

Alpine Meet 1994

Bernese Oberland

The meet

The Bernese Oberland in the Swiss Alps was the venue for the 1994 YRC Alpine Meet, held between 23rd July and 6 August. The valley base was on the outskirts of Lauterbrunnen, near Interlaken.

The attendees

The following twenty two members and guest sampled the delights of this magnificent part of the Swiss Alps:

Ken Aldred
Dennis and Joan Armstrong
Dennis Barker and Anne Edwards
Tim Bateman
Alan Brown
John Devenport
Mike and Marcia Godden
David Hick
Alan and Angie Linford
Harvey Lomas
Alister Renton
Graham Salmon
David and Elspeth Smith
Graham Steine
Martyn Wakeman
Barrie Wood
Daniel Wood

The Location

Lauterbrunnen was an ideal centre, providing easy access to Interlaken, and the nearby villages of Kandersteg, Grindelwald, Murren, Wengen and Stechelberg, with a comprehensive network of paths linking many of these, providing a paradise for walkers of all ages and abilities. The area is steeped in climbing history with the mountains of the Eiger, Monch and Jungfrau forming the north wall of the Bernese Oberland and trapping the largest glacial in the Alps just behind them.

Access into the high mountains was not particularly straight forward, with many of the routes to huts proving to be substantially longer than in other parts of the Alps visited by the Club on previous meets. The difficulty of penetrating the north wall from the valleys meant that the only practical means of getting up high was to succumb to the mechanical delights of the exorbitantly priced mountain railway to the Jungfrauoch, which provides an excellent gateway to the heart of the Oberland.

With hindsight, the best arrangement for those wishing to climb high would have been to have taken the Jungfrauoch train and done a hut to hut tour taking in some of the stunning peaks en route.

The campsite

Alan Linford did a marvellous job in arranging camping and caravan places in our own corner of TCS Camp Site Schutzenbach on the outskirts of Lauterbrunnen, run by the amiable Chris von Allmen, whose staff looked after us well. Alan even managed to negotiate a group discount, including a further discount for those nights when members stayed up in the mountains. Although quite a large site with a large transient population of youth groups, mainly from the USA and the Far East "doing Europe", the facilities just about coped with the numbers. The staff even telephoned huts to book places for us when we were planning trips into the mountains, at no charge, which was most welcome! (Telephone 036 55 12 68, Fax 036 55 12 75)

The location of the campsite was spectacular, with vertical and even overhanging cliffs soaring above the lush valley bottom, broken only by the

waterfalls that fell uninterrupted for the full height of the cliffs. The end of the valley was dominated by the precipitous north face of the Breithorn that provided a beautiful backdrop. There were even sounds as well as sights, with the peel of the church bells often providing a tuneful echo around the rock walls of the valley.

The weather

Despite most of the party arriving at the campsite during or just after a very heavy storm on the first Saturday, on the whole we were blessed with remarkably good weather, especially when we were in the mountains when we were generally accompanied by windless days and azure skies. There were the regular thunderstorms as is common in the Alps during the summer months. One particularly bad day in the mountains saw a large fall of new snow, probably about a foot deep on the summit of the Jungfrau. In the high mountains, the snow usually froze during the night, although the high daytime temperatures did soften it considerably by late morning.

Maps and guidebooks

Several maps were available for the area, with sheets 264 (Jungfrau) and 254 (Interlaken) at 1:50,000 covering the areas visited by people on the meet. In addition, there was the composite sheet 5004 (Bernese Oberland) covering a larger area.

The best climbing guide covering the whole area was 'Bernese Oberland Selected Climbs' by Les Swinden and published in 1993 by the Alpine Club, which included both the mountain routes and also a selection of rock routes. There was of course a good selection of guide books and topo guides in French and German to be found in the book and gear shops to be found in most of the and villages.

For walkers, probably the most comprehensive guide book was 'Walking in the Bernese Oberland' by Kev Reynolds and published by Cicerone Press, which provided many ideas for excursions undertaken during the course of the meet.



Mönch, summit ridge, John Devenport

The Tschingelhorn (3577m)
by Alister Renton

It was on the Welsh meet that the thought of going to the Alps this year entered my head. Barrie Wood was going and had a spare place in the car. Before no time at all I found myself sat on the ferry on the way out to the Alps. We drove right the way though and arrived in Lauterbrunnen at about 10.30 am on the Sunday morning.

Heading out of the campsite were Graham Salmon and Martyn Wakeman on their way up to the Mutthorn Hiitte with a view to doing the Tschingelhorn the next day. "An easy peak for acclimatisation " they told us at 3,655m.

Next day saw our team of Daniel, Tim, Barrie and myself getting our gear ready. We tried to book the hut up by telephone but were unable to get a reply so we opted to go up there in the hope that we would not be turned away. The bus arrived and we boarded and paid the fare to Stechelberg.

Once we had arrived in Stechelberg, we found the path and started the 4 hour walk. The sun was beating down on us. The temperature was just too hot for me. We stopped a few times and drank plenty of water. It seemed to take ages to get onto the moraine but even then the hut was still a fair distance away. Just before we got to the snow line we came across Graham and Martyn on their way back down. We stopped and talked with them for a while before it was time for us to continue up to the hut. When we arrived at the snow line we roped up initially as one party of four, but a little further on we split into two groups. We continued up what

seemed a never ending snow slope. Luckily, they had plenty of room for us and the hut warden muttered something in German about the telephone. We ate well that evening and went to bed as we were all quite tired.

Next morning we woke at 4.00 am and had a warm chocolate drink for breakfast. Only two of us set out. The morning sunrise was quite spectacular, something I had not seen before and so early in the day. We walked over the pass and continued downhill to the foot of the couloir. There were a number of parties in front of us as both myself and Tim were feeling the altitude. The going up the couloir was tough, quite steep and people were passing us on their way down. Once at the top of this section we paused for a rest before continuing up the rocky ridge to the summit snow slope. On the top we were rewarded with splendid views of all the peaks around.

We spent quite a while at the summit before we made our way back down. The couloir took quite a while to negotiate as the snow was getting soft. Anyway we got down safely and walked back to cross the pass. A helicopter had landed in the snow so we watched this before continuing. Once over the pass we went back down the snow slope to the hut. By this time we were both very tired. We had a long deserved drink at the hut and sat down on the veranda. We could not decide whether to walk down to the valley because we did not now the times of the last back down to Lauterbrunnen. Anyway we thought that we would risk it and go down. We collected our belongings and started off. The snow was very soft and this made the going difficult.

We did not stop until we had below the snow line. Once below the snow we again had a rest as by now we were having to carry a wet 11mm rope and it weighed an absolute ton!!

All was going well on the descent until a threatening thunderstorm hit us. It absolutely poured down. We sheltered under a tree. Not the best place!!! We sat there for about 20 minutes before we made the decision to go for it. We kept on passing signs for the valley but the time seemed to be getting longer.

We arrived in Stechelberg. We were hoping that there would be a bus or if not we would have to walk. Luckily there was a bus in about 30 minutes so we sat down to wait. Then I noticed a note at the bottom of the timetable, Tim came over. "Alister and Tim, a car will come at 9.00 pm to pick you up. David" - the time was 8.58 pm - what timing. Barrie's car arrived and we got in and headed for the camp site. It had been a very long day but it was an excellent peak and I would not have missed the experience.

The Morgenhorn (33612m)

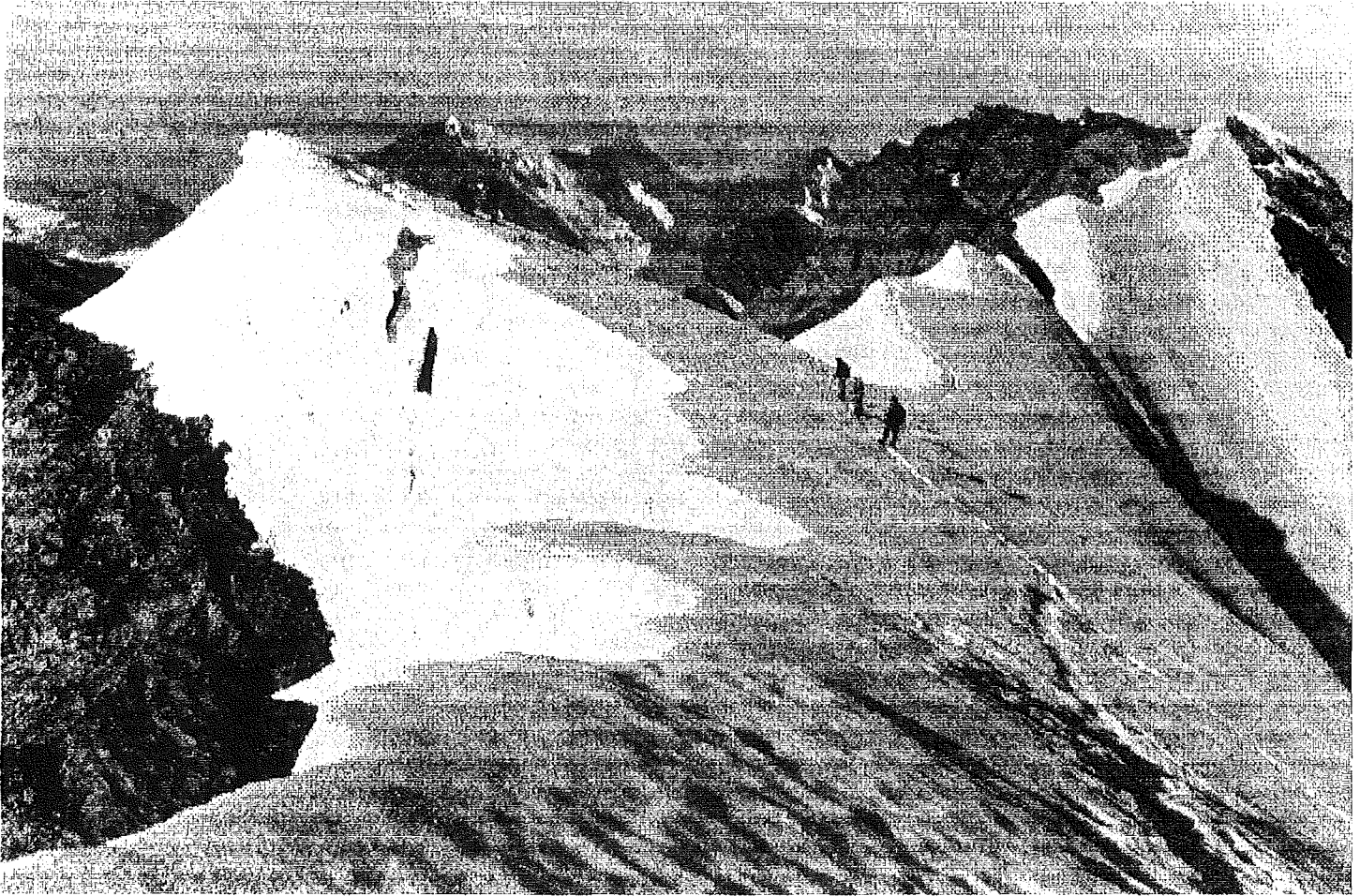
by John Devenport

Several years ago, after an alpine meet in another part of Switzerland I had ventured to the Kandertal and walked up to spend a night at the Blumlisalp hut. The hut is in very impressive surroundings with a line of three peaks forming a spectacular snowy backdrop. One in particular caught my attention, the Weisse Frau, which formed an almost perfect snow pyramid, and I thought at the time that it looked a possible candidate for further attention on a future visit to the Alps.

This year after a successful warm up trip to the Tschingelhorn with the two Davids Smith and Hick, we were looking for our next route, when I remembered these beautiful mountains, and it was soon agreed that this would be the area for our next venture. A fairly long drive took us round to Kandersteg, from where we were able to let a chair lift relieve about an hours uphill slog. Before long we were walking through the forest above the stunning blue waters of the Oeschinensee, a truly beautiful lake set amongst precipitous cliffs. The Blumlisalp hut was clearly visible located prominently located just above the pass at Hohturli, some four hours walk away.

All the time I was conscious of rather ominous clouds heading towards us from the west. It wasn't very long before the first drops of rain hit us, so we decided to seek shelter under some smallish trees, but to no avail. The storm crashed around us and the force of the rain ensured that we got a good soaking. The two Davids found a novel use for their orange bivvy bags i.e. standing upright in them to form (rather silly looking but probably quite effective) portable shelters. Eventually the rains ceased and we continued our journey, walking not more than a couple of hundred yards to find the path passing under a huge overhanging cliff that made Kilnsey look quite tame, and to add insult to injury there was a large wooden seat located in a perfectly dry part of this huge natural shelter!

Continuing upwards the path left the forest and passed through the lush meadows of Unter Bergli before rising steeply through a line of cliffs, complete with lots of safety chains and cut steps, to the higher meadow



of Ober Bergli. At this point we were given a spectacular introduction to the Blumlisalp range, whose spectacular peaks and tumbling glaciers would accompany us on our right hand side all the way to the hut. The views compensated for the rather tedious and quite steep slog, which was interrupted by yet another heavy thunderstorm, so out came the two Davids orange bags again, this time in the middle of the path - much to the amusement of a group of Swiss workmen repairing a fence. I decided to get wet again - after all I did have some pride!!

We arrived at the hut in glorious sunshine and our gear soon dried out. We had taken our own food, but unlike every other Swiss hut I have stopped in, we had to cook it ourselves in the cosy little kitchen

There was plenty of space in the large, well appointed hut, so a relatively comfortable night was enjoyed.

A cloudless night sky greeted us when we set out up the glacier towards the base of the Weisse Frau. By first light we were fumbling our way up an uncomfortably loose rock ridge, and we were also wasting a lot of precious time. It was obvious that progress would be slow in reaching even the bottom of the long, steep snow/ice slope leading towards the summit, and we were unsure about what sort of condition it would be in so we decided to cut our losses and headed down the rotten rock ridge and across to the broad snow/ice slopes of its near neighbour, the Morgenhom.

All of the other parties were heading this way, many making slow progress and it wasn't long before we caught many of them up as we all wound our way up the spectacularly crevassed broad face of the mountain. The higher we went the steeper the slopes became, and the higher we went the thinner the snow cover became, so that eventually we were climbing up a steep slope of water ice. In front a French rope of three included a young teenage girl, who was only just coping with the steep icy conditions.

Suddenly, we emerged onto the amazing summit ridge of the Morgenhorn, with its highly corniced, contorted ridge leading towards the summit of the Weissefrau some half mile distant. The views into the heart of the Oberland were breathtaking, and we stayed on the summit ridge for quite a while, having a late breakfast and capturing the images on film.

It was obvious that the intense heat of the sun would be turning the crisp snow to mush, so a quick but cautious descent was made down the steep snow slopes back to the glacier below, then to the hut. The peace of short refreshment break in the blazing sun on the terrace outside the hut was rudely interrupted by the first of the many day visitors arriving at the hut, so it seemed an appropriate time to leave.

The cooling, soothing waters of the Oeschinensee refreshed my tired, hot feet near the end of the descent to the valley. And I felt glad that I'd returned with my two friends to sample some of the delights of these beautiful mountains.

The Wetterhorn (3701m)

by Barrie Wood

After, much discussion about the various merits and difficulties of the surrounding peaks we decided that the Wetterhorn from the Dossen Hutte offered an interesting and not too difficult route up this classic summit.

Some height was gained driving up to the car park at Rosenlauri from where the hut could be seen on the distant skyline. Initially the path took us through pine woods and over limestone slabs that, promised an interesting descent in the wet. As we approached the moraine the path steepened and ladders and wires appeared - so did the afternoon thunderstorm. Fortunately we were close to the bivi hut and spent half an hour or so sitting underneath it out of the rain. Sitting in a metal cage watching the lightning was quite atmospheric, but Daniel explained that this was the safest place to be as it formed a gaussian cage. It was not until the storm had passed that we discovered that the hut was open and could have passed the time in comfort, so much for the guide books! The rock steepened as we neared the ridge and gave a very airy and slippery half hour.

The warden seemed puzzled on the arrival of three people when only two had booked in and had some difficulty in understanding the concept of poverty and the British student, obviously not a Swiss problem. After worrying about this for an hour or so, she invited Graham in free of charge. Could this be a first in Swiss alpine climbing?

The following morning we started out under a blue sky up the glacier to the Dossensattel. The route from here to the Rosenloui glacier was down an avalanche prone couloir, so we traversed further along the rock ridge to join it further up. We reached the Welhornsattel after about three hours and turned north to gain the crest at the bottom of the final slope, where several other parties from the Gleckstein Hutte joined the route.

We reached the top in four hours which was a narrow ridge about 30 metres long and after eating and admiring the view we retraced our steps. The snow had by now become very soft in the sun and crampons were no longer required. This led to a careless slip on some ice which removed a large area of skin from my forearm, the only mishap of the outing.

We detoured slightly to look at the Dossen with a view to doing it the following day. It did not inspire us and the condition of the snow which had deteriorated further in the heat and the general poor quality of the rock in the area we decided not to bother. Later that evening we witnessed a huge rock fall from the same peak which added weight to our decision.

The walk back to Rosenloui was achieved in hot sunny conditions concluding a very enjoyable outing.

A first visit to Heidi-land
by Anne Edmonds

Aged eleven, Heidi by Spyri was my favourite book. Fifty years later, my first ever visit to Heidi-land came

when I accompanied Denis Barker to the Alpine Meet.

The Lauterbrunnen valley, a narrow canyon carved out by a glacial torrent, was under heavy cloud when we reached the campsite - nothing like the sunny upland meadows with sweet flowers and soft cowbells of my expectations. Nor did the thousand foot high cliffs looming on either side and pierced by sheer falls of water look very promising to a geriatric with recent walking experience. of the Pentlands and Southern Uplands (apart from an attack of vertigo on Snowdon at the YRC May Meet). Alan Linford's assurance that the area was filled with walks tailor-made for me was delivered against a soundtrack of thunder, roaring water and the sharpening of crampons, so was met with scepticism. The idea of a flight from Geneva back home to Edinburgh became attractive.

But the next day up came the sun over the cliff (as it did at precisely 10.27 am for the next fourteen mornings) and the beauty of the scene, crowned by the Breithorn lining up to its name at the head of the valley, lifted the spirits. A little exploration and map reading proved that Alan was not just being kind; the cliffs were indeed networked by circular paths, steep and sometimes precipitous but well maintained, which enabled the steady walker to rise up above the Lauterbrunnental to Heidi-like villages whose carpets of Alpine flowers far exceeded my expectations. And these meadows gave views of the great peaks, Jungfrau, Monch, Eiger and, most awe inspiring of all, Schreckhorn, unbelievable in their power and beauty.

The villages could be reached by train; we did ascend the Schynige Platte (above Interlaken at the northern entrance to the valley) at enormous expense and visited an alpine garden which, to the non-botanist, seemed inferior to what we saw on our walks. The walk down from Schynige - four hours on a circular path through thick, unnatural forest with no glimpses of the lakes below was also a disappointment. After this we left the trains to the non-walkers on search of views and to the serious climbers taking a short cut to their starting base. Our walks used the paths to the villages and areas served by trains - Grindelwald, a wide and fertile valley, Heidi territory and pleasant walking but over-touristed; Wengen, a very smart resort east of our valley, Gimmelwald and Murren to the west (approached by the usual steep winding path giving more distant views of the great peaks), also smart but with a workaday element too. It was reassuring to find that the Swiss practice traditional farming, reaping the steeply sloping hay meadows by scythe and turning the hay by hand fork, as well as the traditional craft of ripping off the tourist.

We walked to Wengen twice - the second time from near Trummelbach Falls (a spectacular but commercialised waterfall complex south of the campsite); we walked (almost climbed in places) up a very steep cliff, descended into an eerie gorge, then ascended through woods and meadows with stunning views of the waterfalls down the south-west side of the Jungfrau to the Wegernalp - I was too exhausted for more than the walk into Wengen, coffee and the easy path down. We had used this path on our first trip to Wengen

when with thousands of others we went over the meadows to Kleine Scheidegg, a railway stop akin to Blackpool sea front, and then across the ridge, losing the crowds as we went and revelling in close-ups of the four great peaks, to Mannlichen - then down a steep but varied path, past avalanche stoppers through woods and meadows back to Wengen and home again. When Denis, from the safety of the tent showed me our route down, I was horrified to see that I had descended a precipice. But over the fortnight I found familiarity with the heights led to a lessening of vertigo; I was not even put off when Harvey witnessed a fatal fall from a path I had walked.

The best was from Stechelberg, the village at the head of the Lauterbrunnental, up an easy path which took us through hanging valleys in front of the Smadrigafalle. This long, high waterfall could be seen from the camp as it comes off the Breithorn glacier to create the Weisse Lutschine, the torrent that dominates Lauterbrunnen. This walk had everything that makes Switzerland so lovely; high snow covered peaks, glaciers, torrents, waterfalls, natural forest of fir and broad leaf, alpine meadows starred with flowers and farm chalets from which the emergence of Heidi herself would have been no surprise. The scramble up a steep cliff at the head of the final valley so exhausted me that I could not make it to the Oberhornsee but consoled myself with Ken Aldred's description of it as just a tarn, really, despite its grand sounding name. The long walk back across the Obersteinberg ridge with yet another view of the Jungfrau and a man delivering wine by mule to the hill top restaurant was much enjoyed.

Strangely enough the finest views of the grand peaks was achieved with the least effort. On an excessively hot day we took the shady track to the village of Isenfluh, stopping frequently to drink from wayside water troughs and drink in the sight across the valley. We inspected the devastation made by a recent avalanche, enjoyed unfamiliar views of what had become our valley and descended to meet the Weisse Lutschine near its confluence with the Schwartz Lutschine, which flows through Grindelwald. I had originally found the Lutschine rather grim with its terrifying force of dead white water, but the chill of its banks was as welcome as shade in the hot walk back along the valley to the camp.

Lauterbrunnen the village offers everything the tourist can need and, although pricey, all the meals and drinks we had were excellent and served very pleasantly. We also enjoyed the bonus of Swiss National Day on 1 August with a jolly procession (including a monster cow bell band), a speech from the Mayor (long and in German but seemingly all about peace and fellowship, and finally a magnificent firework display. I felt like an extra in the last shoot-out of a Hollywood western as the rockets zoomed across the valley reverberating off the cliffs while Murren and Wengen joined in a thousand feet above us.

The campsite was fine- well-equipped, crossed by a cool stream and peopled by pleasant folk of all nationalities. The atmosphere changed when coach loads of moral majority American teenagers appeared; the women spent their days showering, washing their hair, applying anti-wrinkle cream and creating noisy

queues at all hours in the washrooms while both sexes chanted to Jesus throughout the evenings. The bars outside the campsite probably profited.

Altogether a most enjoyable fortnight which proved that the Bernese Oberland can be rewarding even to the nine-mile-a day-and-nothing-over 3,000 feet-please type of walker. And we could have reached the Jungfrauoch by train!

Traversal of the Lobhorner (2566m) by Daniel Wood

A trip by Martyn Wakeman, Graham Salmon, Barrie Wood and Daniel Wood

Graham had twisted his knee on the Monch a few days earlier, so it was decided not to risk a trip to a high hut. Much rifling through the guide book resulted in us trying persuade Dad that despite not having climbed for about ten years a traverse of the Lobhorner was within his capabilities. The following afternoon we set off up the funicular railway towards Murren and then by foot to the Lobhorn hut. This would have been a pleasant three hour walk if the weather had held out.

On arrival at the hut, we found we had it to ourselves, it being the 1st of August and the Swiss national day. That evening the mist cleared to reveal spectacular views of the Eiger, Monch and Jungfrau, also our first glimpse of the Lobhorn. As we sat on the veranda waiting for the fireworks to start, the hut warden pointed out avalanches on the Geissen glacier opposite. The following morning the weather had cleared and reinforced my opinion that hut wardens have an

unusually pessimistic approach to weather forecasting.

We arrived at the bottom of the climb at around eight o'clock; the walk in taking over an hour. The Lobhorn is nothing like to be found in Britain; a strange lump of limestone perched on top of a grassy ridge. From the side, it resembles the teeth of a saw with four distinct teeth. End on it is pear shaped, being very undercut at the bottom. This led to some quiet trepidation on my behalf as it reminded me of the Old Man of Storr on Skye. That trip had not been a successful one.

The start of the climb turned out to be much easier than it looked, taking a line up a vague gully. The route was confirmed by the presence of numerous bolts. Graham and Martyn set off first leaving Dan and I to do some last minute preparations, i.e., introduce dad to these new fangled sticht plate thingies! The climbing eased considerably after the first pitch and after a short while found ourselves on a sharp ridge with superb views to the huge mass of mountains to the south. The rock was generally sound but care had to be taken due to the rubble that seemed to occupy every ledge.

From the top of the first pinnacle, we found a way down to the foot of the next by a series of loose ledges. The way up from here proved harder than it looked; a short steep step protected by two marginal pegs. The way up was more painful than difficult, the rock in the cracks being razor sharp, making jamming almost impossible. The climbing soon eased and after some spectacular abseils and some exposed, but largely uneventful

climbing we arrived at the summit and the last pinnacle.

Graham and Martyn had taken an alternative route up the last pinnacle and had arrived first. They found a tin box hidden under a rock, which contained a summit book and pencil. We all signed this and after some exciting dangles landed back on the path feeling very pleased with ourselves. We had chosen the right route on the right day.

Flowers of the Oberland

by Ken Aldred

The fingers of his left hand were pushed deep into a vertical crack in the rock. His left boot had a dubious hold on a loose moss while the toe of his right boot gave more security after an uncomfortable twist of the ankle. He nervously brought the camera up to his eye and then used his forefinger to focus on the Saxifrage retusa which appeared to have a hold as precarious as his own on the rock face. Satisfied with the focus he operated the shutter and carefully drew breath again. A second photograph from a different angle would have been desirable but without any fancy gadgets on the camera it would have meant descending before he could use both hands to wind the film on. Carefully he straightened his left arm and lowered his right foot back onto the path nine inches below. Being a botanist on a YRC Alpine meet was not an easy option.

While younger and more active members on the meet were rushing up to huts and dragging themselves up impossible ridges, some of us had very enjoyable days in the hills and in

the valleys searching out and attempting to identify some of the flowers for which the area is famous. A large group of us visited the Alpine Gardens at Schynige Platte to see a very wide range of plants, although some of the spring flowers were well past their best. These gardens are well worth a visit, for while somebody remarked, not accurately, that all the flowers could be seen on the hillsides, such a range couldn't be seen in such a relatively small area. Also by carefully selecting the positions and by judicious changes to the growing medium, the gardeners have been able to allow visitors to see groups of plants not normally seen together in one locality. An example of this was the Rhododendron hirsutum next to R. ferrugineum. The former normally grows on limestone, while the latter being a calafuge prefers acid soils. Having praised the garden it must be admitted that the most exciting flowers seen that day were the masses of Gentiana verna and G. bavarica and two small groups of Soldanella alpina seen bordering snow patches on the grassy ridges crossed on the way to the Faulhom. Many Gentians were seen when we visited Mannlichen. The masses of Gentiana acaulis were at the seeding stage but G. lutea and G. purpurea were in flower. Later in the week a single flower of the smallest genus G. nivalis was found just below the Schreckhom Hut. The gentian, Gentian campestris was common in the meadows around Wengen.

On the wettest day of the meet two past Presidents and myself enjoyed a walk to the top of the valley as far as the Oberhom See. On the way we stopped in a hanging valley for lunch by the side of a babbling stream with wide scree beds covered with

Epilobium fleischeri, the Alpine Willowherb. Their masses of pink flowers contrasted beautifully with the greens of the various conifers. However, a more exciting find was a single Primula acaulis growing near the lake. This plant is one of the parents of the many colourful show auriculas seen on display in Alpine Flower competitions. Our find in its wet environment surrounded by mist hung rocks was more evocative than anything seen on a show bench.

Bietenliicke via Soustal

by Mike Godden

A superb Alps meet was drawing to a close, and Marcia and I planned to spend our last night in Lauterbrunnen on the Thursday using our small tent. This meant that our last walking day would be Wednesday, as on the Thursday the large frame tent would have to be taken down and stowed in the car.

We duly caught the funicular to Griitschalp in the company of Dennis Armstrong and duly commenced our walk north through the woods, gradually gaining height until we reached the junction of several paths at Souslager. We had traversed a semi-circle and were now heading south-west up the Soustal valley. The weather was fine and sunny and the weather good.

Climbing steadily, we passed a Swiss family who appeared to be making their way to Oberberg, the only habitation between us and the head of the valley. They had no packs and were obviously were enjoying their walk. As we approached Oberberg we met two pack horses and their attendants on their way down the track.

Presumably they had delivered supplies to Oberberg, and the encounter seemed to answer questions previously raised en route that we were following horse tracks.

Beyond Oberberg there were good views back down the valley, and forward to Schilthorn whose aspect seemed very close. The Lobhorn to the north west did not look so intimidating from 2000 metres, and clearly provided good rock climbing opportunities. At an area called Schlacht Matti, we stopped for lunch.

The track continued forward to the Chilchfluepass, but our route crossed a stream and headed east and then north-east up the mountain side. As we passed a receding snow patch we were pleased to find a plant called Soldanella Alpina, an example of which had been pointed out to us on an earlier walk from the Schynige Platte to the Faulhorn. The terrain appeared to hold plenty of moisture and plenty of plants became more abundant. In particular, there were large tracts of a thistle like plant, Gentians of varying shades of blue and further examples of Soldanella.

As the path became steeper and began to arc to the east, we met the only other people we saw on our route, enjoying their lunch. They had obviously come down from the ridge, presumably traversing our route in reverse. We then started the slow process of following a steep zig-zag path across scree and rocks to take us to the ridge. Dennis led the path and was observed finally scrambling on all fours onto the ridge. The usual shout "This is it" was heard, but he did not disappear from view as all good Yorkshire Ramblers may be expected to do. I then began to wonder what I

had let myself in for - gammy leg and all. I finally arrived on the ridge with Marcia following. The effort was rewarding as the whole of the Bernese Oberland came into view, with splendid views of all of the mountain tops in an arc of almost 360 degrees.

There then followed a brief rest and discussion, after which I unanimously decided that Dennis would go first, I would potter in the middle, and Marcia would encourage me from behind. However, there were no problems, our ski sticks being used to the full as additional legs. In a very short distance we found the way down. This was far worse than the ridge and I had to resort to having five slippery points of contact with the ground.

Very soon we were at the Schilthorn Hiitte enjoying refreshment, and from whence we set off back to Grutschalp via the main path towards Murren, then to Mittelberg and Winteregg following the railway line.

The weather was good throughout the day and we all felt we had achieved something on our final walking day.

Low level rock climbing

by Graham Salmon

At first sight the steep walls of the Lauterbrunnen Valley would appear to offer ample scope for rock climbing, however, very little appears to take place. This might be due to the poor quality of the rock, the unrelenting steepness or the proximity of far better developed areas nearby.

Our first outing turned out to be more of a forest, off the track, stumble. The guide book listed the minor crag of

Wilderswill, just outside Interlaken, as having about forty routes in the grades VI to X (VS to Extreme in the English grading system). We eventually found the crag after a one and a half hour slog through the thick undergrowth and were not impressed by what we found. Due to the waning enthusiasm with the crag, only one climb was attempted and we soon retreated from the crag due to the poor quality of both the rock and route.

A few days later we were again tempted by the prospect of rock climbing and this time were much impressed with the situation. We had chosen a large granite slab called Gelmerfluh in the Grimselpass, just below the Gelmersee. We completed one route, the Via Birra. This was equipped with bolts and pitons, though we also supplemented these with our own equipment. The route consisted of three fifty metre pitches and the descent was via abseil. Unfortunately before we had the chance to attempt a second route, the usual afternoon storm arrived and we abandoned climbing for the day.

After being impressed with our previous visit to the Grimselpass, we again returned, on this occasion to a crag called Oelberg. Two routes were completed on this occasion, Egeliweg (V) and Quartz Rossi (VI). Both the routes were very well protected, with bolts appearing always just after the hard moves. The afternoon storms failed to materialise and we were forced to depart only due to the lateness of the day.

The Grimselpass offers a vast amount of climbing, at all grades and on fine granite slabs. There is enough scope for a complete holiday and only short visits not doing justice to the area.

The Jungfrau (4158m)

by David Smith

The Eiger, Monch and Jungfrau dominate the skyline from the alp above Wengen. The massive structure of the Jungfrau reaches up from the valley floor to its lofty 4158m top, exposing complex rock formations surmounted by two spectacular snow peaks, the Silberhorn and the Schneehorn as foreground to its wonderful ridge and summit.

Way back in 1960, John Varney and I made an attempt on the celebrated Guggi route, a 10 to 12 hour expedition when conditions are good and with a knowledge of the route. Our youthful endeavour was no match for these requirements and as there was much ice on the route we prudently returned to the Guggihutte. Now 34 years on I had not thought that I would see that exalted summit, but I had not reckoned with the friendships built up over the past seven alpine meets, and John Devenport and David Hick very kindly invited me to join them on an attempt.

To minimise the enormous cost of the rail fare to the Jungfraujoeh, we caught the 'Good Morning Train' at £47 return rather than the £70 normal fare. Two hours later at 9.30 am we were at the joch where we met Harvey and later Alister and Tim returning to the valley after their success on the Monch. A wide snow piste littered with tourists leads to the Monch joch hutte, but the clear weather was rapidly being replaced by thick mist. We spent the remainder of the day looking through the window at thick mist and falling snow. Also trying to figure out what the lawn mower in the doorway could be used for!