 103-106) and my 'Reginald Farrer in the Alps 1899-1917' published at https://ebhl.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022_12_Avery_EBHL_Farrer_in_



Figure *1*: ***Albert Smith's Mont Blanc Board Game*** [Balliol College Archives, Chalet Collection: Box IV]


DUNGEON OF CHILLON.
24.
BOURSE.
PALAIS ROYAL.
11.
PARIS STATION.
10.
COURT YARD OF THE HÔTEL.
1.
STREET OF CHAMOUNI.
9.
AMIENS.
31.
A SICK TRAVELLER.
30.
VALLEY OF CHAMOUNI.
8.
BOULOGNE STATION.
7.
GRAND RUE, BOULOGNE.
6.
BOULOGNE CUSTOM HOUSE.
4.
DOVER.
5.
CROSSING THE CHANNEL.
4.
FOLKSTONE.
THE TETE NOIRE.
29.
ST BERNARD DOGS.
28.
THE MORGUE.
27.
GRAND PLATEAU.
46.
LOSE THEIR FOOTING
5.
MUR DE LA CÔTE
32.
33.
LAST SLIDE BACKWARDS.
49.
SOURCE OF THE ARVEIRON
34.
MER DE GLACE.
35.
ARC DE TRIOMPHE.
14.
NOTRE DAME.
13.
12.
15.
ASCENT OF MONT BLANC.
FROM C. ADLER'S PRINTING ESTABLISHMENT HAMBURG



2.

8. If on 42, go back to 37.
9. If on 44, jump to 48.
20. If on 47, lose 3 turns.
21. If on 49, go back to 30.
22. If over 52 is thrown, balance is lost and corpse tumbles down an
Couloir, — other player continues; and may win
— or likewise tumbles down: thus a draw is highly likely
— and honours are preserved.

1

The Ascent of Mont Blanc.

RULES.

1. To be played with two dice.
2. Start from Egyptian Hall.
3. If on 3: reinvigoration such — jump to 6.
3. If on 4: confusion as to whether it is Folkestone or Dover, miss 1 turn.
4. If on 5: vitality low — play with 1 dice for next 3 turns.
5. If on 7: time spent on shopping — miss 1 turn.
6. If on 9: 7.7.U., T.S.R.B. [and certain others] miss 3 turns — seeing celebrated.
8. If on 12: successful speculation — jump to 18.
7. If on 11: 7.7.U., T.S.R.B. [and certain others] — too much money spent on photographs — go back to 8.
If on 15 go on to 16 ("a large glowing bonfire, always remarkable for beauty")
9. If on 17: 7.7.U. — jump to 26; others — lose turn — lose 2 turns.
10. If on 18 (without being sent back to 8): jump to 21.
11. If on 21: some players will miss the remainder of their turns.
12. If on 24 (w.b. conversion): miss 4 turns.
13. If on 27, start again.
14. If on 28, jump to 36.
15. If on 33, a visit to the Chalet with of course take place — miss 4 turns.
16. If on 35, jump to 38
17. If on 39, play with 1 dice for 2 turns.

Figure 2: ***The Chalet's own personalised rules for the Mont Blanc Board Game*** [Balliol College Archives, Chalet Collection: Box IV]

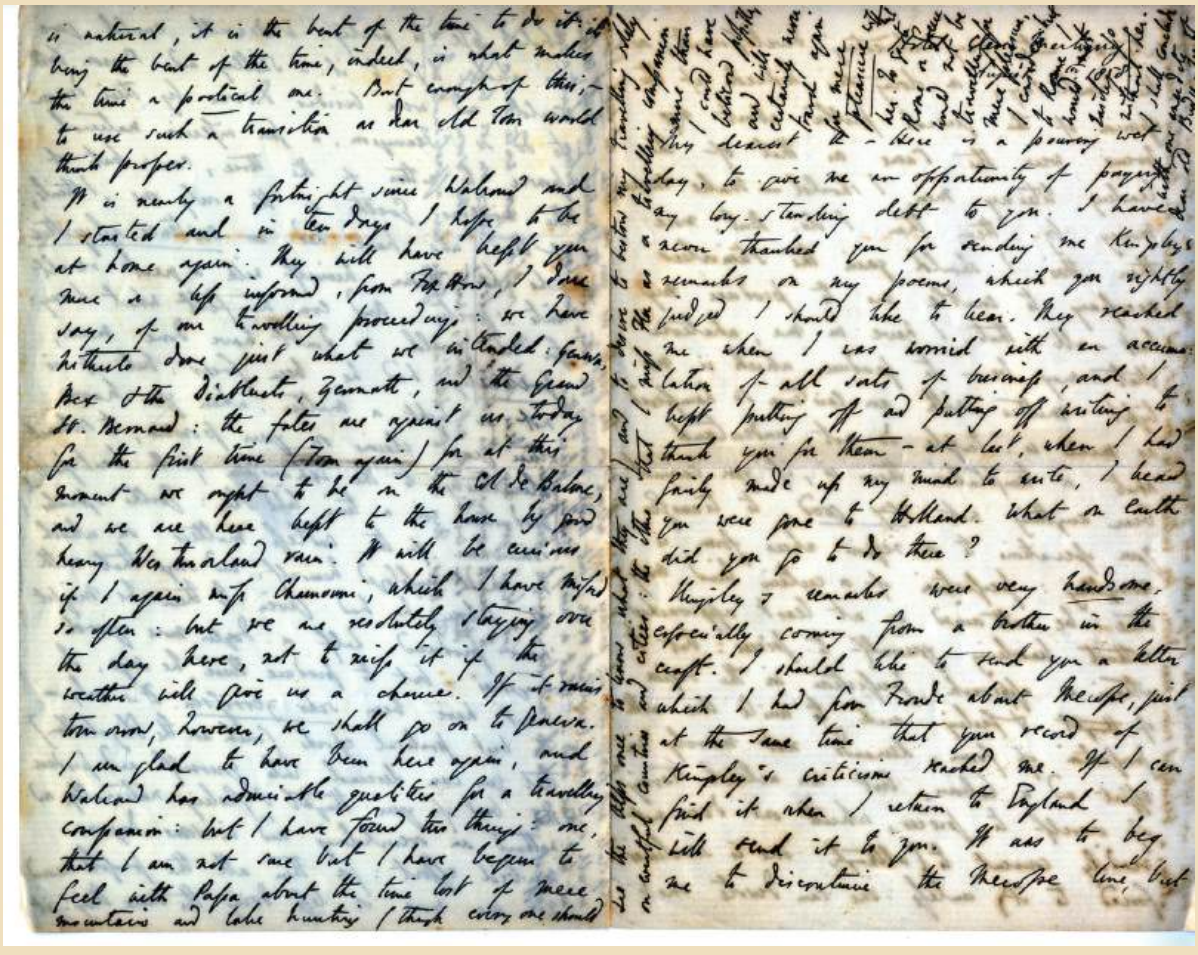
Matthew Arnold (Balliol 1840) was a poet and inspector of schools. His family had a holiday home in the Lake District, where from the age of 12, he spent much time. Here, William Wordsworth was a neighbour and later was a strong influence. Arnold attended Rugby School and in 1840 he matriculated at Balliol and in 1841 won a scholarship. For a short period, he was Assistant Master at Rugby, and was H.M. Inspector of Schools, 1851-67. He served as Professor of Poetry at Oxford University 1857-67.

Arnold visited the Alps in 1851, which was during his honeymoon, and he returned in 1858. He arrived in Geneva in late August, then travelled to Bex by the new railway, then onto Sion, Visp, Zermatt, and up the Gornergrat. Following this he went over the Théodule to Breuil, writing to Jane Martha Arnold Forster from Martigny on 6 August 1858, that 'everyone should see the Alps once.' The quote starts on the bottom right-hand side of the first half of the page, and continues running up the centre.

Arnold joined the Alpine Club briefly in 1859–60 and was a guest at the annual dinner in 1881.

His poem, *Switzerland*, features in many mountaineering anthologies.

Figure 3: ***Matthew Arnold's letter to Jane Martha Arnold Forster from Martigny on 6 August 1858*** [Balliol College Archives, Matthew Arnold Papers, Wodehouse Collection: Wode 2. II. 3]



The Golden and Silver Ages of Mountaineering

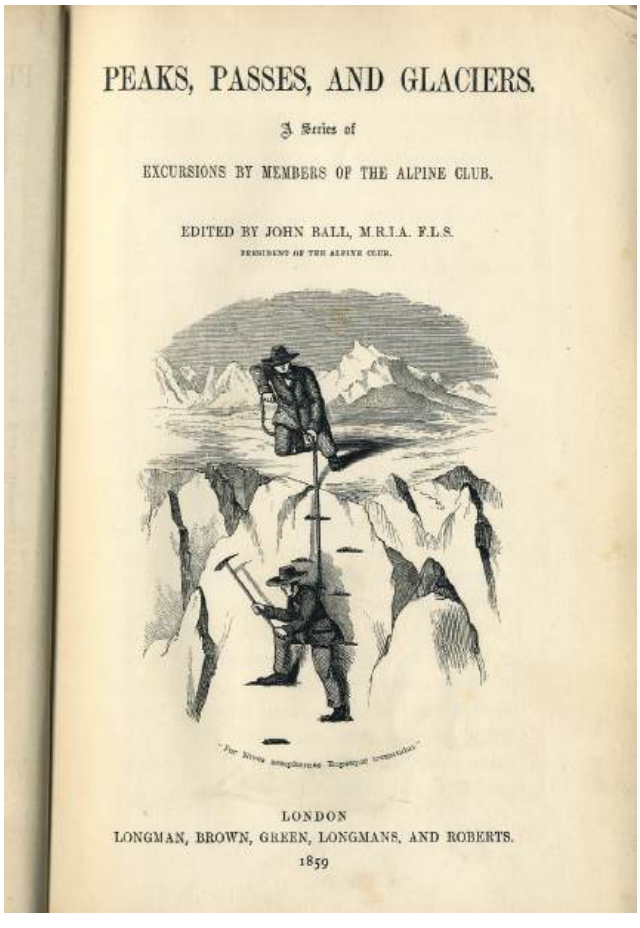
For some, like John Ruskin, the mountains were for looking at.

Others, however, decided to climb to the summit, following entertainer and author Albert Smith. In August 1851 he climbed Mont Blanc and the year after published *The Story of Mont Blanc*. Following this he launched 'Mr. Albert Smith's Ascent of Mont Blanc'. This entertaining show about his ascent was performed at the Egyptian Hall, London, where the stage was a Swiss chalet and St Bernard dogs wandered the floor. He became hugely successful, even performing it before Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at Osborne House. The show ran for around six years and popularised mountains in Victorian Britain, using merchandise, including colouring-books, fans, games, and models. A copy of his Mont Blanc Board Game is kept in the Chalet collection.

Not everyone was a fan. His adventures were derided by John Ruskin, and Herman Merivale (Balliol 1828) wrote in 1856 that Zermatt was becoming 'a second Chamonix; but with nothing, as yet, of the Cockneyism, the Albert Smithery, the fun, the frolic, and the vulgarity of that unique place of resort' (*Edinburgh Review*, 104, 1856, 446).

Between 1786 and 1853 there had been 45 ascents of Mont Blanc. In 1854 alone there were 16, mostly by Britons. Many more made the less perilous climb to the hut on the Grands Mulets which had now become an attraction. Smith had spread the word and brought people to the Alps, but the influx of British visitors was not due solely to him.

Inevitably, there was a need of a forum in which they could discuss their experiences – they needed a club. William Mathews wrote on 1 February 1857 to a climbing companion, the Revd Fenton John Anthony Hort, Fellow of Trinity College, and asked him 'to consider whether it would not be possible to establish an Alpine Club'. The Alpine Club (AC) was formed and Albert Smith was a founding member. Initially, members had to climb to at least 13,000 feet to qualify. In the first year 80 joined and by 1861 there were 158 members. In 1859 the first issue of *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers* was published and the second appeared after only six weeks.


PEAKS, PASSES, AND GLACIERS.

A Series of

EXCURSIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE ALPINE CLUB.

EDITED BY JOHN BALL, M.R.I.A. F.L.S.

LONDON
LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, LONGMANS, AND ROBERTS.
1859

Figure 2: ***First volume of* Peaks, Passes, and Glaciers** [Balliol College Library, Mountaineering Collection]

Tourism began to boom. The lack of peace and solitude was a common complaint. *Punch's* Almanack for 1856 contains the cartoon below, featuring Mr Perk in North Wales looking for the classic mountain experience of being alone, at one with nature. However, he reaches the summit of Snowdon to find a 'crowd of cockney tourists' which leaves him 'scornful of his species'. By this time the mountains were hugely popular, but the serious climbers of the Alpine Club were still hopeful they could evade the crowds. As Clinton Thomas Dent wrote in the *Alpine Journal* in 1887 'The mountains have been less



Figure 3: ***Mr. Perk's Mountain Experiences***. Punch, *1856* [Balliol College Library]

changed by the invading swarms of tourists crawling over and scratching their surfaces than these pigmies suppose, and the majesty of Nature triumphs without an effort over the vulgarity of man.' (*Alpine Journal* (1887), page 338) Adventure and solitude could always be found.

Unlike the military and naval people who went off in search of the Poles and the Northwest Passage, the Golden Age of mountaineering involved the lawyers, doctors, clergymen and others who made up Britain's middle class. Their jobs prevented them from indulging in great adventure, but they had money, and a holiday in which to do some exploring. Thanks to the marvels of modern rail travel, Mont Blanc could be reached in 24 hours and the Swiss Alps in around 56. The Golden Age of mountaineering began with the ascent of the Wetterhorn by Alfred Wills. Wills – later Sir Alfred Wills, the man who tried Oscar Wilde – was a well-to-do barrister. In 1854 he made the journey to Grindelwald. He had been to the Alps before, but this trip was something special: he was on his honeymoon and he wanted to climb a major peak to show his wife what he was capable of.

I had crossed many a lofty col, and wound my way among many a labyrinth of profound and yawning crevasses. I had slept on the moraine of a glacier, and on the rugged mountainside, but I had never yet scaled any of those snowy peaks which rise in tempting grandeur above the crests of cols and the summits of the loftier passes.

The overhang 'curled over towards us, like the crest of a wave, breaking at irregular intervals along the line into pendants and inverted pinnacles of ice, many of which hung down to the full length of a tall man's height!'. Ulrich Lauener, one of the guides, took an ice axe to the ice. 'It depended upon this assault,' Wills wrote, 'whether that impregnable fortress was to be ours, or whether we were to



Mont Blanc from Semnoz by Ben Tibbetts.



return, slowly and sadly, foiled by its calm and massive strength'. Lauener swung and brought down a large piece from the cornice and Wills exclaimed 'I see blue sky!' The Golden Age of mountaineering now began. [Wills, Alfred, (1856) *Wanderings Among the High Alps*. London: Richard Bentley, page 285–286.]

Where Albert Smith had told people of Mont Blanc, Wills told them to go out and experience it all for themselves – for the fun of it, for the exhilaration of reaching the top.

Of 43 first ascents in 1864 and 1865, 37 were made by members of the AC.

'The aim and end of the Alpine Club is a noble one,' cheered a reviewer in *Blackwood's Magazine*, 'The sporting passion exists to a greater or lesser degree, in some shape or other, in the breast of every genuine British man.' [*Peaks, Passes, and Glaciers* (1862), publicity: Opinions of the Press*]*

Suddenly, people realised that in the middle of Europe there lay hundreds of unclimbed peaks. Obviously, this wasn't really news. What was news, however, was that virtually anybody could go out there and climb them.

Edward Shirley Kennedy vividly opened the first *Alpine Journal* in captivating language, beginning his tale of conquering Monte delia Disgrazia in August 1862 with the words:

'As the strokes of midnight were clanging from the Campanile at Sondrio, a carriage rolled heavily into the courtyard of the Hotel delia Maddelena.'

Although the mountain was not an exceptionally tall or remarkably challenging peak, the narrative's distinction lay in Kennedy's stylish prose and its position as the inaugural article in the debut edition. Serving as the direct successor to *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers*, the *Alpine Journal* became the definitive measure of the Alps' rising popularity.

Launched in 1864, its first edition brimmed with enthusiasm, chronicling not only new climbs but also an array of fascinating details. Readers engaged in inquiries about climbers and mountains, recommended Swiss inns, cautioned against inept guides, and delved into discussions about equipment. The *Journal*'s pages were adorned with extraordinary images, recounting experiences like a green shadow cast on Mont Blanc and phosphorescent snow sparkling with each step. It was full of the words of people opening up a new world – a community breaking new ground and free of governments, or territories. One that ignored national boundaries.

R.L. Nettleship (Balliol 1865) was a very active mountaineer. In 1890, he had a good season on the peaks above the Arolla valley, carrying out the first



Figure 4: ***The Mischabel group: Dom in the centre, to the right is Täschhorn, and the flat top to the right of that is Alphubel by Ben Tibbetts***

ascent of the north-west ridge of Blanche de Perroc on 28 July, along with Waiter Leaf, G.W. Prothero, Clemens Zurbriggen and Aloys Kalbermatten. Sadly, Nettleship died on 25 August 1892 on Mont Blanc. He reached Chamonix on 12 August, and climbed the Aiguille de la Floria and the Aiguille de Charmoz. He then engaged some guides and left Chamonix at 3.00pm in the afternoon intending to climb Aiguille du Gouter and the Bosses du Dromadaire. The party left the Col de Voza at 4.00am on 24 August but did not reach the Aiguille du Gouter till nearly 1.00pm. In the morning the weather had been good, but storm clouds began coming in from the south by 11.00am, and a strong Föhn wind was blowing. The party continued to force their way to the Dom and make the Vallot Hut where they planned to spend their second night. The storm broke about an hour after they left the Aiguille and then they lost their way, eventually digging a snow hole to shelter in through the night. They had lots to eat and drink but unfortunately no extra clothing. The storm raged through the night and by Thursday morning it was still snowing hard. They tried to get away, but Nettleship was unsteady and exhausted. He collapsed a short while after setting off and died of exposure.

THE MATTERHORN: THE END OF THE GOLDEN AGE

The Matterhorn is associated with many Balliol people, but the Balliol person most familiar with the mountain is probably Leo Amery (Balliol 1892). Amery worked for *The Times* for ten years and then had 34 years in the House of Commons as a Conservative MP. His first trip to the Alps was in the summer of 1894 (described in *Days of Fresh Air*), during which he climbed the Zinal Rothorn, the Weisshorn and the Dent Blanche, and then made the traverse of the Matterhorn. He was back in 1906 and climbed the Matterhorn by the Zmutt ridge. After the war, despite being in Government almost constantly from 1919 to 1929, he was always in the Alps in the summer. In 1926 he climbed the Matterhorn again, but this time in bad conditions, and made the traverse by the Zmutt ridge to the Italian ridge (*Alpine Journal:* Vol. 38, page 207). He followed this up with the Taschhorn-Dom traverse. In 1943 Amery was elected President of the Alpine Club. During this time the British Mountaineering Council was begun under the leadership of the AC.

Mont Blanc, the Jungfrau, the Wetterhorn and even the Breithorn were by and large snow mountains. The Matterhorn is different – it looks like the ultimate peak, a twisting spike of rock. In 1860 it was also covered in a thin layering of ice.

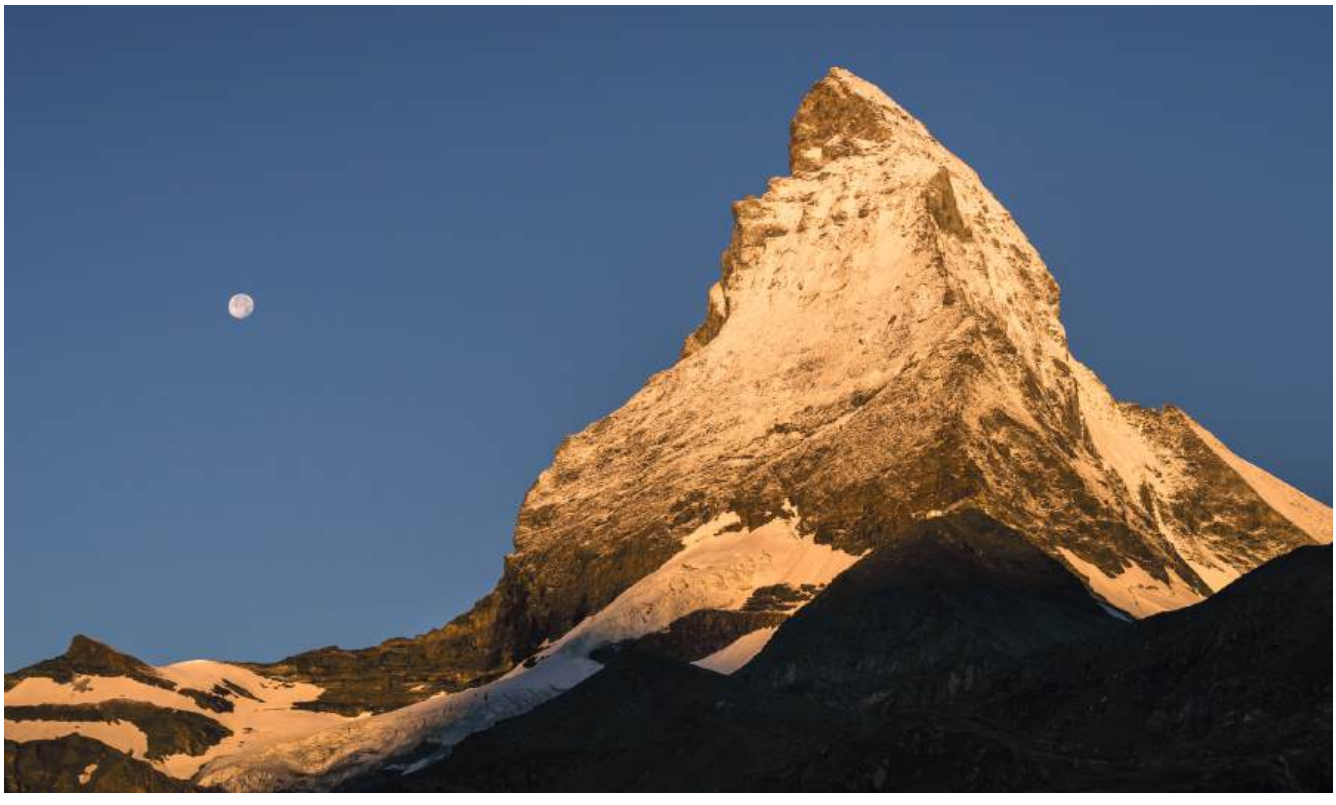


Figure 5: ***Matterhorn from Riffelhorn by Ben Tibbetts. The Hörnligrat, the route of the first ascent is the ridge in the centre.***



Figure 6: ***J.J. Hornby in 1840s*** [Balliol College Archives, PHOT 26-049]



Figure 7: ***John Viriamu Jones*** [Balliol College Archives, PHOT19-005]

Two British climbers vied for the first ascent: they were John Tyndall, the physicist, and Edward Whymper, the prolific mountaineer and illustrator. Whymper finally made the first ascent in 1865 via the Hörnli Ridge from Zermatt. The ascent of the Matterhorn was also a tragedy, one that shook the mountaineering world. It was a tragedy because on the descent four people fell to their deaths. Tyndall did have his moment of glory on 29 July 1868, when he completed the first traverse of the Matterhorn, climbing to the summit from Breuil and descending via Whymper's route to Zermatt.

In 1865 the Golden Age came to an end with this disaster. Now all the mountains had been climbed but the Silver Age brought new techniques, which made harder routes possible.

J.J. Hornby (Balliol 1844) climbed the Mönch, Wetterhorn and the Jungfrau in 1863. The latter, climbed with Tyndall, is described in Tyndall's *Hours of Exercise*. In 1864 he attempted the Dent Blanche, climbed the Dom and went up and down the Eiger in less than nine hours. In 1865 he made the first ascent of the Silberhorn (see drawing by Gerard Manley Hopkins on page 25) by the north-west face. The following year he made the fourth ascent of Schreckhorn and in 1867 the first ascent of the Gletscherhorn.

John Viriamu Jones (Balliol 1875) was head of South Wales University College, and first Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wales. He fell in the love with the Alps when J.T. Wills (Balliol 1877), descendant of Sir Alfred Wills, and third President of the Alpine Club, invited him to spend some time at the Eagle's Nest, summer home in the Alps. Jones and Wills went on trips to Switzerland and had several summer holidays in the Alps. In 1883 they were caught in bad weather near the summit of Mont Blanc, and in 1886 went to Zermatt and later in the Mont Blanc district. In 1887 Jones went to Mürren with Sir H.S. King and ascended the Mönch and Jungfrau in one day.

Although all the peaks had been scaled in the Golden Age, the more adventurous climbs of the Silver Age meant people could still taste adventure. Sir William Edward Davidson (Balliol 1871), the new Secretary of the Alpine Club, was no friend of William Coolidge, the new editor of its journal. It is not clear how the feud between them began, but Davidson is said to have had an aristocratic manner, he had much climbing success and preferred action to words. When Alfred Mummery was blackballed from the Alpine Club, Coolidge pointed the finger at Davidson. When Mummery informed him that 'a well-known member of your club' had tried to bribe his guide to turn his expedition into a failure, Coolidge suspected Davidson. In return he is said to have tampered with the ballot box so that Mummery gained his membership. 'Yes, I cheated Mummery into the Club,' he gloated. Davidson hit back by providing an illustration for a book on mountaineering by C.T. Dent, in which several porters were shown moving luggage. Every trunk had the initials of a famous climber, and bringing up the rear was a parrot in a cage with the label W.A.B.C. On publication the W. was removed, after Davidson was advised of the legal implications, but Coolidge noticed it all the

same. In 1896, Davidson struck again. That year, two Alpine Club members published Christian Almer's *führerbuch* (a guide's record), and in it was an entry in which Coolidge had misspelt Schreckhorn, with an annotation by an 'anonymous climber' – obviously Davidson. Coolidge recognised this as an insult. Unfortunately, Coolidge's response fed the point of the insult: 'I hunted and hunted,' he wrote. 'At last I found that Davidson had put his name to Jungfrau without a f!' He revealed this awful error in the *Alpine Journal*.

Gerard Manley Hopkins (Balliol 1862) had an unusual eye for the mountains. On 3 July 1868, he set off for Switzerland and remained in the Alps until the month was out. He toured with Edward Bond, a friend, using a Baedeker Guide and followed typical tourist trails, visiting the Rigi to see the sunrise. They went to the glaciers at Grindelwald, got up the Gornergrat (10,289 feet.) to get a view of the Monte Rosa range, but unfortunately didn't see a 'completely clear view of the Matterhorn'. [House, H. (ed) (1959) *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, London: Oxford University Press, page 182.] The two also made a few modest ascents, and they climbed to the summit of the Breithorn (13,685 feet).

He described the mountainous landscape which is 'shaped and nippled like the sand in an hourglass and the Silberhorn has a subsidiary pyramid peak napped sharply down the sides. (*Journals* 174). He saw things differently from the usual tourists and climbers, comparing a mountain pass to a 'billiard board', for instance. In strolling in an Alpine valley, Hopkins noticed 'the Melodious lines of a cow's dewlap' (*Journals* 171), and on the way to the Rigi, he witnessed the colours of the lakes blending like a 'chord'; and that the blues and purples 'modulate' by way of their 'sharps' and 'flats' (*Journals* 170).

Henry Seymour King (Balliol 1871) made the notable ascent of the Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey (13,491 feet) on 31 July 1885, along with Emile Rey, Ambros Supersaxo and Aloys Anthamatten. This is a beautiful satellite of Mont Blanc, with no easy route to the summit. King spoke at the Alpine Club the following February, recalling the difficulties encountered on the Brouillard glacier. A porter on the expedition 'began to get alarmed and kept beseeching us to turn back' said King in his talk (later published in the February 1886 *Alpine Journal*). The porter assured them 'that the only result of going further must be the death of the whole party'. However, 'an hour and a half of this work' found them at 'the edge of an enormously wide though not very deep crevasse, which it was impossible to cross except by cutting down the side of it and passing under a series of gigantic seracs, from which the ice was falling all the time.' And once they reached the Col, they cut steps up the 'short ice-slope and got on the rocks leading to the first gendarme; the rocks were rather rotten, but we were not long in reaching its foot, and continuing to ascend found ourselves obliged to cross a narrow snow arete leading to the second gendarme, and rendered very dangerous from a large cornice and the great steepness of the slope on either side'. They were now presented with the second gendarme, which they proceeded towards 'using



Figure 8: ***Mont Blanc from Piton des Italiens by Ben Tibbetts***



Figure 9: ***William Edward Davidson (left), English climber, Alpine Club President (1911–13), and his Swiss guide, Christian Almer, taken in Grindelwald, c.1896*** [Alpine Club Collection]



Figure 10: ***Emile Rey, H.S. Hoare, Von Bergen, unidentified woman, William Edward Davidson, C.D. Cunningham and Hans Jaun, 19th century*** [Alpine Club Collection]

every precaution, and skirting the base of the second gendarme again found ourselves on the rock arete leading towards the final peak.' It took ten minutes more up the last snow slope, but they had done it. Now, they could open the bottle of Champagne.

When King descended from the first ascent of the Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey, what he hoped would be a quiet and private return after a hugely difficult climb turned out to be quite different:

We walked briskly down the valley to Courmayeur, cheering ourselves with thoughts of soup and bed. My clothes were in rags, and my chief desire was to get into the hotel as quietly and promptly as possible. Someone had, however, spied us on the top, and our entry into the village was signalised by the conventional cannon shots; the hotels were full, and the streets lined with groups of Italians who welcomed us with the greatest enthusiasm. We found our hotel decorated with flags … (Alpine Journal (February 1886), page 438.)

The climb remains difficult by modern standards and is often the mountain preventing people from completing all the list of the major (those exceeding 4000m or 13,123 feet) peaks of the Alps. Seymour King followed this climb by making a new route up the east face of Mont Collon with H Barrett. Gertrude Bell visited the Chalet 17–19 August 1900 and, with Sligger, climbed to the summit of Mont Blanc. Afterwards they left an entry in the Chalet book documenting their climb.

The new mountaineering techniques of the Silver Age saw A.F. Mummery become the standout figure, and new equipment was introduced, such as the piton and the karabiner. The British and, to a degree, the French and Swiss, rejected pitons as unsporting. The Germans and Italians, however, adopted the new methods eagerly. A young Munich mountaineer named Wilhelm Welzenbach introduced a system of grading the rock climbs that new devices had brought within reach. The grades ranged from an easy 1 to a 6 that strained human capability. Once again it was possible to recapture the thrill of climbing previously untouched territory, and grading allowed comparisons to be made.

Typically, the hardest climbs were found on north faces, and these were cold and dangerous, resulting in an unusually high death rate. In 1931 the Schmid

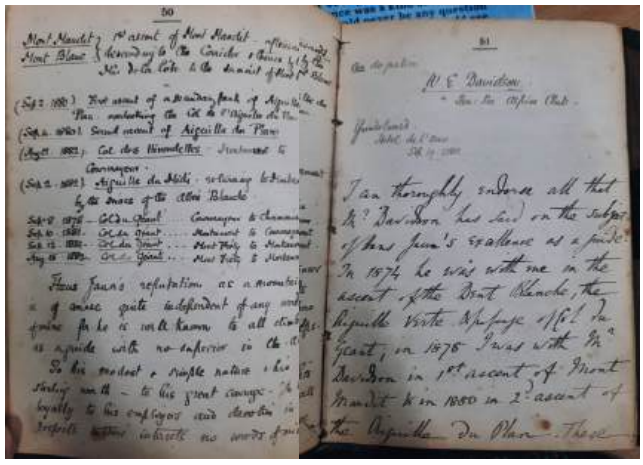


Figure 11: ***Two pages from Hans Jaun's* führerbuch *showing W. E. Davidson's entry for the first ascent of Mont Maudit, as well as other expeditions they carried out together that year*** [Alpine Club Collection]

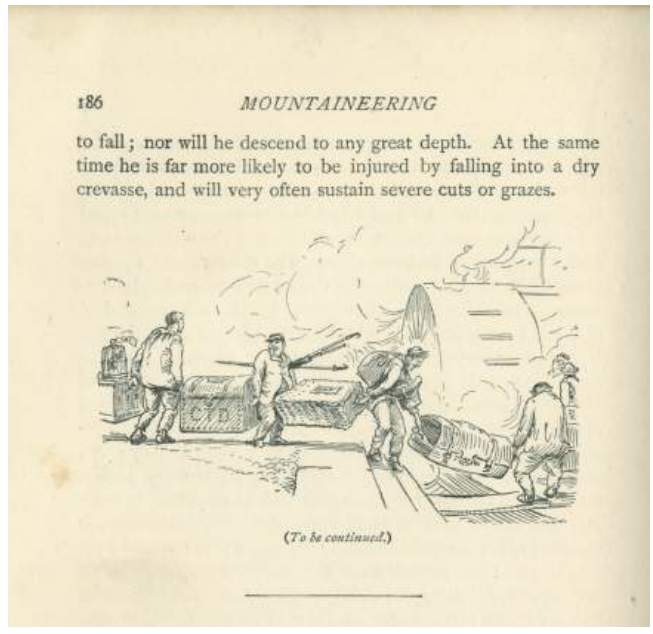


Figure 12: ***Illustration from Clinton Thomas Dent's* Mountaineering** [Balliol College Library, Mountaineering Collection]



Figure 13: ***Sketch of the Silberhorn by Gerard Manley Hopkins*** [Balliol College Archive, Gerard Manley Hopkins: Sketchbook C]



Figure 14: ***Sligger's expedition with Gertrude Bell*** [Balliol College Archives, Chalet Collection: Chalet Book 1]

brothers climbed the north face of the Matterhorn and Germany was proud and excited. The Alps were useful as propaganda to Europe's fascist states. In the run-up to the 1936 Berlin Olympics, it was suggested that mountaineering become an eligible event, a notion that was only dropped when both Switzerland and Britain condemned it as 'something to be deprecated at all costs.'



Figure 15: ***Sligger (left) with guides Schwartzen and Fuhrer on the summit of Mont Blanc in 1900, photographed by Gertrude Bell*** [Balliol College Archives, Chalet Collection: Chalet Book 1]. Reproduced by kind permission of the Chalet Trust.



Figure 16: ***Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey by Ben Tibbetts***



Figure 17: ***Mont Collon by Ben Tibbetts***

Stephen Golding

CHAIRMAN, THE CHALET TRUST

THE CHALET DES ANGLAIS:
A DIFFERENT TAKE ON MOUNTAINS

Mountaineering inevitably suggests healthy, fit individuals with ropes, harness and expensive survival kit, but mountains provide us with much more, ranging from a spiritually restorative environment to artistic inspiration, as in the case of those like John Ruskin. Nestling on the western slopes of Mont Blanc, the Chalet des Anglais offers an academic enterprise allied to a little gentle – and sometimes not so gentle - hill-walking.

In 1891 Balliol undergraduate (later Fellow) Francis Urquhart, known to all as "Sligger", opened the summer home built by his parents in the French Alps to fellow students for a summer reading party. The practice stuck: vacation reading parties were almost ubiquitous then and students were well-accustomed to them. Today the chalet remains the almost sole survivor of that distant time of Victorian house parties and summer retreats.

Sligger's aims were simple: he wanted to introduce students to European culture and history, and did so in a family atmosphere where tutor and student met on equal ground, in a traditional Alpine chalet at 1,680 metres altitude and several hours remote from civilisation. Serious reading intended for self-development was enhanced by the mountain environment and isolation, with none of the distractions of the world outside. These were what Sligger referred to as the "pleasures of learning" and "*la paix de la grande nature*". The world outside has changed dramatically since his day but at the chalet his principles continue to embue the summer reading parties.

The chalet's situation made it perfect for some hill-walking to complement the intellectual pursuit. Many outings were limited to the foothills around the chalet but others were demanding and required significant effort. Ascent to the glacial shelf of Tête Rousse (3,167 m) was routine and often parties circumnavigated Mont Blanc itself, requiring a two- or three-day outing and considerable stamina. Leaving the chalet early, they often covered the 19 km to the refuge at Nant Borant in time for breakfast. The day was spent crossing several valleys and high cols to Courmayeur, and the next in climbing to the Col du Géant (3,356 m), from where they descended to Chamonix on the surface of the vast glacier of the Mer de Glace and thence back to the chalet. One imagines they were all exhausted by then and, as they had none of the equipment which today would be *de rigeur* for this terrain, it is remarkable that there were no injuries, or even fatalities. It is worth reflecting, though, that Victorian and Edwardian students did an enormous amount of sport and also walked or ran to destinations. Whether student mettle has changed since or not, the Mont Blanc circuit fell from the chalet's routine after the Second World War.

Although Sligger discouraged mountain climbing as too distracting from his objectives, many have used the chalet for acclimatising before a major ascent. Sligger was also tolerant of the climbing expeditions of his Balliol colleague and Alpine Club member Cyril Bailey, and later he encouraged Quintin Hogg (Lord Hailsham) and others in their mountaineering aspirations. In fact, Sligger was the first to disregard his own views: in 1900 he was persuaded to make his one ascent of Mont Blanc by the redoubtable Gertrude Bell, who he had invited to the chalet. Thereafter the chalet's annals contain many honourable examples of mountain achievement, albeit that the summer parties still adhere to the



A break from reading on the Aiguillette des Possettes.



The chalet during a summer reading party. With the permission of Dr J J Matthews

founder's preference for combining study with walking.

An intriguing footnote to this story, only recently appreciated, is that in 1911 Sligger developed a friendship with Everest pioneer George Mallory, which lasted until Mallory's death on Everest. In fact this was based on shared academic objectives and although it can be assumed that Mallory would have been invited to the chalet, the evidence is that he was never there.

When Sligger died in 1934 he left the chalet to his junior colleague Roger Mynors with the intention that the parties should continue. However Mynors' circumstances changed significantly during World War Two and the chalet was empty until 1952, when Mynors' brother in law Giles Alington, of University College, began the parties again. Balliol alumnus Sir Christopher Cox, then at New College, began New College parties in the 1960s and in 1970 Sir Anthony Kenny brought Balliol members back. This began the triple-college Trust which now owns and manages the chalet.

Reading parties are rare today but in the summer you can still find Oxford students quietly reading in the peace of the chalet, or striding through the magnificent scenery in the Alpine sunshine. Many who have been there report it as one of the outstanding features of their time at Oxford: we would like to think that Francis Urquhart would have approved.

(A comprehensive history of the chalet, *Oxford University on Mont Blanc: the life of the Chalet des Anglais*, is available from stephen.golding@univ.ox.ac.uk)

Adam Roberts

(EMERITUS FELLOW)

BARRY BLUMBERG'S INTRODUCTION TO ROCK

In May 1994 I had the pleasure of introducing Barry Blumberg, Master of Balliol from 1989 to late 1994, to rock-climbing. We did the Ordinary Route on Idwal Slabs, North Wales. It is a multi-pitch ascent, 450 feet in height, and generously graded in my 1982 guidebook as Difficult. We also did the direct finish, graded Very Difficult. In my report in the *Balliol College Record 1994*, I asked whether Barry at 68, had set a record for the oldest person to tie on a climbing rope for the first time and complete a long climb. I will return to this.

It is 30 years since we cooked up and implemented this scheme. I cannot now recall whether the credit or blame for it belongs to him or to me. Suffice it to say that we both had interests in sport, but not necessarily in the same sports. He was a keen supporter of Balliol's rowing, and could frequently be seen cycling by the Isis, his eye more firmly on the boat than the hazard-ridden towpath. He also went in for long-distance cycle rides. My cycling at the time was more humdrum, mainly about getting from A to B, and I confessed that it was rock-climbing that interested me most. At some point in our conversations, he indicated an interest in trying out rock-climbing. Feeling it my duty to reciprocate, I expressed an interest in long-distance cycle rides. Before we knew what we were doing, we had got diaries out and agreed on dates.

Rock boots for Barry having been hastily borrowed, Saturday 8 May saw Barry, Bob Pascall (my regular climbing partner, a London-based graphic designer) and I heading off early for North Wales. As the forecast for that afternoon was poor, we decided to head straight for the Ogwen Valley, dumping the car at the youth hostel and walking up the lovely footpath to the magnificent amphitheatre of Cwm Idwal.

The rain held off. The climb was pure pleasure. It has a big mountain feel but is in no way threatening. Barry handled it with aplomb. This was not the 'effortless superiority' of the smug Balliol legend, but a calm and competent ascent by a man who enjoyed a new challenge. I left the leading to Bob, so I could play the role of photographer and, occasionally, instructor.

That evening, we stayed at the legendary Pen-y-Gwryd hotel, the shrine of British mountaineering, the High Table and SCR of the sport. Famous memorabilia and signatures cover every surface, including ceilings. Barry loved this haven. He enthused about the climb, but in a way that was completely unpretentious. I had to remind myself that Barry was not just any Nobel prize-winner: through his discovery of the Hepatitis B virus and the antidote, he had probably saved more lives than any person on earth.

The Sunday morning was one of those incurably wet days. North Wales has a reputation to keep up. In the circumstances, it would not have been a good idea to dilute the pleasures of the day before by attempting a wet and slippery climb now. Instead, we visited friends, went for a walk around the astonishing and dramatic Dinorwic slate quarry above Llanberis, and later visited a cafe-bar which has its own (indoor) climbing wall.

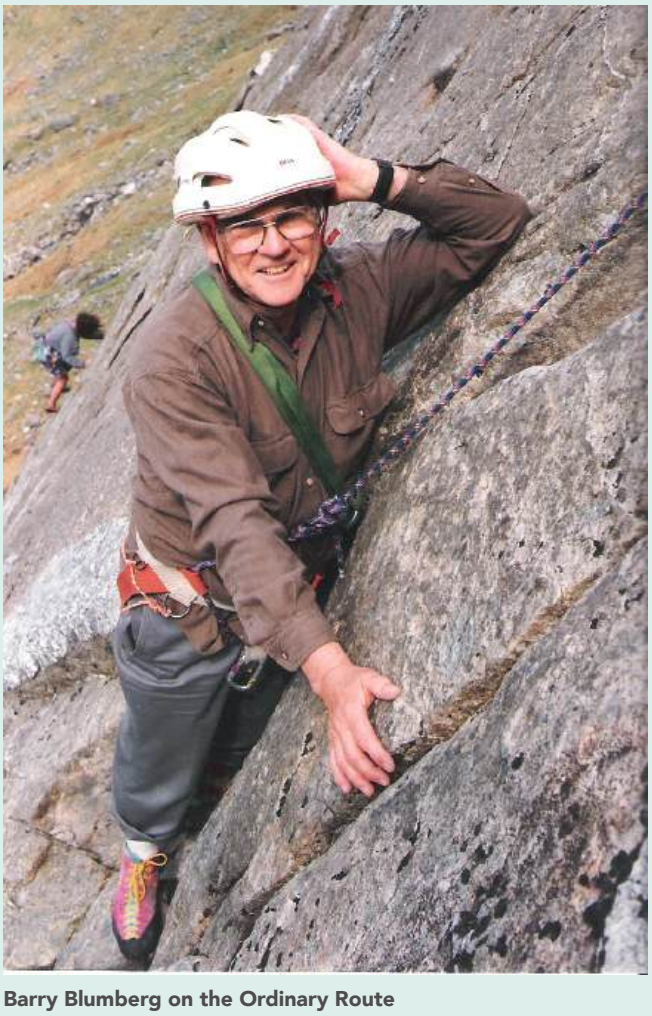
Two weeks later, in teeming rain, we joined two or three hundred others including the Lord Mayor of Oxford, in a 45-mile cycle to Woburn Park in aid of Action Research. In anticipation of better weather

and more cyclists, every Women's Institute along the route had prepared magnificent teas, with hot buttered scones, sponge cakes, and all. Once again, it was not effortless superiority, but we reached our goals.

Barry, born on 28 July 1925, died in his native US on 5 April 2011, age 85. I am still looking, but as far as I know his record for having been, at 68, the oldest person to tie on to a climbing rope for the first time, and there and then complete a multi-pitch climb, is still just about intact. If so, it won't be for long. The web is full of stories of 98-year-olds doing routes on climbing walls. If they haven't already, one of these will soon beat Barry's record.



Barry Blumberg and Adam Roberts in front of the Idwal Slabs.



Barry Blumberg on the Ordinary Route

Oxford University Mountaineering Club

In 1909, the Oxford University Mountaineering Club (OUMC) was founded by Arnold Lunn (Balliol 1907) and Robert Bourdillon (Balliol 1908). The Oxford University Women's Mountaineering Club was formed in 1924.

Arnold Lunn writes in *Come What May* (Eyre & Spottiswoode: London, 1940) that whilst at Oxford he 'founded two clubs, which are still flourishing: the Oxford University Mountaineering Club and the Alpine Ski Club. The former, unlike the sister club at Cambridge, did not number among its objects the organisation of roof climbing, but I kept in practice for the Alps by scrambles on Oxford pinnacles.' It also seems that a new roof-top route was developed around this time, which led into the grounds of Balliol, as Arnold Lunn writes, 'my room came to be regarded by tardy revellers as the normal method of entering the College' (page 68-69). This was because Lunn was known to have a rope in his rooms. The OUMC may not have organised roof-climbing, but they acted as a forum for people who did.

Ken Thomas (Balliol 1934) wrote home to his family about a roof-climbing expedition around Balliol and into Trinity in 1931: 'Sherred lost some sleep that night by staying up until after 1 a.m.; he was on a roof-climbing expedition […] The way on to the roof now lies through a window in the bedroom belonging to Higman, and that worthy gentleman was asleep.'

The OUMC began because a group of undergraduates felt they needed a forum for



Figure 1: ***Robert Bourdillon in the centre of the Balliol College Hockey Past and Present 1909 team*** [Balliol College Archives, Phot23_030b]

their activities. There was already an unofficial organisation that met infrequently on the rooftops, but something more organised was necessary. The exact date of the formation isn't known but Lunn said that it was in 1909, and because he had been sent down from Oxford in Trinity Term 1909 for failing exams in the rudiments of Holy Scripture, it seems likely that it was during Hilary Term.

H.E.G. Tyndale was the first President and Lunn took the role of Secretary. In the early days the club's activities consisted of slide shows. Some members were very active climbers, but they did not climb as a club, and only really managed to climb during the vacations.

During the early 20th century the leaders of UK climbing were generally based at Cambridge and

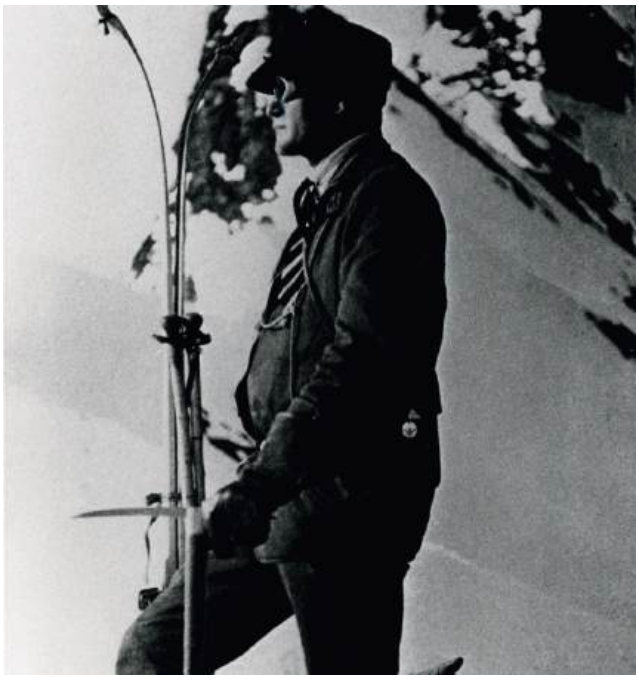


Figure 2: ***Arnold Lunn on the first ski ascent of the Eiger*** [Alpine Club Collection]

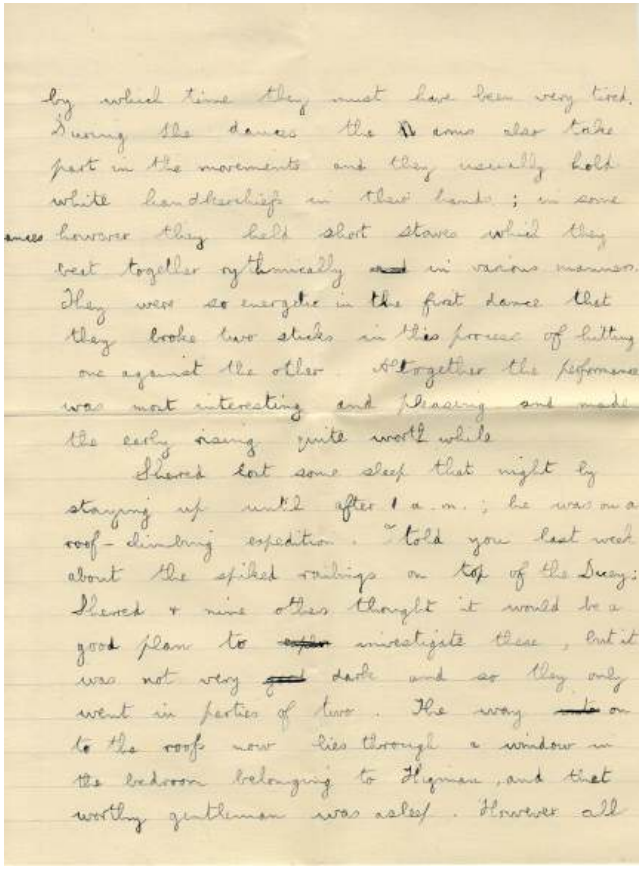
OUMC members were more active overseas. John Hoyland and Paul Wand (Balliol 1932) made an ascent of the Aiguille du Grépon (11,424 feet) in the French Alps in 1934.

David Cox (Hertford) was due to meet Hoyland and Wand at their camp whilst on a Chalet trip, but he was delayed and never made it. Even if he had arrived on time he would have found the tent empty.

Hoyland and Wand had arrived in Chamonix in August, with the intention of climbing on the north side of Mont Blanc. They built a camp on Plan d'Aiguille but they were held back by the weather. They climbed the Aiguille du Grépon when it cleared but were benighted on their descent. Three days later they successfully climbed the Aiguille again with Hoyland leading. This is a difficult climb and theirs was the second ascent by a British team unguided.

They then decided to move to the Italian side of Mont Blanc, hoping for better weather there. They left their camp at Plan d'Aiguille and then set off across the Géant glacier and climbed to the Torino Hut on the Col du Géant. The guides there thought that they had taken longer than expected and seemed to be heavily loaded with equipment.

On 18 September, coincidentally the day Sligger died, Alpine Club member Frank Smythe was asked to launch a search party for the two Oxford students. They were last seen leaving the Gamba Hut above Courmayeur on 23 August, from where they intended to climb the Innominata Ridge on the southern face of Mont Blanc. The next day the weather turned. Smythe and two guides traced their steps up the Brouillard Glacier, to the Col du Fresnay, where they discovered an ice axe. They then descended to the Fresnay Glacier, where they discovered food and clothing strewn around and

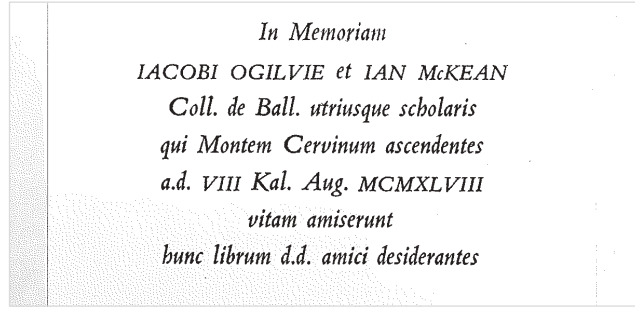


by which time they must have been very tired.
During the dances the Ks come clear take
part in the movements and they usually hold
white handkerchiefs in their hands; in some
cases however they held short staves which they
beat together rythmically and in various manners.
They were so energetic in the first dance that
they broke two sticks in this process of hitting
one against the other. Altogether the performance
was most interesting and pleasing and made
the early rising quite worth while.
Elwood lost some sleep that night by
staying up until after 1 a.m.; he was on a
roof-climbing expedition. I told you last week
about the spiked railings on top of the Quay:
Elwood & nine others thought it would be a
good plan to ~~other~~ investigate these, but it
was not very ~~and~~ dark and so they only
went in parties of two. The way ~~to~~ on
to the roofs now lies through a window in
the bedroom belonging to Hyman, and that
worthy gentleman was asleep. However all

Figure 3: ***A page from a letter by Ken Thomas to his family where he describes roof-climbing*** [Balliol College Archives, Ken Thomas Papers 1-50-2 1-5-1931]



Figure 4: ***William Bell (second from right), Ian McKean (centre) and James Ogilvie (second from left) - the photo was taken in Zermatt the day before the accident*** [Donald McKean's photo archive]



In Memoriam
IACOBI OGILVIE et IAN McKEAN
Coll. de Ball. utriusque scholaris
qui Montem Cervinum ascendentes
a.d. VIII Kal. Aug. MCMXLVIII
vitam amiserunt
hunc librum d.d. amici desiderantes

the bodies of the two climbers a short way away. They were buried next to each other in Courmayeur Cemetery.

The club struggled during the Second World War but with the return of servicemen, membership increased. It was hard for climbers to reach their full potential after the Second World War. Rationing impacted climbing trips and the standards of climbing fell during this period. However, OUMC had two joint meets with Geneva University Club at Zinal in 1946 and Arolla in 1947, and these went some way to improving Alpine climbing standards in the club.

William Bell, Ian McKean (Balliol 1946) and James Ogilvie (Balliol 1942), all OUMC members, tragically died in an accident on the Matterhorn in 1948. The memorial bookplate above can be found in many of items in the Mountaineering Collection at Balliol.

Tom Bourdillon (Balliol 1942) brought new standards to the Oxford climbing scene. Bourdillon was educated at Gresham's School and studied Physics at Balliol. In Oxford he lived in a tiny room overlooking the Turl, which he chose because of an excellent 80 foot drainpipe leading to his window. A strong climber, he reinvigorated the Oxford climbing scene in the 1940s through bold leads on Hiatus on Gimmer crag in the Lakes in December 1948 and the Great Slab route on Clogwyn du'r Arddu on Snowdon (both routes graded Very Severe) and became president of the Oxford University Mountaineering Club in 1950.

After Oxford he worked at the Ministry of Supply experimental station at Westcott, where he developed – along with his father Robert Bourdillon – the closed-circuit oxygen apparatus that would be used on Everest. He was chosen as a member of the 1951 Everest reconnaissance expedition before joining the 1953 Everest expedition which made the first ascent.

Tom Bourdillon and Hamish Nicol (Balliol 1949) climbed together with OUMC during Bourdillon's last couple of years at university. Nicol writes in the 1973 OUMC journal, *Oxford Mountaineering*, that in the 1950s OUMC ran a meet 'every vacation' held 'either in Wales, the Lakes, Scotland or abroad' (page 13). Nicol was introduced to these trips in December

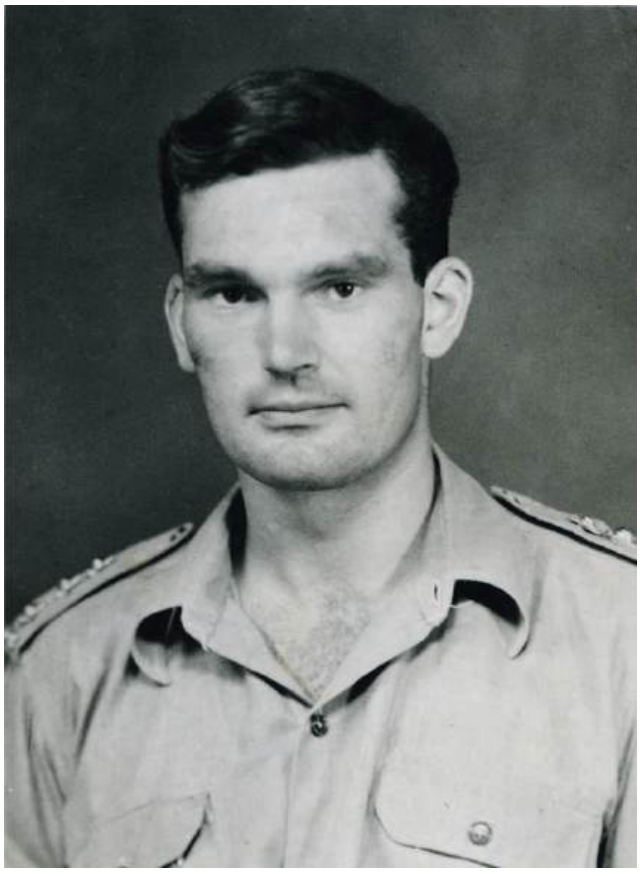


Figure 5: ***Tom Bourdillon, in Army uniform in the 1940's*** [Alpine Club Collection]



Figure 6: ***North Face of the Dru by Ben Tibbetts.***

1949, at a meet which was run by Bourdillon at the Robertson Lamb Hut in Langdale. He describes Bourdillon's 'idea of catering' as buying 'a sufficient quantity of oatmeal and jam, and to leave the rest to chance.' One morning they woke up to find six inches of snow, but this didn't put Bourdillon off; he announced 'that this was just the day to tackle Gimmer Crack […] He was a great believer in 'giving the mountain a chance'. There was no point, in his view, in doing hard climbs on dry summer days. They had to be done when there was a reasonable chance of failure (page 13). It was this training in poor conditions that forged a strong climbing partnership.

They went on to climb in the Alps together during a summer holiday in Chamonix. On this trip they climbed the North Face of the Petit Dru, which is graded as TD. Alpine climbing grades try to capture the maximum difficulty of a route, as well as the overall commitment required. The system used is French and is as follows: F (*facile* = easy), PD (*peu difficile* = a little difficult), AD (*assez difficile* = quite difficult), D (*difficile* = difficult), TD (*tres difficile* = very difficult), ED (*extremement difficile* = extremely difficult).

This route now sees ascents frequently, but Nicol writes that 'it is hard to comprehend the aura of impregnability with which it was then invested. We bivouacked on the [rock] rognon at the foot of the face and I was so excited and frightened that I could not sleep. Alone on this rock with the great face above and the lights of Chamonix twinkling below - it was for me a situation of unimaginable anxiety and delight' (page 14). They were remote and contemplating something not done by a British team before. Following the Second World War, British climbing standards were behind continental Europe, and this was the first Grande Course climbed by a British party. A Grande Course is a big route, requiring commitment, and not just climbing ability but stamina to climb all day or even longer, as well as mental resilience. In short, such routes are the routes that climbing heroes are photographed on. Nicol believes that they were able to do it because of 'Bourdillon's ambition and drive but partly also to the development of new and better footwear in the shape of Vibram-soled boots' (page 13). Nicol went on to climb the West Face of Pointe Albert



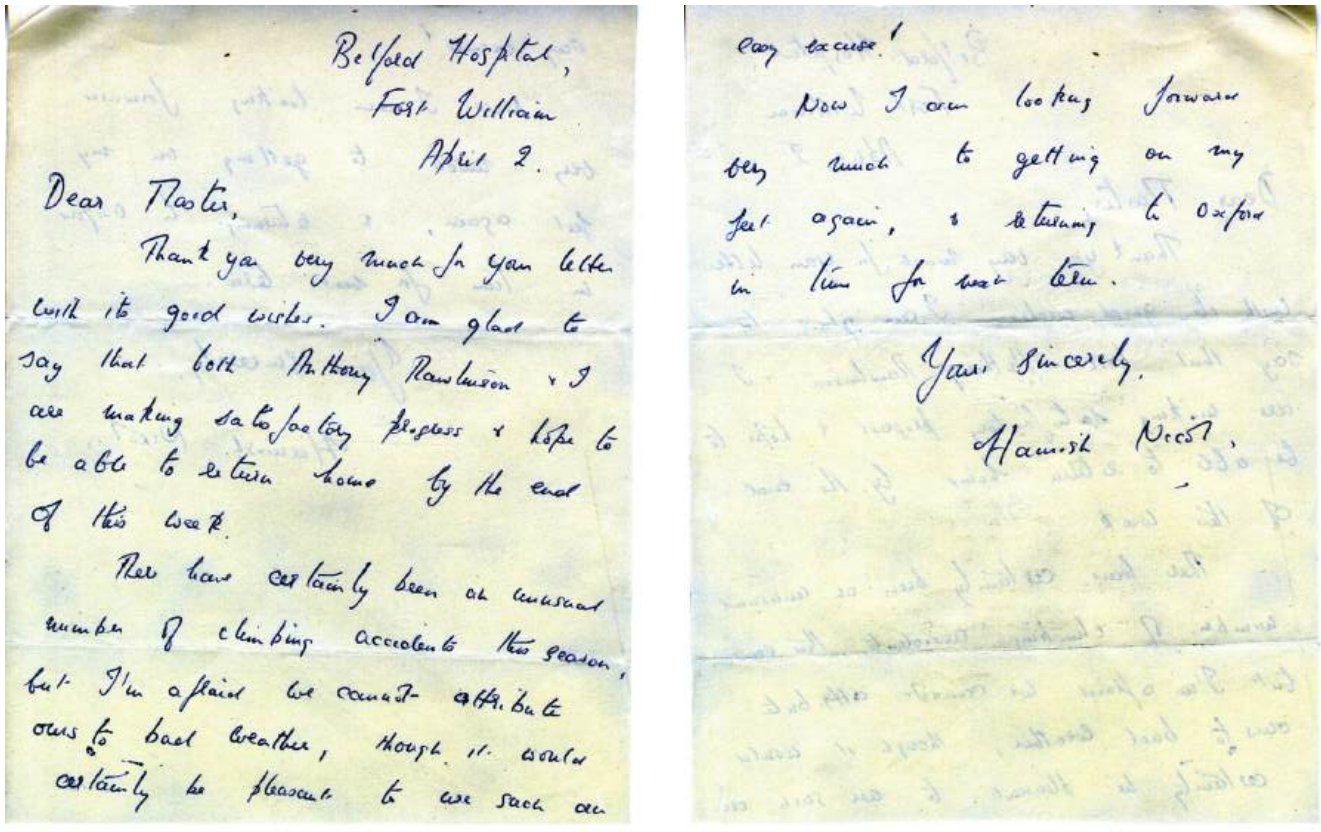
Figure 3: ***Tom Bourdillon leading the East face of Grand Capucin, by Hamish Nicol*** [Alpine Club Collection.]

with Alan Blackshaw in 1953 – the first ED route climbed by a British party in the Western Alps. Tom Bourdillon spoke at the Alpine Club, about his ascent of the Grand Capucin (TD+), during which Bourdillon described climbing on the overhanging face using aid by saying 'for the next hour we were hardly in contact with the rocks.' As the world's first mountaineering club, the Alpine Club can sometimes be slow to change. It is perhaps unsurprising then to hear that several older members wondered out loud why he had bothered to go to the mountains at all if he wasn't in contact with the rock.

Nicol expands on the preparation for the climb in *Oxford Mountaineering* (1973), writing that 'Tom and I' practised 'artificial climbing on a large tree in his garden at Quainton, Bucks. We had only the haziest ideas about etrier [a rope ladder] design, none having been used in England up to that time. Ours were far too long and clumsy' (page 13). Tom Bourdillon is photographed above using their etrier on the route.

In the 1950s the president's invitation meet was formed and held in the CIC Hut below Ben Nevis and became the scene of many accidents. One of these was in 1951 when Nicol and Anthony Rawlinson fell about 600 feet down Zero Gully after 'The pitons came out like studs from a dress shirt.'

Rock-climbing standards in the club were high in the 1970s: Phil Bartlett and Andy Brazier climbed Quiver on Clogwyn Du'r Arddu, which was Britain's first E6. This is an example of a UK traditional climbing grade, which begins at Easy, and currently goes up to E11. Along the way there's Moderate (M), Difficult (D), Hard Difficult (HD), Very Difficult (VD), Hard Very Difficult (HVD), Severe (S), Hard Severe (HS), Very Severe (VS), Hard Very Severe (HVS) and Extremely Severe, which is split into E1, E2, E3 etc. Don Ballance wrote in the 1987 journal that Sean Myles and Mike Dawes were regularly climbing E5, with half a dozen members climbing E3. Today, the club is thriving, with people climbing across the grade spectrum and holding regular meets both indoors and out.



Belford Hospital,
Fort William
April 2.

Dear Master,

Thank you very much for your letter with its good wishes. I am glad to say that both Anthony Rawlinson & I are making satisfactory progress & hope to be able to return home by the end of this week.

There have certainly been an unusual number of climbing accidents this season, but I'm afraid we cannot attribute ours to bad weather, though it would certainly be pleasant to use such an easy excuse!

Now I am looking forward very much to getting on my feet again, & returning to Oxford in time for next term.

Yours sincerely,
Hamish Nicol.

A letter from Hamish Nicol to the Master of Balliol explaining that he and Anthony Rawlinson were recovering well and would return to College in a week. He explains, 'there have certainly been an unusual number of accidents this season but I'm afraid we cannot attribute ours to bad weather, though it would certainly be pleasant to use such an easy excuse!' [Balliol College Archives, Hamish Nicol Dossier]



Hamish Nicol [Balliol College Archives, Hamish Nicol Dossier]

The Bodleian Social Science Library houses the Oxford Mountaineering Library (OML) which was formally launched on 7th December 1992.

This specialist library was created by combining the collections of the Oxford University Mountaineering Club and Michael Roberts & Janet Adam Smith.

Further information can be found here:

https://users.ox.ac.uk/~climbing/Facilities.html#sec-619f

Barbora Sojkova

(BALLIOL 2018)

Immediately after I got my offer of a place at Balliol in May 2017, I searched the internet for climbing near Oxford. A few months before arriving at Balliol, I started rock climbing on the limestone and siliceous outcrops of Prague, Czech Republic. I fell head over heels for climbing that first year and could not imagine giving it up; and so, in blissful ignorance of the geology of England, I imagined that in Oxford too I would be able to take a tram to a crag. The internet search did not yield any crags within the city limits of Oxford - but it yielded the website of the Oxford University Mountaineering Club. I remember reading it thoroughly and deciding right away that I was going to join as soon as I arrived.

I collected my member's card at the Freshers' Fair and joined the club night at Brookes that very evening, keen as mustard. In my first term, I went to all the outdoor meets: my first one was a soggy walk in the Burbage valley followed by bouldering in Climbing Works in Sheffield. The week after, I led my first trad route: a Severe at Holyhead. Two weeks later, I fell off a granite boulder up at Hound Tor and winded myself, resulting in a trip to Plymouth's A&E to check on my shoulder.

In the space of a year, OUMC felt like my home away from home. After I spent a considerable time with a few committee members around the fire at the Fountainebleau campsite, I became the club's secretary and started participating in the community life more closely. When Iffley reopened in 2018, I frequented that strange corridor every Monday, and I organised a number of women- and non-binary-only climbing events, including meets aimed at those climbers. The following year, I became the club's first Welfare Sec. The year after, I finally accepted my fate of being the only Humanities student on the committee and became the Librarian and Journal Editor, a position that I aspired to for a long time but did not want to take up so that I would not feel like a cliché. I remained the Librarian until the very end of my doctorate, editing the Journal concurrently with writing my DPhil thesis.

At certain periods, the OUMC felt much more important than my DPhil. It was my community, my means of escaping outdoors, and possibly my only means of socialisation too. It was, by all measures, much more important than my college. The OUMC enabled me to acquaint myself with the British culture as well as countryside: it was with the club that I first went to Pembrokeshire, my favourite place to climb in the UK. With friends from the club, I also climbed further afield, taking trips to Morocco, France and the Czech Republic. From the club members, I first heard that I could climb in the Alps, something that now seems to be a natural part of my life. I would like to think that I undertook these adventures solely under my own steam. The truth is, however, that I owe every bit of them to those who taught me the basic skills: Alex who first taught me how to build a belay; Jamie who took me simul-climbing up Tryfan, Kathryn who showed me how to move on an overhang, and Emmie who spent her weeknights training with me.

When you pay for the club membership for more than four years, you automatically become a life member. This means that you essentially never leave the club, even if you cease to be active. My transition to life membership was gradual, happening towards the end of my doctorate. As my climbing progressed and my love for it deepened, I began to crave crags that were dry. I decided to swap the busy club meets

for the stability of a long-term belaytionship and the musty club minibuses for the cosiness of my own van. To a certain extent, it seemed like passing of the torch to the new students; but deep inside I feel that the fire that the OUMC helped me to keep alight can never be put out.



Figure 1: ***Barbora after climbing the Mont Blanc de Cheilon in Switzerland***

Everest

As the sport of mountaineering grew, climbers became increasingly competitive and began to look further afield for new and bigger opportunities.

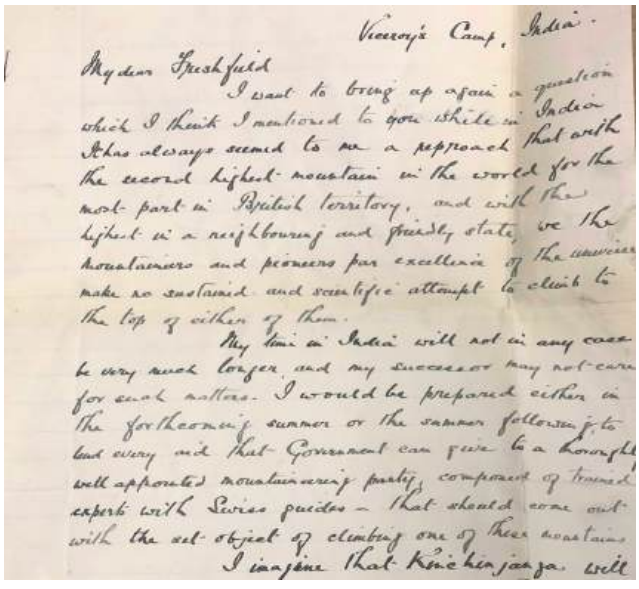
The greatest mountain range was the Himalayas in Central Asia. These had initially been surveyed by the British Empire for military and strategic reasons. In 1892 Sir William Martin Conway explored the Karakoram and climbed a peak of 23,000 feet. In 1895 Albert F. Mummery died while attempting Nanga Parbat, and in 1899 Douglas Freshfield took an expedition to Sikkim. In 1899, 1903, 1906, and 1908 American mountaineer Fanny Bullock Workman (one of the first professional female mountaineers) made ascents in the Himalayas, including one of the Nun Kun peaks (23,300 feet). In 1902 Oscar Eckenstein led an expedition to climb K2, which included English occultist Aleister Crowley. They reached 22,000 feet before turning back because of bad to weather and other mishaps. Undaunted, in 1905 Crowley led the first expedition to Kangchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world, in an attempt described as 'misguided' and 'lamentable'.

Soon, thoughts turned to Everest.

George Nathaniel Curzon (Balliol 1878), Fellow of All Souls, MP for Southport and Viceroy of India, was an extensive traveller and scholar. He seemed to feel that climbing Everest was almost a national duty. For British climbers there was a feeling that this was 'our mountain'. The British measured it, named



Figure 1: ***Lord Curzon stood on the back row, second from left. Balliol College Photo, 1880*** [Balliol College Archives, PHOT19-006]



Viceroy's Camp, India.

My dear Freshfield

I want to bring up again a question which I think I mentioned to you while in India. It has always seemed to me a reproach that with the second highest mountain in the world for the most part in British territory, and with the highest in a neighbouring and friendly state, we the mountaineers and pioneers par excellence of the universe make no sustained and scientific attempt to climb to the top of either of them.

My time in India will not in any case be very much longer, and my successor may not care for such matters. I would be prepared either in the forthcoming summer or the summer following to lend every aid that Government can give to a thoroughly well appointed mountaineering party, composed of trained experts with Swiss guides – that should come out with the set object of climbing one of these mountains. I imagine that Kinchinjanga will

Figure 2: ***A letter from Lord Curzon to Douglas Freshfield, former President of the Alpine Club, encouraging and offering support to a future expedition*** [Alpine Club Collection, Alpine Club Committee Minutes, 6 June 1905]



Figure 3: ***Signed photo of George Mallory sent to F.F. Urquhart*** [Balliol College Historic Collections, FFU2.34A]

it, photographed it, flew over it, and died on it. Curzon called Britain the home of 'the mountaineers and pioneers *par excellence* of the universe' and actively campaigned for a British expedition under the auspices of the Alpine Club and the Royal Geographical Society.

The two organisations joined forces to create the Mount Everest Committee, to administer and raise funds for a British expedition. To begin with, permission from Tibet or Nepal was tricky because both were closed kingdoms that refused foreigners permission to cross their borders. However, Britain's military power and prestige in the region eventually persuaded Tibet to allow a British expedition.

Everest (29,031 feet) was measured in the mid-19th century. It stands in the centre of the Himalayas, on the border of Nepal, and Tibet and like many mountains, marks physical and political boundaries. The Great Trigonometric Survey of British India was able to measure its height with astonishing accuracy from observation points over one hundred miles away. The surveyors estimated it to be 29,002 feet. Breaking with convention, instead of retaining its local name, Chomolungma, they christened it Mount Everest, in honour of George Everest (pronounced Eve-rest), a former chief surveyor. He was not so keen.

The first expedition, a reconnaissance, had mixed news to report: Everest was massive and intimidating but surely not impossible. In 1922 and 1924 there were two large-scale attempts, both from the north via India and Tibet. These two attempts were quite

successful. In 1922 George Finch and Captain J.G. Bruce reached 27,300 feet and in 1924 Edward Norton made it to 28,140 feet, less than 1,000 feet from the summit. On this expedition George Mallory and Andrew Irvine disappeared close to the top, and there was speculation that they might have reached the summit and perished on the descent.

Charles Meade (Balliol 1899), who had achieved mountaineering fame with his early attempts on Kamet (25,446 feet) in India, designed a tent, known as the Meade Tent, which was used on the Everest expeditions.

Tibet banned further attempts between 1925 and 1932 but did grant permission in 1933. Once again three climbers reached the same height as Norton. The final 1,000 feet was proving to be the challenge. There were three more British expeditions in the 1930s, but none got anywhere near the summit.

THE FLIGHT OVER EVEREST

The first flight over Everest was carried out in April 1933 by two Westland aircraft. They were piloted by Douglas Douglas-Hamilton (Balliol 1921) and David McIntyre, and Stewart Blacker and Sidney Bonnett were in the observer seats.

A documentary film, *Wings Over Everest*, won an Academy Award in 1936. The flight was intended for scientific purposes, involving a year's testing to solve technical issues posed by the wind and temperature, and indeed it wasn't fully understood how the human body would cope. The engine, a nine-cylinder Bristol Pegasus S, could achieve 34,000 feet. On the underside of each plane was a camera, which would generate survey strips to map the Everest region onto the Survey of India grid. This wasn't entirely scientific in nature though because the funding came from Lady Houston, an outspoken patriot who said that the aim was to show that 'we are not the degenerate race […] but a virile and active' one. Lady Houston was alarmed by the India Bill, which would introduce direct elections, leading to more Indian representatives with the power to lead majorities and form governments. She thought this was a shameful surrender. Her answer was this flight, which would demonstrate Britain's power.

The flight itself was a success, with the planes flying at 33,000 feet, 4,000 feet higher than Everest. The wind reached 100 mph and the temperature was minus 50 F. Douglas-Hamilton wrote on his notepad 'That's the NE ridge the climbers go up', referring to the ridge on which Mallory and Irvine disappeared. The plane circled for 15 minutes capturing a panorama.

In 1935, the Everest expeditions were still focused and restricted to the north side. This was the year Eric Shipton led his first Everest expedition, and his mission was to gather as much information

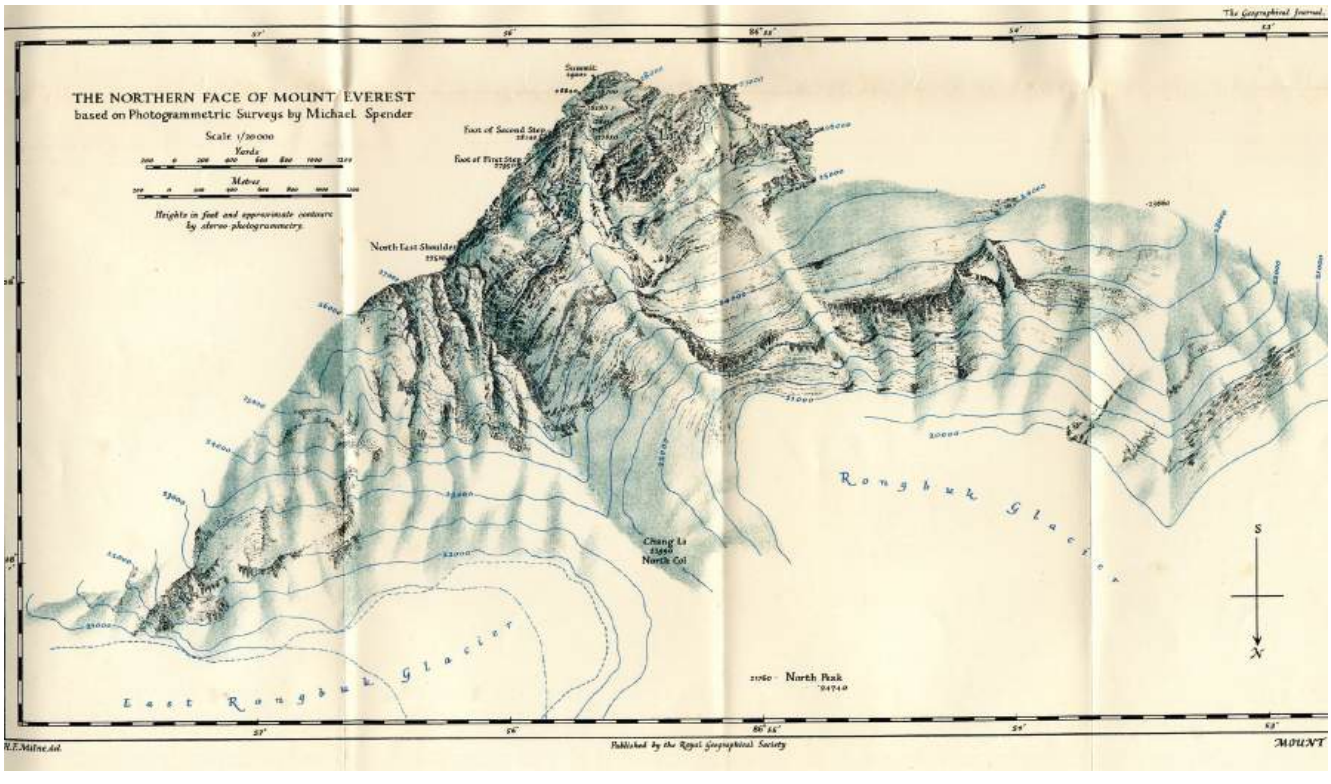


Figure 4: ***Michael Spender's map of the north face of Mount Everest. Published in "Photographic Surveys in the Mount Everest Region." The Geographical Journal, vol. 88, no. 4, 1936, page 289–300*** [Balliol College Library, Mountaineering Collection]



Houston-Westland approaching the summit of Everest from the south on 3 April 1933. Published in The Pilots' Book of Everest (1936) by Douglas Douglas-Hamilton [Balliol College Library, 1 b 210]

as possible and survey the glaciers surrounding Everest. He included the surveyor Michael Spender (Balliol 1925), brother of the poet Stephen Spender. Deborah Barker describes this incident in *The Last Englishmen* (2018). Shipton went to see Bill Wager for advice on expedition members for the upcoming Everest expedition and 'Wager advised Shipton that every expedition needed a man "so universally disliked that the others, with a common object for their spleen, would be drawn together in close companionship." For example, in Greenland there had been this impossibly pompous man named Spender.' Spender ended up being a great companion to Shipton, and a gifted surveyor.

Arthur Hinks, the secretary of the Everest committee, wanted a map showing the precise elevations of the two steps on the north ridge as well as the contours of the rock bands that defined the Great Couloir. He felt this would help settle the question of the best route. The climbers would also take photographs of the horizons from peaks and ridges in the area. In addition to this, they would also photograph what they could on the walk-in of the approach to Everest in Nepal because it was felt that the government there would one day change its mind about allowing an expedition.

Michael Spender obtained enough survey points to be able to calculate the altitude of any point on the North Face of Everest. By the end of August, he was sitting out another snowstorm at 20,000 feet up Everest, which rendered survey work impossible.

There wasn't an official policy on banning other nations, but Britain effectively had the monopoly of Everest because of its relationship with Tibet, and because it controlled travel through India. Climbers were free to try other Himalayan mountains, but none got permission for Everest. Sir Percy Cox, the Secretary of the Everest Committee, wrote to Secretary of State for India, in 1934:

Owing to the number of assaults which have been made upon the mountain in the past exclusively by British expeditions, the final conquest of the mountain has become practically a national ambition.

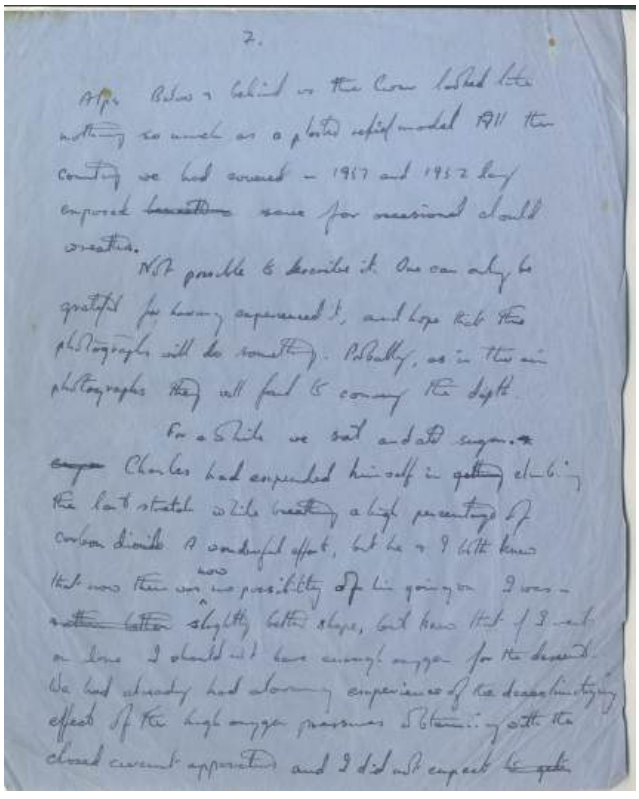
[Indian Office Library. L/P&S/12/4242, Sir Percy Cox to Sir Samuel Hoare, R.G.S., Kensington Gore, London, 25 May 1934. Quoted in Stewart, Gordon T. 'Tenzing's Two Wrist-Watches: The Conquest of Everest and Late Imperial Culture in Britain 1921-1953.' *Past & Present*, no. 149, 1995, page 170–97 (page 184).]

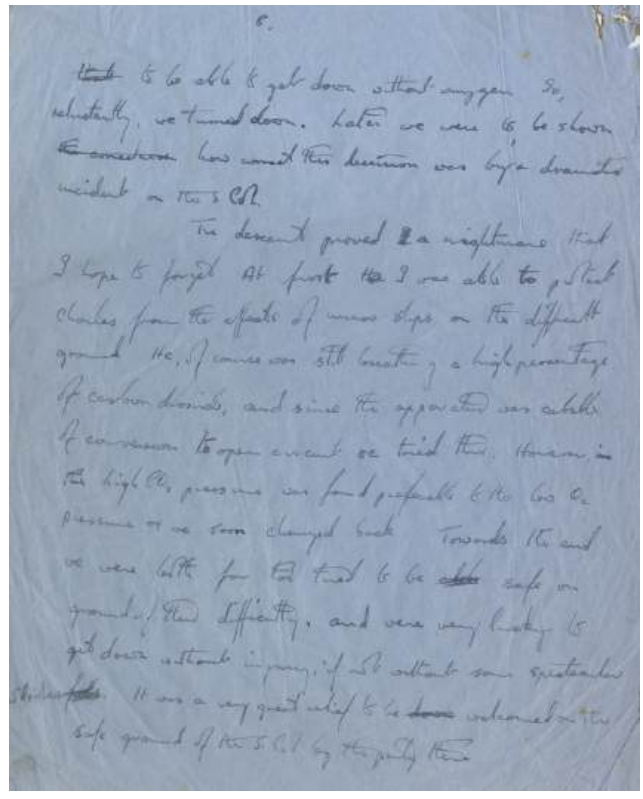
The Second World War changed this state of affairs as it left room for only two superpowers, Russia and the United States of America. In 1947 India gained independence and gave way to the Republic of India and the Dominion of Pakistan with the result that Britain's influence was diminished. In the same period Nepal began to open. In 1949 it allowed British and Swiss parties to make exploratory expeditions and in 1950 a small American trekking party was allowed into the Everest region.

The British made a reconnaissance in 1951 and then held a training expedition on Cho Oyu the following year.

The British weren't ready to have another go in 1952 and in the meantime the Swiss applied and were given permission; Nepalese government was only willing to allow one expedition per year and the Swiss asked first. Letters were written to the Swiss team by Basil Goodfellow, Hon. Secretary of the Alpine Club and Secretary of the Joint Himalayan Committee (formerly the Mount Everest Committee). There was talk of a joint expedition, but nobody was happy enough with the structure of the team. It was decided that the British would organise a training expedition for Cho Oyu, the sixth highest mountain in the world.

Eric Shipton, the leader of the 1951 and 1952 expeditions was opposed to large-scale expeditions,





Figures 5 & 6: ***Pages from Tom Bourdillon's Everest diary*** [Alpine Club Collection] Fig. 5: 'Charles had expended himself in climbing the last stretch while breathing a high percentage of carbon dioxide. A wonderful effort, but he and I both knew that now there was now no possibility of him going on. I was in slightly better shape, but knew that if I went on alone I should not have enough oxygen for the descent.' Fig. 6: 'I did not expect to be able to get down without oxygen. So, reluctantly, we turned down. […] the descent proved a nightmare that I hope to forget.'

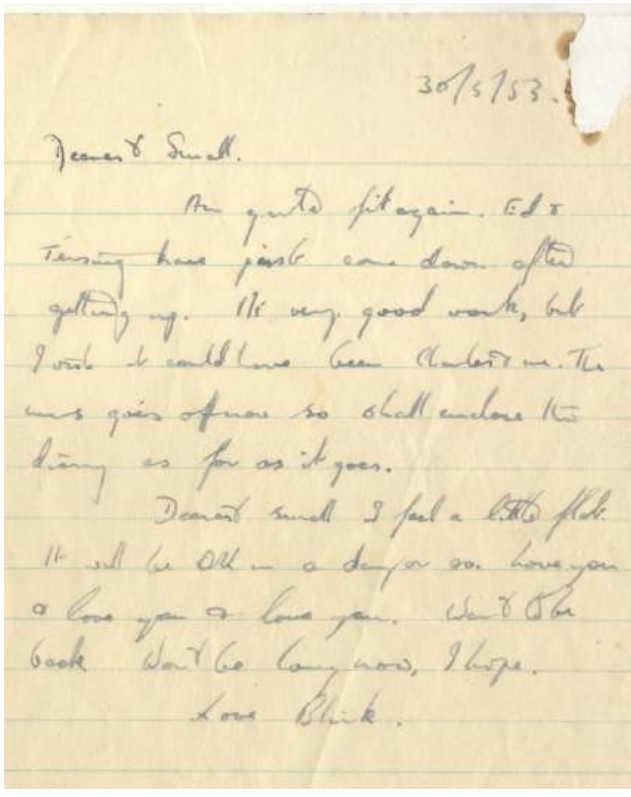
preferring to move quickly and stay agile without porters and oxygen sets, but the Himalayan Committee were opposed to this. Shipton gave way. Britain had Everest fever in the 1950s and *The Times* sold 70,000 copies of a special supplement to commemorate the reconnaissance. The 1952 expedition was the first time some of the 1953 team came together, including Tom Bourdillon and his wife, Jennifer Bourdillon who travelled with them as far as Namche Bazaar. On the way out the team left Namche Bazaar just as the Swiss were below the south summit on Everest – had they made it? Raymond Lambert and Tenzing Norgay, as part of the Swiss Expedition, claimed a new altitude record but were still 500 feet short of the south summit.

Following the Cho Oyu expedition, the committee decided there needed to be a new leader, one with strong organisational skills. It was to be John Hunt. Hunt's first task was to re-recruit the Shipton loyalists and withdraw an invitation to a third New Zealander, Harry Ayres. He took Charles Evans and Alfred Gregory to lunch and wrote to Ed Hillary, to recruit him back to the team, following the replacement of Shipton. Tenzing Norgay joined the team as Sirdar, and because of his reputation from previous Everest attempts, and his performance on the mountain, he became Hillary's preferred partner. Bringing Tom Bourdillon back was a tougher proposition because of Bourdillon's loyalty to Shipton, but Hunt saw that he was vital, both for his ability and technical expertise. Despite resigning from the expedition Bourdillon continued to work on the oxygen set, which he hoped to be much more powerful than it had been on the Cho Oyu expedition. He did of course join the team for the 1953 expedition.

TOM BOURDILLON AND EVEREST

The first ascent of Everest would always have made the headlines, but because it coincided with the Coronation, it was huge, and the two will always be linked.

Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans started in bitterly cold conditions on 26 May 1953 for their summit bid. They had waited for six weeks and were more than ready to get going. From the South Col they would need to climb 3000 feet over mostly unknown ground and then return to camp on the same day – a huge undertaking. They got up at 5.00am and were ready to set off quickly, having slept in their clothes.



30/5/53.

Dearest Smell.

Am quite fit again. Ed & Tensing have just come down after getting up. It very good work, but I wish it could have been shorter on. The wind goes off now so shall endeavour to do something as for as it goes.

Dearest smell I feel a little flat. It will be OK in a day or so. Love you a love you a love you. Don't be back don't be long now, I hope.

Love Blick.

Figure 7: ***Tom Bourdillon's letter to Jennifer on 30th May*** [Alpine Club Collection]

Neither attempted to light the stove; they just drank lemon juice from their flasks which they had brewed the previous night. They were ready by 6.00am.

As soon as Charles put his oxygen set on it froze, forcing Tom to light a candle to thaw the valves. Within a few minutes Charles was back lifting the heavy frame onto his back. However, they were not ready to go just yet. Charles breathed in and felt a choking sensation and took several minutes to recover. After investigation Tom identified the problem as a damaged valve.

Finally, the South-East Ridge lay in front of them, which involved a ridgeline of poor snow and steep rock, but they began moving well, heading up steadily, kicking and chopping steps into the hard snow. When it became too steep, they moved on to the rocks.

They knew that they would now at least break the altitude record set by Tenzing and Lambert the year before and reach the unclimbed South Summit, which sat just 300 feet below the summit.

They had started late but were moving fast, making 1000 feet an hour. If they maintained that pace, the summit would be within their grasp. However, the route became steeper and using their hands became essential, which slowed their pace, so their optimism proved premature.

They were going well until Charles had the light-headed feeling again and upon investigation Tom found that his newly replaced soda lime canister had failed and there was nothing that he could do about it. Despite this Charles Evans continued but couldn't match Tom's pace, meaning a great distance built up on the rope between them. Eventually they made the South Summit, where they heard nothing but the howling wind. They had made it. They were the highest people on Earth, 2,000 feet higher than Annapurna, the highest mountain climbed at the time. From this point lay the final ridge to the summit, 300 feet further. Charles took a photograph of Tom staring up the route, clearly longing to go for it.

Charles saw going forward as completely unreasonable because they had little oxygen and had to make it all the way back down to camp. Their objective was complete as they had scoped the route for Hillary and Tenzing's summit attempt. Later on, Bourdillon wrote about how much he regretted not going for the summit.

The first attempt was over, but they still had to get down, and getting down was to prove the most difficult part of the journey.

Charles's oxygen set was still malfunctioning, so Tom attempted to circumvent the soda lime canister and convert it to an open circuit set. This did not work, so Charles continued to breathe a noxious mixture of carbon dioxide and oxygen. During the descent on the steep rocks, he slipped several times and Tom did his best to hold on to him but he too was beginning to tire.

When they reached the site where they had changed oxygen cylinders just two hours before, they stopped to suck snow and glucose tablets, but they did not reconnect the soda lime canister that they had left there earlier in the day, which would have proved useful. They continued their descent and Tom lost his footing, sliding straight into Charles's back and forcing the two men to hurtle down the mountain uncontrollably. Charles tried to arrest their fall with his ice axe but it was no use – they simply crossed their fingers and waited for the slope to ease. They lay on the snow, panting, for several minutes. When they reached the old Swiss camp site, they vowed to descend extra carefully down the snow gully. They made the descent one rope length at a time, digging



Figure 8: ***Everest from Cho Oyu by Victor Saunders***

into the snow to lower each other down. Charles fell and very quickly brought Tom off his feet too. Below this gully is the South Col, but also the Lhotse face. They were lucky, and later even joked that they 'yo-yoed' down. They made it to within a few yards of the tents and collapsed. Alfred Gregory photographed them and George Lowe took a few more shots.

'We should have gone on, we should have gone on', said Bourdillon.

They really had made an amazing effort, ascending 2700 feet in one day and managing to get back. They were able to give details of their route up the South-East Ridge and they left two bottles of oxygen that Hillary and Tenzing made use of in their, now famous, ascent to the summit.

Tom Bourdillon was filled with pride and regret listening to Hillary and Tenzing talk about their climb. He wrote to Jennifer on 30 May expressing how he felt: 'It's very good work, but I wish it could have been Charles and me.' Bourdillon settled down after Everest and he and Jennifer had two children. He worked as a rocket scientist and always maintained that they could have made the summit.

In 1956 he went to the Alps with some friends and died along with Richard Viney on the East Buttress of the Jägihorn in the Bernese Oberland, on 29 July. John Hunt, the leader of the 1953 Everest expedition, always made efforts to ensure Everest was seen as a team effort, but the summit pair received the most attention and are really the only names remembered now. Bourdillon's climbing career beyond Everest revitalised British mountaineering after the Second World War, and his ascents in the Alps were cutting-edge. The achievements of Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans on their attempt should be remembered, as well as Bourdillon's work on the oxygen set.



Mick Conefrey

Author of *Everest 1953*, *Fallen*, *Everest 1922* and *The Ghosts of K2*

When in 1952 Tom Bourdillon was asked about his food preferences for the forthcoming expedition to Everest, his answer was succinct. Some climbers advocated military rations, some claimed that living off local food was always best, some insisted that there should always be a luxuries box for any high-altitude expedition, but for Tom it was much simpler: 'The most important thing about food is that there is some'. It was a typical comment which summed up his no-nonsense approach to climbing and his deep-seated pragmatism.

Today, Tom Bourdillon is barely known outside climbing circles, but if things had gone differently on 26 May 1953, he might today be one of the world's most famous climbers. Along with Charles Evans, another former member of the Oxford University Mountaineering Club, Tom had been given the chance to make the first attempt on the summit of Everest, by expedition leader John Hunt. Ed Hillary and Tenzing Norgay would go second, but Bourdillon and Evans were to make an initial attempt stroke reconnaissance of the summit of the world's highest mountain. Ultimately, they came achingly close, but stopped just a few hundred feet short of the top, and global renown.

Tom was born in London in 1924, the son of Robert Bourdillon, a decorated First World War pilot who went on to become a highly regarded scientist and medical researcher. Like his father, Tom studied at Balliol, joined the OUMC and climbed regularly in the Alps and North Wales. By the late 1940s he was thought of as one of Britain's leading young mountaineers whose grit and determination made him the equal of the best Europeans. When in 1950 Britain was given permission to reconnoitre the southern, Nepali side of Everest, it was no surprise when he was invited to join the team.

The leader of the 1951 reconnaissance, Eric Shipton, was so impressed with Tom that he invited him to be part of subsequent expedition to Cho Oyu in 1952 and a return to Everest a year later. In the end Shipton did not take part, but the new leader, John Hunt, was equally taken by Tom, both as a very talented climber and a likeable team member who would always do his best.

That wasn't all though. As well as mountaineering, Tom Bourdillon was a gifted physicist who was made the 1953 team's oxygen officer. He even went as far as to design, with his father Robert, a special type of 'closed circuit' set, in which oxygen was continually recycled, in theory allowing high altitude climbers to go much further, carrying far fewer cylinders.

When he and Charles Evans set off for the summit on the morning of May 26, they were both wearing the Bourdillons' patent oxygen apparatus. If they had succeeded, not only would Tom have been known as a world beating climber, but he would also have been the co-designer of the oxygen apparatus that got them to the top.

Evans and Bourdillon were similar in many ways: both had a scientific background, both were middle-class Oxbridge graduates, both were passionate about climbing. Temperamentally though they were very

different: Charles older and a little more cautious. He had served in the brutal Burma campaign during World War Two and was then a highly respected neurosurgeon. Tom had only recently graduated and would soon embark on a career as a rocket scientist. Six foot tall and weighing in at 14 stone, he looked more like a rugby player than a typical climber, but was known as a 'thruster' who liked to push himself on difficult routes.

May 26 1953, however, did not start well. The valves on Charles Evans's oxygen set were iced up and had to be thawed out, losing them an hour of precious climbing time. Things started to improve and they made such good progress up the South East ridge that they stopped early, to pre-emptively change their sets' oxygen cylinders and soda-lime canisters, which cleaned the air of exhaled carbon dioxide.

It was a turning point in their attempt. Afterwards, Tom's set worked perfectly but Charles's oxygen set became progressively worse until eventually Tom had to make a radical intervention, converting it from a closed to an open circuit set, by no means an easy feat on a very exposed slope at around 28,000 feet.

At around 1.00 pm they reached the 'south summit' a lesser pinnacle at 28,800 feet just 300 feet below the top. Down below, some Sherpas at Advance Base Camp who had been following their progress through binoculars, danced into John Hunt's tent to announce that Everest had been conquered. In fact, a very different drama was playing out on high. Tom wanted to go on, but Charles warned him that if he did, he would never see his wife Jennifer again. Reluctantly Tom turned back and the two men began a very slow and unsteady descent 'yo-yo-ing their way down the mountain', narrowly avoiding a very serious fall.

When they finally reached Advance Base on the South Col, they were utterly exhausted and encrusted with ice. In typically selfless fashion, Tom had carried down an abandoned Swiss oxygen cylinder that he found on the way down, hoping that it might have some value to Hillary and Tenzing on their attempt. When fellow climber Alf Gregory came out to meet him, he was disconsolate. "We should have gone on," he repeated continually.

After Everest, Tom took a break from climbing to concentrate on family life. He and Jennifer had two children and set up home near Aylesbury. He wasn't entirely out of the game though: in 1954 John Hunt secured permission for a return to the Himalayas to make an attempt on Kangchenjunga, the world's third highest peak. Tom was slated to be part of the main expedition in 1956, but before that Charles Evans was to lead a reconnaissance in 1955. In the end that reconnaissance was spectacularly successful, climaxing with Joe Brown and George Band going all the way to Kangchenjunga's summit.

Ultimately there was no need for a follow-on expedition, so in 1956 Tom returned to the Alps to climb with some friends. Tragically, their mountaineering holiday ended with both Tom and Richard Viney falling to their deaths on the Jägihorn. In an obituary for the *Alpine Journal*, Tom's friend Hamish Nichol wrote: 'The inscription on the*(ir)* tombstone was apt and read: "They were most rightly reputed valiant, who, though they perfectly apprehended both what is dangerous and what is easy, are never the more thereby diverted from adventuring." That was Tom and Dick all over.'

Climate

Mountainous regions are sensitive to climate change and can provide us with early warning signals of its impacts. Glaciers retreat as a result of temperature changes and such very visible retreats are a clear and stark sign of a changing climate. We also see a decrease in snow cover, and because snow reflects sunlight and helps to cool the Earth's surface, the heating of the planet is further accelerated by its loss. As snow cover decreases, the Earth's surface absorbs more heat, which contributes to climate change. Climate change can also lead to an increased risk of hazards in mountain areas, such as avalanches, landslides, and floods. These hazards can threaten human life and infrastructure. In addition mountains are important sources of water for many downstream communities. As glaciers and snow melt, there is a risk that water availability will decrease, which could have a significant impact on agriculture, drinking water, and hydroelectric power generation.

Peter Hansen summarises the 20th century climate historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, who puts it that, glaciers are the 'accumulators of climate' and 'to talk about glaciers is the same thing as talking about climate'.

[Hansen, P. (2013) The Summits of Modern Man: Mountaineering after the Enlightenment. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, page 276.]

Mountains can also tell us about climate change by providing insights into the past climate. The ice cores and tree rings found in mountains can provide a long-term record of climate change. This information can help us to understand how the climate has changed in the past and how it is likely to change in the future. Overall, mountains are important sentinels of climate change. By monitoring the changes that are taking place in mountain ecosystems, we can gain a better understanding of the impacts of climate change and take steps to mitigate its effects.

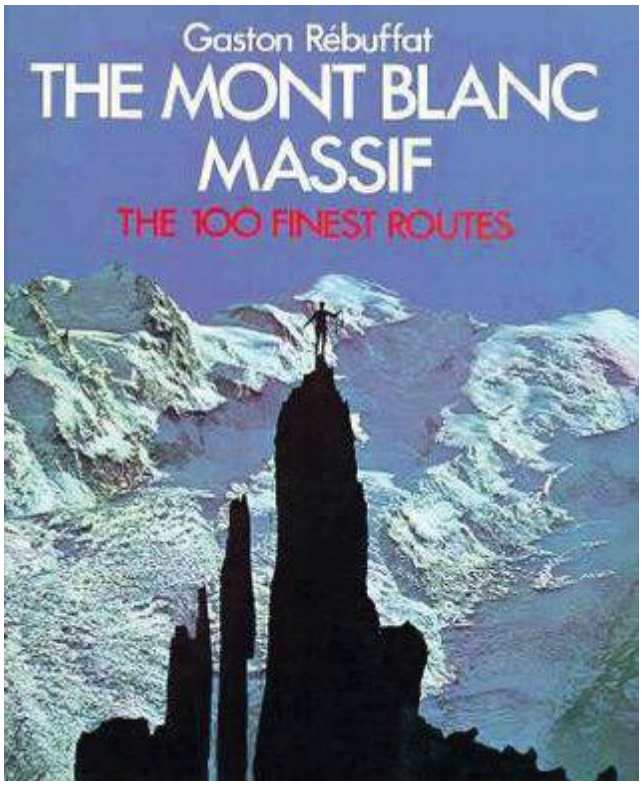


Figure 1: ***The cover The Mont Blanc Massif: The 100 Finest Routes by Gaston Rébuffat. This is a popular and important guidebook to climbing in the area*** [Balliol College Library, Mountaineering Collection]

Two writers working towards a better understanding are Nidhi Jamwal and Jacques Mourey. Jamwal, the author of 'Scientists say worse to come as Himalayan snow ceases' on The Third Pole website (https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/), in January 2024, writes that the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, was 'almost snowless this January'. In a typical year there would be 'at least four to five feet of snow' but by January there wasn't anything. This matters because the snow provides 'water security and provides water for irrigation and farming to local villagers.' Mountains are a vital part of the Earth's climate system, and their health is essential for the well-being of people and ecosystems around the world.

Jacques Mourey is a mountain researcher who conducted a study on the state of the Mont Blanc Massif, through the lens of one particularly influential guidebook: *The Mont Blanc Massif: The 100 Finest Routes* by Gaston Rébuffat (1973). The results were published in the article, 'Effects of climate change on high Alpine mountain environments: Evolution of mountaineering routes in the Mont Blanc massif (Western Alps) over half a century' (*Arctic, Antarctic, and Alpine Research*, 51:1, 176-189). Rébuffat

Figure 2: ***Photo of the Mer de Glace from 1904*** [Balliol College Historic Collections, FFU03-049a]
The photo showing the glacier in 2009, is starkly different.



includes an introductory text for each route, covering the first ascent, the elevation gain, the level of difficulty, the average duration and the equipment needed, the starting point and the route to follow. Mourey explains that the 'The main elements studied were the geomorphic and cryospheric changes at work' and how these affect the journey that Rébuffat describes, 'determining the manner and possibility for an itinerary to be climbed'. The conclusion is that 'on average, an itinerary has been affected by nine changes'. And of the 95 routes looked at, 93 suffered from the effects of climate change, and 'three no longer exist'. Between the end of the 19th century and the 21st there has been a two degree increase in temperature in the Alps and the 'total surface area of Alpine glaciers decreased by half between 1900 and 2012,' with the Mer de Glace alone losing 60 m in thickness (page 176 – 177). The image on the previous page shows the glacier in 1904.

The poster opposite depicts a sea of ice, something that couldn't be expected to be seen today, and was used by a railway company as promotional material. Today, people increasingly use planes to travel to Europe, taking advantage of cheap flights.

Increasing numbers of people visit Everest every year, some to climb, others to visit base camp. In 1996 there was little control on permit numbers, and during the climbing season that year 11 people died on Everest, and there were 14 expedition teams on the Nepalese side and 16 in Tibet. Tragic events don't seem to deter people; more people are drawn than ever have been, resulting in more than 600 people climbing to the summit of Everest from the Nepal side in recent years. Since the 1990s Everest has developed a negative image as the world's highest rubbish dump. Growing commercialisation has led to not only more people on the mountain, but more people trekking and visiting the area. There have been several clean-up attempts but as the numbers of visitors continue to increase, litter and environmental damage are likely to always be a problem. That is, unless stringent restrictions on environmental grounds are introduced.

The powerful symbol that mountains give us is useful for raising awareness of climate change. The term 'Anthropocene' means the 'new "man-made" geologic epoch we are living in' and the retreat of the glaciers was a key bit of evidence for this, according to the Working Group Commissioned by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in 2011 (*Fate of Mountain Glaciers in the Anthropocene*, page



Figure 3 ***Mer de Glace glacier in France. 6 August 2009*** [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mer_de_Glace_Glacier_in_France_-_2009-08-06.jpg]

3). This term is currently unofficial as a geological epoch. Is the usefulness of the term more in the way we behave towards it? If the act of naming the epoch and defining our place within it changes how we behave and act towards the climate, which could be more useful. Peter Hansen, in The Summits of Modern Man (2013), writes that 'when humanity collectively becomes a geological agent, can what we call mountains have dynamic effects? Mountains may look immutable, but, as any geologist will

tell you, they are not. If what "we" call mountains or nature changes how we interact with the wider world, then a formerly static nominalism could become dynamic. If "modernity" were called

"Anthropocene," would that change how we act within it?' (page 294-95). Hopefully this does impact our behaviour, and we commit to acting more deliberately, and think and act beyond ourselves, needing less stuff and leaving the world as we found it, if not better – I guess what this really means is simply to behave as alpinists in all we do.

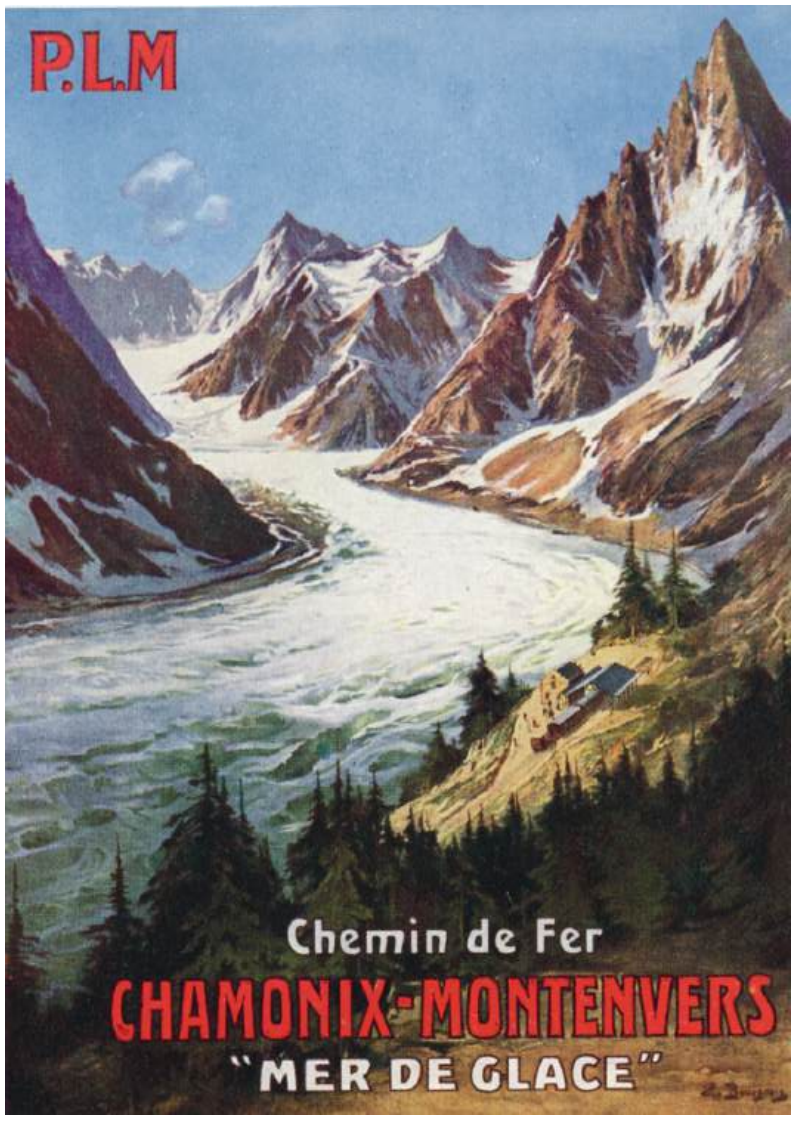


Figure 4: ***Poster from Hommes et Choses du P. L. M. (Compagnie des Chemins de Fer de Paris à Lyon et à la Méditerranée) published in 1911***
[Balliol College Library, Mountaineering Collection]

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