

Tributes to Stephen Simpson

Stephen was an experienced mountaineer and climber which he undertook extensively in the British Isles, the Alps and in several visits to the Himalayas, two of them with the Gorphwysfa. He then took his family to Nepal in 1995. Members were Stephen, Martin, his friend Anthony, and Janice. They visited the Rolwaling valley and he climbed Ramdung Go - just a high walk! The other 3 climbed another peak entirely!

He then went to a little explored valley west of Namche Bazaar and followed this with Richard & Gilliane Sills on a trek that took him to the summit of Island Peak.

Following his retirement, Stephen had been his usual active self, but a number of cycling accidents played some part in the general deterioration of his health.

Harvey

Stephen was one of a kind – a fine, if idiosyncratic, all-round mountaineer; strong, fit, and determined to get to the next peak, and the one after that. We spent many happy winter days in the company of the Naishes and Simpsons, in either the Lake District or various parts of Scotland.

The abiding memory is of Stephen striding into the distance, leaving lesser mortals – including the navigator – trailing in his wake. Days that stick especially in the memory: traversing the Forcan Ridge of the Saddle; racing over the Five Sisters of Kintail to escape a thunderstorm; standing on the summit ridge of Beinn Sgritheall, watching the sun go down over the Sound of Sleat, not fretting that we would have to descend the heathery slopes by torchlight.

Then there were the Alpine peaks in the company of Janice and Stephen: an ascent of the Gran Paradiso; an ascent of Piz Palu in the Bernina, followed by a heart-in-mouth abseil off the Fortezza ridge; Alphubel by the south-east ridge; and a wonderful traverse of the Weissmies from the Saas side, up over the Trift Glacier, and down the south-east ridge to the Zwischbergen Pass and so to Almagell – the latter climb in the company of John Rowlinson on his last “Viertausender” peak.

Later there was a Himalayan trek, with ascents of Gokyo Ri, Pokalde and Imja Tse (Island Peak). Stephen will have been seen by many as taciturn, a man of few words. But spending time with him revealed another side – a keen wit, a sense of fun, and an ability to produce apposite literary quotes. He will be greatly missed, and our thoughts are with Janice, Duncan, Martin, and the rest of the family.

Richard Sills

Stephen was a distinguished scientist and a considerable, if rather eccentric, mountaineer. His approach to the mountains was characterised by enormous vigour and determination. His was an uncluttered approach to mountains. He took little interest in the mechanical side of the sport and he had no interest in the devices which fill the rucksacks of most modern climbers to aid their safety. His energy was such that he sometimes found it difficult to accommodate the more modest pace of lesser mortals.

He joined the Gorphwysfa expedition to the Himalayas in 1981 near the mountain of Nanda Devi. We experienced atrocious weather. Being trapped in a small tent on the edge of a glacier for many weeks exhausted Stephen's patience. One day he vanished from the campsite to the great concern of his friends. He later told us that he spent a few days living in a remote cave occupied by goats and goat herders. Nevertheless he, with John Rowlinson, made the only successful ascent of Berthartoli

Himal South, 20,720 ft. the only mountain summit achieved by the expedition. Stephen's company was always stimulating. His originality offered a rewarding view not just of mountains but of life in general. We and the club will miss him greatly.

Brian Smith