

Bob

By Laura Alexander

We still talk of Bob

Laugh at the time when, hungover, he caught the wrong train in Glasgow,

Spent Hogmanay in Inverness and not Glen Pean.

Refer to routes at Mod as 'vertical'

In a mocking emulation of Bob's gravelly tones.

Tell newcomers to the club of his dramatic entry into Lagangarbh on a winter's night;

Stocky, dark, still clad in salopettes, harness, helmet

Full rack dangling about his knees, icescrews, pegs, hexes, nuts, the lot.

Snow on his shoulders, axes in hand,

There was the scent of epic adventure about Bob and his partner that day,

The late return, no chance to take to take off or put away the gear.

Within, we students had been attempting to impress the hut's owners,

Swapping climbing talk and whisky with venerable members of the SMC.

One of our new acquaintances turned to the apparition at the door:-

'What did you do then?'

Expecting, after all our talk of IV's and V's, to be impressed.

'The Aonach Eagach' said Bob proudly, 'East to West'.

The SMC member looked at his great array of ironmongery, and raised his brows.

The room fell silent.

Conversation languished after that, the SMC members kept to themselves.

We felt as though Bob had let us down,

Made nonsense of our proud boasts to be hard climbers.

In truth though, Bob loved the hills, got as much from his climbing as any other,

Accepted our derision of his careful preparations and his excessive gear;

Gave as good as he got when we took the mickey in the pub.

His death, leading a rock route many of us would have soloed, made us think,

Made us realise that perhaps he had been climbing to his limit,

That, for him, the Aonach Eagach in winter had been an epic, was an achievement

And that mountaineering was his life now more completely than it was ours.