



THE WEISSMIES
from the Portjengrat.

A. Hackett

NOTES ON THE SAAS FEE MEET, 1934.

It could well be argued that the best person to write a description of a Club Meet is not the leader of the Meet, who might be tempted to paint the picture in a flattering way, but rather some candid and independent critic who would include in his description all the omissions and mistakes in the staff work, and his views as to how that work ought to have been done. Your committee, however, does not subscribe to this view, and consequently the organiser becomes chronicler, and the errors and omissions will not be recorded.

There is no doubt that one of the most useful activities of an Association such as ours is the organisation of mountaineering expeditions, and in this connection the year 1934 was a notable one in the history of our club, as marking the first Easter Meet in Scotland, and the first Summer Meet in the Alps.

Saas Fee was a happy choice. It is comparatively easy of access, a charming place at which to stay, offering many pleasant and romantic walks, and mountaineering expeditions to suit all grades of skill and experience, on peaks ranging from 10,000 to 15,000 ft. in height. The main valley runs very nearly due north and south. To the north lie Stalden, Brigue, and the Rhone Valley; to the south the Monte Moro Pass and the Italian frontier. On the west is the Mischabel group, a long range served by the Mischabel and Britannia huts, and crossed by several passes to the Nikolaithal and Zermatt. The Dom—14,942 ft., is the highest peak. Eastward lies another fine group, of which the Weissmies is the highest point. This group is served by the Weissmies hut and the Chalet at Almageller Alp.

Twenty-six members and friends were present:—

The President and Mrs. Brettell, Mr. and Mrs. Jolly, Mr. and Mrs. Peaker. The Misses Birch, Davis, Drury, Grosvenor, Kemp, Lister, and Logan. Messrs. Boyd, Elkington, Gibson, Gregory, Grosvenor, Hackett, Henn, R. Legge, Lister, Mottram, Steeple, Thompson, and Wadsworth.

General instructions were issued in good time beforehand. They included full details of the travelling and hotel arrangements, and advice on equipment, maps, etc. A packing list was also circulated.

The arrangements for the journey were made by Messrs. Thos. Cook and Son, and worked smoothly. We left London at 2 p.m. on July 28th, reaching Brigue in the Rhone Valley at 9.25 a.m. next day, and Stalden at 10 a.m. The new motor road from Stalden to Saas Grund was then completed to a point about half way—Huteggen—which was reached by auto. The picturesque walk along the upper section of the valley, rising from 4088 ft. to 5900 ft., can be done in three hours, but the day was hot, the mule track dusty, and there were many stragglers.

Comfortable quarters had been booked at the Grand and Belle Vue Hotels. The Management had supplied a room plan, which had enabled rooms to be allocated in advance and luggage labelled accordingly, which greatly facilitated the settling-in process.

The cost of the return fare from London to Stalden, including meals en route, was £9 15 0, and for the Hotel accommodation 9 Swiss francs per day, or £8 8 0 for 14 days, at the rate of exchange then current. These terms included room, meals, provisions for expeditions, kurtax, tips, and two baths per week. Extra baths and all afternoon teas were 1fr. each extra, thus permitting of individual extravagance or economy. Further opportunity for extravagance was provided by the Wine List.

All the active members of the party, and some who claim that they are not as active as they were, responded gamely to the leader's plans on their behalf. Those plans aimed to give everyone the opportunity of making such a series of expeditions as they could enjoy, and as would enlarge their Alpine experience, having regard to the general conditions. Any success we may have attained in this endeavour was due largely to the willingness of the more experienced to take their share in helping and guiding the newcomers to ice and snow work.

We were fortunate in securing good guides. Emil Andenmatten made a first-rate chief, and he was ably supplemented on various occasions by Alfred Supersaxo and Heinrich Burgener, both worthy representatives of well-known names.

The weather conditions during the fourteen days of the Meet were but moderate. There were two periods of depression when little could be done, but fortunately there were three short periods of high barometer reading and fine weather, of which full advantage was taken.

The major expeditions accomplished were:—

Nadelhorn	14,220ft.	3 ropes.	
Weissmies	13,226ft.	5 ropes, on two days.	
Allalinhorn	13,236ft.	3 ropes.	
Laquinhorn	13,140ft.	1 rope, guideless.	
Fletschhorn	13,128ft.	1 rope, guideless.	
Ulrichshorn	12,890ft.	3 ropes.	
Portjengrat	12,008ft.	2 ropes.	
Mittaghorn- Egginer	11,080ft.	4 ropes	} guideless, on various days.
Mittaghorn	10,330ft.	3 ropes	

In making these climbs, members of the party put in 61 Hut-nights at the Britannia, Mischabel, and Weissmies huts, and at Almageller Alp.

Many lesser expeditions were made to the Monte Moro, Antrona, and Zwischbergen Passes, to the Kessjenjoch, and to the Lange Fluh. Off days were utilised in exploring the numerous delightful walks on the lower slopes. These included many unsuccessful attempts on Mellig (8812 ft.), which attempts usually terminated at Hannig Alp, where an excellent Thé complet could be obtained. In addition to the serious mountaineering expeditions, of which official records were kept, it is believed generally that other and more romantic rambles were enjoyed by certain members.

It has been stated that the party worked well and hard, so much so that the sum total of height ascended on major expeditions was three quarters of a million feet, which curiously enough is equivalent to 26 ascents of Mt. Everest from sea level, one for each member of the party.

So much for hard facts and statistics. There are many scenes and incidents one might recall:—

The difficulties which arose before all details were finally settled to the satisfaction of the participants.

My relief after distributing over £200 worth of Cook's Travel Tickets at the Victoria Station barrier.

The various reactions to the choppy Channel crossing on the Cote d'Azur.

The mysterious disappearance of three members at Berne, and their even more mysterious re-appearance at Thun.

The happy thought of the President and Mrs Brettell to meet and greet us as we alighted at Brigue.

The thrill of the motor run from Stalden to Huteggen, and the collision with the run-away cyclist.

The glorious weather of the first three days, spent respectively in training walks on the Saas Fee Glacier and the Lange Fluh, climbs to the Weissmies and Britannia huts, followed by the peaks of the Weissmies and the Allalinhorn.

The magnificent walk from the Plattje to the Britannia hut.

The pluck and determination of the novices on these early expeditions.

The anniversary (Aug. 1st) of Swiss Independence, when we enjoyed:—A Special Dinner, Speeches (patriotic), Processions, Fireworks, Dancing, a tour of the Cafés, etc.

How many members lost many francs that night, though Jolly won an ice axe.

The ascent to the Mischabel hut in a storm of rain, hail, thunder and lightning, and the pert remark of the old guide descending—"Il n'y a pas des lits en Saas—donc?"

How some returned to the Hotel to disprove this statement, while others pushed on to the hut and climbed the Ulrichshorn next day.

The second expedition to the Weissmies, with glorious summit views, and the glissade descent of the S.W. ridge.

Jolly's midnight caravan (11) to witness the dawn from the Monte Moro Pass and the St. Joderhorn (9975 ft.) and the wonderful views of Monte Rosa therefrom.

The cowardly desertion of a member benighted at the Mischabel hut, from which he returned next day, sans food, sans tobacco, sans temper, sans everything!

The strenuous and exciting day spent by the President and Peaker in traversing the Fletschhorn; and the President's equally exciting night journey ascending from Saas Grund to Saas Fee.

The cold conditions for three ropes on the Nadelhorn when one member suffered from frost-bitten fingers. This was a stout effort by "The old brigade".

The traverse of the Portjengrat Ridge on a fine warm day which was the last major expedition.

The general enjoyment of the Mittaghorn-Egginer traverse, which was described as Crib Goch magnified five times.

We made no climbing history, as all ascents were by ordinary routes, and on most expeditions we had the advantage of a guide leading the first rope. But we did enlarge the experience of those who had been out before, and we did very happily initiate a number of Novices to the joys of Alpine mountaineering. And it was all done at moderate expense, as should be the case at a Club Meet.

The party broke up on Sunday, Aug. 12th, and the way in which the members scattered emphasizes the necessity for independent travel tickets for the return journey. Some passed on to other centres as far apart as Zermatt and Kandersteg, others arranged to break their return journey at various points, while a select few chose to spend yet a few more days in lovely Saas Fee.

An excellent photographic record of the holiday was obtained, the work of Messrs. Boyd, Hackett, Steeple, and Thompson being particularly good. Subsequently a folio was formed and circulated to all those who took part in the Meet; and our thanks are due to Miss Ivy H. K. Kemp for the success of this feature. The Association possesses a permanent record of these photographs in a set of about 80 slides, made from the pick of the negatives.

In spite of my threat at the commencement of these notes, I will record two serious omissions in the general organization—failure to secure a good group photograph, and the unfortunate omission of face protection drill! Both should be provided for on a future occasion.

Finally, I am told that it was a successful Meet.

G. A. LISTER.