



Panel

## 7.2. The Great Outdoors – 150 years of mountain sports and tourism in the Alps. Part II

**Panel organiser: Barton, Susan, International Centre for Sports History and Culture, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK**

The year 2013 will be the 150th anniversary of popular tourism by the British in Switzerland. In 1863 the English tourism entrepreneur Thomas Cook organised his first tour of Switzerland, vividly documented by Jemima Morrell in her journal published a century later. Tourists visited remote locations in the rural Alps which entailed physical exertion in order to be rewarded by the joy of experiencing spectacular and wondrous mountain scenery. Less than two years later the first winter guests began to arrive, in St Moritz and Davos. Although already popular with grand tourists, the 1860s marked the beginning of tourism in the Alps. In celebration of this century and a half, this panel will examine the role played by tourism and outdoor activities, such as the search for health in spas and sanatoria, mountaineering, hiking and winter sports in the rural alpine environment. Mountain landscapes provide locations for leisure, sport and tourism. The rural environment is itself a commodity to be consumed and enjoyed by visitors who contribute to local economies. Tourism provided new opportunities for employment in the hospitality, construction, travel and leisure industries as well as cultural exchanges and technological transfer. Tourism has both changed and helped conserve the landscape. As early as the 1890s, concerns were being raised about the impact of railway building on the landscape and the increase of visitor numbers they would bring. Mountain railways, ski lifts and other tourism infrastructure, the erosion of footpaths, the collection of minerals and flora and disturbance of habitats by increasing numbers of visitors all had an impact on visual amenity and sensitive ecosystems, not to mention the effect on traditional cultures. Papers in this panel will discuss the history of leisure, sport and tourism in the mountains, with a particular focus on Switzerland.

**Chair: Barton, Susan, International Centre for Sports History and Culture, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK**

Wednesday, 21 August 2013 // 0900 – 1030 // Session 7 – Room A-119

### 7.2.1. The British attitude to mountain guides through the eyes of Elizabeth Le Blond (Burnaby/Main) (1860- 1934): mountaineer, photographer and writer

Paper

**Armstrong, Madie, International Centre for Sports History and Culture, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK**

British success in climbing the peaks of Switzerland was due to the knowledge and expertise of the mountain guides as well as the tenacity of the climbers. British Alpine literature gives some recognition to the guides, though they were not credited with first ascents. Female climbers often felt held back by the guides' attitude to women. Climbing between 1881 and 1903, the mountaineer Elizabeth Le Blond (Burnaby/Main) (1860-1934) succeeded in making several first winter ascents in Switzerland and 19 first ascents in Norway with a number of guides, in particular Joseph Imboden. She wrote five books on the mountains and the Alps where she lived from 1885 to 1900 and described climbing adventures and Alpine life that included details of the guides training and how the guides obtained their Führerbuch as well as hints on selecting a guide. Her aim was not only to relate her own exploits but also to show the potential visitor and novice mountaineer what to expect on their first trip to the mountains. This paper examines the guide/climber relationship through the eyes of Le Blond, her early achievements with Edouard Cupelin to whom she dedicated her first book and her climbing partnership with Joseph Imboden. Le Blond was not always complimentary and spoke plainly of the difficulties created by inadequate and ill-prepared climbers and guides. Her attitude is compared to that of other author-climbers to illustrate a British opinion of mountain guides.

### 7.2.2. Enabling Women: the influence of the Alpine environment

Paper

**Roche, Clare, Birkbeck, University of London, UK**

Middle-class women journeyed in increasing numbers to the Alps during the last half of the nineteenth century. Many of them walked and a substantial minority climbed; several became the first women to stand on top of the major Alpine summits, whilst a few made first ascents for either gender. They have received little attention from historians of any persuasion – culturally, socially or from the perspective of gender or leisure. The remote and rural nature of the Alps encouraged, even dictated, a different 'way of being' for all travellers who sought out the higher peaks and pastures. This paper considers the important part played by this particular environment in stimulating middle-class women to transgress the accepted codes of behaviour and dress normally associated with their social status. The immersion in a more rural, minimalist lifestyle – what the mountaineer and philosopher Phil Bartlett terms a 'return to the primitive' – enabled them to experience a physical and social freedom largely unavailable to them, at that time, in Britain. Ironically, the rural simplicity of the Alps had the power to reveal the hollow nature of contemporary gender assumptions, which more sophisticated society largely underlined.

#### Participants

##### **Armstrong, Madie**

Madie Armstrong is a PhD research student affiliated with the International Centre for Sport History and Culture at De Montfort University. She holds an MSc in Global Ethics from the University of Birmingham and a multifaceted career path including university research administration and development work in Senegal, West Africa. Her research examines the juxtaposition of the public/private persona in auto/biography and memoir through the life, writings and photography of Elizabeth Le Blond (1860-1934) mountaineer, photographer and first president of the Ladies Alpine Club.

##### **Barton, Susan**

Dr Susan Barton is an honorary research fellow in the International Centre for Sports History and Culture at De Montfort University in Leicester. She has a wide range of interests in social history and her publications include work on knitted textile industry, working-class tourism, the British seaside, package holidays in Spain, sport and

learning disability, tourism development in Switzerland and winter sports. Her current project is an investigation into the Winter Olympics up to 1948 and their sporting and touristic legacies. Her books include 'Healthy Living in the Alps – the origins of winter tourism in Switzerland, 1860-1914'.

##### **Roche, Clare**

A first class history degree from Birkbeck in 2007 developed into a fascination with the long nineteenth century and a particular interest in the history of women, medicine and science. A masters at Cambridge University in History and Philosophy of Science & Medicine consolidated this and led to the discovery of female mountaineers who appeared to transgress the prevailing medical, scientific and social view of middle-class women. I am currently a doctoral student at Birkbeck researching this group of women. For over thirty years I have been, and continue to work as, a physiotherapist.