

# Mountaineering in Switzerland

---

Vignette: Expedition to Switzerland,  
July and August 1971



## Contents

Mountaineering in Switzerland .....	1
<b>July 1971 .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Journey from England through France and Germany to Switzerland .....	1
Night on a Mountaintop .....	4
Hill Walking with Roberto .....	7
Rock and Ice Climbing with Carlo .....	11
Piz Palu and Piz Cambrena .....	14
The Journey Home .....	19
Epilogue: Late 1971... ..	21

# Mountaineering in Switzerland

## July 1971

### Journey from England through France and Germany to Switzerland

[This story is based on the diary that I kept at the time.]

Saturday 24 July 1971 – Midnight. Mid-Europe. Crickets chirping. About to succumb to the first real sleep I have had since Thursday/Friday, 36 hours ago. Events, from then till now being more or less continuous, I shall endeavour to relate with the failing aid of a torch, in a camping site in the Rhine valley, just a few hundred metres from the German border...

Friday 09:46 – I caught the train from Market Rasen and had a picnic lunch aboard. Then I took the tube to Liverpool Street station, train to Broxbourne, and then a bus, arriving at Haileybury at about 3 pm. Mr 'Humphrey' N [HRN] supervised the last packings of the Army Land Rover; we all had a final coffee in Red House: Mr N, Chris A, Keith M, Doug H, Jack P, Mr 'Jim' C [JMC], Simon H and Mr 'Bongo' S [CS] – the others having quitted, and Mr 'Chalky' W being already in Lugarno, Switzerland. All of us except Jim, Mr S, Simon and Chris started first for Dover in the 'battle-tank' [Army Land Rover], the others following – intending to "meet at Dover" on arrival – in Mr S's Volvo. Our route took us through Broxbourne, Waltham Abbey, Epping Forest (with detours), the Dartford Tunnel, the A2 via Chatham, Canterbury, and thence to Dover.

We waited for over an hour at the obvious, but unspecified, *rendezvous* at the eastern car docks, but there was no sign of the others – nor during the entire journey. Doug, Jack and I walked along the front to see if they had parked; and to procure some paper-bag fish and chips which we ate ourselves hot, and conveyed to Keith and HRN, as they were rapidly losing heat. Dusk was falling, and above were white luminescent cliffs and wheeling gulls. By pure chance, on our return, Jack spotted CS's Volvo, empty, parked half-way along Marine Parade. We left Doug there and informed the others. CS's party arrived having shown no responsibility or initiative as regards the *rendezvous*, having dined on steak and Beaujolais (admittedly at vast expense)!

It was then, after much tension between Doug and Jack that it was admitted that the former had left his passport at home (in Solihull), because he was under the impression that we were traveling on a collective basis. Final plans favoured he should spend the night in Dover, catch the early train to London, collecting his passport which his parents would bring down on an early train, then Dover and Calais ferry to be met by CS, JMC and Sebastian on Saturday afternoon – they having crossed as normal and spent the night near Boulogne. The Land Rover would continue as scheduled (which it has done).

The car ferry, *French Compeigne*, departed at 23:59. I drank masses of coffee to keep sleep at bay, but caught the odd wink of sleep on deck. The lights of France loomed near 01:30, and we landed at Boulogne at about 2 am. Safely clear of docks, customs etc., we parted company until supposedly Basel, and the battle-wagon driven by heroic Humphrey rattled off into the night. A misty dawn crept across the landscape at about 4 am, finding us driving through long poplar avenues typical of northern France. We stopped for a 'breather' and coffee at 05:30 at Bapaume, a small town near Arras, which boasted, in the main village square, a statue pock-marked with what looked like World War II machine gun bullets.

Breakfast consisted of baguettes fresh from the *boulangerie*, off a long road leading to Reims. I managed to capture about 20 minutes sleep on the next run, and we arrived at some famous champagne works just south of Reims around 10 am (imagining it to be mid-afternoon)! We went on a difficult-to-understand tour round the famous cellars and caves, seeing the vast 20,000 litre barrel used at the 1889 Paris festival. [The tour guide was amusing – driving us around in a motorized vehicle and saying, "and now we are going to do

a U-turn: I turn, *you* turn, we all turn..."] we all enjoyed a free glass of champagne at the end.

Onwards east, having lunch before reaching Nancy at the beginning of the Alsace-Lorraine area. This was a two-hour stop, and we had baguette and compo salmon. After lunch a took a stroll in one of the abundant forests. Then east again at 3 pm, our route taking us around Nancy and south towards West Germany, avoiding Strasbourg. I enjoyed seeing the beautiful hills of Alsace-Lorraine, and small towns and villages with distinctive 'German-looking' architecture – houses with yellowish pebble-dash walls and red-tiled roofs, and churches with Germanic roofs. The eastern side of the hills, as we came down, afforded us a terrific view over the Rhine valley and towards the beginnings of the Black Forest. We drove through Colmar, getting lost in the town centre. We then went on to Neuf-Brisach, and the border camping site. We pitched our tents and ate compo steak-and-kidney pudding. Early bed – I slept alone in a tent.

Sunday 25 July 1971 – up at 07:00. Compo sausages and beans for breakfast. We packed up the Land Rover and set off shortly before 09:00. We then crossed the Rhine through French and West German customs. Then Chris and I sauntered back through the West German post, without passports, to take a photo of the Rhine. The armed customs official gave us some very dubious looks, but nothing worse! We joined a splendid autobahn short of Freiburg – a good fast road with vegetation strategically planted to screen out the oncoming traffic. During our journey along it, CS and his party joined close behind us, with Doug. Near 10 am we arrived at the frontier town of Basel. We crossed the West German-Swiss border with little difficulty and spent some time changing money etc.

We set off southwards, but not in convoy. The sun was very fierce. The landscape comprised gentle wooded hills and typically Swiss houses such as wooden chalets. Presently we caught sight of large, very hazy mountains in the distance. We met the others outside a town just north of Lucerne, where we had a delicious cold meat and salad lunch, preceded by melon, with a light beer, at a high-class out-door restaurant, all shops being shut as it was Sunday. It rained at one point, but the sun soon resumed its ferocity. We proceeded through the city of Lucerne and, skirting the lake, approached the Alps. The terrain remained fairly flat for several kilometres, as we wound past lakes and mountains, which became progressively higher. We stopped several times to admire the view. Eventually, after passing through several tunnels, we entered the Gotthard Pass, in which the road climbed steeply in hairpin bends for several thousand feet, almost to the level of patches of snow. The road then dropped precipitously, sometimes taking off from the mountainside altogether in flyovers. Back down on a reasonably flat level we drove through several towns with Italian sounding names, until we arrived at Bellinzona, and met the others at Taverne nearby.

We then went on to Tesserete, where we met Chalky W. He led the way to a parking place near his semi-detached terrace cottage. We unloaded the vehicles and walked to the house which overlooked Lugano and the mountains of Italy. It was now dark. Had supper in the *stalla* [cowshed] on the ground floor, discussing plans and the various dangers of adders and stag beetles, which seemed to abound there. I slept in that room, rather apprehensive of both... [I remember Chalky saying that we were all suffering from 'journey tiredness'.]



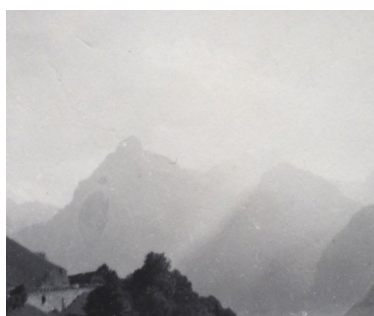
*Northern France – Day 1*



*Alsace, France*



*Rhine – West German border*



*Into the Alps...*



*Lake Lucerne, Switzerland*



*The 'stalla' (cowshed) at Tesserete...*



## Night on a Mountaintop

Monday 26 to Tuesday 27 July 1971 – the day began with a lecture from Chalky W on the infamous *Vipera Europa* ["So when you are bitten by a snake, you say 'I've been bit!' and then you shout "*Vipera, vipera! Hospitale, hospitale!*". I remember seeing a huge fly on top of the tent, being attacked by smaller flies.] We shopped in Tesserete, then went on to a swimming lake beyond, and had a blissful cooling swim away from the fierce midday sun.

We went back to the cottage for a salad lunch. Then having kitted up, we set off at 15:45 in two parties for the 5,000-foot mountain above the cottage. We 'navigated' in turns, aiming for the white wooden crosses that marked our route. Unfortunately, we took a wrong turn at the bottom of a ridge we intended to follow. Instead we rounded the base, gaining little height and we were plagued by horseflies and heat. Putting on an anorak made me sweat gallons [but CS told me to take it off, as I was losing too much moisture]. Further up the mountain, the lack of trees, diminishing flies and a cool breeze improved matters considerably. An hour more of sweating upwards in the blazing sun found us eventually at the summit of *Monte Della Cruce* – marked by a huge white metal cross on top. The ridge leading from this rose further on to the summit of *Caval Drossa* at 5,000 feet. It was relatively easy going to the top, except for apprehension about hornets! We reached the summit at 19:15. There was no sign of the other party, and the view from the summit was restricted owing to heat haze.

After a few moments we began descent on the other side and soon ran into thick and perilous bushes. We tried to make it to the path running from the foot of the valley before dark, as we had planned to dine at Bellinzona – but the sun was sinking rapidly, and we were faced with dangerous descents through scrub to cross gorges. Eventually darkness overtook us, posing fatal risks for further climbing. We therefore made for a deserted cow-croft, just below the summit, that we had spotted earlier. We reached it at 20:45 in almost complete darkness. We sterilized some stream water for consumption, and then spent the next ½ hour collecting leafy branches from nearby bushes to make bedding. This we constructed, jutting out from the western wall of the stone shed – making a communal 'bed' for five. We 'dined' on a few pieces of chocolate and barley sugar sweets (CS having forgotten the emergency rations!). We 'hit the twigs' at 22:00, managing to snatch a little sleep at intervals.

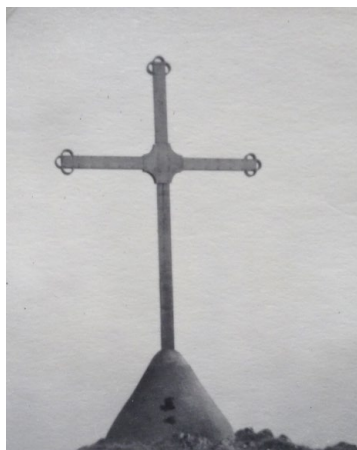
01:30 saw us very cold and uncomfortable. It was just light at 04:00, so we set off at 04:30, making for the large metal cross via the summit ridge. [There is a famous photograph of our party at dawn, being attacked and warding off 'killer sheep!']. From the *Monte Della Cruce* we saw plainly the easy route we should have adopted on our original ascent. We covered the simple distance back to base in under 1½ hours, arriving there at 06:30. The other party had made the summit in 2½ hours, having taken the correct ridge route. They just made the valley path before dark, having encountered the same difficulties as ourselves. They waited and drank beer for 3 hours in a pub in a nearby village.

We spent the day in comparative relaxation. After a comfortable breakfast we started (in two parties) for Luino, on Lake Maggiore in Italy. We rattled through Taverne and Ponte Tresa taking a minor road to the border to avoid fussy customs. We made Luino by 11:00 meeting the others and driving south to find a suitable beach. The sun was blazing hot, but we were able to bathe in the cool, clean lake, surrounded by slopes dotted with typical Latin villages not unlike Tesserete. We sunbathed, had lunch and relaxed all afternoon. We started back at 16:00, stopping for ice cream in Luino, where we saw a hydro-plane close-up. We arrived back at base at 18:30 and had sausages and spaghetti for supper. The evening was spent relaxing, with some of the party going down to Tesserete for a drink.





*Attacked by killer sheep, after a night on the mountain...*



*The summit of Monte della Croce*



*Cow (!)*



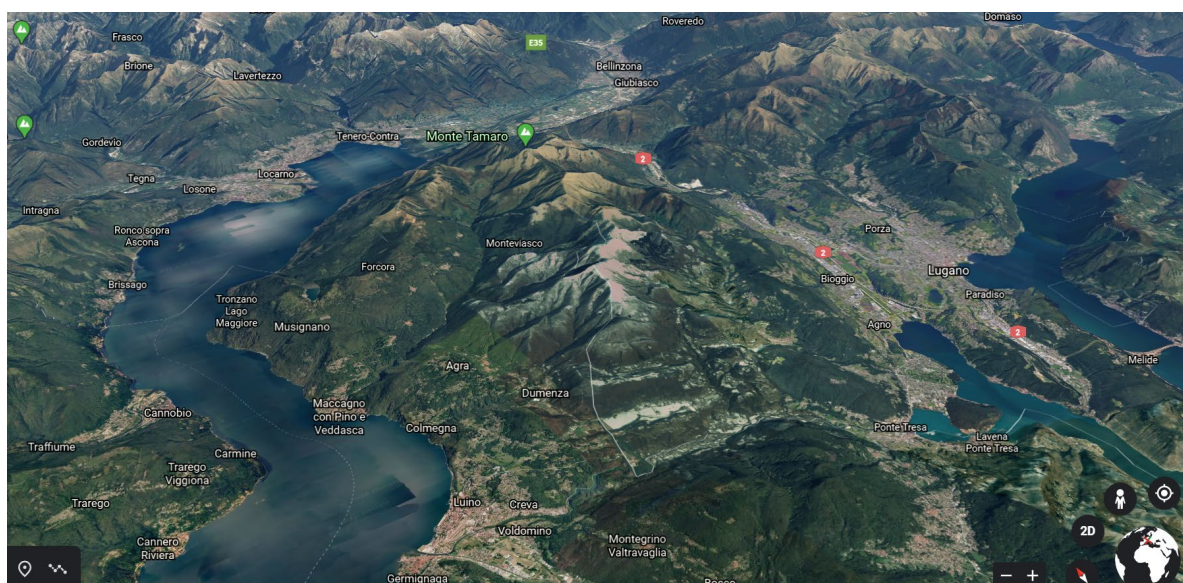
*Hydroplane at Luino, Lake Maggiore*



*Sunbathing by the shore of Lake Maggiore, Italy*



Google Earth 2020: Tesserete (bottom left), with Caval Drossa (top right), looking north



Google Earth 2020: Luino and Lake Maggiore (left), with Tesserete and mountains (top right), looing north-east



## Hill Walking with Roberto

Wednesday 28 July 1971 – Up at 05:30 for breakfast, then drove to Bellinzona to meet our guide Roberto. The plan was for one party to climb from half-way up a mountain to a café on top, and for the other to climb from the café to a 7,000-foot ridge and back, meeting at the restaurant for lunch. Being in the first group we drove in the Volvo to the border village of Carena, half-way up our objective. We set out along a clearly defined path through trees before the sun got too warm. The horseflies were not as bad as on Monday. There were plenty of streams for cooling down, and even some drinkable horse-troughs. We kept losing and rediscovering path. We entered a tricky belt of bracken and trees, before we finally reached open land above. Then we continued up a gently sloping saddle, until we could see a deep valley and higher mountains on the other side. Thereafter it was easy going to a road which led straight to the restaurant. We arrived there at about 12 noon.

There we met the other party and had a superb lunch of risotto, chicken, peaches and wine. After a short siesta, our party started along an excellent vehicle path towards the knife-edge ridge. The weather conditions were overcast and cool – and clouds were soon blowing around us. We reached the summit and continued along a very rock-spectacular knife-edge until rapidly thickening cloud, and the fact that owing to the wine some people's sense of balance was not quite what it should have been, not to mention any names in particular (!), we decided to turn back the way we had come. We drove down to Bellinzona to Roberto's house where he gave us supper. We listened to Beethoven [including the Appassionata Piano Concerto] until late.



*Postcards of Tesserete, Switzerland*

Thursday 29 July 1971 – Very late morning, clearing things up. We set out for the *Denti della Vecchia* or ‘Granny’s teeth’ (dentures?), leaving the car at a nearby village. The first part of the climb was a simple wide path leading through the woods, eventually ending at a *ristorante* half way up, where beer and lemonade was available. We all had a picnic there. [I remember Keith, nick-named ‘Plank’ because he was tall, remarked that he felt no meal was complete unless it was finished off with at least two cups of coffee – we had not packed any mugs on the expedition, so we had to drink our coffee out of mess tins!] After lunch our climb took us on to the sawtooth ridge, following a path, until we arrived at the Swiss-Italian border stones. A Swiss track running below the ‘teeth’ led to the highest point, *Sasso Grande*. It was a very interesting rock climb to the precipitous, knife-edge summit, whence a misty view of surrounding land was obtained. The white limestone rock formations were very dramatic. After about half an hour at the top we started our descent – following the same route proved easy and uneventful. We enjoyed a good dinner back at the *stalla*, and then spent an hour or so in the *ristorante* at Tesserete having shandy, while Chris, Jack and Doug consumed five beers (each) in 45 minutes! CS picked us up at 21:45.



*Knife-edge ridge*



*‘Bongo’ [CS] on the Denti della Vecchia*



*Denti della Vecchia*



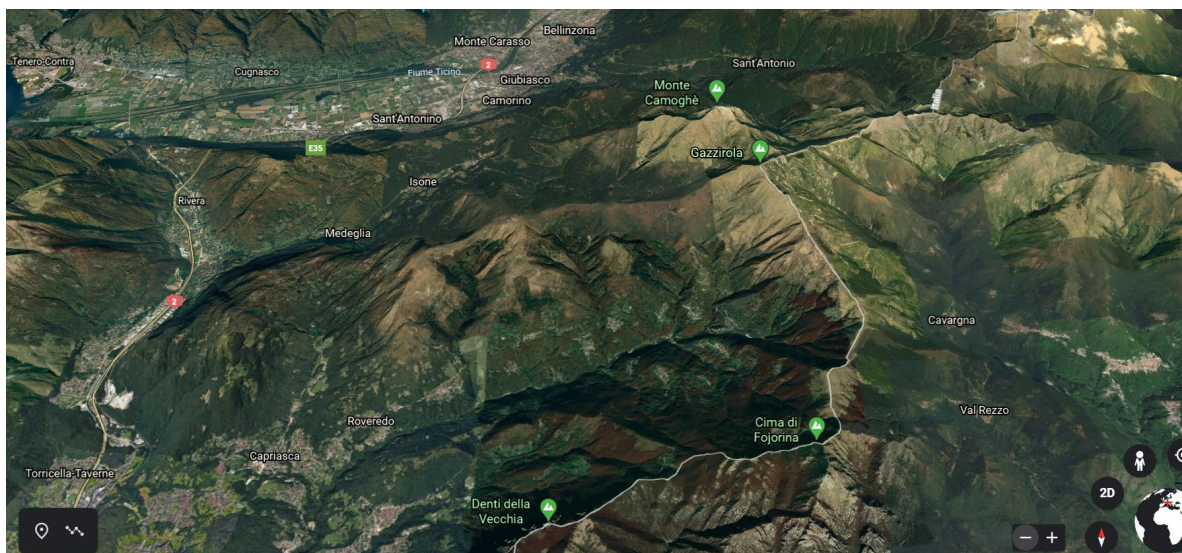
Friday 30 July 1971 – Up at 5 am (groans) for an especially long walk. We arrived just beyond Roveredo at 8 am. HRN, Keith and I walked for 20 minutes up a road leading close by *Monte Bar*, our objective. The others came by Land Rover. We ascended steeply, this time, by almost general approval, moving in one sociable group. We reached the *Caval Drossa* ridge, climbing to the top of *Monte Bar* (JMC and CS having raced each other all the way). We then continued along that ridge, descending to flies and heat, having lunch in extreme heat. We then ascended, very hot (HRN and Jim having dropped out), to the *Gazzirola* summit (7,000 feet), on the other side. This was also on the Swiss-Italian border. We followed the ridge along the border to San Lucio, a fierce *polizei* Italian frontier post, and descended along a stony, uncomfortable track to the village of Bogno, where Keith stood us drinks. Back to camp. Chris had his usual drinking session in Tesserete. I played JMC at chess, both of us doing terrific queen-taking moves. We had walked over 12 miles over difficult terrain.



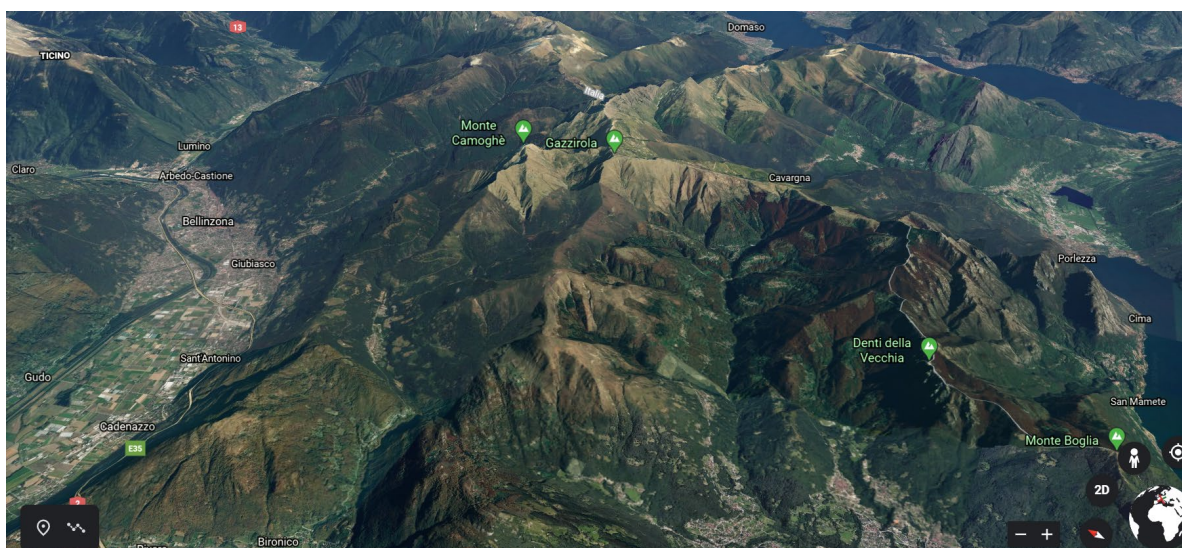
*Humphrey, Simon, Roberto, Chris, 'Chalky' W, Jim and Doug*



*Swiss farm near Roveredo*



Google Earth 2020: Denti della Vecchia (bottom centre), with Gazirola (top right), looking north



Google Earth 2020: Denti della Vecchia (bottom right), with Gazirola (top centre), looking north-east



## Rock and Ice Climbing with Carlo

Saturday 31 July 1971 – We struck ‘camp’ and loaded cars until 10:30. I travelled in the Land Rover with HRN, Jim and Keith through Lugano, scorching Italian towns by Lake Como, and back into Switzerland. The change was sudden and dramatic: the real Switzerland leaped into existence, with ice-capped mountains, chalets and pine forests. We had a picnic lunch in a forest before reaching St Moritz. We then drove through Pontresina, to a camp site affording a terrific view of the Engadine, including *Piz Palu*. We made up camp, and then went back into Pontresina to collect crampons and ice-axes, and shopped for presents including Swiss cherry jam. For supper we cooked tinned steak and kidney pudding on our camp stove and went early to bed.



*First sight of the mountains from Base Camp*



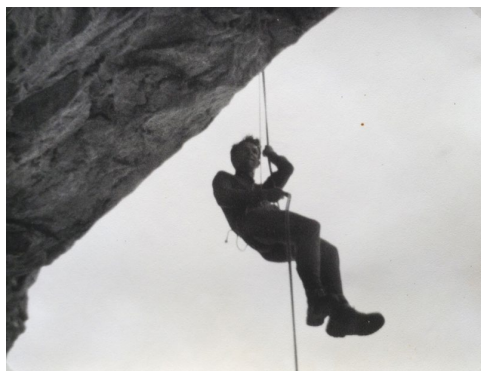
*The three-peak mountain on the left is Bellavista – Piz Palu is further to the left, obscured by a closer mountain.*

Sunday 1 August 1971 – Up at 05:00, tinned sausages and beans for breakfast. The weather conditions were cold and fresh. We walked, all kitted up, towards the Engadine, to meet our French-speaking instructor, Carlo – for a day’s training in rock climbing. We walked on the rocks of a moraine just below the foot of the Engadine Glacier, from which flowed a creamy looking river of melted ice. Here we learned the art of ‘boulder-stepping’, ‘four-appendage climbing’, and various rope tricks – especially ordinary fisherman’s-knot-tied rope ‘belt’ and belaying. [I still clearly remember the instructor’s teaching: ‘take only small steps, make sure at least three limbs – e.g. two feet, one hand – are in contact with the rock at any one time.’] All this down >80-degree slopes!

We learned to make classic descents with double ropes. We had our picnic lunch in the shade, then split up into threes, each with a rope, climbing professionally in convoy to the top of a series of cliff. We all had to descend a cliff of 60 feet, using a classic descent with belaying safety rope and pitons. My turn soon came. Apprehensively, I edged away from the top, until the face became vertical. Looking down, I felt I could not make it. So I crawled back to safety, feeling sickened and shattered, and decided to have another go after watching some others making descents from the bottom. My turn soon came round again. This time with greater confidence, and slowly mastering the art, I launched into the unknown, never, after a belay rescue, letting my behind hand go, and *never* turning my eyes below strict horizontal! The ‘free fall’ was painful, but soon I was on firm ground...

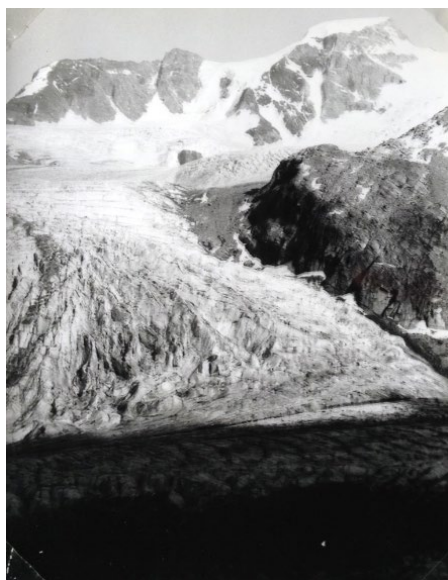
We returned – all of us – to the hotel, where drinks were consumed, followed by supper *à la* Chris (tinned ‘compo’ rations), back at camp. Soon afterwards a procession of campers carrying lanterns filed past us towards a vast bonfire in the shape of a wigwam, which was

then lit. Huge flames shot up, sending golden sparks of burning pine wood high into the night sky. The Commandant made a stirring speech in German – someone told me he was waxing eloquent about pollution and the environment – and what a beautiful camp site this was. The speech ended with a massive display of fountain-like and rocket fireworks, as the pine flames began to die down into glowing embers. I was told later that this had been a celebration for Swiss Independence Day.



*CS performing 'rope trick' on 70 feet high cliff Carlo's teaching methods – Day 1...*

Monday 2 August 1971 – I awoke to the sound of heavy rain falling on the tent – and monumental thunderclaps. At 05:00 it was still raining, but the clouds were high and broken. The rain had stopped by 07:00, enabling us to set out, meeting Carlo at the Morteratsch Hotel. The sun was soon up and hot, as we continued up the valley under heavy-laden rucksacks. We arrived at the head of the glacier – a vast river of ice with a white river issuing from its base.



*Tributary glacier, with Piz Cambrena (top right) – part of the Morteratsch glacier system...*

We reached a near level area on the glacier with the aid of pickaxes, where we first put on our crampons. Carlo taught us walking techniques, downhill, uphill, sideways uphill. He showed us how to cut steps with the axe. [I recall he showed us how to install a piton or ice-screw – and after one or two turns in the ice, he challenged anyone to try and pull it out, promising him a bottle of wine if he succeeded – needless to say, his wine was quite safe!] We tried some slope trekking in groups tied together with in ropes – using belaying techniques etc. We stopped on dry rocks – just short of the crevasse region – to have lunch.

After lunch we decided to make for the 'hut', by traveling over the crevasse region. This meant countless hair-raising steps across murky cracks in the ice, and perilous passages across narrow ice defiles crossing treacherous voids. Keith stepped on some loose snow. Down he went, stopped by his shoulders and arms above the edges. We hauled him out unharmed. This was our only mishap. Soon we came off the ice-river near the far end, and having climbed over the moraine, reached the hut. It was still very hot, so we had (expensive) beer and lemonade. We slept right in the attic on communal mattresses – a real hole of Calcutta. Supper at 18:30, bed at 19:30 for a very early start in the morning.



*Ice training on the Morteratsch Glacier – the journey to the peaks...*



*Passing under Piz Cambrena*



*Dangers awaiting the unwary traveller...*



## Piz Palu and Piz Cambrena

Tuesday 3 August 1971 – 03:00 Rise (!! breakfast 03:15 – we drank our coffee out of mess tins. Left just on 04:00, making our way towards the top of the Morteratsch, just above the hut. A red glow in the east, and at last the sun edged above the ragged horizon. A few spittings of rain. Gradually the rain increased, thick cloud setting well in. After  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour of travel, we stopped underneath a sloping rock – with another climbing party. After waiting over an hour, wet and cold, we returned to the hut near 07:00 for another breakfast.

Leaving at 09:00 for the Morteratsch glacier, we arrived, walking straight down the side of the moraine, roughly two hours later. The rain had stopped and the clouds had cleared, raising our spirits no end. Picnic lunch (compo) by the Land Rover, near the Morteratsch Hotel, went into Pontresina at 15:00, cashed last traveller's cheque and bought chocolates for home. By the time we had arrived back at the Land Rover, the sky had completely clouded once more – rain and thunder on its way. We decided therefore to take the cable-car to the Diavolezza hut, for a second attempt at the mountains. A great (but expensive) trip, saving us a four-hour walk. Travelling by cable-car was rather like being in an aircraft, almost inducing air sickness. We reached the very posh Diavolezza Hotel – and rather incongruously cooked 'compo' in the hotel hall.

Weather looking hopeful – Hebrews 13 v 5 [“for he has said, ‘I will never fail you nor forsake you’” – also referring to Deuteronomy 31 v 6, 8 and Joshua 1 v 5].



*Diavolezza Hotel, with Piz Cambrena (left) and Piz Palu (right) showing routes taken for the ascents...*





*Pontresina*



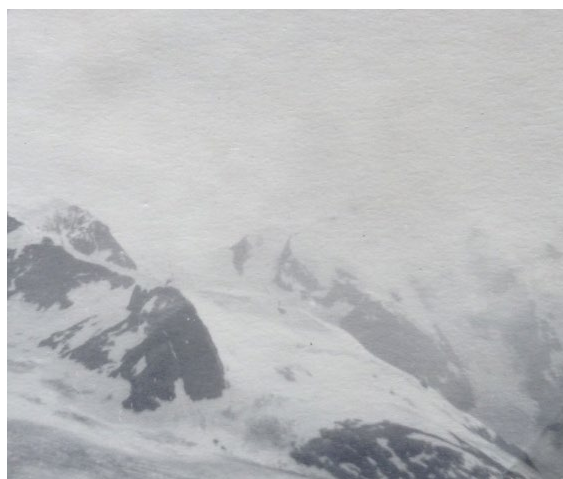
*The second ascent...*

Wednesday 4 August 1971 – Very disturbed dreams. We were on our way to *Piz Palu* – but we arrived at a scene in which the party had quarreled – and everyone lay dead, with weapons. CS then suggested that we should go home for the day and have a wash and brush up at Oxford Circus for a cost of £1!

Up at 03:00 again – a medium looking morning. Rain clouds threatening. We set out after an early breakfast, rounding a precipitous hill close to Diavolezza – the snow was beautifully hard, the sky greening in the east. After  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour's walking, we came on to a tributary of the Morteratsch glacier, donning crampons and ropes. Jack and I went with Carlo, in the lead. The sky was steadily clearing; the possibility of rain now seemed remote. We crossed the smooth part of the glacier with no difficulty. Then we began the ascent through a belt of severe crevasses, the sun just starting to cast its rays over the mountain ridges, casting terrific shadows on the prime, hard snow. The 'Cul Mor' shape of *Piz Palu* lay above us.



*Piz Palu – Piz Cambrena to the left, Morteratsch Glacier to the right*



*The objective – Piz Palu in bad weather...*

Reaching the saddle, upon a precipitous ridge, we were afforded the most marvelous sight, of lower mountains, to the east, topped by pink clouds. The sky directly above became unnaturally darker, the air thinning as we gained the east peak. The route to the middle, the highest peak at over 12,000 feet, was the most precarious knife-edge path I have ever experienced – vast gaping crevasses on the northern side, a steep shelving drop towards Italy on the southern side. 08:10 – I gained the highest point above sea level in my life. We hardly stopped, owing to various dangers, but descended to the rounded western summit before celebrating with handshakes and chocolate. [This was most probably the rounded platform just to the west of the central summit, rather than the true western summit.]



*Piz Palu...*



*The summit, at last!*

We descended to some rocks, slightly further down and more out of the wind, for a meal (breakfast? lunch?), and tried to continue by rock, westwards, but found that some of our party were dangerously slow at rock climbing. Carlo decided we should descend by our ascent route – the snow was becoming steadily softer and wetter with the increase in sun power. We had to use a fixed rope for the slippery descent down the steep summit ridge to avoid sliding over a precipice. The next part, between this ridge and the glacier, was completed (by the first two ropes) in an incredibly short space of time, since we employed the technique of boot-skiing, supplemented by some good old English ‘bottom-sliding’ *when* one fell over! It was terrific fun, and considerable speeds were reached – leaving more cautious members of the party annoyingly far behind. ‘Skiing’ was slightly restricted while traversing the crevasses belt. I very nearly fell into one, when Jack pulled the rope (and me) while rounding a corner.

We crossed the flat part of the glacier in extremely wet snow – and arrived back at Diavolezza after 10 hours of climbing. Meals and relaxation in which I admired the view until bed at 19:00.

[Here I experienced, perhaps for the very first time, a tremendous sense of achievement and fulfillment. We would not be going home disappointed, defeated by bad weather – we had achieved our objective, done what we had set out to do, to climb to the summit of *Piz Palu*! It was literally a mountain top experience. I had prayed and the Lord had answered. It was my first real experience of answered prayer – and deep down I knew, from that moment on, I could trust in God...]

Thursday 5 August 1971 – 03:05: “*Raus, raus!*” Off shortly after 04:00 for *Piz Cambrena*, far lower than *Piz Palu*, but technically more difficult. The sunrise was especially beautiful – pink-tainted clouds filling the valleys to the east; the sun gilding the *Piz Palu* and *Bellavista* peaks with pale orange, a sinister witch-hooded coloured cloud, advancing towards us up the Morteratsch valley. [I remembered this later as “a grey cloud in the shape of a huge bird hovering, menacingly in the western sky”.] We crossed yesterday’s glacier tributary – I was on Carlo’s rope as before, and soon reached the rocky base of *Piz Cambrena*. Easy rock and snow climbs for the first hour. We were presently linked all together on one rope, which made advancing annoyingly slow, but safer. The rising sun soon thawed out our frozen limbs. The last snow-ice 300 yards to the top, inclined steeper than 45 degrees proved to be the real *Cambrena* and took us nearly two hours to cover. Carlo would advance, stick in a *piton* and secure a safety rope. We would advance using crampons and picks, with precarious footholds, slotting our sections of rope as we passed each *mousqueton* [carabiner]. Our progression was like Gower Street [London] in rush hour! Ten feet further – standstill while someone lower down the line vainly fiddled with a *piton* – cramped with ankles in painful positions, frightened of slipping, avoiding falling lumps of ice from higher step cutters. The progress was fairly exhilarating but grueling and insecure. At last the perilous incline leveled out.

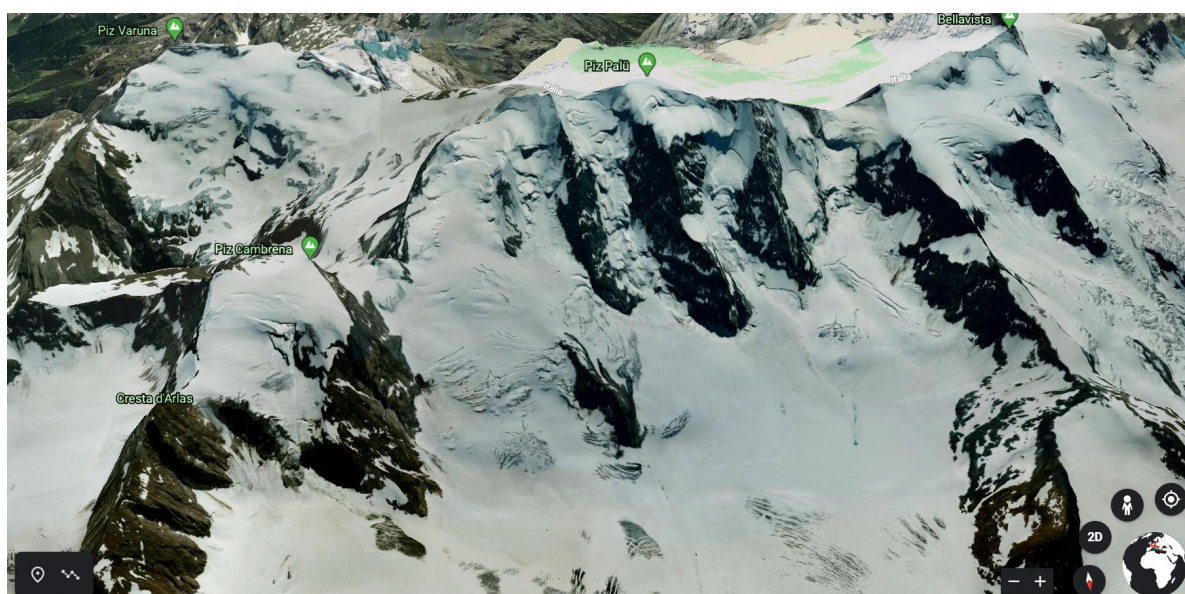
We reached the summit near 9 am, stopping for bread, cake and chocolate, but not for long, as the weather was rapidly deteriorating. We made our way down the western slope, holding on to a safety rope on the first part of the steep snow incline. We side-stepped with *piolets* and descended until we reached some rocks on the edge of the glacier. We then roped down until we reached a snow-covered crevasse bordering the level part of the glacier. This we crossed, prostrate, to avoid letting the snow give way, secured to ropes. All safe, we reached the glacier path, with Jack, Carlo and I going separately in the lead – some soft snow skiing was done and then we had to wait ages for the other *escargots* [snails]! We returned to Diavolezza for beer and chips with Carlo. Some of our party left by the 16:00 cable-car to return crampons and axes to Pontresina.

We departed at 16:45, moving through several cloud patches. We re-pitched camp at site – HRN (who had stayed behind) made some excellent curry. After supper we all (except Keith and Simon) went down into Pontresina for a swim at the very modern *eisbahn* pool (indoor, heated). We paid the phenomenal amount of 3 Swiss Francs for a bathe – which was a little cold for my present liking. The hot showers were tremendous – and a healthy Turkish bath could be experienced by turning the shower to scalding hot and bathing in the steam! This made bathing more palatable. We rounded off the evening in a cosy pub, where most of us had draught beers.





Google Earth 2020: Piz Palu and Piz Bernina, looking south-east



Google Earth 2020: Piz Cambrena and Piz Palu, looking south





*Farewell to the mountains...*

### **The Journey Home**

Friday 6 August 1971 – We struck camp and were on the road by 9 am. I traveled in the Volvo – first taking crampons etc. into Pontresina. We drove north, taking a minor road through the Albulapass, which I thought looked very like Iceland, then up the eastern side of Switzerland passing in sight of Liechtenstein and the Austrian border. We had a picnic lunch in a pine forest further north. [I remember HRN using fractured French, saying he would do something culinary “avec une épune plastique” where *épune* was (logically) the French for ‘spoon’!]

*Pine forest where we had our picnic lunch*

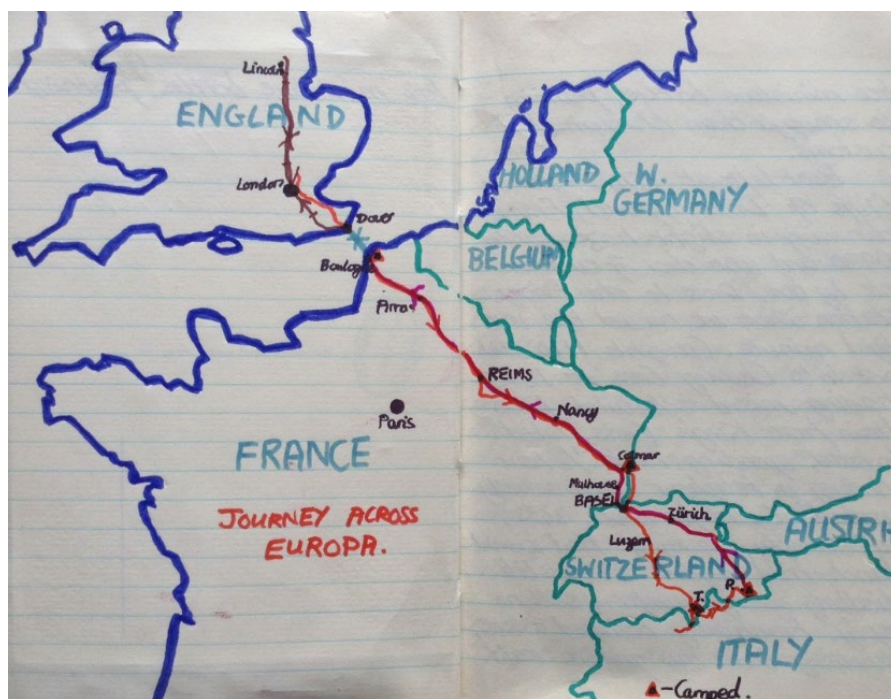


We left the Alps, as we began to enter Zurich (the largest Swiss city), and then on to Basel. We had some drinks at the French border while we waited for the others. Swapping around drivers, we entered France, planning to camp near Nancy. Immediately we noticed the yellow-lined bumpy roads, with untidy borders and plane tree avenues. We went on through Mulhouse [*Ville des Fleurs*] and (unintentionally) Colmar, where we caught a glimpse of the hills of the West German Black Forest. We passed back over the hills of Alsace – almost falling asleep. Clouds, rain and lightning lay before us as we headed for Nancy. Within a few kilometres of the city the rain was intense, the lightning terrific. We had a *rendezvous* at the proposed camp site – and unanimously we decided not to camp, but to drive on through the night. Supper at Toul. Sleep as we rattled along.

Saturday 7 August 1971 – my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, I woke up in front of Reims Cathedral – looking a bit like Notre Dame in floodlight – at about 2 am. It was my first sight as a person of 16! On westwards, until our *rendezvous* at Bapaume, exactly two weeks after going through on our outward journey. We managed to find a café open, where we had coffee. We then continued to Boulogne, where we all met up. CS made the unpopular decision of spending the night here, because the drivers were very tired, instead of sailing back to Britain that day. So we pitched our tents in a camp site north of Boulogne overlooking the Channel, but not quite able to see Britain, having looked around some of the older parts of the town. After lunch we spent the afternoon wandering on the beach. We saw some World War II relics further north, including a complete German assault base, practically intact – rusted rail tracks leading to landing craft piers, iron crane structures, bomb-blasted pillboxes, and gun mountings! [These must have been left over from the Allied D-Day Landings of 1944, just 27 years previously.] Supper at 18:00 – curry and compo. Afterwards we walked into Boulogne for beer and lemonade, and final expedition celebrations.

Sunday 8 August 1971 – Up at 05:10. We packed and drove to the ferry – we bought some duty-free miniature bottles, hoping to smuggle them through Customs. The boat left at 07:45 – soon the cliffs of Dover appeared, France dimming in slight haze. We landed at 09:30 and were clear of Customs etc. by 10. We then drove to the Priory Station where we missed the 10:10 train by one minute; however, we caught the 11:10 which got us into Charing Cross at 12:55, having missed the scheduled 12:00 train from Kings Cross. I took the Tube to Kings Cross Station and spent the next ½ hour trying to find a telephone that actually worked. I called for Louth 3433 unwittingly [I should have called Louth 2433] – no reply. I had a worried lunch – and tried again at 2.30 pm still dialing wrong number – still no reply.

Frantically I boarded the 3.15 pm train, knowing that my parents would be dead worried. Suddenly it dawned on me that I had been dialing the wrong number! Then I found, on arrival at Newark, that there were no trains to Market Rasen until (as I discovered) 9 pm! By divine providence [note], and against most reason [sic], I boarded a train bound for Lincoln St Marks planning to ring from there. Mum met me on the platform with the astounding news that our phone had been out of order!! She had therefore *not* been worried about me not ringing and had commuted between Lincoln and market Rasen to meet successive trains! So I came back home, with loads of news – and had my long-awaited birthday presents over drinks: £4.50 book token, thermos, slide rule, cassette. Early bed....



Map of our journey

## Epilogue: Late 1971...

*[These are some notes I wrote many years later, around 2005 or 2006, after my father died and I started writing up my most important 'memoirs'. These notes are based on my memories of the events of late 1971, stemming from our Switzerland expedition.]*

... but in 1971, my spiritual life began to change again, as the Spirit started His work of renewal and revival....

In Switzerland that summer, on an army cadet training camp, I prayed for clear weather, to allow us to climb *Piz Palu*, overlooking the Morteratsch Glacier in the Engadine. Having abandoned an earlier expedition due to rain, I prayed that the clouds would clear, allowing us one last attempt. From the Swiss town of Pontresina in the afternoon I looked at the mountain peaks, surrounded and threatened by swirling clouds, and remembered the promise of Hebrews 13 verse 5: "I will never fail you nor forsake you." The next morning, very early, we were wakened by our Swiss guide, telling us to get ready of the climb... in the pre-dawn twilight, the snow was hard and crisp, the air ice cold. But as the night paled, the sky cleared, and after two or three hours of strenuous climbing with ice-axes and crampons, we passed over the 'knife-edge' summit of *Piz Palu*, pausing for photographs a little way down on safer ground. We watched the sun rise over the Italian Alps, with snow and scattered clouds rose-pink below us stretching into the distance. I had prayed and the Lord had answered! This was my first real experience of directly answered prayer...

In the autumn term of 1971 Chris B introduced me to some key spiritual truths – about the Holy Spirit as the cure for a 'mercurial temperament' (Galatians 5 verses 22, 23 – I suffered from depression and anxiety), and the need to exercise faith ("Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" – Romans 14 verse 23). School events came to a head in October, with the death of our chemistry teacher, Mr Y, and the expulsion of five boys for taking drugs.

One Sunday night, prayer suddenly came alive – I had been reading David Wilkerson's book *The Cross and the Switchblade* – and I felt burdened to pray for Mike S, who had not been expelled, but I suspected might be caught up in the drugs scene. I did not know him well, so early in the week I asked him to play a game of squash. Then later in the week I invited him to my study for tea, ostensibly to talk about stereo systems. (Andrew S, who shared the

study was out, and James T had been asked to pray.) It was Study Old 3B, overlooking Little Quad, and I remember clearly looking intently at the hexagonal biscuit tin, dark red with a pattern of white swans... I remember the pleasant fragrance of Earl Grey tea... There was a lull in the conversation, and quite suddenly I found myself asking Mike, "Tell me, have you ever thought about asking Jesus to come into your life?"

Silence... Mike's jaw dropped open, and his former relaxed expression changed to one of astonishment and dismay. But he listened intently as I tried to explain how to become a Christian. He seemed deadly serious and confided in me that he came from a broken home (I did not know this), and that he had been praying that his mother would remarry. When he left, he said he would think over what I had said. A few days later he told me that he had asked Jesus into his life, and I explained how the Lord had led me to speak to him about becoming a Christian. I remember running to Hailey in the dark to tell Chris and others, ecstatic with a wild joy I had never known before...

A few weeks later, Chris, Andrew and I were sitting together in Old 3B, praying. Chris was very quiet, and then he said he felt the Lord was leading him to pray that Andrew and I would receive the gift of speaking in tongues. I felt a great sense of peace and joy, as Chris prayed that as we went out into the world we would shine as lights in the darkness (Philippians 2 verse 15)...

*"Let the joy which wells within you now flow out to all. Let them see Me in you, and by My power go out and tell with gladness the good news of salvation and redemption to all nations. Shine like the sun at noonday and in the darkness of this world shine like stars in the universe at night!"*

Hallelujah! Led by the Spirit, I started to pray using strange words – I was speaking in tongues! I was filled with the Spirit and full of joy...

We came down from the mountain and out on into the world which lay before us. From that moment on, I prayed often 'in the Spirit' – in tongues... and since that year I have spent much time with the Lord, quietly praying in tongues...