

The Cortina Meet

Sheila Murray

Continental Meet, July 2009.

This heading in the February Newsletter caught my eye and, as I read on, I became more excited to see that “senior citizens will find plenty to see from below the peaks”. Was this my chance to join another Alpine Meet since the first occasion in 1960? I was sorely tempted but the prospect was somewhat daunting. Was I wise to embark on such an adventure at my age? But I need not have worried.

Let me take you back briefly to 1960 and the time when travel abroad was limited because of the then allowance of foreign currency. To get to Geneva we flew from London in the very early hours of the morning, reaching the railway station as the early workers were emerging for their day's work. I can still vividly remember sitting on the platform relishing coffee, croissants and black cherry jam - what an introduction to Switzerland! We journeyed on by train along the lake-side, and then by bus into the Valais with its chalets on 'toadstools' and the post-buses with their musical horns - a sound now seldom heard. We eventually reached the simple Aiguille de la Tza Hotel from where, under the guidance of Anne Cordiner, already an experienced Alpinist, we had our first experience of the Alps in all their glory. I can still recall the thrill of early morning expeditions from a hut, guided at first by torchlight across the sparkling snow, eventually to the summit of, say, the Pigne d'Arolla or the Tête Blanche, and the extensive panorama of snow-covered peaks in every direction.

But enough of nostalgia and fast forward to July 2009. This time there was no early-morning flight, but a pick up from one's house at a civilised hour for the drive to Edinburgh, whence to Italy and Marco Polo airport. Here a water-taxi was hailed and soon we were skimming over the waters to the centre of Venice itself. Disembarkation was a somewhat nerve-wracking experience but a strong arm was at hand to ensure no mishaps occurred. Our party of the two Scobbies (Eilidh Senior and Eilidh Junior), Frances Macrae-Gibson and myself spent two nights in a small but very central hotel, a stone's throw from St Mark's Square thus making our modest sight-seeing relatively easy. Having assimilated the 'flavour' of Venice we were glad to board a train and head north to Bolzano, where we met up with Ken and Lydia Thomson, who had made their way there by a more strenuous route and one more in keeping with a Cairngorm Club Meet. The main purpose of going to Bolzano was, of course, to view Ötzi, the Ice Man, whose 5,300 year-old remains were



Two Past Presidents beneath the Cinque Torri: Sheila Murray and Ken Thomson

discovered in the Ötztal Alps by Helmut Simon in 1991, and which now provide the centrepiece of a fascinating exhibition in the museum.

Now our circuitous journey to the Dolomites was nearing an end, and Cortina d'Ampezzo beckoned, and (dare I say it?) a taxi was engaged to take us there. At last, after some difficulty finding our apartments, we had arrived! There we were joined by Gordon Stalker, the seventh member of the group. This being my first visit to Cortina, I was surprised to find such a large, sprawling township with one-way streets, numerous hotels, restaurants and up-market

shops. All this surrounded by breath-taking walls of impregnable rock. What could I possibly do here?

I soon realised that the resourceful Eilidh had the answer, by using the local buses and the occasional taxi (!) one could gain a thousand metres or so, and thereby, instead of always looking UP, one could now look ACROSS at these mighty limestone giants! Our favourite vantage point was the Tre Croci, where we could laze in the sun, do a little botanising, or take slightly more strenuous exercise before rendezvousing at the nearby restaurant to sample what was on offer.

One day Ken kindly took a day off and assisted me onto a chair lift, thus enabling me to reach the even greater heights of the Cinque Torri. Here we explored the Italian gun emplacements, from where they successfully faced the Austrians on Monte Lagazuoi during the First World War culminating in the battle of Caporetto.

So the days passed and down from the heights we returned to Cortina where certain of us had a little rest, after which, as if by magic, a delicious three-course meal would appear by courtesy of Eilidh and Frances. Usually the three 'youngsters' of the party would join us later to tell us of

their day's exploits, which filled me with a certain amount of envy. It was good to know that some club members still upheld its traditions, yet at the same time to realise that advancing years should not be a deterrent to joining such a meet. This octogenarian certainly does not regret having done so, thanks to Eilidh and the others.

The Cairngorm Club