

## ULULA ACCOUNTS OF FOREIGN TREKS 1974 - 1981

2021 Note.

1974 was the first year for which, in addition to the Ulula Article, more detailed account of Foreign Treks was given in the Trek Log Book which was established by Chris Little in September 1977. Further details are given in the section of the website about the Trek Log Book. That section also has the text of the 1974 to 1979 Trek Logs.

For the 1980 and 1981 Treks in which I was involved, I have added some of my images to the original text. These illustrated Trek Logs each have their own section of this website.

Allan Witton, 2021.

### 1974 FOREIGN TREK - MONT BLANC - MATTERHORN

S. H. BUCKLEY

"Each in his own private hell . . ." This phrase— coined one morning in July of this year as Trek wobbled and stumbled its way up the moraine from Arolla to Col Collon, in a blistering heat, and against a backdrop more reminiscent of Dante's "Inferno" than an advertisement for "Alpen"— seems to sum up the personal aspect of Trek. It is the loneliness of the walker, burdened with a 40-pound pack, concentrating hard on placing one weary foot in front of the other, occasionally glancing upwards to the summit and praying that it would at least look as if it were getting nearer.

That, however, is only one aspect of Trek, and its value is perhaps that there is so much more that will be remembered when the aches are forgotten and the blisters have healed. I shall remember first and most of all the staggering scenery—the coyness of Mont Blanc which never seemed inclined to shed its covering of cloud, the eerie beauty of the Lac de Mauvoisin, the majesty of the Matterhorn glistening in the sunlight, and the welcoming charm of Zermatt during the fireworks, speeches and torchlight processions of Swiss National Day.

I shall remember the feeling of exhilaration and achievement on reaching the top of the Col du Mont Rouge at 10 in the morning, after five hours' hard walking, and being confronted with an immaculately white snowfield. I shall remember the feeling of humility before the mountains, of our being just 47 insignificant dots against that vast sometimes unfriendly expanse.

I shall remember also the mundane—the desire for civilisation and a cosy bar, the joy of a hot shower, the puzzled faces of the Swiss watching an improvised game of "podex". I shall remember the sight and sound of David Wylde and Jim White chasing bemused, tinkling Alpine cows out of "our" field at one in the morning, the nonchalance of Nick Poole, later copied by Dean Logan, 50 yards adrift from the rest of the party, trying to finish "The Exorcist" or "Day of the Jackal".

Crossing Paris on Bastille Day was like a military operation—unsuspecting Parisians were jostled and poked by tent-poles and billy-cans as Trek sped from the Gare du Nord to the Gare de Lyon, arriving just in time to benefit from our couchettes. Our arrival in Argentière, just outside Chamonix, sparked off a territorial dispute between the local headman and a man renting a 17th Century farmhouse over the ownership of the field in which we were camping. The result was a free night.

During our subsequent progress through Switzerland and Italy, we were able to study the people. The Swiss were accommodating and friendly but gave nothing away, while the Italians rubbed their hands with glee and cried "Plentee monee . . ." In Switzerland, we were bedevilled by conflicting weather reports about the treachery of the snow above 10,000 feet, which persuaded us to take a guide for one day. In Italy, we met deserted villages, paths which existed on maps but not on the ground, and we also enjoyed a welcome Trek meal at Cervinia after two days of "protoveg" (a meat substitute that could be eaten when heavily flavoured).

Some will say that Trek '74 was an ambitious affair. A number of walks were longer than might have been expected, but being blessed with gloriously hot weather for most of the three weeks, none of them were impossible. As the party of 40 boys and seven masters gathered in Old Hall Lane on that Sunday morning, few could have realised what lay in store, least of all myself, but few can have returned three weeks later, without feeling that they had had the experience of a lifetime.

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I SUPPOSE it really began on High Street in the English Lake District—the sweating brow, the aching shoulders, the desperate struggle for wind, the unbearable thirst. Miraculously, the initial training weekend camp at Small Water near Mardale deterred nobody, and the full complement of thirty unfit boys and four equally unfit staff assembled for departure early on Tuesday 15th July in Albert Square, bound for Saas Grund, in the Swiss Valais, on the 1975 Foreign Trek to Monte Rosa.

The itinerary planned traversed three hundred degrees of a circle centred on Monte Rosa, 4596 metres, the highest mountain in Switzerland. The trek started and finished in Switzerland, but en route for Zermatt went over high passes between the Italian valleys of Macugnaga, Sesia, Gressoney, Ayas and Tournanche, emanating as radii of the circle from the Monte Rosa massif.

Man sleeps horizontally, a fact apparently not recognised by the French Railway System, whose carriages we were thankful to quit at Visp and the Rhone Valley, after a gruelling night's travel from Paris. The final few miles up the Saastal from Visp to Saas Grund were accomplished with a show of accustomed virtuosity by the driver of our post bus. Unfortunately, most of the party were too sound asleep to appreciate the gradual unfolding of the high mountain scenery. Coffee and rolls revived us at Saas Grund, after which our host, a local innkeeper christened Hans, led the way to our campsite. This acquired a precarious privacy by being surrounded by water, being an island in the local glacial torrent. The notice upstream, warning of 'sudden floods', was hardly reassuring.

However, we liked Saas Grund. Our first excursion, to the Britannia hut, 3030 metres, in the Mischabel range, gave us splendid views of the mighty Dom and Taschorn, and introduced us to that alpine treadmill, the zigzag path. The following day it rained heavily, but we had a pleasant walk to see the Fee glacier at close quarters. Chamois were common, as were marmots. One member of the party was so taken by the marmots, that he fed them, a little prematurely perhaps, his emergency nuts and raisins!

It was time to start trekking in earnest, over the Monte Moro Pass to Macugnaga in Italy. Monte Moro has taken mule traffic since the twelfth century. However, the heavy June snowfall had not cleared, and the steep slopes to the col were tricky enough to encourage a healthy respect for mules. The view from the pass toward the eleven thousand foot precipice of Monte Rosa must be one of the greatest sights in the Alps, and we were blessed with perfect weather to see it.

On reaching the Italian hut just below the Pass, another startling sight awaited us. Here, a bevy of bikini-clad Italian girls lay bronzing on the balcony. One girl, determined to leave no flesh un-tanned, wielded a parabolic mirror to reflect the precious rays of infra red light.

Staffa, in Macugnaga, claimed an off day, before the caravan crossed the Col del Turlo to Alagna, en route suffering a highly uncomfortable sloping bivouac below the col. Alagna has charm, in other words cheap wine and simple architecture. It also has a most curious native tongue, a mysterious formula of Swiss Italian, Swiss German and Swiss Romanche, which occasionally defeated even Steve Buckley.

Next came the Col d'Olen. The bivouac site here was very beautiful—these high camps are, for me, one of the most enjoyable features of trek. Here, we encountered a curious hoard of flying insects, renegades from Scottish Trek, no doubt. They gathered on our flysheets, were shaken off, performed a backward somersault to the ground, and perished instantly. An early start next morning took us to the summit of the col in one long leg (trekkers walk in legs of fifty minutes, a relic of bygone days when each tent was allotted a leg to carry the 'bomb', a heavy and dangerous pressure cooker) and we reached Gressoney in time to spend the afternoon in pursuit of cleanliness. Some took this less seriously than the staff. A glacial hair wash does wonders for the character.

Gressoney provided a fine camp site in open scenery, and a very cosy hostelry opposite, whose toast proved an even greater attraction than the regulation hard boiled egg for breakfast. Here, the lurg struck. Eight succumbed to a day of gastric torment, while the rest walked, with the aid of a cable car, to the Gnifetti hut, 3611 metres. The cable cars are called locally 'oeufs', so the ski instructors can rightly claim to go to work in an egg. The descent was notable for a long glissade (safe, I hasten to add), and an engaging duel between our brave leader, Tim Peacock, and a local pig. The following day, our invalid's appetites returned for a feast of local chickens in the evenings. One of the many miracles of trek is the way it transforms a bunch of culinary novices into chefs of some distinction. Particular mention must be made of Mike Kurer and his tent, who won the coveted staff award for the best cooking.

On to St. Giacomo, or St. Jacques, via the Col del Bettaforca. A real grind was this, up a newly bulldozed construction road for a ski lift. While not denying that skiing is an exhilarating sport, one wonders how long the pollution of the Alpine mountains in its name will remain unquestioned. With the impeccable timing which blessed the trek, we managed to collect provisions in St. Jacques and pitch our tents above the town before we suffered a violent storm. The morals of the village were guarded by a church mural in the square, consisting of a large, menacing eye, bearing the simple inscription: *Dieu Voie Tout*.

The limestone shades of the Col Superiore della Curie Grande are for me inextricably linked to the name of Ovomaltine, thanks to a culinary *coup* of Kurer, who supplied a piping hot cup of that beverage on this Col. Below lay Cervinia, in Val Tournanche, Matterhornland. From here it looks more threatening than the picture on a well known breakfast cereal. Here we had our three course trek meal, notable not just for the food, which was excellent, but a reacquaintance with tables and chairs. Cervinia, however, lacked charm. The wine was expensive and the architecture aspired to shabby modernity.

One pass remained before we reached our final destination of Zermatt. This was the Theodulpass, 3290 metres, a high glacial pass. We hoped on the way to climb the Breithorn, 4165 metres, but a reconnoitre proved this was not feasible in the prevalent snow conditions. We contented ourselves with the Kleine Matterhorn, 3700 metres, a rocky promontory jutting Northwards from the Theodul snowfields.

We rose at 4 a.m. from the bivouac site, and reached the Col by 7 a.m. After an easy snow plod and a sharp scramble, we soon reached our peak, the highest point of the trek. The view was appropriate, covering all the Western Alps from Mont Blanc to the Bernese Oberland and the Gran Paradiso. We returned to the Col, picked up our sacks for the last time, and after a brief encounter with a passport officer on skis, crossed the glacier safely and descended into Zermatt. Aching shoulders could rest at last.

Not so our aching calf muscles, which carried us up the final excursion to the Mettelhorn, 3406 metres, on yet another perfect day. This is an ideal viewpoint for the magnificent cirque of Zermatt peaks, exemplifying Alpine scenery of the highest quality.

One feels that it is not possible to come to terms with the Alps without paying a price in terms of sweat, toil and hardship. Trekking provides a wonderful opportunity, not just to lose weight, but to savour mountain scenery, and mountain companionship, at its very best. We did!

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AFTER LEAVING Telfer Road at 7.00 a.m. on Monday 12th July, an uneventful journey via Calais and Innsbruck found Trek in Bressanone, a Medieval Cathedral town just south of the Brenner Pass. The intended route was through the Dolomites from Bressanone to Fiera, with the expected high point being an ascent of the Marmolada (3340 m).

A day's rest in Bressanone, and we left in glorious sunshine. As we progressed up from the valley by cable car, an impressive sight of things to come was gradually revealed—a sight I am sure all members of this trek will remember for a long time. The characteristically spectacular pinnacles of the Dolomites were laid out in breathtaking panorama—the Peitlerkofel group, the Geisler group, the Puez group, the Sella group and beyond.

The first two days proved to be the most gruelling of the whole trek (with the possible exception of the pre-trek weekend in Snowdonia!), but by the 19th July we were well under way and made our first excursion, to the summit of Piz Boè (3152 m). From here we also had our first glimpse of the Marmolada, an impressive snow-clad peak.

It should be pointed out that at this stage the food rations were beginning to run low, without the immediate prospect of replenishing them. This did not seem to concern any of the members (utmost confidence in their leaders?) though several of them did look rather concerned when they were asked to crawl into a low, dark cave beneath a rock behind the chosen camp site at the foot of the Marmolada. Eventually, Gemmill volunteered to do so and retrieved a substantial hoard of food, hidden by CTL and SHB on their recce at Whit—needless to say, the camp ate well that evening!

The summit of the Marmolada unfortunately proved to be impassible without ice axes and crampons and so, after a couple of very wet days in Canazei, we trekked along the Val di Contrim, where we camped by the Rifugio Contrim. It was here that we met 'Mad Mario', a local inbred farmer who was not at all happy at the prospect of us camping on his land. Luckily, a local guide at the hut was very kind and persuaded him to let us do so!

The south wall of the Marmolada towered above us along the next part of the route, but again we were to encounter very wet weather and it was a somewhat bedraggled MGS party which arrived at the Albergo di San Pellegrino. Even the very welcome hot chocolate did little to raise spirits as the storm raged outside. However, when CTL announced that the proprietors of the Albergo had agreed to let us have some rooms for the night, all faces lit up at the thought of not having to go out and pitch camp! More was in store—once all were dried out and changed, we sat down to an excellent 3-course meal, washed down with a few bottles of local wine. We were so impressed by the superb hospitality that votes of thanks were offered, in French by SHB, in German by Michael Kurer, in English by CTL and, with the aid of a phrase book, in Italian by DS. A marvellous ending to what had been, at times, a rather miserable day.

The Pale di San Martino lay ahead, but the weather again caused us to detour—this time because of too much snow. Eventually, we made it to the Rifugio Pradidali for our last, and probably best, high level campsite. From here we were able to reach our second summit, the Cima di Fradusta (2939 m) before completing the final part of the trek, down to Fiera di Primiero.

After a couple of days rest in Fiera, we had somewhat of an eventful train journey to Venice, when we almost ended up in Yugoslavia and got caught in the most intense thunderstorm any of us had ever experienced. In fact, the first night's camping in Venice was during the continuation of this storm. The final two days in Venice were spent drying out and sightseeing, before the train journey back to England.

This was a tremendous trek for me, as I hope it was for everyone. My memories include the mixed weather, the breathtaking scenery, the welcome stops at the many, hospitable mountain huts and particularly the meal at San Pellegrino. As far as the members of trek were concerned, I shall remember Bates' incessant chatter, Taylor's intellectual discussions of Milton, Cropley's ever present grin and the culinary excellence of Ager, Bennison and Kurer, not to mention the marvellous film made by the same three.

THE STATISTICS alone are impressive. Seventy-odd miles walked, at least 40,000 feet climbed, most of it with full forty-five lb packs, and a whole week towards the end when the main party did not descend below 7,000 feet. The names of the cols, too, roll impressively off the tongue, from the first day crossing the Riffeljoch, by way of the Ölgrubenjoch, the Winnebachjoch and a dozen others to the Peiljoch at the end.

Let us forget the journey out and begin instead at the beginning of Trek proper, in Pfunds, a tiny peaceful painted village that we left before dawn for what was to be the most tiring day of all—but isn't the first day always the hardest?—a day to set the pattern for the rest. Impressively laden we wind our way in crocodile, slowly but inevitably, fifty minutes walking then ten of rest, leg after leg, towards the snowline, towards the peaks, towards the col. There we have lunch, and look back over the valley we have just left and into the one we are making for, before shouldering our packs again and dropping easily towards the campsite.

And of course throughout the two weeks of walking, nothing was ever the same. Every campsite was different: the rain-sodden, tree-covered grass slopes just a few yards from the warmth and laughter of the Gepatschhaus, the silent mist on the shore of the Riffelsee, the little plateau below the Chemnitzer hut from which we could look down into the Pitztal 3,000 feet below.

Every col was different: some like the Riffeljoch a long snow plod; some steep and sudden, the edge only feet wide, with the path snaking backwards and forwards up the final headwall, then plummeting down in the same fashion on the other side; and some hidden curiously away in the depths of the mountains, and reached only by several hours' walking over slowly rising rocks. The Peiljoch will remain in the memory for a long while; an easy ascent culminating suddenly in the amazing sight of the icefall of the Sulzenau glacier, acres of the most appalling chaos, eerily silent in the afternoon sun.

Not every day was devoted to trekking. We had a welcome rest-day in the middle, in Längenfeld (sunbathing, washing clothes and eating hugely), and on three other days we left our high-level camp for an excursion—an unloaded assault on a summit. The first, on the Hohe Geige (3,395 m) was superb, a continuously interesting scramble culminating in a steep snowfield. The day was clear and sunny, and from the top the peaks and snow seemed to stretch in every direction as far as the edge of the world.

The Schaufel Spitz (3,333 m) promised even more; MJW and TJP reconnoitred it the previous day and had marvellous views of the Dolomites. In the event, however, it was misty and cold, and we saw nothing and had to settle for a somewhat grimmer satisfaction rather than the sheer delight we had anticipated.

But Trek is not all mountaineering, and the recollections are not merely those of physical effort. Other memories persist. The path up to the Chemnitzer hut, through a bewildering riot of flowers. The coldest rivers known to Man, which we drank and in which we washed (in that order). The herd of ibex surprised by our approach, their antlers silhouetted against the sky. The cows in the campsite near Lisens who roused us early with their bells and who caused some of us to wonder what would happen if they tripped over or sat down on a tent.... Waking one morning to find that six inches of snow had fallen, turning every tent into an igloo and blanketing off even the sound of the stream nearby.

We must remember the personalities, too. The ebullient colonial, the intellectuals, the ladykiller (besieged for his address by sweet little Mädchen as we waited to leave), the gourmets who usually produced a five-course evening meal, and the quartet in another tent who would eat the next day's breakfast rather than cook dinner. All human life was there.

The Wilder Freiger was a worthy finale, in perfect weather, up a superb mixture of snow and rock to the ridge leading to the summit plateau. That we were turned back there by a foot of powder snow was largely immaterial: we felt little sense of anticlimax.

Those of us not involved can have no idea of the amount of organisation required: the planning of routes and menus, the booking of ferries and campsites, the contingency plans, the EEC red tape. (And teaching, too!) To SHB, TJP, MJW and especially CTL, all our thanks.

TREKKING IS a virus. Every August I resolve to condemn the pack frame to the attic, and next year to swap the aching muscles, the cramped meals of reconstituted soya, the endless upward treadmill, for a week's package to Benidorm. Then the reunion comes, those slides full of sunshine and smiles, smoothing the rough edges of one's recollections. Then the maps, irresistible new place names, new contours, new mountains to conquer. The virus strikes for another year.

Trek '78 gave us a remarkable route through the Pyrenees, which took 20 boys and four staff through 80 miles of The Parc National des Pyrénées. This was trekking at its finest.

First there was the camping, real camping. A tent for my money is an uncomplicated but effective shelter from the elements, not a canvas bungalow with all mod-cons. Camping is not an end in itself but a means of exploring wild places. The best campsites are places of beauty. Our outstanding site this year was the most inconvenient —the ground was level, but one had the choice of icy snow or sharp pebbly rubble to pitch on. But what a site that was, perched nine thousand feet up above the village of Gavarnie, in the shadow of the Brèche de Roland, or breach, resembling Joe Jordan's missing tooth, in the frontier wall, (where according to legend Roland, cousin of Charlemagne, dashed his magic sword Durendal against the rock). That night we froze, waking early to a magnificent dawn over Spain and the russet sandstone of the Ordesa Canyon.

Then there was the trekking. I remember our trek over the Hourquette d'Ossau particularly, a col en route from Pont d'Espagne to Gavarnie. The first hour goes slowly, plodding upwards in the silence of early morning shadows, up through pine forest to open country. Suddenly, we round a corner, the sun bursts into view, the ground turns white to dazzle unaccustomed eyes. Ahead is the southern precipice of Vignemale, the highest limestone face in Europe. After two hours we halt by a hut for a long morning siesta, and sunbathe beneath the hot sun. Stoves come out, coffee is brewed, moist fresh rolls are broken into.

Then the climbing starts afresh, the final two legs to the col. The sun is now hostile, but the air is fresher, less humid. Views gradually unfold, new peaks emerge, ridges interlace in a graduated tapestry of shadow. Ice axes are needed for this final upwards traverse in deep snow which leads finally to the col. It is hard to believe we are now over five thousand feet higher than our starting point.

All that remains is half an hour down easy snow slopes to the Refuge Bayssellance and our next "bivvy". We slip and slide on the soft snow; there is an undignified scramble to find the best sites. The experts have surveyed the ground critically from above and make straight for their selected patch. Soon all the tents are up and bodies slump in relaxation which is well earned.

Then the excursions. Packs are grounded and we head for the peaks. Walking packless is a release: gravity is halved, the uphill work is no effort. This year we climbed three ten thousand metre peaks (Ed. -10,000 foot peaks), and got to within an ace of the summit of Monte Perdido, the third highest in the Pyrenees. Here we encountered our only bad weather, wind and mist, and the final snow slope proved beyond the mountaineering capabilities of the party.

Finally, there is the companionship, the companionship of shared hardships and experiences. I believe that a simple life style makes people more civilised. The language is sometimes strong and there are occasional arguments, but in all but a few cases I have been impressed by the spirit of co-operation which has existed on all five of the Treks it has been my good fortune to participate in.

TREK '79 WENT to Switzerland, with the intention of traversing the Bernese Oberland, a range famous for the Eiger and the Jungfrau. The party approached the Swiss border after a long day's travel by way of hot French motorways with a sense of great anticipation at the thought of such an ambitious project. A foray into an unknown country is always exciting, but there is something particularly magical about Switzerland with its chocolate, cheeses, and, of course, its mountains. We were quite a large group of 19 boys, 3 masters, and Brian, coach driver and wit.

Trek revives fond memories; the majesty of the sun glistening down on snow-encrusted peaks, the dancing freshness of mountain brooks, and the endless picture-postcard scenes stretching away into the distance. Nor will one easily forget the squalor of a hike-tent full of kit into which Barry Peden has just knocked a pan of soup. Trek represents extremes; on the one side pain and endurance, on the other pleasure and enjoyment. There can be few sensations to equal that of standing near a mountain peak and surveying the surroundings; or, after a very early morning departure for Kleine Scheidegg, of witnessing dawn breaking over the Eiger, a sight of rare beauty even amongst the jewels of the previous three weeks.

The increasing fitness as Trek progresses naturally produces a greater enjoyment. It should be said that the first few days in Switzerland were very difficult because of the intense heat. We set off from La Barboleuse and trudged to the Col de Sanetsch in two extremely tiring days. Next an excursion was made up the Diablerets glacier, which meant we did not carry packs, and on the way down several of us found a most welcoming hotel.

We moved to Gstaad where we met our friend Brian again, before moving on to Lenk via the Wildstrubel. The latter provided a memorable excursion for those hardy enough to participate, with some incredible views. Others stayed in camp and indulged in the trekker's favourite pastime—eating.

From Lenk the party moved to Kandersteg, by way of Engstligenalp, where we got caught up in the World Jamboree. Scout hospitality allowed us to join in the activities and we became friendly with one troop from Germany. Kandersteg was followed by a swim in a glacial lake, the beautiful Oeschinensee, and then it was on to Wengen, and our final trek over Kleine Scheidegg.

A major attractive feature of Trek is the camaraderie, a tremendous feeling of team spirit amongst each tent group, heightened by the competitions for cooking and so on. Looking back, it is very easy to forget the occasional traumas, but after the first few days we were in such good form that we were able to play American football at the end of the day. Brian joined in, much to the dismay of the opposition, and scored several goals.

Sandwiches at the Hotel de Sanetsch, a midnight swim in a private open-air pool in Grindelwald, and fishing for trout in the town hall pond on the last morning with an iron pole: these are some of the things that will remain in the mind from Trek '79 for a long time. Thanks are due to Messrs. Little, Leversha and Gomersall for all their efforts, and to all the trekkers who made it such a good time.

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TREK 1980 TRAVELLED to the Dolomites of Northern Italy, a mountainous limestone region to the south of the main Alpine chain. While lacking the altitude of the higher Swiss and French Alps, the Dolomites provide some spectacular scenery, being quite different in character from their northern neighbours. The valleys are long and narrow, often with precipitous rock-walls towering above them, and they tend to disappear from sight entirely in views from the high plateaux. Our coach-driver, Dennis, exercised consummate skill in negotiating hairpin bends while bringing the bus to rendezvous with the party at the valley heads.

We were walking the "Alta Via 1", the first of the long-distance footpaths to be set up by the Italian authorities, and well maintained with waymarkings and signposts. Our original intention had been to walk only the first half of it, but our rapid progress in the second week enabled us to complete all but the technically difficult final section.

We assembled at School and loaded sacks, food, camping equipment and supplies into the coach with some trepidation, knowing it would be two days before we would see our beloved belongings again. We then proceeded to Aylesbury to meet the other half of our party, from Aylesbury Grammar School, and led by Mr. Little, who, while at MGS, led and participated in many Foreign Treks. A channel crossing and two blistering days later we arrived at the Lago di Braies, ready to commence walking. Equipment was given a final check, food was distributed and we shouldered the rucksacks.

The first day was in some ways the worst: we were unaccustomed to climbing in the heat with packs, and the climb seemed to stretch forever. It was with great relief that we eventually gained the col, and descended to the pastures to search for a campsite. Here arose what was to be a familiar problem, that of finding adequate water supplies. On this occasion we resorted to melted snow, but in future we were luckier and the expedient was not found necessary again.

After that everything seemed downhill by comparison. Among the highlights were the ascents—the whaleback ridge of Croda del Becco, the exhilarating early morning climb to the snowy peak of La Varella, and the long plod in mist up the snowfields to the summit of Tofana di Rozes, 10,500 feet above sea level. As we gazed down the precipitous south face, we breathed out in relief that we had overcome weariness and vertigo yet again.

We passed some of the classic rock-walls of Alpine climbing: the magnificent "Wall of Walls" of the Civetta, the gaunt pinnacles of the Cinque Torri, and the famous buttresses of Mount Pelmo, once thought impregnable. We sat in the cafe at the top of Mount Nuvolau, and gazed out over the distant Marmolada and the imposing peaks of Antelao and Croda di Lago, before setting out on the steep descent, aided by fixed cables, to the pass below.

And on the last day came the 6,000 feet descent, almost at a jog, to the coach waiting to take us northwards, and an unforgettable dip in a convenient rock pool.

The clear blue skies came as a revelation about European weather to an emigre Australian such as myself. Nonetheless, when a thunderstorm did break, it came with a vengeance, and turned our site into a swirling torrent, and tents were abandoned for the floor of the nearby hut. On the succeeding day the weather was back to form, and flysheets soon dried in the baking sun as we climbed, dripping with perspiration, to the next col, and the strange lunar landscape of the Grande Lagazuoi.

As on every trek there were the characters: Danny Fletcher, hygiene fiend and chef extraordinaire, Lister Smith, who seemed to do all the chores for his tent without complaining, Graham Liddell from A.G.S., with his finger constantly clicking the shutter of his camera at views, cows and companions, and Peter Collins, also from A.G.S., master of wit and repartee.

The staff too contributed their own special skills. Mr. Little sampled most of the mountain lakes, in the apparent belief that the worth of a bath is proportional to its coldness. Mr. Witton, a Scottish Trek refugee, once he grew used to the unaccustomed luxury of dry boots, discovered that F= ma did not extend to moving certain boys uphill. Dr. Leversha astonished friend and foe alike with his command of Italian, especially when arguing with the local police or negotiating with hut wardens. Mr. Hammond, from A.G.S., gained his first experience of Alpine trekking, and will be helping to continue the tradition at his own school. Dennis Hughes, our coach driver, walked and camped with us most of the way and proved an invaluable companion (and he's coming next year!). Our thanks go to everybody who made the holiday possible.

WE MIGHT have foreseen some of the bad luck which was to pursue the 1981 trek, when we were driven down off Snowdon in June by icy winds and heavy rain. But back at Pen-y-Pass, with scarcely a square inch of dry clothing between us, we reflected that this was after all a training weekend in wet and windy Snowdonia. And so it was that we set out to the Alps, equipped with shorts and sun-tan cream, still cherishing visions of rosy Alpine sunsets over pink snowcapped peaks.

Our original plan was to cross the Hohe Tauern range from East to West, passing the Hochalmspitz, Ankogel, Sonnblick, Glockner and Venediger groups, and culminating in an ascent of the Großvenediger, Austria's second highest mountain. The party consisted of 38 boys and five staff, Messrs. Leversha, Stubbs, Witton, Souster and Dobson.

There comes an awful moment on trek when the coach stops, ice-axes are distributed and it is time to walk. Atrophied muscles seize up, foolishly guzzled chocolate-bars weigh heavily in the stomach, and aching limbs stagger off up the meadow-path through the rich tapestry of Alpine flowers. We climbed into the damp cloud which was to accompany us for many days, and set up camp in the misty surroundings of an almost subterranean Alpine hut, built thus to avoid the fate of its predecessor—destruction by avalanche.

The facilities at the huts may be simple, our camping-spots beside them stony and hard— especially when we are asked to leave the green patches for the horse—but the welcome is nearly always genuinely friendly. As we sheltered from cold wet weather, fires were lit for us and washing lines hung up for our damp socks.

The boys took it in turns to impress the masters with their culinary expertise: a not inconsiderable task, since meals are prepared from small unlabelled bags of greenish powders. Thus temporary colour-blindness may result in chicken-flavoured tea or Instant Whip Stroganoff.

After descending in torrential rain to the municipal campsite at Obervellach, we camped beside the Mollbach, a pleasant little stream. By the early hours it was in spate, breaking its banks and flooding much of the campsite. Most tents were moved and we took shelter in the campsite buildings until dawn broke over a sad mess of abandoned tents and floating debris, none of it ours. Several boys distinguished themselves by cheerfully serving porridge and hot tea to homeless campers, who admittedly approached their first English breakfast very warily.

Routes were changed drastically in view of poor weather and occasional glimpses of fresh snow-fall at higher altitudes; and yet there were periods when the sun shone and we set out again for the mountains. On such a day we reached the Salm Hut and camped in a valley of squeaking marmots above a tiny hut where a mountain cowherd was happy to sell us fresh milk for a few Schillings. There too we found edelweiss, watched chamois, and saw the sky illuminated by sheet lightning. In another burst of summer we reached the summit of the Roten Kogel (2762 m) and took in an immense panorama of sparkling peaks, sheer walls of rock, and far below on dizzily plunging slopes the hazy greens of pinewoods.

It had been hoped that a successful ascent of the Großvenediger would round off trek and compensate for earlier disappointments. However, as we camped beneath the Badener-Hut, an icy wind brought snow, making the next day's crossing of the Löbentörl one of the most harrowing. The track was completely obscured, and safety ropes had to be fixed when we crossed snow above steep gullies. The difficulties encountered in such weather on a relatively easy route convinced us that the Großvenediger would have to be left to another more fortunate trek, so an excursion to Europe's highest waterfall at Krimml was substituted.

By this time, however, many of the boys had developed a certain allergy to water, and opted instead to watch the Royal Wedding on television in a local hotel. As a final touch of irony, when our coach took us back to Salzburg, the sky turned blue, the sun began to shine and we were at last able to dry our damp socks.