

THE MANCHESTER GRAMMAR SCHOOL

FOREIGN TREK 1986 VANOISE



Grande Casse from the path up to Col de la Vanoise



Camped at la Fournache



Descent down the Réchasse glacier

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I originally word-processed the text of this log on a BBC computer using Wordwise in the autumn of 1986. I completed this version with a detailed walking route summary, a digital sketch map, scanned images and appendices in 2019, using an Apple Macintosh and Microsoft Word, with iPhoto and Preview to edit the images.

I scanned the majority of images from 35 mm slides taken for the Trek Reunion in November 1986. 56 of them are scanned from a set of 'official' prints taken by Paul Atkins; these are marked with a dot after the image. Thanks to Paul for permission to use the images he took. Time has taken its toll on the images; the slides have darkened and the prints have faded, and the slides with lots of snow and high contrast are particularly poor. Editing has improved them somewhat, but there remains a mismatch in colour balance between slides and prints (particularly the blue skies and green grass) that my simple editors cannot correct. Where I have been unable to produce a reasonable colour balance I have converted them to monochrome.

To keep the overall file size down, all the images are low resolution, but of sufficient quality to display fairly well at A4 page size. The average size of the 182 images used is about 50 kB, giving a file size of about 10.7 MB, the size of about 4 medium digital compact camera images.

After such a long time it has obviously been impossible to obtain permission from individuals to use images which include them. Anyone who finds this a problem should contact me.

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Carved PNV sign



Paul Atkins at Lac Blanc

LEADER Allan Witton

STAFF Gerry Leversha Derek Stubbs Bill Souster Adrian Dobson
 Simon Duffy Mark Hesketh
 (3 tents)
 Dennis Hughes (coach driver)

TREKKERS

Tent	Leader	Members (* denotes a previous Foreign Trek)		35 trekkers
1	Howard Foxall (1SS)****	Paul Atkins (OM)***	Ian Bancroft (OM)*	Adrian Grundy (3BM)*
2	Mike Billingham (2Mb)**	James Cornish (MS2q)*	Kevin Henry (OM)*	Steve Secker (MS2r)*
3	Martin Boulton (2Mb)*	Nigel Clowes (2Mb)*	Robin Hall (2Mb)	Tony Kay (2Mb)
4	David Knappett (3Ma)	David Pallin (3Ma)	Mark Shaffer (3Mw)	Richard Spencer (3BM)*
5	Richard Steele (3Bb)	Simon Edmonds (3Mw)	Gavin Lewis (MS3q)	Steven Rix (2BM)
6	Dan Short (3Ma)	Julian Housby-Smith (3Mw)	Richard Mehlman (3BM)	Simon Milling (3BM)
7	Matthew Jacobs (3Mw)	Rob Carey (5F)	Alistair Roberts (5F)	
8	Andrew Sambrook (5D)	Tim Adshead (4E)	Nick Atherton (4J)	Matthew Crosbie (4E)
9	Paul Elbourne (4M)*	Oliver Allmand-Smith (4M)	Steve Robinson (4M)*	Graham Williams (4M)

DATES Monday 14th July to Sunday 3rd August (21 days)

COST £200



The staff on Pointe de l'Observatoire.
 Along the back: Mark Hesketh, Allan Witton, Derek Stubbs, Bill Souster, Gerry Leversha
 In front: Adrian Dobson, Simon Duffy

TENT GROUP PHOTOS

All Tent Group images are from Paul Atkins' prints.

TENT 1 on the ascent route to Pointe de la Réchasse, with Grande Casse and Grande Motte on the skyline: Howard Foxall, Ian Bancroft, Paul Atkins, Adrian Grundy



TENT 2 below Col d'Aussois:
Steve Secker, James Cornish, Kevin Henry, Mike Billingham



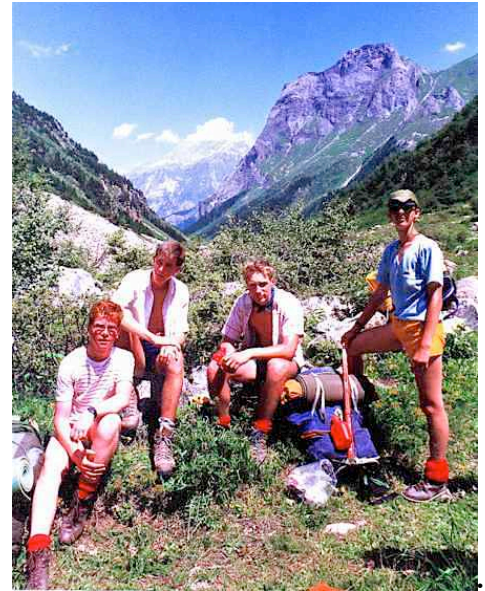
TENT 3 lay out their Karrimats at the Ritort bivvy:
Nigel Clowes, Martin Boulton, Tony Kay, Robin Hall



TENT 4 relaxing at Lac Blanc: Richard Spencer, David Knappett, Mark Shaffer, David Pallin



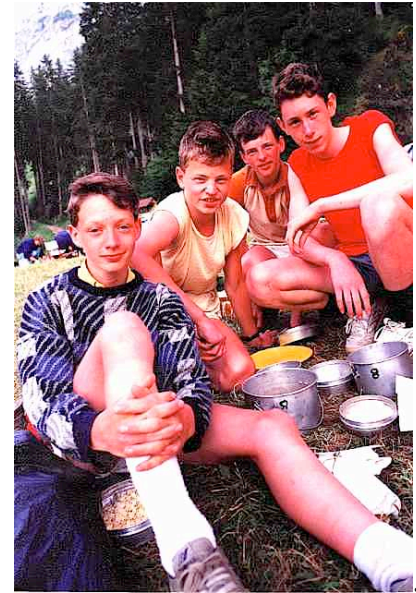
TENT 5 at Lac Blanc, with Dent Parrachée and Dôme de l'Arpont:
Steven Rix, Richard Steele, Gavin Lewis, Simon Edmonds



TENT 6 in the Chavière valley:
Simon Milling, Julian Housby-Smith
Dan Short, Richard Mehlman



TENT 7 pitching the tent at la Fournache, with Pointe de l'Echelle
on the skyline: Matthew Jacobs, Alistair Roberts, Rob Carey



TENT 8 cooking at the Pralognan campsite:
Nick Atherton, Tim Adshead
Andrew Sambrook, Matthew Crosbie



TENT 9 enjoying a shady leg-stop: Paul Elbourne, Graham Williams, Steve Robinson, Oliver Allmand-Smith

THE WALKING ROUTE

The route was an almost complete circuit of the Vanoise National Park, passing close to most of the major peaks and through many of the massif's valleys. The rather complex arrangement of the main mountain groups and valley paths made it hard to choose an 'ideal' and logical route. A further complication was the strict ban on camping within the National Park, and the provisional itinerary went through several revisions before we set off, and was further modified as we walked the route, which in the end consisted of 4 sections between valley camps.

1. Three-days from Arc 2000 to Pralognan, along the flanks of Mont Pourri, Dôme de Bellecôte and Grand Bec.
2. A whole-day excursion to Pointe de la Réchasse, followed by a three-day loop over Col d'Aussois and round the southern end of the Vanoise glacier to Termignon.
3. A spectacular two-day, 35 km crossing through the heart of the National Park, beneath the 1500 m walls of Grande Casse and Grande Motte to Val d'Isère, staying overnight at the Entre Deux Eaux hut.
4. A walk up to camp in the Grande Combe, with an ascent of Aiguille de la Grande Sassièrre as a finalé.

OUTLINE ITINERARY AND WALKING ROUTE SUMMARY

		21 days	6½ days travel	3 free days	11½ walking days				
July		All heights in m	Height m	Distance km	Ascent m	Daily totals			Naismith Time
						km	Ascent	Descent	
14-16	Coach	MGS > Felixstowe > Chaumont > Bourg-St-Maurice							
17	Coach Trek	Arc 2000 Refuge de Plaisance via Col du Plan Séry	2100 2170			21	1050	980	6-30
				2609					6-00
18	Trek	Refuge du Plan des Gouilles	2350			9	890	710	3-50
19	Trek	Pralognan	1430			16	950	1870	5-50
20	Free day	Pralognan	1430						
21	Excursion	Pte de la Réchasse (W ridge) from Pralognan (Mont Bochor) 2023		3044		20	1170	1620	6-45
22	Trek	Ritort	2030			9	630	30	2-40
23	Trek Excursion Excursion	la Fournache Pointe de l'Observatoire le Grand Chatelard	2390 3015 2817	12 1 2	1110 100 430	15	1640	1280	5-50
24	Trek	Termignon	1310			16	450	1530	4-10
25	Trek	Refuge Entre Deux Eaux	2130			14	1280	460	3-50
26	Trek Coach	Val d'Isère via Col de la Leisse Bourg-St-Maurice	1850			21	800	1080	5-00
				2761					5-30
27	Free day	Bourg-St-Maurice							
28	Coach Trek	Tignes la Grande Combe	1790 2600			5	880	70	2-30
29	Excursion	Aig. de la Grande Sassièrre from la Grande Combe	3747 2600			10	1200	1200	5-20
30	Trek Coach	Tignes St Ferréol	1790			5	70	880	1-15
31	Free day	St Ferréol > Annecy				Naismith's daily average:			4h-30
1 - 3 Aug	Coach:	St Hilaire > Zeebrugge > MGS							

Grand Totals:	Distance	Ascent	Descent	Time
(All 11½ days walking)	161 km 100 miles	11,000 m 36,100 ft	11,700 m 38,400 ft	53 hours
Daily average:	Distance	Ascent	Descent	Time
(excluding 30th)	14.2 km 8.9 miles	995 m 3260 ft	985 m 3230 ft	4h-45

A Trek is a walk from one campsite to the next (with full packs).

An Excursion is a return walk without full packs.

Sassièrre Summits are in bold.

2170 Heights of mountain campsites (and hut) in blue.

Chaumont Official campsites in green.

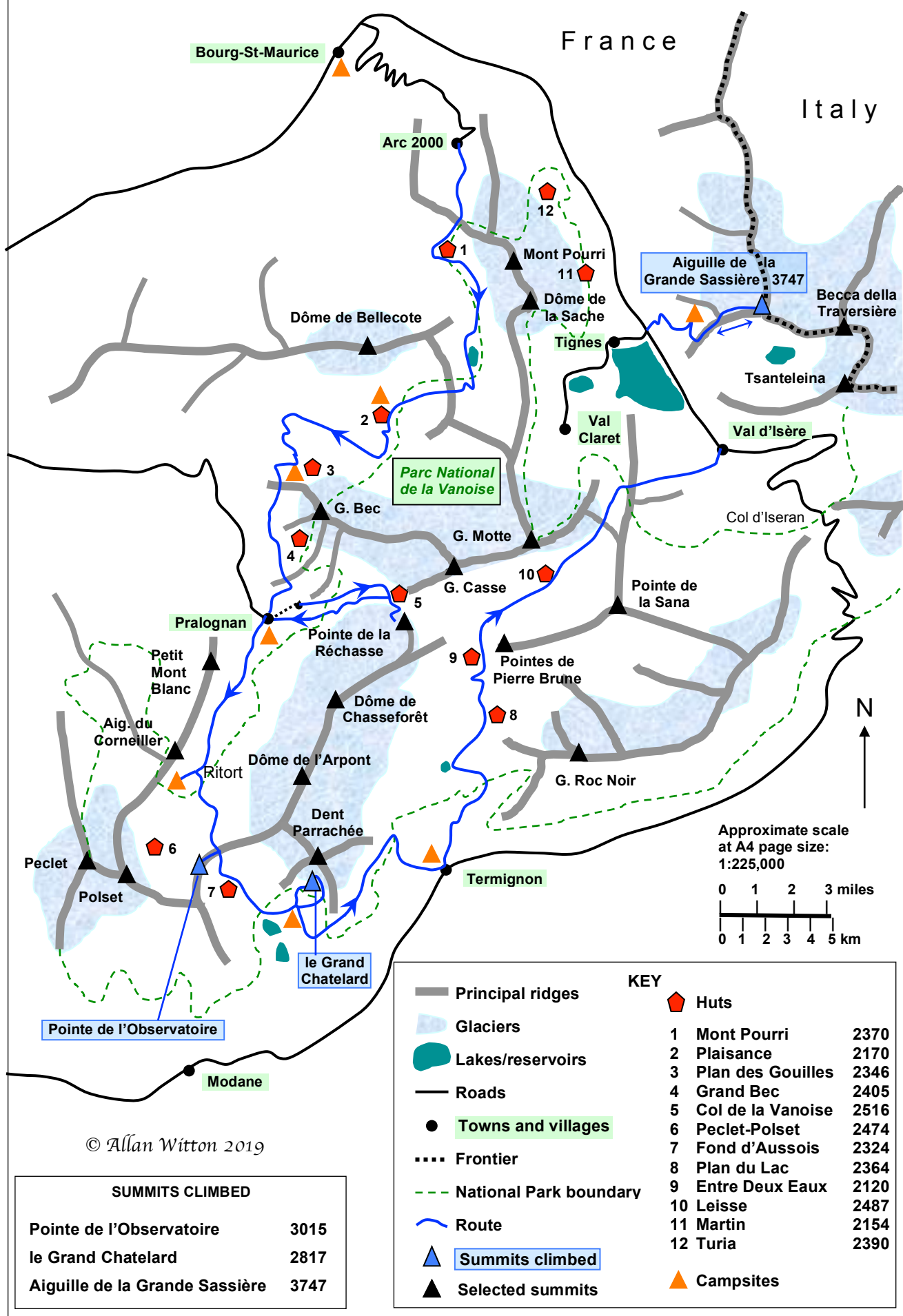
Deux Eaux Night in a mountain hut

Naismith

Times according to Naismith's Rule:

12 min/km and 10 metres/min for ascent.

SKETCH MAP OF THE ROUTE



© Allan Witton 2019

MAPS

All maps are Institut Géographique National (IGN)

	Scale	Sheet	
Carte Topographique	1:100,000	53	Grenoble - Mont Blanc

This covers the whole route and gives a good overall view of the area. It's fine for general route planning and logistics, but it lacks the fine detail of paths and contours.

Didier & Richard Edition	1:50,000	11	Vanoise
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This also covers the whole route and is an excellent map with sufficient detail that the 1:25,000 maps were hardly needed. It was the recommended map this year.

Carte Touristique	1:25,000	235	Vanoise Tarantaise
		236	Vanoise Grande Casse - Dent Parrachée
		237	Vanoise Haute Maurienne

These have excellent and accurate detail and are ideal for following the route when off waymarked paths and for planning mountain campsites.

GUIDES

Graians West	Robin Collomb	West Col	1967
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This is now very dated and it became apparent that the glaciers have changed significantly over the last 20 years. However it was useful for deciding which summits might be possible, and the route description for Grande Sassièrè ('climbed by all and sundry - little more than a long walk') proved to be accurate.

Walking the French Alps: GR5	Martin Collins	Cicerone	1984
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This was useful for general background about the area, but covered little of our route.



The whole party outside the Plan du Lac hut, with Grande Casse and Grande Motte on the skyline

Standing, left to right: Kevin Henry, Oliver Allmand-Smith, Gavin Lewis, Steven Rix, Matthew Crosby, Andrew Sambrook, Tony Kay, Tim Adshead, James Cornish, Mark Shaffer, Matthew Jacobs, Adrian Grundy, Robin Hall, Nigel Clowes, Mike Billingham, Howard Foxall, Martin Boulton, Dan Short, Richard Spencer, David Knappett, David Palin, Bill Souster, Mark Hesketh, Derek Stubbs

Kneeling, left to right: Allan Witton, Simon Duffy, Rob Carey, Gerry Leversha, Paul Elbourne, Graham Williams, Alistair Roberts, Steve Secker, Adrian Dobson, Julian Housby-Smith, Steve Robinson, Richard Mehlman, Simon Milling, Paul Atkins, Ian Bancroft, Richard Steel, Simon Edmonds, Nick Atherton, Dennis Hughes

ITINERARY

For each walking day a table of times taken (in hours and minutes) between points along the route is given, together with the cumulative time. These are times spent on the move and exclude stops. The time given in brackets is the total time for the day including stops. A 'leg' is normally about 50 minutes walking (followed by a break of about 10-15 minutes), though this varies if the walking is exceptionally hard or easy or if there is a particular objective such as a hut, stream or summit ahead. The distance walked, ascents and descents each day include any optional excursions.

Monday 14th July	Coach	MGS - Felixstowe
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We met at school at 1.30 p.m., loaded the coach and left at 3.00, and arrived at Felixstowe at 8.30, with a half-hour break at Watford Gap. There was time for an hour's amble along the prom before the short drive to the ferry terminal for the night crossing.

A peaceful Felixstowe to Zeebrugge crossing for some



Tuesday 15th July	Coach	Zeebrugge - Chaumont
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The route to Beaune via St-Quentin and Reims was thought to be as quick as by-passing Paris (Senlis-Maux-Melun).

Long queues at the border cost us almost an hour which meant we couldn't reach Dijon as intended in eight hours driving and so we stopped at Camping Municipal in Chaumont - convenient, uncrowded and cheap.

Wednesday 16th July	Coach	Bourg-St-Maurice
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We took the motorway via Lyon as far as Chambery. After a total of 7½ hours driving, we arrived at Camping le Versoyen, 1 km east of town at 6.00 p.m.

The site was full, but as our booking had been accepted there was room for us.

A motorway service stop



As Camping le Versoyen was the only site in the Vanoise which had replied to accept our booking we asked if it would be possible to camp there again ten days later if we couldn't find camping in Val d'Isère, and were told that they would fit us in. We had a food distribution, loaded the coach and left at 8.45, and reached a deserted Arc 2000 within the hour (with the coach radiator boiling over).



It was a fine, sunny day with some high cloud covering the tops of the higher peaks. At 10.15 we set off to follow the easy landrover track to Col de la Chal, reached in just over one leg.

The scenery is more pleasant than I had expected given the extensive skiing development all around, and even the summit of Mont Blanc, 30 km to the north, could be seen through layered cloud.

Setting off up the track with Aiguille Grive ahead



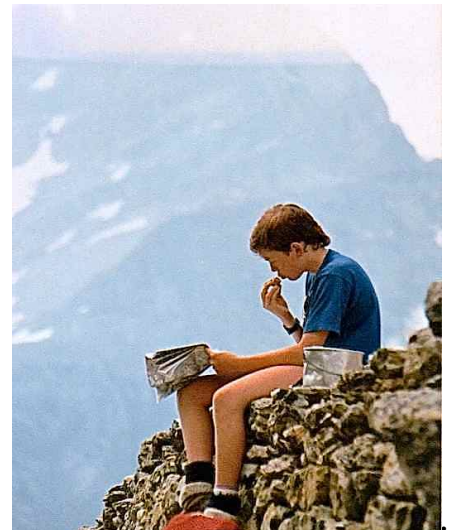
En route to Col de la Chal, with the snowy summit of Mont Blanc just visible above cloud

There's also a fine view south from the col, especially to cloud-wreathed Sommet de Bellecôte, and there seemed to be good camping possibilities by Lac Riondet, just below the col.



Sommet de Bellecôte from Col de la Chal

The good track continues over Crête des Lanchettes and down to the Mont Pourri hut where we arrived at 12.30 for an early lunch. The hut is typical of many of the more modern huts in the Vanoise established by the park authority (the PNV) - small, of wooden construction and lacking the character and sympathy with the landscape of the older, stone-built huts in Austria.



From the hut the view south extended beyond Lac de la Plagne to the flanks of Grande Motte rising into the cloud-base, and the lake seemed hardly an hour's walk away. In fact it took precisely two hours to the lake, but it was an easy walk in beautiful surroundings. We had to follow the path as it looped north to the footbridge as the stream near point 2092 was rather too deep to wade comfortably.

Towards Lac de la Plagne



From Arc 2000 to Pralognan is basically a three-day walk, but there aren't suitable camping places outside the National Park to divide it into roughly equal parts. So the intention had been to camp at Lac de la Plagne and make the first day the easiest, leaving a harder second day with two big climbs (over Col du Plan Séry and up to the Plan des Gouilles hut).

The lake is a delightful spot with big peaks towering all around and is deservedly popular as an objective for tourists walking up from Peisey-Nancroix (which I had considered as an alternative starting point for Trek).

It would have been a fine place for the first night's camp (with a herd of grazing cattle for company!), but as the party was walking very well and it was still only 3.45 we decided to push on to the Plaisance hut and make the second day easier.



We began the stiff climb to Col du Plan Séry at 4.15 and in one leg were just short of the top, with just a few slower walkers who needed more frequent rests following behind. The col is surprisingly broad with good camping possibilities (but for the National Park ban).



The climb to the col begins



Approaching Col du Plan Séry

Even though the walk down to the hut is easy (passing through an amazingly flat, clay-filled lake-bed), it was a rather tired party that straggled down to the hut between 6.40 and 7.00, for welcome refreshments at the hut.

The ground is rather sloping around the hut where most tents were pitched; there are flatter areas just west of the bridge over the stream (2184) about 200 m north-east of the hut.

By the time we had cooked dinner the hut had closed and the guardian gone back down to the valley! However, as it had been such a long first day we were all ready for an early night.



Times:	Arc 2000 > Mont Pourri hut	2-00	2-00	Distance:	21 km	Ascent:	1050 m		
	Lac de la Plagne	2-00	4-00					Descent:	980 m
	Plaisance hut	2-30	6-30 (8-30)						

Dennis left early to return by the same route to collect the coach, and we set off at 9.40 with an easier day in prospect. The cloud base had lowered overnight and it wasn't until we descended steeply from the hanging valley past the impressive Cascade de Py that we walked down out of the mist. What should have been good views of Grand Bec and its glaciers on the walk down were obscured by cloud and the tops remained hidden all day. The Laisonnay hut on the valley floor was closed so we had only a brief stop there and then continued down the valley track to reach the luxurious Bois hut for elevenses.

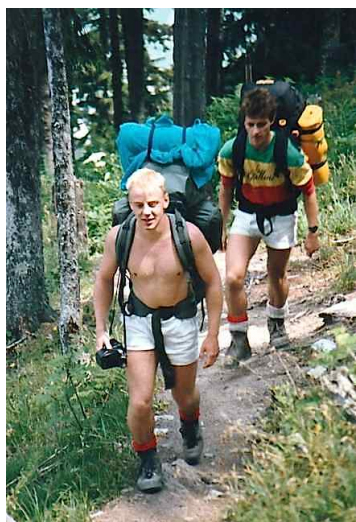


The Cascade de Py



Leg stop outside the closed Laisonnay hut

The day's climbing began at 12.00 as we followed the easily graded zig-zag path up the steep, wooded slopes of Grand Bec. After one leg we emerged from the woods and stopped for lunch, unfortunately without a stream for a water supply. The anticipated leisurely lunch stop was cut short by the threat of foul weather approaching from the west and we did have a few drops of rain as we climbed the rest of the way to the hut without a stop (75 minutes for the leaders and half an hour longer for the few who were feeling the effects of the previous day's long walk). It could have been worse; as we climbed, two separate thunderstorms passed to the north of us and left the peaks across the valley dusted with snow.



Nine tent groups found pitches on the rough bouldery ground near the hut, while three found much better conditions some 300 m to the west.

It rained hard from late afternoon so after dinner we spent a convivial evening in the hut, which was almost deserted apart from our party.

**Times:**

Laisonnay hut	55	55
Bois hut	30	1-25
Plan des Gouilles	2-25	3-50
		(5-30)

Distance: 9 km**Ascent:** 890 m**Descent:** 710 m

The weather had really closed in overnight and although the heavy rain and hail had stopped by 7.00 it was very cold with a layer of hail on the ground and visibility down to a few yards.

Refugees from the previous year's poor weather on Scottish Trek must have begun to wonder if the stories and photos of snowcapped peaks set against blue skies on Foreign Trek were really true. It certainly wasn't for this day, which was cold, wet and dreary throughout.



When we assembled at the hut for a 9.30 start there were two trekkers missing. It turned out that in walking the 300 m back to the hut they had missed it and on reaching the path had presumed they were above the hut and started walking down the path; they were in fact below the hut. So much for the navigation skills of Tent 3 who were to be leading for the day! This feat earned them the Silva Navigation Award at Trek Dinner in Annecy.

Shortly after leaving at 10.00 we picked up the faint path (shown only on the 1:25,000 map) which heads west towards Chalets de Meribel. The path seemed little used and was quite overgrown in places, and the occasional green way-markings on rocks were helpful. The combination of misty conditions, occasional drizzle and rain dripping off overgrowing bushes made a rather dreary couple of legs to Plan Fournier where we had lunch.



Lunch at Plan Fournier ...



We left at 1.00 and followed the track then path towards the Grand Bec hut. The original intention for this first section of the route had been to continue round Grand Bec to camp at the Col de la Vanoise. From there it would have been a straightforward climb to Pointe de la Réchasse before descending to Pralognan on the fourth day.

The camping ban would have meant stopping short of the col and camping near Chalets de la Glière, still within easy distance of Pointe de la Réchasse.

... with Ryvita and jam!

Given the poor weather we headed directly for Pralognan in the hope that a free day would give the weather the chance to clear up and we could do Pointe de la Réchasse as a whole-day excursion from there.

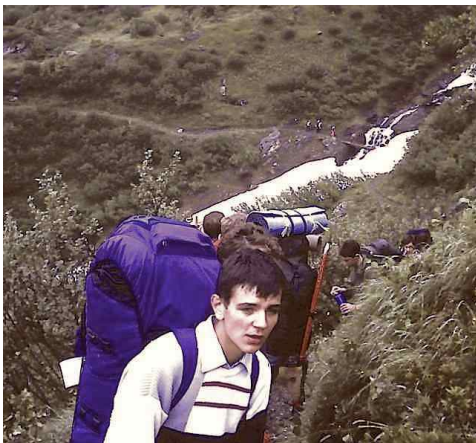
We took the path through woods below Pointe de la Vuzelle, where wayfinding wasn't easy as there are many more paths than marked on the 1:25,000 map. The impressive Cascade de la Vuzelle was the only view of anything we had all day.



A dreary, damp leg-stop



Cascade de la Vuzelle



It wasn't a pleasant climb to Mont Chevrier; the path was steep, boggy and overgrown and it was then raining quite hard.

A well-engineered, zig-zag path then led down, out of the cloud, to les Granges on the northern outskirts of Pralognan, where we arrived at 5.00, after four rather tedious legs from Plan Fournier.

Beginning the steep climb to Mont Chevrier

Dennis had already enquired at the campsite I had written to without any reply (le Chamois) to be told there was no room, but the adjacent site (Camping d'Isertan) accepted us.

The rain had stopped and the cloud was clearing by the time we were putting up the tents and had the food distribution, and there was the promise of a better day in the morning.

Food distribution at the Pralognan campsite



Times:	Plan Fournier	2-10	2-10	Distance:	16 km	Ascent:	950 m
	Cascade de la Vuzelle	1-50	4-00			Descent	1870 m
	Pralognan	2-00	5-50			(7-30)	

Early morning cloud soon dispersed to give a fine, warm day, Foreign Trek weather at last! Pralognan is a beautiful alpine village in a superb setting, retaining much of its old charm and not too developed for tourism. It's an ideal place for a free day, and we were lucky enough to coincide with the 'Festival of the Guides', with marching bands, street dancing in traditional costume, a climbing and rescue demonstration, helicopter rides up the valley and a firework display in the evening! There was also a colourful street market, so the village was bustling with activity.



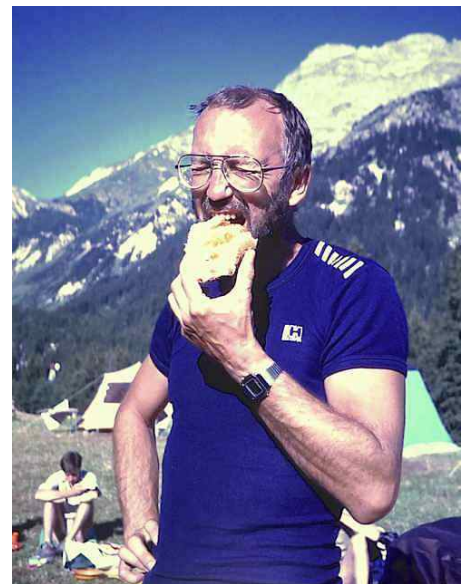
Rise and shine, it's a beautiful day!



Cloud clearing off Petit Mont Blanc to the south



Running repairs by Dr. Dobson



Petit Mont Blanc is limestone not snow



View of our 'organised' campsite

There were no takers for an optional afternoon excursion to Crête du Mont Charvet (described as a really interesting walk in a recent issue of 'Climber'). The lads were content to sort out their belongings, relax and enjoy the sunshine and the festivities. In the evening we organised kit for a prompt start the following morning.



The market with the ridge of Crête du Mont Charvet above



The cheese, ham and sausage stall



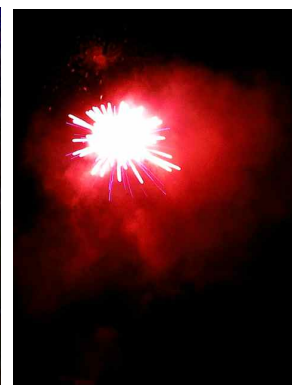
Staff lunch in town ...



... followed by a siesta



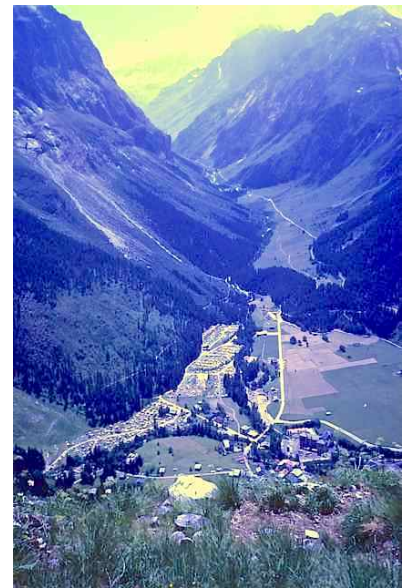
View east from camp with the green dome of le Moriond, Aiguille de la Vanoise to the left of it and the snowy top of Grande Casse to the right



We left the campsite at 8.00 to catch the first two cable cars of the morning to Mont Bochor, from where there's a marvellous view over Pralognan and up the Chavière valley.



At the top station of the cable car with le Marchet on the left, Petit Mont Blanc on the right, and the distant Peclet-Polset group



View over the campsite to the Chavière valley

We set off walking at 8.30, and with the greater part of the ascent already done it was an easy and delightful walk to the Col de la Vanoise hut (reached after two legs) with superb views of Aiguille de la Vanoise and Grande Casse on the way. Unfortunately Robin Hall and Mark were feeling unwell so they turned back after the first leg to walk down to camp.



The Vanoise glacier field comes into view



Grande Casse and the Grande Casse glacier ahead



The stepping stones across Lac des Vaches



Pointe de la Réchasse and the Réchasse glacier come into view as we approach the col

Without a cloud in the sky it was getting very hot so we were all liberally coated with suncream when we left the hut at 10.50.





Tent 2

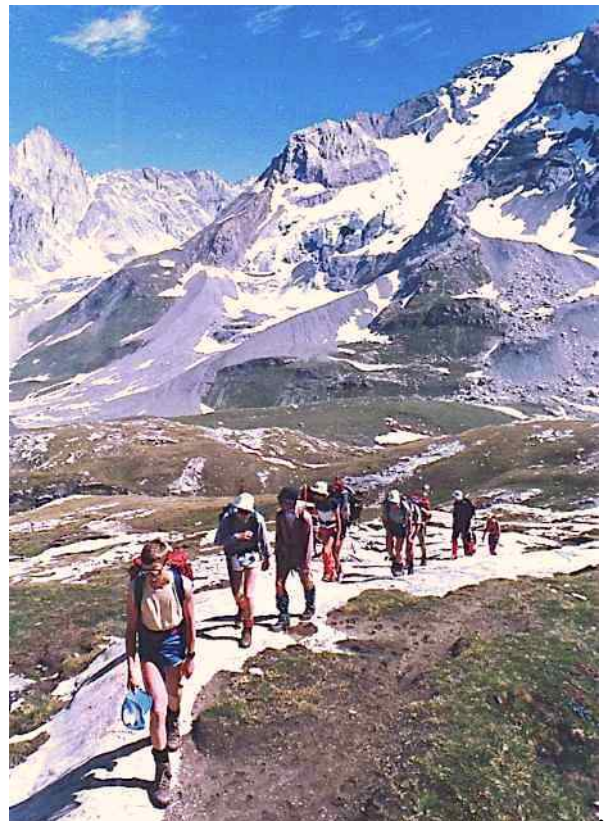


Pointe de la Réchasse is the dark peak on the left skyline

An easy and fairly obvious path soon branches left off the main Arcelin valley path, and rises, initially over rock and grass hillocks then over rock terraces and scree, generally south to point 2774 and then south-east towards the northern edge of the Réchasse glacier (about 200 m east of point 2930).

Some cairns indicate the line of the intermittent path and it is accurately represented on the 1:25,000 map.

There is in fact a choice of cairned routes; one goes more directly from point 2774 towards point 3044.



The beginning of the ascent from the hut



Leg-stop just below the Réchasse glacier with Grande Casse and Grande Motte



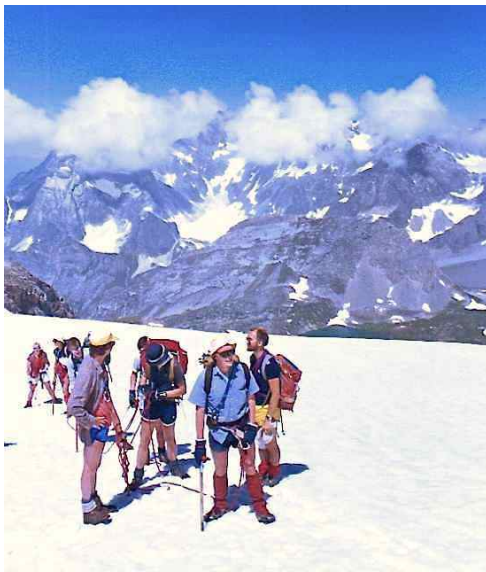
We put on the new chest slings and karabiners ready for roping up later and took a gently rising line slightly south of west across the snow at the foot of the Réchasse glacier.

After about 300 m we roped up and turned south up the steepening glacier (there was evidence of hidden crevasses) to reach the west end of the ridge (marked as point 3044 on the map) without difficulty at 1.30.



It is a superb spot with splendid views all around, especially of Grande Casse and south across the Vanoise glacier field.

It had taken longer than anticipated from the hut (2 hours on the move plus 45 minutes for a stop and roping up), and although it was still fine, low cloud was developing rapidly and it looked as if a storm might be brewing.



Although Collomb describes the rest of the ascent as easy enough, the summit of a 10,000 foot Alpine peak is no place to be when a storm breaks so we had only a 15 minute photo stop then headed back for the hut.

We took the more direct line down to point 2774 (which wasn't easy due to much loose debris) and arrived back at the hut at 2.45.

The thickening cloud didn't develop into a storm so we had a long stop outside the hut having a late lunch. We set off at 3.30 and to make the walk a loop we returned down the Arcelin valley path back to camp.

Descent from the Réchasse glacier

After passing through the almost-dry bed of Lac des Assiettes the Arcelin valley path descends steeply (1000 m in 4 km), mostly on a good path with some rocky stretches.

There were good close-up views of Grand Marchet and the Aiguilles de l'Arcelin, and a fine prospect of Dents de la Portetta across the valley. It made an interesting variation on our approach route.



The Aiguilles de l'Arcelin from the path leading down the Arcelin valley

The party straggled out along the easy path and we ambled down in small groups to reach the campsite at about 5.15 without an 'official' leg stop. Lower down the path took us past the impressive Cascade de la Fraiche, where some of us stopped for a paddle.



It had been a long and demanding walk, and it was a pity we didn't make the final summit, but it had been a most enjoyable and satisfying day nonetheless. It's a highly recommended excursion and must be one of the most varied and spectacular from a valley base anywhere in the Alps.

Times:	Vanoise hut	2-00	2-00	Distance:	20 km	Ascent	1170 m
	Réchasse ridge	2-00	4-00				
	Vanoise hut	1-00	5-00				
	Pralognan	1-45	6-45				
				(9-15)			
				Descent	1620 m		

Any remaining thoughts of risking a night or two camped in some secluded corner of the National Park had by this time been abandoned. By each footpath entering the Park there was a sign prohibiting camping, dogs, leaving litter, picking flowers and disturbing the wildlife. These prohibitions were obviously meant to be taken seriously for there was also a list of fines for each transgression; for camping it was £40; whether this was per camp, per tent or per person we didn't intend to find out. Consequently this left us with the problem of the 35 km crossing through the centre of the Park between Termignon and Val d'Isère.

The original intention from Pralognan had been to camp near the Péclet-Polset hut and then attempt Dôme de Polset as a day excursion before going over Col de Chavière and round to Termignon. The camping ban meant that we would have to stop short of the hut and camp by the park boundary at Ritort.

With an easy day ahead we were in no hurry to leave Pralognan. A leisurely breakfast and visits to the shops and bank delayed us until 11.30 by which time it was hot and we were glad to be walking through woods for the first leg.

The route up the Chavière valley rises gently all the way to Ritort, making it an easy and pleasant walk, with fine views back down the valley to Grand Bec and improving panoramas east to the Vanoise Glacier. We took the path or track alternatives to the road up the lower valley



Grand Bec with Mont Bochor the wooded hill below it



Tent 6 with Roc de la Valette



Ritort is just a collection of farm buildings in the valley bottom where the path divides for the steep climbs to Col de Chavière and Col d'Aussois.

We arrived there at 3.15 (after 3 legs) to find a herd of cows in the valley bottom and the farmer busy with a mobile milking machine, so we continued and set up 'camp' by the path junction 600 m further along the Chavière path.



It didn't matter that there isn't much level ground there as most people bivvied without even bothering to pitch their tents. If the weather stayed fine, we thought that perhaps a compulsory bivvy for all en route from Termignon to Val d'Isère could be the solution to the camping ban.



Our sloping, grassy hillside, with Ritort in the valley bottom, the Vanoise Glacier, with Tent 4 relaxing

Our grassy hillside was a pleasant spot to relax in the afternoon sunshine, and there was a good view of the Péclet-Polset group, with the glacier approach to Dôme de Polset clearly visible.

An excursion to Dôme de Polset would have been a very long day from our lower campsite rather than as initially planned from the Péclet-Polset hut, with a distance of 17 km and 1300 m of ascent.

Also, viewed through Derek's monocular the glacier crossing looked steep and a little tricky, so we decided to give it a miss.



Tent 3



The Péclet-Polset group



The idea of a late afternoon excursion to the hut raised little enthusiasm, as by then lethargy had set in for the day.

Times:		
Pralognan - Ritort	2-40	(3-45)
Distance:	9 km	
Ascent:	630 m	
Descent:	30 m	

Wednesday 23rd July	Trek	la Fournache	2390
	Excursions	Pointe de l'Observatoire	3015
		le Grand Chatelard	2817

With having to start the day from much lower down than the Péclet-Polset hut, we decided to take the shorter route over Col d'Aussois rather than over Col de Chavière, and go up Pointe de l'Observatoire on the way

Although Robin Hall had managed the previous day's easy walk well enough, he still wasn't feeling fully fit, so he and Adrian set off early to take the initial climb at an easy pace, and the rest of us followed on at 8.20. It was a fine day with some high cloud and quite a fresh westerly wind.



Leg-stop, with a view back to Col Rouge and Aiguille des Corneilletts on the right



Everyone managed the stiff climb to Col d'Aussois (950 m in 4 km) very well and by 11.30 we had reached the top. The path is well waymarked and the areas of snow we had to cross just below the col caused no difficulty.

Dennis left us at the path junction (2202) to return via the Vallette hut to collect the coach from Pralognan and meet us at Termignon. He reported that it was an interesting high-level route.

Approaching Col d'Aussois, with the Vanoise glacier beyond

We left packs on the broad col and made the easy ascent of Pointe de l'Observatoire. The western cliffs dropping to the Chavière valley make it quite a dramatic summit and there are good views of the Vanoise glaciers and the Péclet-Polset group.

The route up Dôme de Polset didn't look any easier from that vantage point. We were back at the col in half an hour, and that included 15 minutes on the summit.

The party on the summit





On Pointe de l'Obsrevatoire



The Péclet-Polset group

A strong wind was blowing and it was quite cold so we walked down from the col for half an hour to find some shelter for lunch. An easy path leads down the boulder-strewn southern slopes and there the prominent summit pyramid of Dent Parrachée came into view, and it was to remain the dominant feature for the following two days.

Another half hour's walk brought us to the Fond d'Aussois hut for a coffee then the path led easily round to la Fournache with fine views over the Amont and Aval reservoirs below.

A quick recce above the main path confirmed what the map suggested: ideal camping on a small, grassy plateau beside the Fournache stream and just south-east of a ruined chapel, where we arrived at 3.20. As it was still only mid-afternoon we had considered continuing for another leg or two round towards Termignon but there didn't seem anywhere suitable to camp further on.



Descent from Col d'Aussois



Ideal camping, with Pointe de Labby (3518) on the left, Dent Parrachée (3697) on the right and Grand Chatelard inbetween

It was the best campsite we'd had so far - soft, level pastures for easy pitching, a profusion of flowers and a fine view of Dent Parrachée with the cliffs of Grand Chatelard in the middle distance.



The flowers are mostly buttercups, common orchids and globeflowers

Inspection of the map suggested it might be possible to climb Grand Chatelard by way of its more gentle northern slopes, so after leisurely afternoon tea Simon, myself and eight enthusiasts set off at 5.00 to find out.

Carrying minimal equipment we made rapid progress towards the western flanks of the peak (sighting our only chamois of this Trek on the way) and we found the cliffs on the north-west side breached by a steep scree gully. A scramble up loose scree brought us to the summit plateau without too much difficulty, and it was well worth the effort. With the evening sun lighting up the peaks, the views of Dent Parrachée and down to camp were superb.



On Grand Chatelard. Standing: Allan Witton, Kevin Henry, Mark Billingham, Adrian Grundy, Martin Boulton, Simon Duffy
In front: Graham Williams, Paul Elbourne, Steve Robinson, Ian Bancroft



View down to camp (above and left of centre) with the Amont and Aval reservoirs beyond

We found a rather easier way off, northwards to the col which connects it to the main ridge, and for variety returned easily down the eastern side to arrive back in camp for dinner at 6.30. It is a splendid little excursion for a small group.



Return to camp



Tent 5

We thought we might get a visit from a man we presumed was a local farmer who had been watching us from the buildings to the north-west, so we took the initiative and went across to see him.

It turned out that he was a well-to-do businessman who had bought the old farm buildings as a holiday retreat and he was very interested to hear about our Trek.

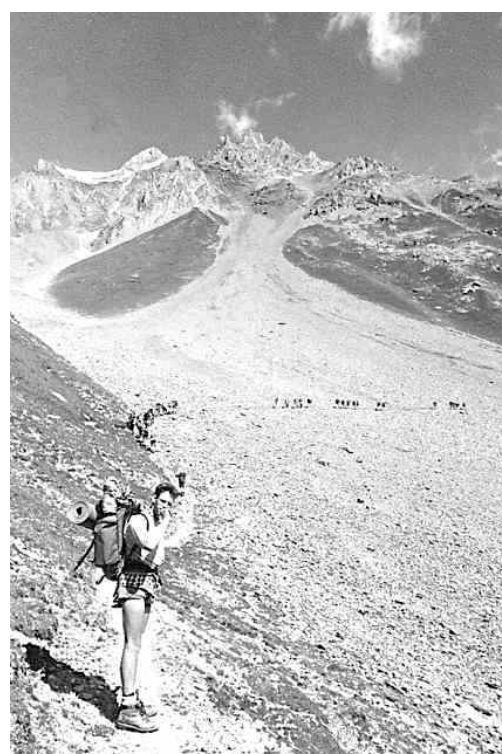


Times:	Col d'Aussois	2-40	2-40	Distance: 15 km	Ascent: 1640 m Descent: 1280 m
	Exc. Pte. de l'Observatoire	15	2-55		
	Fond d'Aussois hut	55	3-50		
	la Fournache	50	4-40		
	le Grand Chatelard	40	5-20		
	la Fournache	30	5-50		
			(8-30)		

It was another bright and breezy day as we struck camp at 8.40 to return to the GR5 path which circuits the southern flanks of Dent Parrachée. Unusually for an alpine path it is remarkably level for almost all the 9 km to Montafia, and it gave us a chance to stride out and enjoy the scenery. The only significant climb is at La Turra (200 m) where we chose the short cut path marked on the map as difficult; it is a steep climb but without any difficulty whatsoever.



Miles of level balcony path round the southern grassy flanks of Dent Parrachée

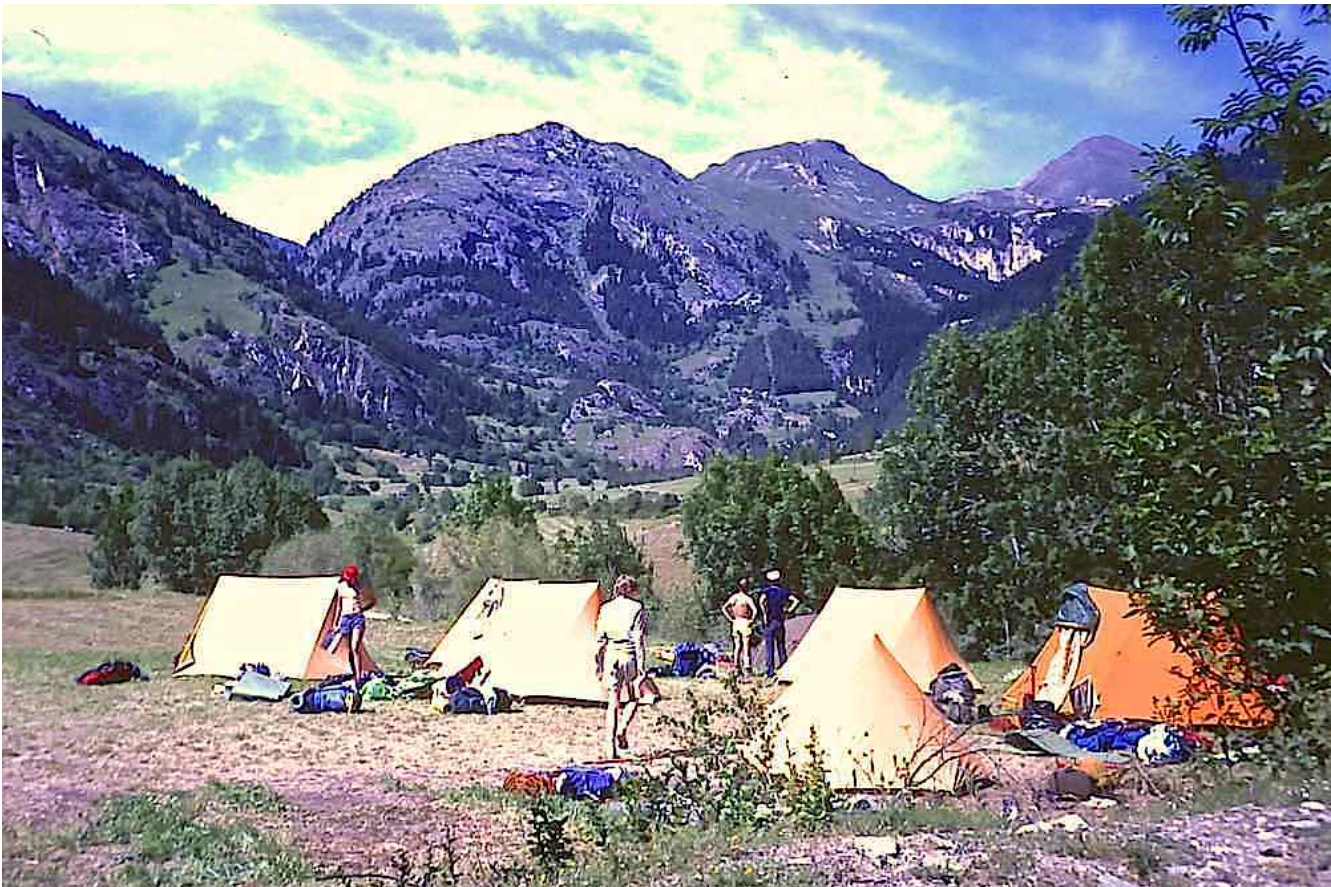


Dent Parrachée from the south-east

The only problem of the morning was that most of the streams were dry and as it was a warm day it was quite a thirsty walk. As it was such a fine day and an easy walk we ignored the short cut path down the Ruisseau de Bonne Nuit and continued to Montafia, with more fine views of Dent Parrachée, before descending.

The morning's walk had been four easy legs and at 1.30 we arrived down at the track leading into Termignon, where we had lunch in a field on the outskirts. Staff then left the party sunbathing and set off to investigate camping possibilities.

There had been no reply to the letter sent to the campsite in Termignon, and when we met Dennis in the village he had already enquired there, only to find it full. However, we were told it was permissible to camp 'wild' in the field where we had had lunch and the farmer would collect the fee the following morning.



Our camp in the corner of a farmer's field

Termignon is a quiet, rural village, and after a food distribution from the coach and setting up camp we spent a pleasant afternoon just ambling around.

We also enquired at the 'Inspection du Park' about the capacities of the Entre Deux Eaux and Leisse huts should we need to use them.

The original intention had been to make the 35 km crossing to Val d'Isère in three days, camping at Lac Ferran and Lac de la Leisse en route. This was now revised to a two-day crossing, staying at one of the huts if the weather wasn't suitable for a bivvy.



Tent 6

Times:	la Turra	1-20	1-20	Distance:	16 km	Ascent:	450 m
	Montafia	2-00	3-20			Descent:	1530 m
	Termignon	50	4-10		(4-50)		

Unusually for such a low altitude (1310 m) there was a very heavy frost and even the sleeping bags of those bivviing were crusted white. The temperature remained well below zero until the sun's rays hit camp and it then developed into a beautiful, cloudless day (ideal for a compulsory bivvy!).

During breakfast the farmer turned up to collect payment and charged us £20, an extortionate sum for the use of a field with no facilities.

Frost-encrusted rucksack



By 9.30 the tents, ropes, ice-axes and crampons had been loaded onto the coach and we set off along the easy track to le Villard. From there a path ascends steeply on the north bank of the Chavière stream, then crosses it beneath an impressive waterfall, and there were marvelous views of Dent Parrachée as we followed the good path towards Lac Blanc.



View back down towards Termignon



Dent Parrachée from the east

The short diversion to Lac Blanc is well worth it as the path avoids the road to the Plan du Lac hut, and the lake itself is an idyllic spot.

It was still only mid-day when we arrived and by then we had done most of the ascent, so we had a long stop, sunbathing, swimming in the lake and taking in the superb scenery, particularly the view over to Dent Parrachée and the Vanoise glacier.

The Vanoise Glacier, Dôme de l'Arpont and Dôme de Chasseforêt



There's also an impressive view down into the Doron Gorge from just west of the lake.

The view east is less impressive, Pointe du Grand Vallon just looks a huge pile of rubble from that angle.

Pointe de la Réchasse and Grande Casse peeping over the intervening ridge



At 1.15 we reluctantly re-packed our belongings and followed the path to the large car park at Bellecombe, from where we took the GR5 path rather than the track to the Plan du Lac hut.

We had another hour's stop for lunch outside the hut.

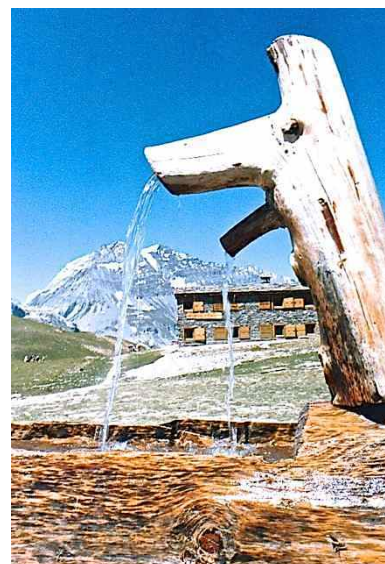
Leaving Lac Blanc



On the GR5 path heading for the Plan du Lac hut, with Grande Casse on the left, Grande Motte on the right and the nearer rocky Pointes de Pierre Brune



The Plan du Lac hut



Departure from the hut was delayed further while everyone took a ‘Trek Photo’ of the whole party just west of the hut with the huge walls of Grande Casse as a backdrop (see page 8).

It was then a short and easy walk to the Entre Deux Eaux hut, an old rendered stone building in a superb setting. Dennis left us just before the hut to return to Termignon via the Arpont hut, which he reported to be another interesting and varied route for the future. By that time it was 4.15 and a strong breeze had sprung up, bringing some cloud over from the west and suggesting the possibility of rain.

While we were sitting by the hut contemplating the best course of action we were approached by the hut warden.

Apparently word had been sent up about our possible arrival, and his friendly welcome and offer to accommodate the whole party (at a discount) was too tempting to decline and we decided to take up his offer and stay for the night.

Grande Casse above the Entre-deux-Eaux hut



Most were accommodated in the black hole of the basement dormitories (10 to a bunk) with the younger lads and some staff in a rather more well-appointed loft.

We cooked dinner in relays in a small dining room, and washed up in the cattle trough outside (with the cows disposing of any leftovers!). It would have been interesting to have had a compulsory bivvy, but staying at the hut was quite an experience too.

‘Left-over peach-flavoured Angel Whirl?’



Distant Grand Roc Noir (3582) on the left and Pointe de Lanserlia (2909) in the evening twilight

Times:	Lac Blanc	2-00	2-00	Distance:	14 km	Ascent:	1280 m
	Plan du Lac hut	1-00	3-00			Descent:	460 m
	Entre Deux Eaux hut	30	3-50 (6-45)				

The previous evening's cloud hadn't brought any rain and it was another beautifully clear morning as we left the hut at 8.40. The path up the Leisse valley is a delightful walk, gaining height gradually as it passes beneath the huge cliffs of Grande Casse and Grande Motte, and we passed some ideal bivvy spots on the way.



Grande Casse above



Leg-stop at a perfect bivvy site, with pointe de la Réchasse just visible

We reached the Leisse hut comfortably in 1½ legs. The hut is one of the small, wooden, PNV type, with an additional building under construction to increase its capacity. Most of us took the half-hour break outside the hut to savour the fine views. (*My slide of the view over the hut and down the valley is such poor quality I have substituted a digital image of exactly the same view in exactly the same conditions taken in 2019 when the Old Trekkers stayed at the hut.*)



View back down the Leisse valley, with Pointes de Pierre Brune, Pointe de la Réchasse and Grande Casse



The large un-named lake at Plan des Nettes came as a delightful surprise; snow-fringed and mirror-smooth, it gave perfect reflections of the peaks all around.

Beyond the higher Lac des Nettes the ground becomes a rugged mixture of boulders, moraine, scree and snow patches, though the path remains good and easy to follow.

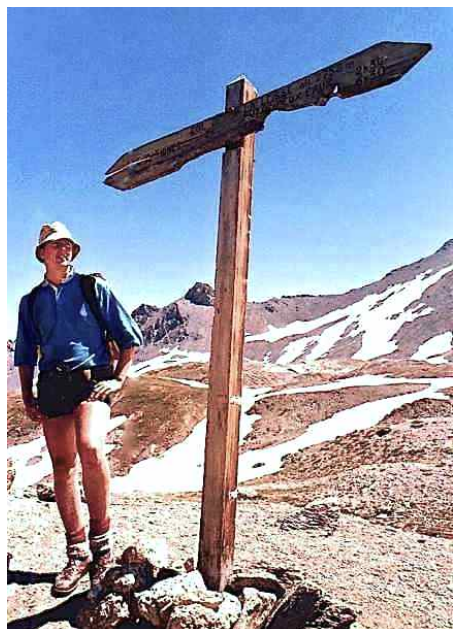


Views back over the lake at Plan des Nettes with the cliffs of Pointes de Pierre Brune and the distant Pointe de la Réchasse

As we approached Col de la Leisse the impressive eastern glacier of Grande Motte, dotted with summer skiers, came into view, and there were fine views from the col itself.



The lower edge of the huge Grande Motte glacier comes into view



On Col de la Leisse ...



... with a view back to Grande Motte ...



... and ahead to cloud-topped Dôme de la Sache and just beyond it the summit of Mont Pourri

After two legs from the Leisse hut we were just short of Col de Fresse and stopped for lunch. There was a small group of tents pitched nearby (just outside the Park boundary) and apart from a single tent just below Ritort this was the only time we'd seen anyone else mountain camping on the whole route.

Tent 9 enjoying lunch



A small group nursing sore knees left first to cross Col de Fresse and descend to Val d'Isère slowly and gently via a skiing 'green run' route to the north of Rocher de Belvedere. The main party took a shorter route over Collet du Grand Pré which actually took longer. The bulldozed ski slopes and multitude of tracks made navigation difficult and progress slow until we found the track down into Combe de Santon and hence down to Val d'Isère.



Descent to Val d'Isère

After so much fine mountain scenery the town seemed totally incongruous, looking more like Kirkby New Town dropped in the Alps. No doubt it looks more attractive under a blanket of winter snow. We met the 'advance' party at the coach and as they had already been turned down at the campsite (even though there was clearly plenty of room) we drove back to Camping le Versoyen in Bourg-St-Maurice and a welcome chance for a shower after 5 days.



We had planned to arrive at Val d'Isère with just two walking days left, and the two alternative endings were either to attempt Aiguille de la Grande Sassièr (if the weather allowed) or to continue from Tignes, along the east side of Mont Pourri via the Martin and Turia huts to complete the loop to Arc 2000. As we had omitted the Polset excursion, and had walked from Termignon to Val d'Isère in two days instead of three we were left with four walking days, enough to climb Sassièr and then return to Arc 2000 via the Martin hut. The weather looked settled enough to try Sassièr and it was thought that anything after that would be an anti-climax, so we opted for an extra free day, with Sassièr as a finalé.

Times:	Leisse hut	1-25	1-25	Distance:	21 km	Ascent:	800 m
	Col de Fresse	1-50	3-15			Descent	1080 m
	Val d'Isère	1-45	5-00			(7-00)	

Sunday 27th July	Free Day	Bourg-St-Maurice
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Although the setting of Bourg-St-Maurice in the broad Isère valley isn't as charmingly alpine as Pralognan, the town has plenty of shops, an interesting old centre and there's enough to do. It was a sunny day and with temperatures well into the nineties most lads spent the afternoon in the nearby swimming pool. During the evening a violent thunderstorm developed over the Bellecôte ridge to the south-west, with a phenomenal lightning display. We escaped with hardly a drop of rain but wondered if this change in the weather would put the Sassièr excursion in jeopardy.

Monday 28th July	Trek	Tignes - la Grande Combe	2600
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The storm had cleared overnight leaving just light cloud and what seemed like settled weather. We left at 9.45 and drove back up the valley to arrive at the Tignes barrage at 10.30. Unloading the coach and distributing the ropes, chest slings, ice axes, crampons together with three day's food, plus a return drive to Val d'Isère to collect post, delayed departure until 12.15.

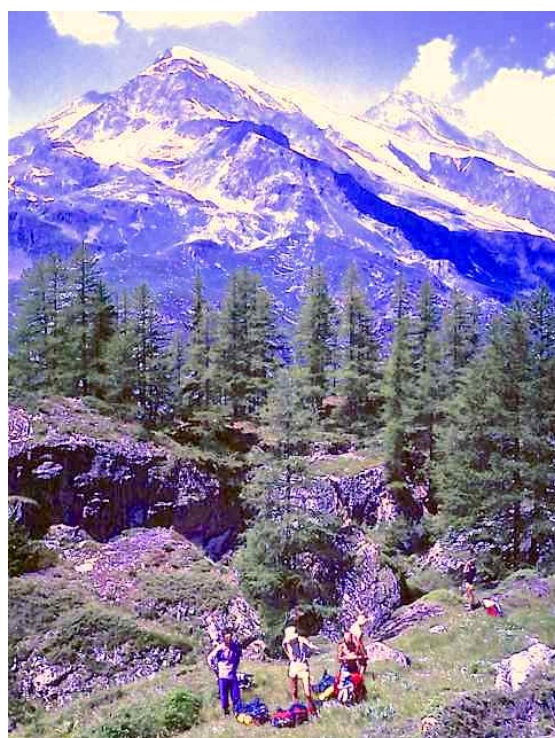


Sorting out gear at the coach - tents, sleeping bags, cooking gear, food, slings, crampons, ice axes and full winter walking gear

The start of the path leaving the road and ascending the north bank of the Chevril stream was overgrown and not easy to find.

It very soon makes a sharp left turn before ascending through woods where it wasn't waymarked and was very hard to follow. Navigation involved quite a bit of guesswork until we reached the much clearer, waymarked path coming up from le Villaret, which leads easily up to the small saddle at Digue where we had lunch.

Dôme de la Sache and Mont Pourri





Lunch with a view over Lac de Chevril towards Grande Motte

We left the main path leading to le Chargeur to follow traces of a path heading east up a dry stream-bed. The path marked on the map leading north into the Grande Combe wasn't evident on the ground, so we climbed grass slopes and over the shoulder near 2653 to drop down into the head of the combe. On the way we spotted what looked like a promising way up through the rock outcrops, boulders and scree onto the west facing slopes leading to the end of Sassièrè's south-west ridge (3005).

We arrived at 4.00 to find wide, flat pastures with a clear stream running through, perfect for a mountain campsite. To the east the headwall obscures the peak of Sassièrè; to the west snow-capped Dôme de la Sache dominates the skyline.

View into the head of the combe



View out of the combe to Dôme de la Sache

It was a beautiful late afternoon and we had plenty of time for relaxing, and some ball games.



Spot the ball

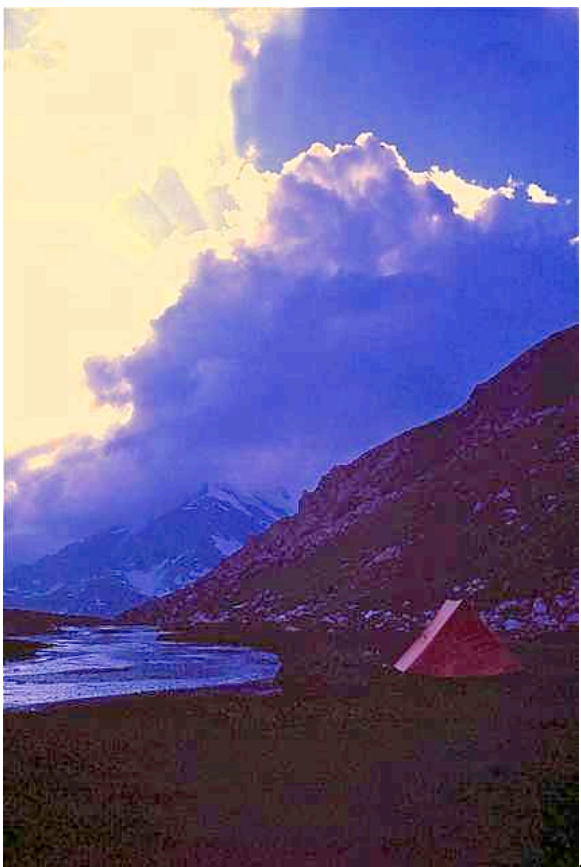


Tent 6 cook dinner in the warm sunshine



Tent 8 entertain Adrian to dinner

In the evening rope-groups were allocated, and we had roping-up and crampon fitting practice, and instruction on the use of ice-axes. An equipment check revealed two lads without dark glasses and in view of the large amount of snow to be crossed the following day it was decided they should remain in camp.



Fair weather cloud billowing over Dôme de la Sache



Crampon practice on a steep snow bank near camp as it gets dark

Times:	Tignes - Grande Combe	2-30	(3-40)	Distance: 5 km	Ascent: 880 m	Descent: 70 m
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Camp was roused at 5 a.m., just before first light, and a check at 5.30 that everyone was up and about revealed Oliver Allmand-Smith frying smoked bacon brought up from Bourg-St-Maurice for breakfast - such initiative! At 6.00 we had assembled for departure just as the sun's rays were filtering through the layers of morning mist. After a final equipment check we left at 6.15 and climbed past point 2653 to the gap in the rock outcrops (with a prominent finger) we'd seen the previous day.



Starting off up the west ridge, with D me de la Sache and Mont Pourri in cloud



View down to Tignes and lac de Chevril

This turned out to be the correct way up the west flank of the ridge, for we picked up a fairly well-trodden and cairned path zig-zagging relentlessly up on to the ridge at 3005. As far as the junction of ar tes (3313) the ridge is broad and easy to follow. It drops slightly before a fairly steep final climb which involves a rock step that required considerable care. Just before gaining the glacier to the north of the ridge there was a rather awkward traverse for a few metres over a hard-packed snow-patch, but again not really difficult.



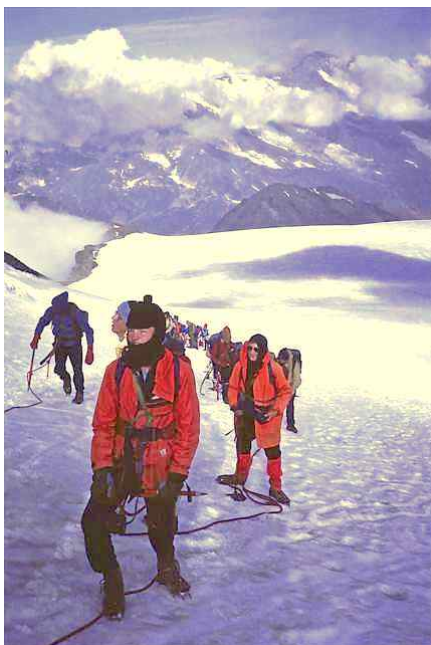
Roping up at the start of the gradual ascent up the Sassi re glacier

The weather was settled, with layered cloud obscuring the summit. At that point we put on chest slings and crampons, roped up and set off in five rope-groups up the gently rising slope of the glacier keeping about 50 metres from its southern edge. There were several others walking the route; we had passed a man who had set out from le Saut (300 m lower than our camp) and there was a small group which paralleled our route keeping to the edge of the glacier all the way. In a dry season it may be possible to ascend all the way without going onto the glacier at all.

It was easy going on the crisp snow until the gradient steepened with a slightly awkward exit from the glacier up a steep snow bank onto the shale slopes which form the west ridge of the final summit pyramid. At 3500 m this was higher than I had climbed before and for the first time I felt the effects of the thinner atmosphere (or was it just advancing years!). A deep, well-worn groove in the loose shale then zig-zags up the final 250 m, 40  slope with no difficulty except for the effort involved.



View back to Dôme de la Sache and Mont Pourri



Our party on the steep snow ascent below, as another party descends the shale path

Groups arrived on the summit between 10.15 and 10.45, and the thin cloud which had veiled it during most of the ascent had then dispersed providing us with a superb panorama of peaks and glaciers for many miles around, though with cloud topping many of the peaks . It certainly felt every bit of its 12,300 ft height, with the Gliairetta and Sassièrè glaciers seeming a huge distance below us.



On the summit with Mont Pourri in cloud

View east down to the Gliairetta glacier

The dark pointed peak above and left of centre is Becca della Traversièrè (3337 m, 10,949 ft) which the Old Trekkers climbed in 2012 from the Italian side

Just beyond that is Granta Parei, and in the very top left is just half of the summit glacier of Gran Paradiso



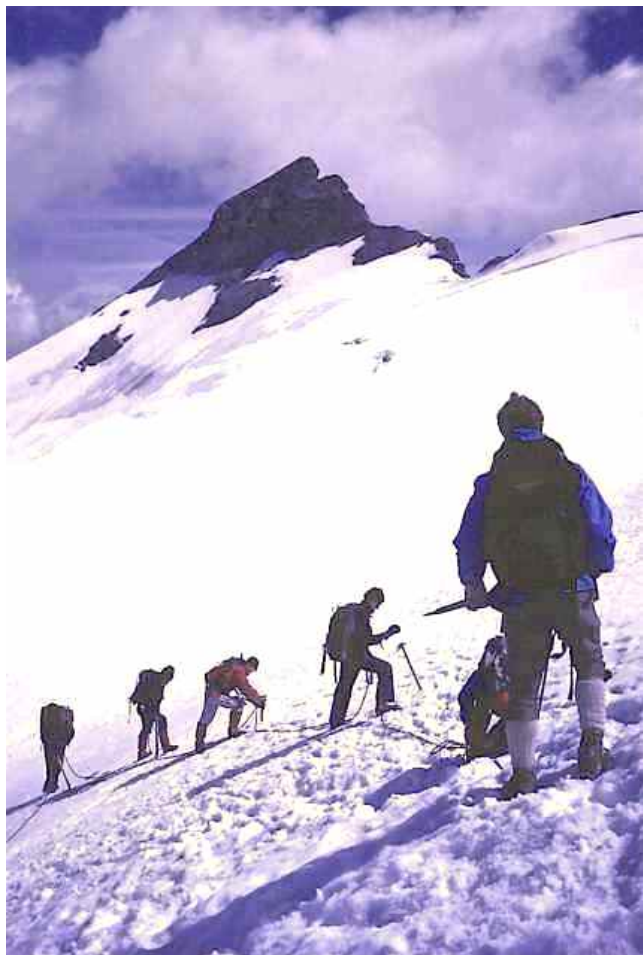
We left the summit in rope-groups between 11.00 and 11.15 and returned to camp by the same route.



Going down the deep, well-worn groove in the loose shale



The steep snow descent onto the glacier



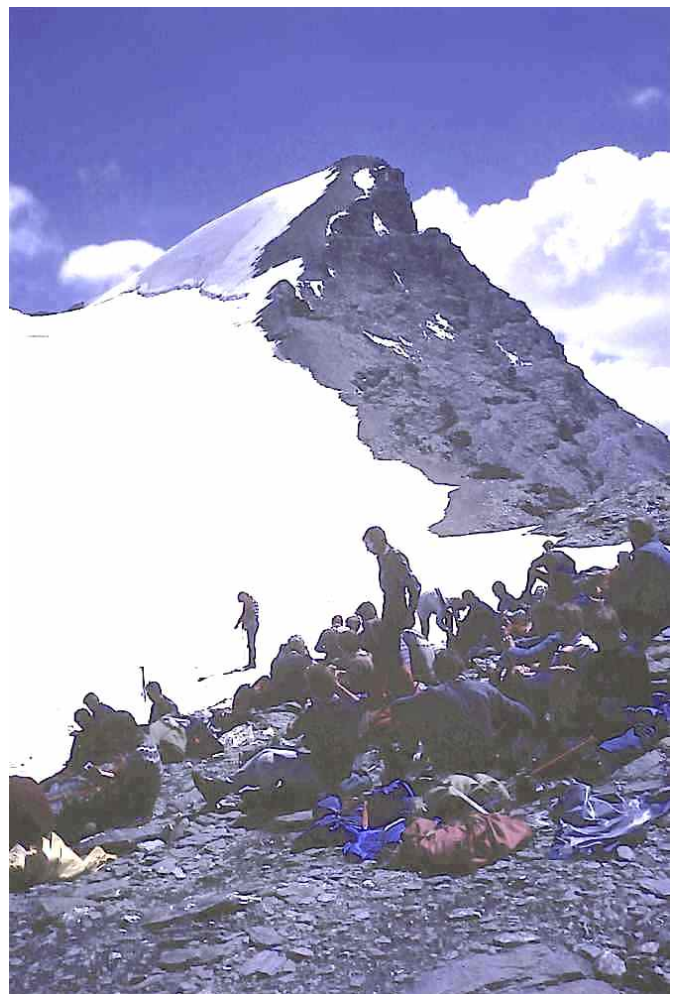


Easy walking down the Sassi re glacier

With the weather now clear, the retrospective view from the glacier of the route up the summit pyramid looked formidably steep and it was probably just as well we hadn't been able to see it on the way up.



Retrospective view over the glacier to the summit cone



Off the snow



Tsanteleina on the left, Lac de la Sassiére below

We were all off the glacier at point 3313 by 12.15 and after un-roping left for the ridge walk down to camp at 12.50. The rock step down onto the south-west ridge was rather more difficult in descent and although we didn't need to use a rope it did spread the party out by 20 minutes, and we then made our way easily down to camp in small groups, arriving between 1.50 and 2.10.



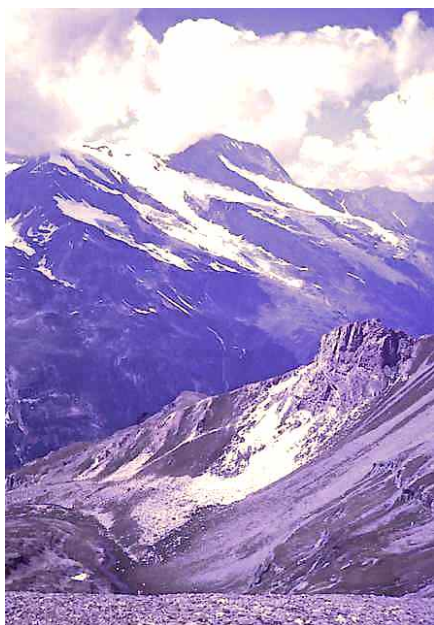
Above the rock step with a view down to the Grande Combe on the right and distant Pointe de la Sana



Descending the rock step



View back up the broad west ridge, to the junction of arêtes (3313 on the left) and Grande Sassiére on the right



View down into the Grande Combe



We rejected the option of striking camp and walking down to the coach in the afternoon as this would have left us with another free day, and it would have made it rather late to find camping near Annecy if we had driven there. So the pleasant, warm afternoon was spent mostly sunbathing and playing ice-axe cricket.





Ice-axe cricket, with the igloo builders busy on the far snowfield

However one group, under the direction of Chief Engineers Duffy and Boulton, expended considerably more energy hewing out blocks of snow from a snowbank just south of camp to construct an igloo. It was completed by the evening and Simon and Martin spent the night inside it.



The igloo engineers completed their task just before dark

Tim Adshead, Adrian Grundy, Martin Boulton, Simon Duffy, Nigel Clowes, Matthew Crosbie, Steve Robinson and Nick Atherton

Times:	Arête junction	2-00	2-00	Distance:	10 km	Ascent:	1200 m
	Grande Sassiére	1-20	3-20			Descent:	1200 m
	Arête junction	1-00	4-20				
	Camp	1-00	5-20	(7-45)			

Wednesday 30th July	Trek Coach	Tignes St. Ferreol
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We struck camp at 9.00, returned by the same route to arrive down by 10.20 with just a 5 minute stop, and we then had the coach loaded and away within half an hour. We thought that the campsites around Annecy would be very busy, so we stopped short of the lake at 1.15 and were accepted at the first site we tried, St. Ferréol.

The site was inexpensive, had plenty of room and good facilities, the only drawback being the stony ground which made it difficult getting the tent pegs in securely. After lunch and sorting out gear there was ample time for an amble round the pleasant village which boasts a working water-powered sawmill.

Times:	Tignes	1-15	(1-20)	Distance: 5 km	Ascent: 70 m	Descent: 880 m
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Thursday 31st July	Free Day	Annecy
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We took the coach to Annecy and it was a beautiful day to look round this delightful old town. We booked Trek Dinner at the Café Hotel de Ville and returned there in the evening after sprucing ourselves up back at the site, including for one person, a Trek first, wearing a tie!



Perhaps the young man in a tie(!) is destined for high office?

It was a fine, warm evening and we were offered tables inside the restaurant or on the pavement outside. Fortunately we chose inside as during the meal there was a violent thunderstorm with rain bouncing a metre high from the pavement outside. The meal and speeches were very good and we were still in high spirits as Dennis drove us back to the campsite, with community singing to one of his George Formby tapes.

We arrived back to find several of the tents had been flattened by the storm and there was equipment and kit scattered everywhere. It was rather late by then to sort out the chaos, so those without tents slept in the washroom, under the coach or simply bivvied.

Friday 1st August	Coach	Courtenay
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Fortunately there was no permanent damage to the tents or anybody's gear and we managed to sort it out and pack within an hour and left at 9.15. We had a hypermarket stop at Annecy and arrived at Camping St. Hilaire near Courtenay (by the A6 south of Paris) at 8.00 after a 7-hour drive.

Saturday 2nd August	Coach	Zeebrugge
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We set off at 9.30, by-passed Paris (Melun - Meaux - Senlis) and arrived in Bruges at 5.00 in a driving time of 6 hours. After cooking dinner in the coach park there was plenty of time for some sight-seeing before the half-hour drive to Zeebrugge for the midnight sailing.

Sunday 3rd August	Coach	Felixstowe - MGS
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We docked at 6 a.m., cleared customs within an hour and reached Manchester by early afternoon.

SUMMARY AND COMMENTS

Of this year's staff only Derek had walked in the Vanoise before, and he had passed through only briefly from Modane to Val d'Isère on the way to Gran Paradiso on the 1973 Trek. There are no detailed records of that Trek or any previous Trek through the area, so this year's Trek had an element of exploration.

The Vanoise

I was hugely impressed by the Vanoise and can easily see why it was made the first National Park in France.

Features which make it ideal as a trekking area are:

- there are some magnificent major mountains and striking glaciers;
- there are a number of worthwhile peaks accessible to walkers;
- all the cols linking the main valleys are technically easy;
- there is a very good network of waymarked paths;
- there are plenty of huts;
- the flora is rich and varied.

Camping in the National Park

In response to my letter to the PNV park authority I was expecting to hear that camping was allowed when more than an hour's walk from a road, as was the case in the Pyrenees National Park in 1982; however the response indicated that there was strictly no camping anywhere in the Park. Given this strict ban and the numerous huts, both CAF and PNV, the area would be very suitable for a hut-to-hut tour, which would also give access to the Rocheure valley (using the Femma hut) and the areas to the west of the Chavière valley (using the Lacs Merlet hut). With no hut on the approach to Sassièrè, its ascent would be a very long one without camping in the Grand Combe.

[2019 note. On the Vanoise hut-to-hut Trek in 1991 there were PNV park authority notices in the huts indicating that camping in designated areas close to at least some of the of the huts within the National Park was now permitted on payment of a fee. This remained the case when the Old Trekkers did hutting Treks in the Vanoise in 2017 and 2019.]

Finding valley campsites remains a problem, in spite of attempts to book them in advance. The only site which replied and accepted our booking was Bourg-St-Maurice; I had no reply from Pralognan, Termignon and Val d'Isère.

Route

In spite of several revisions to the planned itinerary before we set off and further modifications as we progressed, what emerged in the end was an excellent route through a spectacular mountain area, and Grande Sassièrè was a splendid finalé to a most enjoyable and satisfying route.

With half of our walking days consisting of five or more hours walking carrying full rucksacks, and daily averages of almost 9 miles and 1000 m of ascent, it was quite a demanding route. It is credit to the willingness and determination of this year's group that our average walking time was not much longer than Naismith's.

Weather

After very dismal walking on the 2nd and 3rd days, we were fortunate to have ideal trekking weather for the rest of the route.

Party

The party was excellent throughout. From the inexperienced fourth-formers to the experienced sixth-formers and Old Mancunians the bonhomie was excellent.

My slight disappointment at not getting to the top of more peaks was more than made up for by the superb ascent of Aiguille de la Grande Sassièrè. It is by far the highest mountain I have ever climbed and as far as I can deduce second only to Klein Matterhorn (3883 m in 1975) on Trek's all time list. Delving back into the Trek Log Book to find other high peaks that Trek has climbed has prompted me to produce the list of Trek High Points which is included in the appendices. This list goes back only as far as the Trek Log Book, 1974.

My sincere thanks go to Gerry, Derek, Bill, Adrian, Simon and Mark for their help and support both in planning the Trek and on Trek itself, and for their very good company, and to Dennis for his many hours of driving and unfailing cooperation throughout. Particular thanks to Gerry, Derek and Simon, without whose guidance we wouldn't have attempted Aiguille de la Grande Sassièrè.

Allan Witton

November 1986

Stocked up with food and warm clothing the 1986 Foreign Trek set off for the Vanoise region of France on July 14th for 3 weeks. After 3 days of travel and a memorable six-hour ferry crossing from Folkestone to Zeebrugge, we reached Arc 2000, our starting point.

The next three days were at times arduous for inexperienced trekkers, but Mr Dobson's knowledge of wild flowers and the thoughts of a warm meal of dried food at the next camp and of Mr Duffy making another igloo, kept us going.

The walking became easier as the time passed and we tackled mountains such as La Pointe de l'Observation, La Pointe de la Rechasse. Surely the highlight of the holiday was climbing the 12,490 feet high Grand Sassi re - the highest trek had been for 12 years. After an early morning call from Mr Stubbs, and armed with ice axes and crampons, we set off from base camp at around 5 a.m., before the glaciers started melting. We spent four hours altogether on the ice, and the views on top were magnificent - Mont Blanc, Italy and much more.

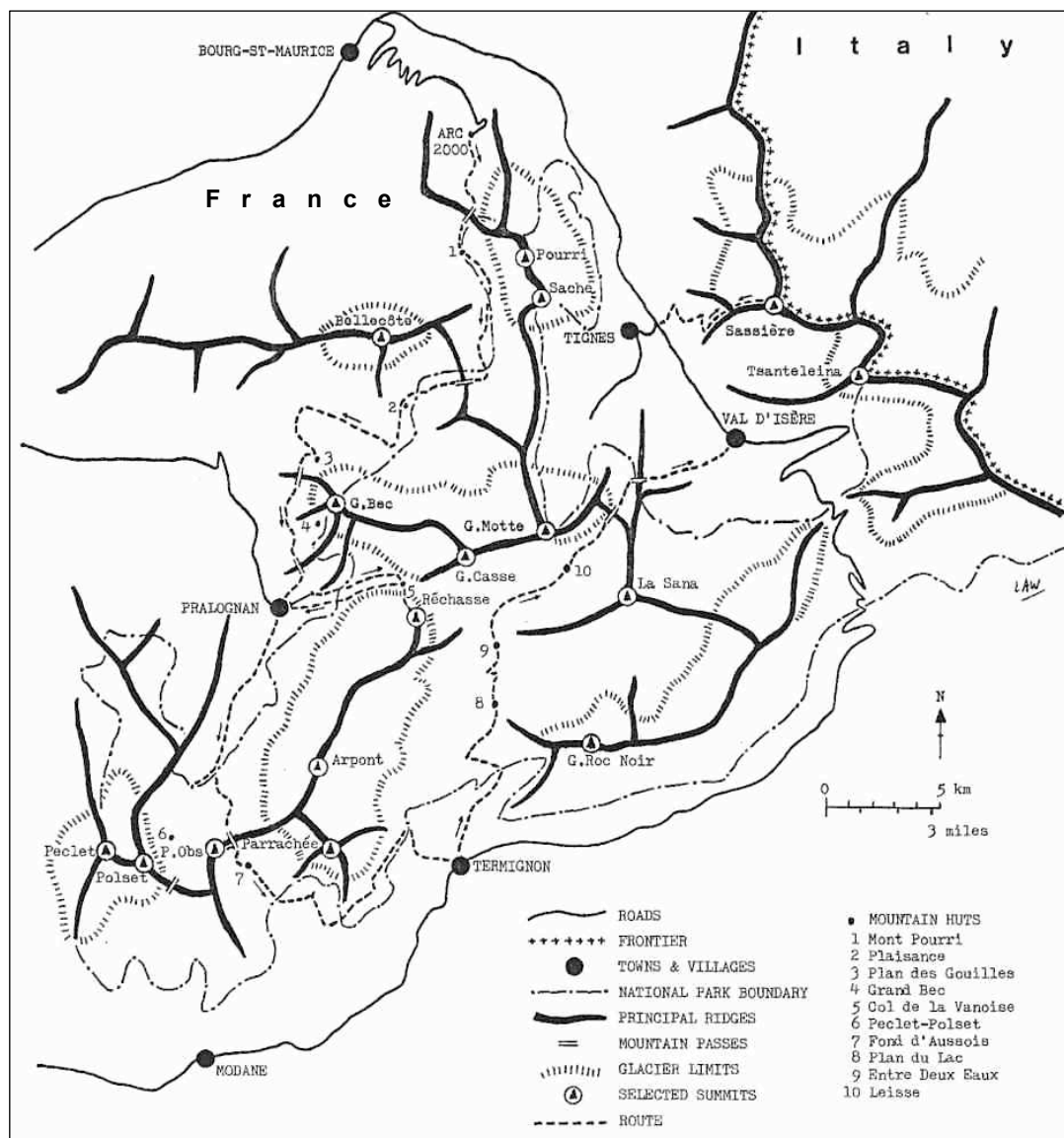
A plate of steak and chips was welcomed by all (except vegan Mr Dobson who tucked into his salad) at the Trek Dinner in a restaurant by lake Annecy. Dr Leversha, who has now sadly left us made a heart rending speech about his time at MGS. Thanks must go to Mr Witton for his splendid organisation and planning once again, on his 6th Trek, and to all other masters who made it such a memorable holiday.

ARTICLE FOR THE SCHOOL MAGAZINE ULULA

This year the Ulula article consisted of just a selection of photographs, all of which are included in this log.

ORIGINAL SKETCH MAP

This is a scan of the pen-and-ink sketch map provided for the boys before departure. I drew the original on an A3 sheet and photo-reduced it to A4. Digital map drawing technology wasn't available in 1986.



2019 NOTE

Prompted by the fact that Aiguille de la Grande Sassi re is by far the highest alpine summit I have climbed, I wondered how it compared with the other big mountains that Trek has climbed. This led me to research some other aspects of Trek history and hence produce the text on this page and the lists on the following three pages for the original 1986 Trek Log.

As part of the Trekking Centenary celebrations in 2004 a printed Centenary Brochure was produced which gives a comprehensive account of the first 100 year history of Trekking at MGS. It has a section listing all points above 3000 m that Trek has reached between 1974 and 2004. There is also a section on the ascent of summits from the earliest days as recorded in Ulula accounts. In 2015 a digital version of the Trekking Centenary Brochure was produced in order to make it more widely available.

TREKKING AT MGS

MGS has a tradition of trekking which stretches back to the 1904 route marches from Alderley and Grasmere Camps and, with the exception of breaks during the wars, there has been at least one Trek almost every year since. From the earliest days trekking was distinguished from camping, a tradition established at the same time, by the fact that trekking involved carrying camping equipment from one site to the next.

The first Foreign Trek was to Germany in 1910 under the leadership of High Master J. L. Paton. From that year until 1939 the venue of Treks switched between home and abroad, though always within western Europe. There have from time to time been other expeditions to more remote areas. Ray Davies led climbing expeditions to Iceland in 1968 and 1972 and to Norway in each of the other five years from 1967 to 1973. Geographers did fieldwork in Yugoslavia in 1976 and Iran in 1968 and 1970, and there must have been other adventurous expeditions over the years.

Foreign Trek became an annual event in 1947, and an annual Scottish Trek was added by Ian Bailey in 1956. Since 1947 Foreign Trek had always been to the Alps until the first Pyrenean Trek in 1978. The Pyrenees were visited again in 1982 and are now established on Trek's list of venues. In 1984 there were two smaller expeditions each attempting something Trek had not done before. A party of 23 trekked for 11 days across the volcanic wastes of south-central Iceland, and a party of 13 explored the 'via ferrata' systems of the Brenta Dolomites.

With the advent of modern lightweight camping equipment and dehydrated foods, the routes of traditional back-packing treks have moved higher into the mountains, and it is now typical to spend at least half the nights camping in the wilds at around 2000 - 2500 metres (7000 - 8000 feet).

AIMS OF TREK

Foreign Trek differs from many expeditions in that it doesn't rely on scientific fieldwork as a justification for its expeditions (regular Biology and Geography field trips cater for this need). The aim is simply to walk through, and live in, wild, mountainous and sometimes remote areas for the 'pleasure' of doing just that. The nature of trekking and the demands made on expedition members, both physical and in terms of such things as good organisation, teamwork and self-reliance, make it an educational experience in the broadest sense.

EXPEDITION REPORTS

With the exception of articles in the school magazine ULULA, there seem to be no written records of the Treks before 1974, when Chris Little instituted 'Trek Log' in which successive leaders have recorded details of the expeditions they organised.

From 1983 each year's log has been produced as a separate word-processed expedition report, but still with the original dual aims of being a practical help to future leaders taking Trek to the same area, and as an historical record more detailed than Ulula. In these reports the itinerary has been essentially a brief, factual account, concentrating mainly on the route taken, times and conditions.

RECENT FOREIGN TREKS 1974-1986

This list gives outline details of recent Foreign Treks from the start of Trek Log in 1974 to date.
For the full list of Treks from 1904 to 2004 see the Trekking Centenary Brochure.

YEAR	COUNTRY	AREA	LEADER	STAFF	TREKKERS	COST
1986	France	Vanoise	Witton	Lerversha, Stubbs, Dobson, Souster, Duffy, Hesketh	35	£200
1985	Austria	Zillertal	Witton	Lerversha, Willson, Dobson, Souster, Adams	37	£185
1984	Iceland		Witton/ Willson	Souster, Adams, Green, Orrell	17	£250
	Italy	Dolomites/ Ortler	Lerversha	Stubbs, Bridges	10	£190
1983	France/ Switzerland	Mont Blanc - Grand Combin	Witton	Lerversha, Stubbs, Dobson, Souster Brierley, Kennedy	38	£180
1982	France	Pyrenees	Witton	Lerversha, Stubbs, Dobson, Souster, Willson	37	£170
1981	Austria	Ost Tirol	Lerversha	Stubbs, Witton, Dobson, Souster,	38	£150
1980	Italy	Dolomites	Lerversha/ (Little	Witton Hamment - Aylsbury GS)	16 (+15)	£150
1979	Switzerland	Bernese Oberland	Little	Lerversha, Gomersall	19	£150
1978	France/Spain	Pyrenees	Walker	Little, Peacock, Stubbs	20	£125
1977	Austria	Tirol	Little	Peacock, Buckley, Walker, Hancock,	21	£120
1976	Italy	Marmolada	Little	Stubbs, Buckley, Walker	25	£100
1975	Switzerland/ Italy	Monte Rosa	Peacock	Stubbs, Geoghegan, Buckley, Little	30	£79
1974	France/Italy Switzerland	Mont Blanc - Matterhorn	Wylde	Stubbs, Geoghegan, Buckley, Poole, Bowyer, Peacock	40	£80

SUMMARY WALKING STATISTICS FOR FOREIGN TREKS 1982 - 1986

Year	Area	Full Walking Days	Total distance walked		Total height Climbed		Daily averages for full walking days				
			km	Miles	Metres	Feet	Distance		Ascent		Walking Time
							km	Miles	Metres	Feet	
1986	Vanoise	11	161	100	11,000	36,100	14	8.9	995	3260	4h-45
1985	Zillertal	12	149	93	10,100	33,100	12	7.6	840	2760	4h-45
1984	Iceland	10	182	114	-	-	18	11.5	-	-	-
The only extended climb was 3950 ft (1200 m) to the summit of Hekla											
1983	Mont Blanc - Grand Combin	11	140	87	11,500	37,600	13	8.1	1050	3430	4h-50
1982	Pyrenees	12	137	86	10,400	34,100	11	7.1	870	2840	4h-45

TREK HIGH POINTS BY YEAR 1974 - 1986

According to accounts in Ulula, 1933 was the first year when Trek climbed a mountain higher than the 'metric Munro' line of 3000 m (9843 ft), and that was Piz Boè (3152) in the Dolomites. However Ulula accounts vary greatly in the detail they include and many make no mention of the peaks climbed. Not until Chris Little instituted Trek Log in 1974 were detailed records made. See the Centenary Brochure for more details.

I drew up this a list of the highest points reached by Foreign Trek since detailed records were started with Trek Log in 1974. Many other summits and high passes have been climbed but only those over 3000 metres are listed, except when a Trek didn't reach this height in which case the highest point reached that year is given.

For a list from 1974 to 2004 see the Trekking Centenary Brochure.

		Summits		Other High Points	
1986	VANOISE	Grande Sassièrè	3747		
		Pointe de l'Observatoire	3015	Pointe de la Réchasse (West Ridge)	3044
1985	ZILLERTAL	Schwarzenstein	3369		
		Schönbichlerhorn	3134		
		Richter Spitz	3052		
1984	ICELAND	Hekla	1491		
	DOLOMITES/ORTLER	Mont Confinale	3370	Mont Cevedale (NW Glacier)	~3600
1983	MONT BLANC - GRAND COMBIN	Mont Rouge du Giétro	3439		
		Mont Avril	3347		
		Pointe d'Orny	3270		
		Grand Tavé	3158		
1982	PYRENEES	Vignemale	3298		
		Pic Perdiguère	3222		
		Le Taillon	3144		
		Pic de Néouvielle	3091		
1981	EAST TIROL	Kasteneck	2836		
1980	DOLOMITES	Tofana di Rozes	3224		
		La Varella	3055		
1979	BERNESE OBERLAND	Wildstrubel	3244	Les Diablerets (NE Ridge)	3109
1978	PYRENEES	Vignemale	3298	Mont Perdido (NW Ridge)	~3050
		Le Taillon	3144		
		Grande Fache	3005		
1977	TIROL	Hohe Geige	3395	Riffeljoch	3100
		Schau fel Spitz	3333	Ölgrubenjoch	3095
1976	MARMOLADA	Piz Boè	3152		
1975	MONTE ROSA	Klein Matterhorn	3883	Gnifetti Hut	3611
		Mettelhorn	3406	Britannia Hut	3029
1974	CHAMONIX - ZERMATT			Col du Mont Rouge	3325
				Theodulpass	3290
				Hornli Hut	3260
				Col Collon	3087
				Col de Valcournera	3066

1986 High Points in blue

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ORGANISATION

Travel

Dennis Hughes' 52 seat coach with spare seats removed to stack rucksacks inside.

Felixstowe - Zeebrugge overnight channel crossing. Although Zeebrugge is further north, it's still possible to get to the Vanoise in 3 days. It was the cheapest crossing and it saved a night's camping.

Training

All boys were given comprehensive advice sheets in safety, campcraft and cooking, together with a copy of the excellent BMC booklet Safety on Mountains, together with a copy of the Provisional Itinerary and a sketch map of our proposed route. This was to encourage them to take an interest in the route we were walking and to be able to identify features and mountains.

On the Training walk rucksacks with full personal equipment were carried so we could check boys' kit.

The Practice camp involved all kit apart from snow gear. All boys performed well.

Training Walk

Thursday 27th March

24 boys

Meet: Piccadilly > Train to Glossop station

L A Witton, A P Dobson

Route: Glossop - Shelf Brook - Doctor's Gate - Bleaklow Head -
Bramah Edge - Glossop (About 11 miles)

S J Duffy

Practice Camp

Saturday 28th June - Sunday 29th June

Travel by Minibus. Because of the capacity limit of two minibuses Tents 1 and 2 (all experienced Foreign Trekkers) were excused.

27 boys

28th Grasmere - Heron Pike - Fairfield - Seat Sandal - Grasmere barn (about 10 miles)

Staff?

29th Grasmere barn - Helm Crag - Gibson Knott - High Raise, Pavey Ark - Blea Rigg -
Grasmere (about 9 miles)

Equipment

Tents

Vango Force 10: Eight Mark 5 and a Mark 4 for the boys. Staff used a Mark 4 with nylon flysheet plus two 2-man lightweight tents belonging to Simon and Derek

No new tents were bought. A new Mark 5 and two Mark 4 flysheets (one nylon) were bought.

Stoves, Billies and Water Carriers

Camping Gaz S 200. Six new ones were bought.

12 new large billies were bought as these degrade quicker than the inner ones.

Per Tent Group: 2 Camping Gaz stoves, one set of 3 nesting aluminium billies and a polythene water carrier.

Spare gaz cartridges were available as needed from the coach.

Ropes, Ice-axes and Crampons

We carried ice-axes for all and just 2 ropes for the whole of the trekking route.

For the Réchasse and Sassièrre excursions we used 5 ropes, chest slings, ice-axes and new full-boot walking crampons. The new crampons were bought to replace the instep crampons used previously, which proved to be not very satisfactory.

Kit list

Essentially the same as last year. There is a copy in the file.

Discount

Discount of 10% for boys arranged with Estcourts (15% on the two Open evenings). The major Trek purchases were from Cotswold Camping, whose discount prices were lower.

Food

The established practice of buying food in catering packs from Cash and Carry outlets and pre-packing the dried mountain food has been honed to perfection. Small bags of individual ingredients were bagged into whole meals labeled with the date, and these packed into date-labelled boxes, along with any tinned foods required for that distribution, and loaded into the coach in reverse chronological order. It's labour-intensive, but well worth it for the convenience of food distributions on Trek. Fresh bread and milk were bought when camped in the valleys. Allowances were given in Annecy and for breakfast on the return ferry.

First aid

Organised by Adrian. We carried two comprehensive kits between the staff in case we decided to split the party. Apart from just the usual minor blisters there were no problems.

Recruiting

Plans for the Trek were announced at Trek Reunion in the November, followed by a display of slides, maps and photographs in the Exhibition area until the end of term. Recruiting went well.

Insurance

It appears from Trek Logs that the School Journey Policy with the Commercial Union was first taken out in 1975, when the special endorsement was negotiated to the effect that 'trekking' was not considered to be 'mountaineering' in the exceptions to the policy, providing that ropes are not used for climbing, but only as a safety measure. See the 1975 Log. Trek has taken out this policy each year since.

Cover for this year with the CU (including rescue and £4000 of equipment cover) was about £7 per head, whereas a West Mercia policy (recommended by the AAC) was about £17 per head to include rescue, with equipment cover extra.

Given the nature of this year's planned route, I decided to check that we were properly and fully covered by the CU policy with the endorsement. In an interview with the manager at the CU Stockport Branch I made the following points.

1. For almost the entire route we would be on waymarked paths.
 2. We would make some summit ascents which were not strictly on 'paths' and may involve scrambling and crossing snowfields and glaciers. These ascents are along recognised walking routes and do not involve 'climbing'. I quoted the text about the ascents of Pointe de la Réchasse and Grande Sassièrre from the Collomb Griens West Guide.
 3. Crossing glaciers we will wear crampons and be roped together for safety.
- It was readily agreed that our 'trekking' is classed as 'walking' as far as the policy is concerned, so the policy was issued.

I expressed concern that the previously-negotiated endorsement stated '...'trekking' along recognized *footpaths*' and it was agreed to amend this to '...'trekking' along recognized *walking routes*'. The clause relating to 'emergency recovery to the nearest hospital' (first included for Iceland in 1984) was also included. I also pointed out that three of the party were Old Boys, now at university, and as with Nick Plimmer in 1984 (who had left school and been in employment for a year), it was in order to include them on the policy.

ACCOUNTS

EXPENDITURE	See Note	1985	1986
		Cost/head (37)	Cost/head (36)
Coach		£2,800.00	£2,800.00
Ferry		£539.50	£1,061.50
Other travel	[1]	£392.00	£243.96
Food	[2]	£1,759.94	£1,886.58
Equipment	[3]	£536.36	£1,073.18
Camping	[4]	£570.05	£449.30
Insurance		£157.00	£268.24
Maps		£58.52	£18.76
Guides	[5]	£30.30	£4.50
Postage, phone etc.		£45.58	£24.84
Gaz		£104.83	£112.32
Photographic	[6]	£73.94	£66.85
First aid		£6.52	£36.05
Currency/bank charges		£30.10	£13.00
Prizes		£42.60	£33.52
Subscriptions	[7]	£31.00	£18.00
		£7,178.24	£8,110.60
For Notes see following page		£194.01	£225.29
		TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£8,110.60
INCOME			
Charges	34 @ £200	£6,800.00	
	2 @ £150	£300.00	
			£7,100.00
Other	Deposit Account Interest	£27.13	
	NSB Interest	£303.32	
	Tent hire	£40.00	
	Equipment hire	£48.74	
	From MAC (crampon payment)	£350.00	
			£769.19
		TOTAL INCOME	£7,869.19
		LOSS FOR 1986	-£241.41
BALANCE at 6/1/86	Current Account	£107.28	
	Deposit Account	£161.72	
	NSB	£1,245.32	
			£1,514.32
	LOSS for 1986		-£241.41
NET BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD			£1,272.91
BALANCE at 13/1/87	Current Account	£45.92	
	Deposit Account	£184.35	
	NSB	£1,042.64	
NET BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD			£1,272.91

NOTES

[1] OTHER TRAVEL

Practice walks	£15.60
Practice camp	£91.76
Cable car	£49.80
Petrol	£36.80
Dennis' tip	£50.00
	£243.96

[2] FOOD

In Manchester		£1,351.90
On Trek		£125.28
Allowances	Annecy	£53.75
	Ferry breakfast	£43.75
Trek meal		£284.20
Reunion refreshments		£27.70
		£1,886.58

[3] EQUIPMENT

Mark 5 flysheet	£53.82
Mark 4 flysheet	£45.75
Mark 4 nylon flysheet	£44.40
12 large billies	£48.00
38 pairs of walking crampons	£787.36
6 Gaz stoves	£53.16
Other spares	£85.57
	£1,118.06
Refund on 12 pairs of crampons	-£44.88
	£1,073.18

[4] CAMPING

		Per night
Chaumont	£18.00	£18.00
B.-St-Maurice (3)	£124.50	£41.50
Pralognan (3)	£105.00	£35.00
Termignon	£20.00	£20.00
St.Ferreol (2)	£39.80	£19.90
St. Hilaire	£37.00	£37.00
	£344.30	
Average: per night		£31.30
per person per night		£0.87
Entre Deux Eaux	£105.00	
	£449.30	

[5] GUIDES

Michelin camping guide	£4.50
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[6] PHOTOGRAPHIC

Cine	£43.05
Other slides and prints	£23.80
	£66.85

[7] SUBSCRIPTIONS

YET	£15.00
Iceland Unit	£3.00
	£18.00

EXCHANGE RATE

Weighted mean : £1 = 10.0 FF

NOMINAL RUNNING COST

This figure reflects the running cost for this year's Trek, allowing for any unusual expenditure items.

Equipment	Annual allowance @ £15 per head	£525.00	
	Less actual equipment expenditure	-£1,073.00	-£548.00
1985 Vanoise map and guide purchases			£55.00
1985 food surplus			£100.00
			-£393.00

Hence nominal running cost is £7,717 i.e. £214 per head

Allan Witton January 1987