



On the slopes of Monte Moricone, looking towards Monte Vettore.



Near the source of the River Tenna



Approaching the top of Monte Sibilla



The north-eastern Sibillini, after leaving Fiastra.

A sad postscript, November 2016.

In the recent earthquakes, many of the villages and hamlets were devastated. In particular, Visso and Norcia were very badly hit, and Castelluccio is now little more than a heap of rubble. Some paths are said to be impassable because of rockfalls. Hence, anyone planning to visit the area should do some research in advance to see if it is feasible.

ALPINE MEET, BEAUFORT-SUR-DORON, SAVOIE

30th July to 13th August 2016

The idea for this meet came from the meet leader, Alister Renton who had visited the area both in winter and summer. Besides identifying the best-placed caravan and campsite he found a large rustic chalet for those preferring something more solid over their heads, complete with resident female cat and her three kittens. Both places were a little down valley from Beaufort-sur-Doron, a delightful village above Albertville and southwest of Mont Blanc. This was an inspired choice of base giving easy access to several walking, mountaineering and mountain biking areas besides the local sport climbing and via ferrata crags.

Thirteen made it to the meet with Tony and Val Penny having to withdraw on the eve of the start after one had a thankfully minor swimming accident. The ages of the attendees ranged from 4 to 70 with half being in the lower half of that range. All were active in the hills with some sport climbing and mountain biking as well. As ever the meet was sociable with different groupings heading out each day and with two grand get-togethers for barbecues.

We were blessed with good weather and only one day was blighted by heavy rain showers and that day coincided with an antiques market in the village. A couple of guests visited the factory to see production of the famous Beaufort cheese while the rest of us settled for repeated samplings of the product with chunks of baguette longue.

Mountaineering activities

Sandwiched between the better-known massifs of Mont Blanc and the Dauphine Alps, the mountains of the Beaufortain Alps remain much less visited in the summer months. The complex geology of the area provides diverse ecology and the resultant wide variety of flora we encountered were superb. There were plenty of butterflies too. A few marmots and chamois were seen, but no bouquetin. The availability of car access to a number of high cols and a couple of open chair lifts facilitated a variety of interesting day hikes and scrambles to the summits of different mountains, one having an excellent via ferrata.

Use was made of two older English guidebooks (Walking in the Tarentaise and Beaufortin Alps, JW Akitt, Cicerone, 1995.

Summits For All - The French Alps, Edouard Prevost, 1991, Cordee) and one newer French guide (Le Guide Rando: Beaufortain, Philippe Gachet, 2012).

The area was covered by two IGN 1-25k sheets: 3531OT and 3532OT; an excellent, free French mapping app called iPhiGénie allowed these to be viewed and cached on our tablets and smart phones – it's recommended to anyone heading to France.

The summits and routes taken are summarised below:

31st July – An afternoon walk up the hill behind the chalet was enlivened by coming across a primitive sort of bothy. The younger element extended the outing and reaching a top and creating a rough descent not evident on the map or, in places, on the ground.

1st Aug - Tête Nord des Fours (2756m)

Above Beaufort, the Plan de la Lai is a broad platform reached by road and we headed north east to the precipitous Crêtes des Gittes ridged traversed by an old military mule track. We met several mountainbikers en-route to the Refuge de

la Croix de Bonhomme for their descent. Further up, a couple of large snow patches were encountered just below the Tête Nord des Fours summit.

2nd Aug - Mont Coin (2539m)

We drove up from Areche and took the very rough track to the popular picnic spot of the Lac des Fees to begin our ascent on foot to the Cormet d'Areche col. One party ascended to Mont Coin via the Col du Coin and descended by the narrow and sinuous NNW ridge. The other climbed the SW ridge, both parties arriving back at the lake at the same time, but none saw the fairies. Meanwhile Richard soloed up the Grand Mont from the Lac des Fees via the Col de la Lauze and then descended to Areche after a long day.

3rd Aug - Pointe de la Grande Journée (2460m)

The chair lift from Le Planey was used to aid our ascent to the Refuge des Arolles. We traversed to the Col de la Bâthie and climbed to the rocky summit of the Pointe de la Grande Journée. One party descended the narrow SW ridge, the other group followed a different route into the S combe before meeting at a stream where several cooled their feet. A welcome beer was had at the Refuge before taking the lift back down before it closed.

4th Aug - Roc du Vent (2329m) Via Ferrata

The Plan de la Lai provides access to the Roc du Vent via ferrata, the only one in the area. This interesting 2km route is equipped with some 900m of cable and a 20m Nepali bridge. An hour's walk saw us gearing up at the start of the cabling to begin following another party up the exposed and slabby S ridge. This led to a flat grassy top with views over lunch to Mont Blanc in the distance and large colonies of edelweiss and blue gentians.

A cabled descent then led to a rocky defile and a strenuous climb up a vertical section the other side, then across another top and down to the wire bridge.

Spectacularly situated with fine views down to the Lac de la Gittaz barrage below, concentration was needed to maintain motion along the cables without swaying too much. Safely across, the final section was a protected descent down to a mined tunnel for a spot of caving, where head-torches were required to negotiate the 100m back to daylight. A very good day out and recommended to anyone in the area.

6th Aug - Legette de Mirantin (2353m)

SW of Beaufort the road climbs up to several alpages and their chalets. We parked at Les Choseaux and began to follow a route that had been marked out for the Mont Mirantin fell race taking place the same day. Leaving the marker flags at Lac Couvert, narrow paths led us to a pleasant traverse over the Roche Plane to its eponymous col. Here an even less trodden path soon vanished into rocks and scree as we began to ascend the NE flank of the Legette de Mirantin. After (wrongly) rejecting a route up a leftwards diagonal couloir, our line became steeper and looser, then dangerously loose, finally necessitating steps to be kicked in the mud and shale flakes before the summit was gained. Fortunately, a more straightforward descent was found back down steep grassy slopes the across to Lac Couvert to join our upward route.

7th Aug - Roche Parstire (2109m)

An easier day was enjoyed from the Col du Pré roadhead over the Roche Parstire and along the ridge to the Passage de la Charmette col to descend back to the car via the sentier botanique.

8th Aug - Mont Joly (2525m)

Departing from the Col du Joly, we climbed steeply up to the Aiguille Croche (2487m) whilst admiring the long ridge in front of us, seamed by gullies. This was followed NE for over 4km to Mont Joly, the closest we got to Mont Blanc. On the way, we passed several large diameter pipes emerging from the ground with down-turned ends connected by buried pipes to a central station having oxygen and propane cylinders. These turned out to be Gasex avalanche control cannons. From Mont Joly's summit, the views over the Tré la Tête glacier to the Aiguilles de Bionassay and Mont Blanc were stupendous - parties on the Bosses Ridge and the Dômes de Miages could clearly be seen through binoculars. Regretfully, we eventually turned our eyes away and headed back along the ridge and down the meadows to the car park.

9th Aug - Lacs de Trepête

We parked beside Lac de Guerin in uncertain weather and walked up to the Col de la Lauze (2119m) observed by two perched Griffon vultures and then W down to the first tarn of the Lacs de Trepête, returning the same way. The highlight was a close encounter with another vulture as it flew past only some 30m away above the lake.

10th Aug - Crêt du Rey (2633m)

We had a cool and cloudy start at the Cornet d'Areche as we followed a path across the pastures to the sinuous ridge leading up to the Crêt du Rey, watched by a large herd of bell-ringing cows beside their mobile milking shed. The NE ridge was pleasantly airy and led up to the summit where we continued down the S ridge and across to the Col du Cornes Noir and back past the cows.

11th Aug - Le Grand Mont (2686m)

Our last route used the only other open chair lift which is from Areche to Cuvy. We ascended past the charred ruins of the Refuge de l'Alpage, burnt to the ground earlier in the year and up to the Col de la Forclaz. Then a boulder field and more rocks were crossed to the summit of Le Grand Mont and its small solar powered weather station to enjoy our last views of Mont Blanc before returning the same way to enjoy a celebratory beer back in Areche.

A number of other walks were made around reservoirs or up valleys by those wanting quieter days. The area is well served with seats or grassy banks giving views which warrant a long sit and stare.

Mountainbiking

A couple of full days were spent mountain biking. One involved a number of demanding road-less cols in the area of Mont Coin and the other made use of a bus to reach Les Saisies

Road cycling

The Rentons made a number of cycle outings. The longest was towards the end of the meet when Alister and Neev cycled 57 km in 7 hours on their 1966 tandem, taking in some epic Tour de France climbs along the way to make 1,841m ascent in all. Going up one of the hills a check of 7-year-old Neev's blood sugar level found an oral injection of jelly babies and a fruit pastille was needed before they could continue. Their determination to live life to the full is to be admired.

Sport climbing

Beaufort village has its own south-facing bolted crag, Falaise de Beaufort, conveniently close to the parking, leaving a walk-in of just 130m. Several visits were made, usually in the evenings once the sun had left it. A couple of the twenty routes on the right at 3 gave a gentle introduction then

working left there were 4s and 5s. Richard managed one of the latter at the second attempt after his trainers failed to provide enough grip on a high bare steep section and he glissaded backwards gracefully. The highest grade climbed was one of the 6as.

The most amusing descent was 4-year-old Iona's after a top-roped clean onsight ascent. The transition to being lowered off proved too uninviting so she sat on a high ledge swinging her legs looking unconcerned. Ma had to shin up a parallel route, swing across, grab the back of her harness and descend with Iona dangling like a bag of shopping. Iona was not the youngest on the crag.

After a scramble up the left-hand edge of the crag, Beth was introduced to via ferrata techniques and moving roped on a well-protected long and winding route up three crags. Chains, wires, bolts and pigtails clearly identify the route which takes in a ridge, tower, steps across gaps, dièdre, chimney, traverses, mantleshelf, a short descent and face climbing on rungs. After ending the tour at a station of the cross, the descent path passes the Gendarmerie. Not included in the crag's topo (available free from Tourist Information) are a number of tree-shaded bolted routes on the higher tiers though these were not clean like the bottom crag.

Other attractions

The distinctive local produce was incorporated into many of the group's meals including the Beaufort cheese which was even available from a vending machine in case supplies were required outside shop hours.

The local market proved popular one wet morning with stall holders offering for sale a wide range of rural curiosities. There were also a number of mountaineering texts and photographs of interest. Needless to say the several local coffee shops were also frequented.

The young employed attendees could only manage one week but they packed a lot into that week and flew in and out to maximise their time in the mountains. Those having more time available drove down with most taking the same Hull-Zeebrugge overnight ferry

and getting to the chalet in less than 30 hours from home. They split the return journey with overnight stops in either Troyes or Metz. The Rentons had a third week in Malbuisson in the French Jura on their way home.

Once again the alpine meet was a success. The area gave plenty to do with a variety of interesting routes and activities – well chosen, Alister, thanks for arranging the meet there. Many days we had good views of Mont Blanc's southern side which provided a suitable excuse to sit and stare. Picking out the various routes on it and its surrounding peaks – even spotting some of the climbers – prompted recollections of some members' earlier ascents. The daily strenuous activity was good preparation for the two who were soon to be heading to the Himalayas. These meets certainly deserve their place in the Club's meet list.

M Smith

Attending were:

Mick Borroff
David Hick
Christine Marriott (guest)
Beth Marriott (guest)
Alister Renton (meet organiser)
Jane Renton (guest)
Neev Renton (guest)
Iona Renton (guest)
Helen Smith
Michael Smith
Richard Smith
Fiona Smith (guest)
Dave Booker (guest)



Joly Ridge



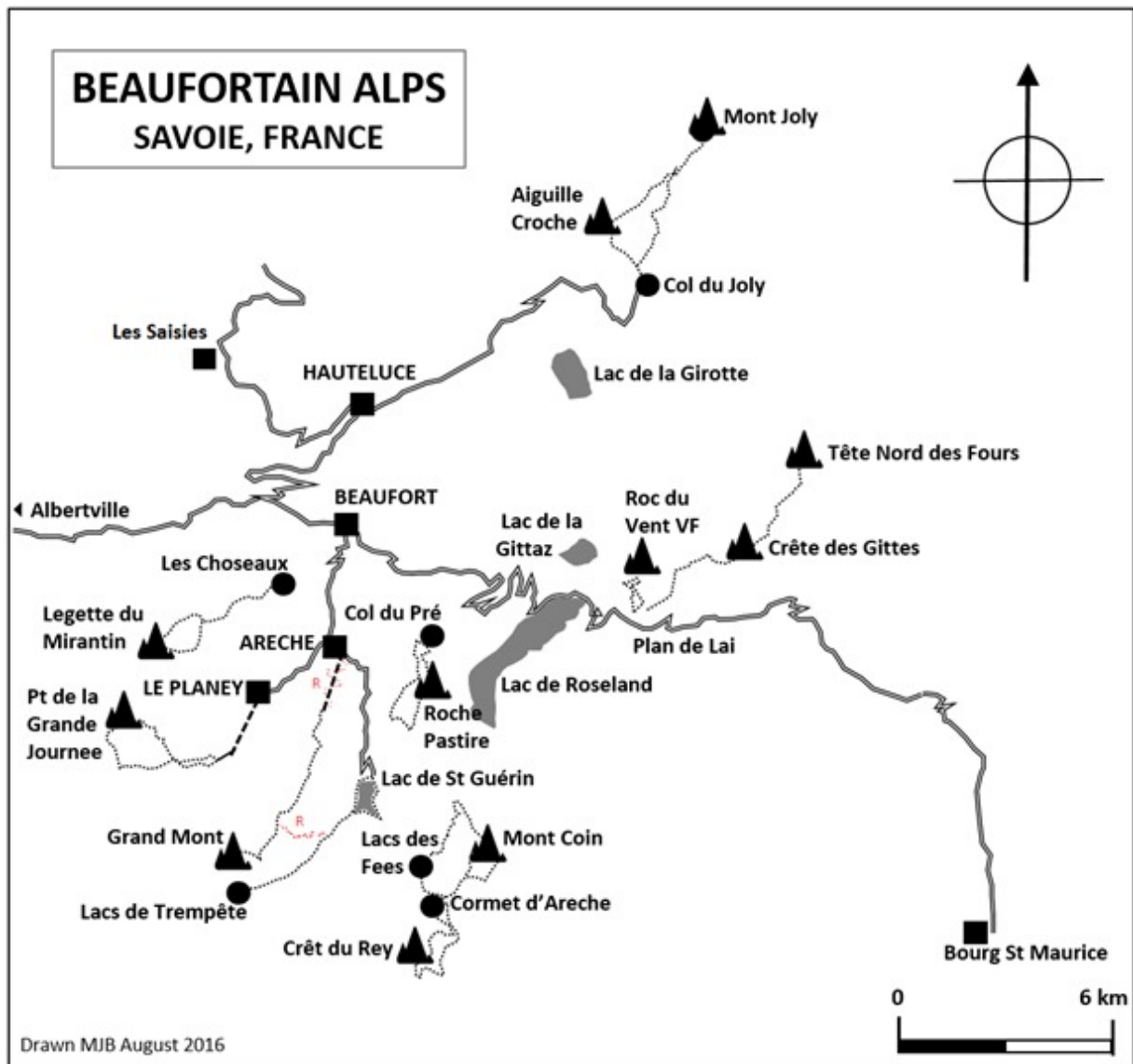
The flank of the Legette de Mirantin



Joly Ridge
monument



Grand
Mont



WEED OR WILD?

What is a weed to one man is a wild flower to another and at the end of the day a weed is just a plant growing in the wrong place. We occasionally have articles on botany going into detail about wild plants but not often about what are normally thought of as garden plants. All our plants did originate somewhere in the wild although often much altered by selective breeding. This is an article about the not so humble tulip and its origins a long way from our gardens. It is a brief account of a fascinating excursion researching the origins of the iconic tulip, one of our most beautiful spring garden plants and an ever popular cut-flower.

HIDDEN GEMS AMONGST THE MIGHTY TIEN-SHAN MOUNTAINS

John & Valerie Middleton

THE MOUNTAINS.

The Tien-Shan, or 'Celestial Mountains' as they are more popularly known, are part of the northernmost Himalayan belt of hills that began to form when the Indian and Eurasian plates collided some 55 million years ago. Since that point in time a 2,800km long range of stunning snow-capped summits and dazzling valleys has steadily developed that extends from the 'Bogda-Shan', just east of Urumqi in the Xinjiang Province of China, westwards to Tashkent the capital city of Uzbekistan.