

THE M.A.M. ALPINE MEET 1969 — BERNINA AND BREGAGLIA

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When faced with the slightest threat of leading an Alpine Meet it has been my normal policy to "con" someone else into it in such a way that they are convinced that the M.A.M. is pleading with them to do it and the M.A.M. is convinced that the prospective leader is all self sacrifice and enthusiasm. When the 1969 meet was first "mooted" by Bob Jeal, Ralph Goldsmith and I had already decided to revisit the Bernina, scene of a happy and energetic interlude with Norman Cochran some years previously. It was therefore only a matter of very slight slanting of the truth to leave Ralph in the inescapable position of meet leader.

It all fell apart as Ralph's job caught up with him and he "reluctantly" pulled out. However, it only took two pints to find Stuart Hutchinson prepared to act as joint leader with me, and as time went on I was happy to find that he was taking the dominant part in the organisation, and life appeared normal again. However, half an hour before leaving to catch the boat, Stuart 'phoned to say that his job had caught up with him too and there I was, trapped.

So after a long drive largely spent trying to remember who was coming, and rapidly reading guide books and maps in off driving periods, we arrived at the delightful but crowded camp site at Morterasch late on a Saturday afternoon and frantically searched for "lebensraum" for the flood which was to arrive on Sunday. We met Mike Rhodes and party who had been there for a week and I had an attempt to flog the co-leadership to him, but he being younger and quicker witted than I soon outmanoeuvred me.

During Sunday afternoon most of the party (27 in all) arrived in time for a cracking thunderstorm which had the advantage of revealing which parts of the site flooded. Left to themselves people managed to sort things out extraordinary well.

Monday dawned sparkling and most people were anxious to get going, there was flurried shopping, telephoning of huts, indecision and decision, and eventually a party of eight set off heavily laden for the Boval Hut for a three to four day tour. Others intended to visit the Tschierva and Co-az huts on the morrow.

Our original intention had been to ascend the Fortezza ridge to the Col Bellavista, climb Piz Palu, back to Col Bellavista and along the Bellavista traverse to the Marco-e-Rosa hut. After three beers on the terrace of the Boval Hut this started to look a very long way and there was hurried reference to the guide books, eventually we settled on the Bu-uch route which works its way through the left hand side of the icefall going up to the Fuorcla Crast 'Aguzza'.

Away to a start in the dark, landing on the Morterasch glacier at first light, we worked our way fairly slowly up into the ice fall with its impressive cliffs and seracs until we came to a grinding halt below a 25-ft. overhang of ice with a crevasse at its bottom. Eventually Hugh Thomas forced a way excitingly up a steep 150-ft. ice slope to its left while the remainder of us shivered in the shadow of some cracking seracs. We then broke out above the ice fall and trudged our way through the softening snow to the Marco-e-Rosa hut to be greeted by Giovanni who remembered me from a previous visit.

The Marco-e-Rosa (3540m) while not being quite the highest slum in Europe is probably the most expensive one. It is small and usually overcrowded, but remarkably well situated and a place I enjoy being in. We had our spaghetti and tinned steak, cooked in large quantities, being glad to get rid of the weight, but when we came to the night's accounting found that not only had some of it been sold to other guests, but we ourselves were being charged as though it was hut food. Some desperate multi-lingual bickering managed to get the aweinspiring bill reduced by 20%.

Wednesday was ushered in by a thunderstorm and snow and we lay abed awhile, then roped up in the hut for a five minute sortie up towards the Piz Bernina the leader returning scarcely before the last man had left the hut doorway, driven back by blizzard and forked lightning. There was some desultory messing about and then half the party, appalled at the thought of becoming storm bound for days at Hilton prices, set off into the blizzard to descend the Bellavista traverse and Fortezza ridge. They were seen again.

The remainder drank Grappa and taught Tom Huckerby to play liar-dice until mid-day when Giovanni, in radio-communication with the Marinelli hut, told us that it was about to clear up. He was right and at 1 p.m. we set off to do the Piz Bernina (4049m) by its East Ridge. This gave a pleasant mixed climb of rock and narrow snow ridge of moderate difficulty with a few stretches of ice. While approaching the summit we looked back and saw great masses of thunder cloud approaching and shortly after starting our descent it hit us with wind and snow and static discharge and we had to take things very slowly as the rocks became badly iced and snowed up. At one point Hugh Thomas was belayed to an iron cross to which was attached the wire rope down which Don Bradburn was descending, and he became somewhat agitated saying that the cross was emitting sparks. Ultimately we hit the long snow slope above the hut to find with pleasure that an Italian party had waited to see us safely off. Even Giovanni, astounded by the inaccuracy of his weather forecast, came up the slope with a lamp to meet us and guide us back to the hut, notoriously difficult to find in bad weather.

Back to an evening of warmth and friendly banter in the hut, it seemed that it was going to be a typical Alpine holiday after all. It was still snowing next morning, but at 7 a.m. it abated and we

left to traverse Piz Zuppo (3996m) and the four peaks of Bellavista (3922m). This went extremely well after a slow ascent of Zuppo the boulder slopes being iced and we had the pleasure of well compacted snow ridges clean of steps and some stretches of moderately difficult rock ridge. We descended via the Fortezza down to the Morterasch glacier where we were soaked to the skin by another thunderstorm, called at the Boval for a beer and then trudged wearily down the track to Morterasch in the dark, satisfied at having climbed three mountains and six summits in our first sortie.

While all this was going on, several parties went to the Tschierva hut and under the leadership of Mike Rhodes managed to climb Piz Morterasch (3751m) by the North Ridge and Piz Tschierva (3546m) by the East Ridge, several members of the party achieving their first Alpine peak. Some members also visited the new Coaz hut.

Meanwhile Mike and Lynn Hicks and Dave Thomas had arrived and dashed up to the Tschierva hut from where Mike and Dave attempted the Bianco Grat. However, on reaching the Fuorcla Prievlusa they were met by the fierce thunderstorms that had dogged our party and, after spending an uncomfortable time at the Fuorcla with plenty of company, were forced to descend.

Everyone met up again at Morterasch. It then became apparent to the leader that he was supposed to do more than go off climbing like everyone else. The Forno hut seemed a good place for some cohesive activity since there were many climbs of a wide range of difficulty; the hut was fairly large and the peaks not quite so high. A large body of men and women set off up the track from Maloja in the rain. They were overtaken by an even larger body of men in the form of The Emmental section of the Swiss Alpine club, bound for the same destination and singing their heads off. Our arrival at the hut was a little confused as it was already full, but the warden, having an English wife, speaking excellent English, was unperturbed, sorting us out to sleep as a party on mattresses and tables in the dining room.

The visit here was happy and successful, we were sung to sleep by the Emmentalers, and not so enjoyably awakened by their morning performances. The weather was very fine and everyone climbed. On the first day a large party ascended Monte Sissone by the northern approach, an easy climb mainly on snow with magnificent views of Monte Disgrazia and the Torrone group. There was excitement on the descent when some of the party were exposed to a deluge of ice blocks from an ice fall on Cima di Rosso, but no harm was done except to the leader's nervous system.

That evening another wave appeared, including Charlie Aldridge, who had arrived unannounced and managed to find the party. We rose early, but got away not so early, the number of people milling around being excessive. The main party led by Tom Huckerby and

David Dickson managed to do a very good traverse of Monte Rosso, next door to the hut, climbing by the North East Ridge and descending by the North West Ridge. It was a mixed snow and rock route done in superb weather. The leader's party set out to do Piz Bacun, but his route finding was appalling and after several false and hairy starts the party finished up on a spur of Piz Casnil without a hope of ascending anything, but having learned quite a lot about the general topography of the region.

The next day was very fine and after making a fairly early start two parties set off for the Piz Bacun and the Cima de Largho. One party led by David Dickson made a traverse of Piz Bacun by its East and North Ridges, a good expedition on snow and rock while the rest of us led by Hugh Thomas climbed the Cima del Largho by its East Face. This is a very pretty rock peak and gives a beautiful exposed rock climb of V. Diff standard. On examining the summit book we were amused to find that the previous British party to climb it included Bob Robinson and Stuart Hutchinson on an M.A.M. meet several years before.

Meanwhile, Dave Thomas and Mike Hicks had returned to the Tschierva hut and, in really good weather, had made two fine expeditions, the first was a traverse of the South Ridge of Piz Prielus and the South South East Ridge of Piz Morterascch a **Difficile** standard climb. On the next day they had their revenge on the Bianco Grat of Piz Bernina.

At the same time, two parties (Christine Salter with Barbara McLauchlan and Sheila Shuttleworth with some friends) made the East-West traverse of Piz Palu, the second party having an interesting time returning across the Morterascch glacier in the dark.

There was another re-congregation at camp and an off day which was spent festering or wandering around Soglio or up the ski lift and along the ridge to Piz Languard. Tom Huckerby had a most rewarding day photographing flowers and Don Bradburn and Hugh Thomas from their sleeping bags, surveyed the talent at the camp site. Those who would not admit to being exhausted then went over the Bernina Pass into Italy and drove round the Bagni del Masino and up the steep long path to the Gianetti hut. The strong Welsh contingent (Dave, Mike, Lynn and Hugh) treated the Italians to some "bel canto" singing. From here, after a "shambolic" early rise without assistance from the hut warden who didn't like people that day, one party traversed the Piz Badile by the East and South ridges and the rest of us went up Piz Cengalo by its West Ridge. The weather was perfect and we were able to watch four parties (one solo) climbing the North East Face of the Badile and we met a British party who had just climbed the North Ridge of Cengalo after doing the N.E. face of Badile on the previous day!

And so it was all over, after a prolonged pack up interrupted by farewell drinks with everyone individually and watching Helen Hartley do the complicated accounts, a fine professional effort. I enjoyed it. I hope the others did and am very grateful to them, particularly for the way in which the stronger climbers looked after the weaker ones, including the leader.