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Jeremy Richard Naish 1930-2004

Jeremy Naish, who was born on 20 August 1930, died in 2004 aged 74. He established his reputation as an audacious climber when, as President of the Oxford University Mountaineering Club, he made the first ascent of Christ Church's Tom Tower with an American Rhodes Scholar Jim Murray, having surmounted the crux by using the clock's minute hand as an aid. He followed this up with a solo ascent of the Radcliffe Camera, leaving his shirt flying from the top as proof positive. When seconding Jeremy's inexplicably delayed application to join the Alpine Club in 1973, a future President and Oxford don David Cox could still recall the youthful feats of this 'extremely nice man'.

After leaving Gordonstoun, Jeremy, as befitted a distinguished admiral's son, did his National Service as a midshipman in the Royal Navy before going up to Oxford to read law at New College in 1951. Already blooded by two Cairngorm winter seasons at Gordonstoun, he launched himself into OUMC mountaineering with characteristic enthusiasm and during his university years notched up the equivalent of six months' climbing, mainly on OUMC meets in Wales, the Lakes, Scotland and the Alps. At the 1953 OUMC meet at Saas Fee he climbed with Alan Blackshaw and John Hobhouse amongst others, then spent another three weeks at Chamonix with Jim Murray, his Tom Tower partner. His routes that summer included the Dom's north-west arete, traverses of both the Jagigrat and Portjengrat, the Aiguille du Plan's east ridge, the Dent du Requin's Voie des Plaques and the north-north-east ridge of the Aiguille de l'M.

After going down from Oxford in 1954 Jeremy joined the Elder Dempster Line in Liverpool but found the work somewhat prosaic. His 1955 Alpine season in the Dolomites with Robert Bruce, Richard Adrian and John Hobhouse included a grade V climb on the Cinque Torre and, having by now left Elder's, he then spent four months as an Outward Bound instructor at Ullswater. The following year he joined the Colonial Service as a District Officer in Zanzibar, later serving as ADC to the Governor. Here he met his future wife Gillian who was then working as an assistant to Professor Louis Leakey, the eminent anthropologist.

Local leaves from Zanzibar offered scope for mountaineering in the then still exotic snow mountains of East Africa. In 1958 Jeremy undertook a remarkable three-week expedition to the Ruwenzori accompanied by nine porters and their headman Sadelda. From Ibanda their route to the heart of that magical range wound through bamboo jungle, the Jabberwocky forest of tree-sized heathers and the infamous Bigo bog to the groves of giant groundsel that surround the Bujuku hut. Jeremy climbed Mt Speke on his second attempt supported by the valiant Sadelda clad in gym shoes bound with sacking. He then soloed Edward Peak on Mt Baker and finally Moebius on the Stanley Plateau. Before leaving Zanzibar, he and Gillian climbed Kilimanjaro by the Ratzel glacier route.

By the early 1960s the Colonial Service offered no long-term career prospects, so in 1962 Jeremy and Gillian reluctantly returned to England where he embarked on the daunting task of qualifying as a solicitor. After spells with Carlisle and Cambridge law firms he joined Morrell, Peel & Gamlen in his beloved Oxford and eventually became its senior partner. In 1962 he undertook the last serious Alpine season of his youth, attending the joint AC/CC meet at Pontresina for climbs in the Bernina and Bregaglia followed by a Zermatt fortnight with Anthony Rawlinson, John Emery and others doing routes which included the Dent Blanche (Ferpectle) and Rimpfischhorn traverse.

The professional and domestic demands of re-building his career and bringing up a young family meant that for over 10 years from 1962 Jeremy did little mountaineering. However, in 1973 he joined a trekking party I organised to cross the Cambrian mountains and after his election to the Club in 1974 began a mid-term mountaineering career with customary brio. His emphasis now was on classic Alpine routes and overseas expeditions including one to the Nanda Devi region in 1981 and another to the then virtually unknown Tien Shan in 1988. Many of his climbing companions during this period were members of the Gorphwysfa Club, an informal group of friends who had once made full use of the old Pen y Pass hostel.

But most particularly he climbed with our member John Rowlinson who has warm recollections of their happy days together on the Winch, Jungfrau, Grandes Jorasses and many other mountains. I am indebted to John for his memoir of epics such as their 21-hour day on the Weisshorn in difficult conditions; or Jeremy's crevasse rescue on the Aletsch glacier by John and his wife Nancy; or the occasion when a near-fatal lightning bolt on the Gross Grunhorn summit struck John and knocked Jeremy unconscious. John's tribute ' We all have had occasion to be thankful that there was someone of his physical and moral strength on the other end of the rope' is a measure of the man.

Jeremy made light of the heart condition which afflicted his latter years but he never really got over the untimely death of his charming wife Gillian two years before his own. His family, friends and climbing companions will always remember his resolution, integrity and courage in good times and in bad and the warm hospitality that he and Gillian dispensed from their lovely 17th century house at Charlbury.

J G R Harding

In compiling this obituary I am indebted to John Rowlinson, Jeremy's lifelong friend Ian Smart and the Editor of the New College Record for their generous assistance.