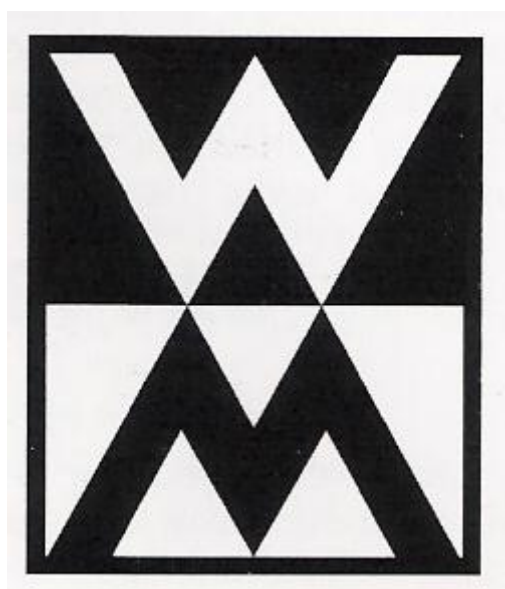


# THE WAYMARK STORY



The history of  
WAYMARK HOLIDAYS  
1973-2007

by  
**COLIN SAUNDERS**

**Plus reminiscences from  
directors, staff, leaders and clients**

# THE WAYMARK STORY

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Written and edited by  
**COLIN SAUNDERS**  
(staff member 1982 to 1989)

**In memory of  
Peggy Hounslow  
and  
Noel Vincent**

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**If you are reading this online, you may find the hyperlinks useful for finding more information, indicated by *underlined italic text*.**

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## FOREWORD

For 34 years, from 1974 to 2007, Waymark provided walkers and cross-country skiers with memorable holidays that often led to lasting friendships and even marriages. It was a sad day when its last ever group of holidaymakers returned from Honfleur on 7 October 2007.

Waymark Holidays Ltd. was taken over on 10 December 2002 by *First Choice Holidays PLC*, who in May that year had also acquired a similar operation, originally called Exodus Expeditions, but now plain *Exodus*. Waymark continued to operate independently from its Slough headquarters.

Then the Waymark newsletter for Spring 2007, included an article under the heading ‘Waymark and Exodus: perfect travel companions’. It said: ‘We are delighted to announce that Waymark has teamed up with leading adventure tour operator, Exodus, to offer you a comprehensive selection of trips right across the globe.’ It highlighted the similarities: an excellent pedigree stretching back over 30 years and a commitment to responsible tourism.

Exodus offered a much larger selection of walking and trekking holidays, but a reason for the merger could be discerned from reading between the lines: ‘[Exodus]’ small selection of cross-country and ski touring will be significantly enhanced by [Waymark’s] specialist programme of award-winning cross-country skiing holidays.’

‘We’re incredibly excited,’ continued the article, ‘about this latest development here at Waymark, and we hope you are too.’ A few months later, Waymark was absorbed into the Exodus operation, located in Balham, southwest London. Their Slough headquarters was closed and most of its staff were made redundant.

At the time of writing (December 2008), the Waymark name and logo continue to feature in the Exodus winter activity programme, as Waymark’s reputation remains fresh and prominent in the cross-country skiing community. In its small and specialist way, Waymark had reached the peak of the holiday industry, winning the *Guardian/ObsERVER Travel Award* for Best Ski Company in 2002, 2003, 2006 and 2007.

However, not long before this ‘teaming up’, in March 2007, it was the turn of First Choice to be taken over: by *TUI AG* (Turistik International Aktiengesellschaft), based in Hanover, Germany, which already included in its empire the British travel industry giant, *Thomson*, and a much smaller tour operator called *Headwater Holidays*. Until the turn of the millennium, Headwater, like Waymark and Exodus, was a profitable independent operator of activity holidays, including walking and cross-country skiing, but now via several takeovers it has become just a trading name of TUI UK Limited. So Exodus and Headwater are now very similar operations in the same stable. ‘Where will it all end?’ one wonders.

At the time of writing, Waymark Holidays Ltd. still exists as a dormant company among nearly 600 companies in the TUI stable – a subsidiary of a subsidiary (First Choice Holidays

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Ltd.) of a subsidiary (TUI Travel PLC). It has illustrious companions; as well as those already mentioned, stable-mates include names that will be familiar to seasoned travellers, though some have now disappeared from the market place: Air 2000, Britannia Airways, Canadian Pacific, Citalia, Horizon Holidays, Iberotel, Jetsave, Lunn Poly, Magic of the Orient, Olympic Holidays, OSL, Portland Holidays, Skytours, Unijet and many more.

There has been acid comment from some quarters that this story is an example of how big business takes over a successful small company and proceeds to wreck it! However, it should be noted that, at the time of writing, Exodus were still proudly displaying the 'Waymark Experience' logo beside their cross-country skiing holidays, and that many former Waymark leaders now work with Exodus. It is to be hoped that former Waymark clients will continue to enjoy holidays under their guidance.

And this could all change tomorrow – may have already changed by the time you read this. It seems that, one way or another, the highly regarded Waymark name will sink ever lower in the pecking order for those that own it, and it is, sadly, the way of such things that it, too, will probably vanish from public view before long.

In some ways, Waymark was behind the times. It was reluctant to use colour photography in brochures; it was slow to adopt computerisation; and it grudgingly accepted credit cards. Yet it stubbornly refused to embrace growth for growth's sake (it would have been easy to do so) and steadfastly put the care of its clients first. Waymark was a big-hearted little company, whose adherence to old-fashioned values may have contributed to its eventual demise. As one client reminisces later in this document: 'We wished we had taken more holidays with Waymark: that aura of caring for you almost as a family, that knowledge of centres acquired over many years, was rarely to be found with other companies.' And another: 'I was so impressed by the thoughtfulness and kindness shown to me – not an old and valued client at that stage but a complete newcomer – that I was pleased to encourage the waverers to use Waymark'.

For those who remember Waymark in its heyday, its disappearance is regrettable, but the author hopes that this document will provide a suitable epitaph and ensure that the name will live on. It may even inform students of tourism. And it may allow those who enjoyed working for and travelling with Waymark to wallow in nostalgia for a while.

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## AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

In March 1982 I attended the inaugural meeting of the *London Region Nordic Ski Club*. Sitting next to me was Noel Vincent. As we chatted, it emerged that he was a director of Waymark Holidays. At that time I was working for Milbanke Travel, a small part of the mammoth multinational hotel and catering group TrustHouse Forte (as was – THF was the victim of a takeover by Granada in 1995). So, as well as cross-country skiing, we had the travel trade in common. I happened to mention that, as a keen walker, I was trying to set up a programme of walking holidays for Milbanke, and since Waymark was building an enviable reputation as an operator of walking and cross-country skiing holidays, we shared those interests too.

Shortly after that, I received a letter from Vincent (as he preferred to be called) to say that Waymark was looking for new blood, and was I interested. I was going nowhere at Milbanke, and my proposed walking holidays did not take off, so I jumped at this chance to make my hobby my work as well. I started work there in August 1982, and spent seven interesting and very happy years as a full-time employee, plus a further six as editorial consultant for the brochures.

When I arrived, the company had just three full-time staff: Peggy Hounslow, the Managing Director, Vincent and Steve Green. I made four. Plus part-time help two or three days a week from Jill Hollingworth (who prepared packages for leaders), Joyce Coles (who typed confirmations and invoices), Pauline (who typed letters and maintained the mailing list) and Enid Boxall (who cleaned the office and made us tea in the afternoons). Then there was Liesl, Peggy's dachshund - about which (whom?) more later.

Being a very small company, all full-time staff, including directors, were expected to turn their hand to whatever needed doing, so you could find yourself talking to clients, answering their queries, taking their bookings, sending out brochures, talking in some foreign language (poor French or slightly better German in my case) to hoteliers or coach operators, writing out air tickets, writing cheques in foreign currencies, briefing leaders. And as Enid only worked afternoons, in the mornings we (including the directors) took our turn to make coffee - it was my job to organise the coffee rota. But my favourite time was when we all sat round discussing next year's programmes and selecting photographs: what should stay in, what should go out, where should we look for new holidays.

And if you suggested somewhere new, and the directors thought it sounded promising, you would be sent there to look for suitable accommodation and check out the walking or skiing. Or even if you hadn't suggested it! This could happen several times a year, and for some reason my friends thought I was constantly 'on holiday', despite my protestations that researching new holidays was very hard work.

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Peggy and Vincent were very kind to me, and even helped with a bridging loan on favourable terms when I was buying a flat near the office. Vincent retired in February 1985, when he and his wife, Beryl, bought a house in Bramber, West Sussex. Peggy retired in 1990 and moved to nearby Steyning. I sometimes visited them there, until, sadly, they passed away: Vincent in 1996, Peggy in 2006.

I remained on good terms with Waymark when I left in 1989, and continued to help with producing the brochures on a consultancy basis for several years afterwards. Peggy and Vincent even offered advice when I set up my own walking holiday operation, though as mine was in Britain and Waymark's was abroad I was not competing.

I would like to make clear that I have undertaken this small work of history purely as a labour of love. I do not expect to make money from it, or any other gain – it is on record only so that anyone interested can, I hope, enjoy reading it. And so that the proud name of Waymark Holidays will live on for ever, or as long as my website lasts – whichever is the sooner. (But note that copies have been lodged with the *British Library* and the five *Legal Deposit Libraries*, so should remain there for as long as those august institutions last.)

I harbour no delusions: this document is unlikely to attract the attention of Penguin, or indeed any other book publisher. As a printed book, it would be unlikely to sell more than a few hundred copies and therefore uneconomical to print, hence this electronic format, which should also mean that it can be more easily updated as and when new material comes to light.

I hope this story will be of interest to anybody who was involved with Waymark over the years and remind them of some good times and excellent holidays. It has certainly had that result for me in the course of writing it.

Colin Saunders

April 2009

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## AN INTRODUCTION TO THIS DOCUMENT

The document is laid out in two parts.

**Part 1: ‘The Waymark Story’** is the definitive history of nearly everything that happened to the company during the course of its 34-year existence. This does not mean that the facts quoted are set in stone, and the author will not be surprised if someone comes forward to suggest corrections or additions for a future edition.

Chapter 1 tells how the company was founded and developed.

Chapter 2 sets out the company’s general policies.

Chapter 3 is a list of personnel involved with Waymark over the years.

Chapter 4 summarises the travel arrangements made for Waymark’s holidays.

Chapter 5 goes into some detail about the contents of the brochures.

**Part 2: ‘Reminiscences’** is formed of contributions from people with (preferably fond) memories of working for or travelling with Waymark. Further contributions are invited and will either be published on the [updates page](#) on the author’s website or included in a future edition.

### **Other publications by Colin Saunders**

[Navigation and Leadership – a manual for walkers](#) (Ramblers’ Association, 1994)

[London – the definitive Walking Guide](#) (Cicerone Press, 2002)

[Walking in the High Tatras](#) (with Renáta Nárožná, Cicerone Press, 2nd edition 2006)

[The Capital Ring](#) (Aurum Press, 2nd edition 2006)

[The Vanguard Way](#) (Vanguards Rambling Club, fourth edition 2009)

For more details click on the above links or visit the author’s website:

[www.colinsaunders.org.uk](http://www.colinsaunders.org.uk)

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Waymark Holidays owed its existence to the courage and foresight of its founders, Peggy Hounslow, Noel Vincent and Humfrey Chamberlain.

The author is indebted to the following people and organisations, who have contributed in various ways:

The Cabinet Office, Humfrey Chamberlain, Peter Chapman, Viju Chhatralia, Dulcie Cringle, Rosemary Crosbie, Jill Hollingworth, Andy Hosking, Nancy Johns, Ian Jones, Bob Mason, Stuart Montgomery, Sue O'Grady, Elizabeth Philpott, Adam Pinney, Martin Read, Paul Sibert, Alan Smith, Beryl Vincent and Jim Wood.

He is especially indebted to Peter Chapman, Stuart Montgomery and Martin Read for allowing him access to their collections of Waymark brochures, without which writing this work would have been immeasurably more difficult and devoid of detail.

Finally, thanks to Exodus who have acquiesced in the publication of this document.

The author has tried to contact as many former directors, staff, leaders and clients as possible, but inevitably some will have escaped the net. If after reading this document you feel that something noteworthy has been omitted, or if you believe any statements to be incorrect, please contact Colin Saunders\*. There will be a Waymark Updates page on the website [www.colinsaunders.org.uk](http://www.colinsaunders.org.uk), where relevant communications of this nature may be published, with your permission – though they may have to be edited. The author hopes to revise this document from time to time, so that any relevant updates can be incorporated.

Colin Saunders asserts his right to be identified as the author of this work. Whilst every care has been taken in compiling this document, it is possible that some errors or omissions have occurred. The author accepts no responsibility for unforeseen consequences, but will be grateful for notification of such errors or omissions.

\* If you need to, please contact the author: [colin.saund@btconnect.com](mailto:colin.saund@btconnect.com).

## **PART 1: THE WAYMARK STORY**

### **CHAPTER 1. HISTORY**

#### **The founders**

##### Noel Vincent

*Thanks to Beryl Vincent for most of the information appearing below.*

Noel David George Vincent was born on 22nd December 1910 in Fulham, southwest London – just a stone's throw from what, six and a half decades later, would become the home of Waymark Holidays. He was christened Noel as the result of being born close to Christmas Day, but he did not like to use it. In the early 20th century it was customary in scientific circles (where his early career lay) for people to refer to colleagues just by their surnames, so 'Noel' became 'Vincent' and he was happy for it to stay that way.

From 1928 to 1946, Vincent was a researcher in wind engineering, testing the effect of wind on structures, based at the National Physical Laboratory in Teddington, Middlesex. This no doubt contributed to his cool, analytical mind and grasp of facts. This job was considered a 'reserved occupation' (essential for the war effort), so he was not called up for military service during the Second World War.

Vincent was an enthusiastic member of the *Youth Hostels Association* – one of its earliest members from its foundation in 1930. His first wife was the warden of a temporary hostel at Leatherhead in Surrey, and Vincent assisted her when his work at the NPL allowed. With help from the Wandsworth Group of the YHA, he was to play a key role in converting two adjoining, isolated and very dilapidated 17th century cottages in woodland near Ranmore Common, also in Surrey, into the now very popular *Tanners Hatch Youth Hostel*, opened in May 1946. He subsequently wrote a history of the hostel, and one of the last photographs of Vincent appeared in South East Rambler magazine in 1996 when he was guest of honour at the hostel's Golden Jubilee celebrations. An item in YHA News of Autumn of that year said, 'Noel Vincent was one of those charismatic wardens who proved to be an inspiration to generations of hostellers in the early decades of the YHA'.

Immediately after the war, Vincent was asked by the YHA to set up an international organisation, based in France, to organise working parties to rebuild damaged and destroyed hostels in Europe. In 1946, having returned to London, Vincent and his friend, Ernest Welsman, another keen YHA activist, decided that, with the return of peace, their future lay in travel, and offered their services to the YHA to run hostelling holidays abroad. The YHA felt they could not get involved at that stage, so instead the pair turned to the Ramblers' Association, which readily agreed to their proposal.

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So in 1946 the RA set up Ramblers' Association Services (RAS, later to be better known as *Ramblers Holidays*) with Welsman as 'Organising Secretary' and Vincent as 'Overseas Assistant Organiser'. Their first office was in Park Road, near Regent's Park. The contacts Vincent had made while working in France proved very helpful when setting up holidays there, and his proficiency with languages eased negotiations with hoteliers – he spoke fluent French, was reasonably proficient in German, Italian and Spanish, and had a smattering of Arabic and Swedish.

Vincent also led some of the holidays. One of his party members on the first holiday, to Tunisia (£27 for two weeks all-in), was Beryl Morphet, who was to become the second Mrs Vincent. The party met in Marseille, for the ferry to Tunis. Beryl remembers her first meeting with Vincent: 'He was an unforgettable sight with his black beard and khaki shorts – and purple arms and legs! We wondered what we had let ourselves in for.' It turned out that the colourful limbs had been coated with Mercurochrome, a popular antiseptic of the time, to treat scratches received while bathing from rough rocks in the Mediterranean.

Vincent and Beryl married in 1950; their first home was a room in the basement of the RAS office in Park Road, then they found a small flat in nearby Ivor Place. 'Ivor Place was like a village,' says Beryl. 'Everyone was so friendly. The butcher used to rest his joints of meat against our door, so that when we opened it, they fell inside. It wouldn't have passed modern Health and Safety regulations, but we didn't mind and loved living there.'

By 1960 they could just afford to buy a house, and bought 53 Oxford Gardens, North Kensington, London W10, for £5000. Fourteen years later, Waymark Holidays' first office was briefly located in a room there.

Vincent was always receptive to new ideas, and although RAS was primarily an operator of walking holidays, he persuaded them to experiment with other activities such as cycling, horse-riding and sailing (for which a new class of dinghy, called the Rambler, was developed at their sailing centre in Estartit, Spain – possibly in association with *Yachting World* magazine). His idea for a four-centre tour in Switzerland proved very popular – and as 'Titlis to Jungfrau' later became one of the most enduring holidays in the Waymark programme.

Another significant introduction to the programme was cross-country skiing, which Vincent had been introduced to, and impressed by, some years earlier. This was actually the true form of skiing, used for thousands of years as the main means of getting around in mountainous areas during the winter. The British perception of skiing as a mainly downhill sport stems from its popularisation in this form by *Sir Henry and Sir Arnold Lunn* in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Vincent believed that there would be a demand for the less glamorous but more traditional cross-country, and this was to be borne out later when Waymark became the market leader for such holidays.

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While at RAS, Vincent became active in the trade body, ABTA (*Association of British Travel Agents*). He attended their conventions, and one of these took place in Montreal, Canada, where the guest of honour was the glamorous film star and armed forces' pin-up, *Jane Russell* – Beryl has photographs of her with Vincent.

RAS later moved to offices in Finchley Road, opposite what was then the John Barnes department store (now a Waitrose supermarket). Ernest Welsman stood down as head of RAS around 1970 and Vincent took over in the role, but he was never really happy in it. He preferred being out in the field, and the challenge of looking for new holidays and negotiating with hoteliers. By then, RAS had expanded considerably and had also set up (in 1955) a subsidiary called Wings, to operate holidays to more exotic places outside Europe. They used charter flights operated by such historic names of the aviation industry as Eagle Airways, Hunting Clan and Laker Airways, using workhorse aircraft like the *Douglas DC-3* and *Vickers Viking*.

Welsman returned a few years later, but the relationship had changed. Vincent felt that the organisation had become too large and unwieldy, and resigned in 1973. Now aged 63, he took the brave step of deciding to set up a new company. By now, he had formed a close business relationship with his assistant, Peggy Hounslow, and had little difficulty in persuading her to join him.

One of Vincent's leaders, Ruth Hoffers, was also instrumental in setting up Waymark Holidays. She had married one of her party members, Humfrey Chamberlain, a businessman who provided the bond that allowed them to trade and became the first Company Secretary.

Vincent's readiness to get involved continued during the Waymark era, when in his 70s. He helped set up a Mountain Marathon for *Karrimor* at Kvitåvatn, and in 1982 was a founder member of the *London Region Nordic Ski Club*.

Vincent retired from full time work at Waymark in 1983 when he and Beryl moved to Bramber in West Sussex. They were keen gardeners and walked off with many prizes at local garden shows. They hosted garden parties there for Waymark staff – a memorable feature of these was the lamb roasted on a spit that Vincent had constructed, turned by an electric drill! He continued as a director until his death in December 1996, just days before his 86th birthday. The following tribute, written by Peggy Hounslow and Humfrey Chamberlain, appeared in the brochure:

‘When the idea of Waymark was born, Noel Vincent was already 63, an age when most are planning their retirement, not starting a new business venture! Through the first difficult years, his enthusiasm and enormous knowledge of people, places and mountains served as a foundation for the company that grew from it. His detailed memory was, at times, phenomenal, and his talent for descriptive writing brought to life the tours and the countryside he was promoting in our brochures.

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‘He had a great way with people and everybody liked him. He was kind, generous and, above all, he had a wonderful sense of humour. When his laugh rang through the office everyone smiled. But, like the scorpion, there was a sting in the tail when he found staff or leaders taking their duties too lightly.

‘After retirement in 1985 he happily spent time in the garden, his workshop or mastering the complexities of the computer. He never lost his zest for life. We all miss him greatly, he was a very special person.’

### Peggy Hounslow

Marguerite (Peggy) Hounslow was born in South Africa in 1923 and came to England in 1960. In her home country she was a schoolteacher, and was much involved with horses. One of her first jobs after arriving here was as a groom for Lady Asquith. Peggy joined Ramblers’ Association Services when they set up a programme of riding holidays in Austria, and it was her job to organise the holidays and look after the horses at the centre, reporting to Vincent. She earned a reputation for her handling of *Haflingers*, a strikingly handsome breed, chestnut with a flowing white mane, that originated in South Tirol. Sadly these holidays did not last long, and Peggy was offered a job at the Finchley Road headquarters. Before taking this up, she brought the horses back to Britain and found new owners for them all.

In 1973 Peggy left RAS when Vincent resigned, and joined him and Humfrey Chamberlain to set up Waymark Holidays. She was a formidable lady, very confident and businesslike, and it was agreed that she should be the Managing Director. She was also very thrifty and saw to it that every penny paid its way, and every cost-saving measure was implemented – an attitude that continued even when Waymark became a very successful and profitable venture, in its small way.

A knee injury sustained while skiing in Kandersteg severely curtailed Peggy's participation in outdoor activities, but she retained her interest in the history of travel and discovery, and became a Fellow of the *Royal Geographical Society*.

Those who did not know Peggy well sometimes got the impression that she was something of a tyrant; indeed her tongue could be sharp at times, and she did not suffer fools gladly. However, her outbursts quickly subsided and she could be very kind to those who worked hard, and considerate of the needs of staff and clients. She was the motivational force behind Waymark's involvement with blind skiers. Peggy's love of dogs was legendary, especially dachshunds, and at various times up to three of them would accompany her to the office.

Peggy was proud of her South African heritage and was keen that others should appreciate the beauty of the country. It was included in the programme in a number of guises, but sadly for her never really took off.

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Peggy retired in 1990 and moved to Steyning, West Sussex, close to Vincent's home in neighbouring Bramber. She devoted her time and energy to animal and conservation causes, supporting numerous charities including the *Woodland Trust*, *Campaign to Protect Rural England* and several animal (especially dogs) rescue homes, including the *Cyprus Association for the Protection and Care of Animals* (having read an article in the Cyprus Airways in-flight magazine en route to a holiday there, then being appalled at the state of some of the dogs she saw there). On her death in 2006, from breast cancer, with no surviving family, her estate was divided among thirteen of these charities.

This mini-biography probably fails to do justice to Peggy – it is a shame that no other tribute to her seems to have been written. The author would be grateful to receive any further details of her life.

### Humfrey Chamberlain

Humfrey Chamberlain was born in Leicester in 1923. He graduated from the University of London in 1940 with BSc Hons, then with a PhD at Cambridge in 1949. His subject was chemistry, and his early career followed this path as a researcher for Shell and as a lecturer at Leeds University. In 1955 career changes took Humfrey first into farming, then into business as a director of companies with interests as diverse as chemicals, petroleum, signs and beer.

In 1971 Humfrey married Ruth Hoffers, who led for Ramblers Holidays and Wings. When Noel Vincent and Peggy Hounslow broke away from Ramblers in 1973, Ruth persuaded Humfrey to provide financial support, by taking a third of the shares in the new company and by providing the bond required by the Civil Aviation Authority. Humfrey became Waymark's Company Secretary, a position he held until the acquisition by First Choice in December 2002. He and Ruth continued to lead holidays for some years.

Humfrey has been, and remains, very active in a wide variety of activities, especially flying, gaining his private pilot's licence 1980, gliding instructor rating 1983, and 'Full Cat' instructor rating 1987 (= Full Category Instructor, an instructor who has the relevant experience and training to qualify as a Chief Flying Instructor.)

His other activities and interests include swimming, skiing, walking, climbing, gardening, wood turning, cooking, music and reading.

### **In the beginning**

In 1973, Peggy Hounslow and Noel Vincent (plain 'Vincent' to his friends and colleagues) were long-standing employees of Ramblers' Association Services (RAS, now better known as *Ramblers Holidays*), working in offices in Finchley Road, Hampstead, North London. They were finding their boss, Ernest Welsman, increasingly difficult to work with (it was later

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revealed that he was suffering from a brain tumour, but this was not known at the time) and Peggy and Vincent 'wanted out'.

One of the RAS leaders, Ruth Chamberlain (née Hoffers), who worked under Vincent's direction, was sympathetic and enlisted the help of her husband, Humfrey – they had married shortly before all this in 1971. (Indeed, Ruth had introduced Humfrey to the joys of leading walking and cross-country skiing holidays, and they continued to do so until they felt they had got a bit too old for the job.) It was decided that Humfrey should set up a company, and that he, Peggy and Vincent should subscribe equal amounts of money to set things in motion.

At one meeting of the nascent board, Vincent produced from his pocket a lump of rock, which had been marked with coloured paint. 'This', he said, 'is a waymark, and I propose that the name of the company should be Waymark Holidays.' In November 1973, Company Number 1145436 was incorporated in that name, with a share capital of £5000, with Humfrey as Company Secretary, Peggy as Managing Director, and Vincent as Director. Each director was allocated 1666 shares fully paid up, and *Maurice Andrews & Co.* of Cheam were appointed auditors (a position they held until the takeover by First Choice in December 2002).

Humfrey had substantial business interests and was able to provide financial backing for the CAA (*Civil Aviation Authority*) bond, without which no tour operator could trade legally. Thus the first publicity could show that Waymark held Air Transport Operators Licence (ATOL) number 624B (which later became 624 then 0624).

It was Peggy who designed what became the instantly recognisable logo, consisting of a black **W** on a white background above a white **M** on a black background. It first appeared in the walking holidays leaflet for 1975, initially in black and white, later in a variety of colours and styles. And it continued to be used post-merger in the Exodus skiing brochure, highlighting the 'Waymark Experience'.

Working initially from Vincent's home at 53 Oxford Gardens, North Kensington, he and Peggy started to compile a small programme of walking holidays for the first season in 1974. A permanent office was soon found in the basement of a coal merchant's premises at 295 Lillie Road in Fulham, London SW6 7LL, and they were able to publish this address, together with a phone number 01 385 5015 – it was felt that the London number would enhance the company's prestige.

They chose a bad year to start: 1974 was the year of the infamous collapse of the giant charter airline, *Court Line*, which dragged down the equally massive tour operators, Clarksons and Horizon, and a host of smaller companies, stranding over 40,000 holidaymakers abroad. Of seven countries offered by Waymark in that year, it appears that only departures to France operated, plus a disastrous bicycle tour in Britain – more later. At the end of that first season,

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it was touch and go as to whether the company could continue, but they survived, learned, and eventually prospered.

### **Waymark and cross-country skiing**

Vincent had started a small programme of cross-country skiing (popularly referred to as XC) holidays for Ramblers in 1969, and had similar ambitions for Waymark. Soon after the start, he and Peggy were approached by Rod Tuck, a retired Royal Marine captain, who was in the process of establishing a mountain lodge (Fjellstoge) at *Kvitåvatn*, in the Telemark region of Norway. Rod had little difficulty in persuading them to include Kvitåvatn: it was a resounding success and led the company to expand its winter programme.

(Despite poor snow in the late 80s and early 1990s, contributing to bankruptcy for the Fjellstoge in 1992, it recovered and Kvitåvatn still features in the Exodus XC programme. Rod Tuck left to become a university lecturer in Lithuania, and died aged 72 in 2006. For his fascinating life story see [http://www.xcuk.com/Pages/ecom39\\_ngf1.html](http://www.xcuk.com/Pages/ecom39_ngf1.html).)

Other countries were added, mostly in the Alps. The introduction to the 1982-83 winter brochure boasted: ‘We think we can now claim to be the leading UK tour operator in [cross-country skiing]’, and indeed Waymark eventually came to be generally accepted as the market leader in this activity. The introduction to that year’s brochure stated: ‘We remain primarily a holiday organisation rather than a ski school [but with us, unlike a ski school] you have the services of your own leader/instructor all day every day and not just two or four hours a day, five days a week’.

Cross-country skiing gradually grew to equal the walking programme, with over 2000 clients in the 1994-95 season. Nearly half of them went to Norway, providing more visitors to that country in winter than any other tour operator. Waymark consistently plugged the fact that Norway has more reliable snow than the Alps, and its supreme suitability for XC. In recognition of its services to Norwegian tourism, in 2004 the company was invited to address the AGM of *Norske Spor*, an important organisation promoting cross-country skiing, which translates itself into English as Skiing Norway.

In recognition of its huge efforts on behalf of cross-country skiing, and the high quality of its holidays, Waymark was awarded the prestigious annual Guardian Observer Travel Award for best ski company in 2002, 2003, 2006 and 2007. (They are now called the *Guardian, Observer and guardian.co.uk Travel Awards*).

Although snow conditions remained generally reliable in the higher centres, global warming began to affect the lower ones. Until the late 1980s and early 1990s the programme had featured centres as low as 600m in the Alps (Fuschl, Windischgarsten) and other upland areas in Continental Europe, such as the Black Forest and Jura, and there were many low altitude

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resorts that benefited from Waymark's custom. When snow is plentiful, places that are not particularly suitable for downhill skiing are ideal for XC: undulating tracks in woodland and across fields, surrounded by mountains, provide a charming setting as you glide serenely from your hotel to an inn for lunch – and possibly rather less serenely back to the hotel. Sadly (and despite some very snowy winters higher up), global warming has resulted in a trend towards unreliable snow, or even no snow at all, at many places below 1000m, with the result that the number of centres offered in Continental Europe declined.

### **Finding its feet**

Waymark carried exactly 99 clients on its first programme of walking holidays, and the first year's trading to November 1974 showed a loss of £3,874 on turnover of £16,397 – quite acceptable for a first year. The following year showed a substantial improvement, no doubt boosted by the first season of XC, with turnover of £49,683, a gross operating profit of £4,636 and an insignificant nett loss of £425. The first nett profit, of £4,693, was achieved in 1976, after charging directors' remuneration of £1,612. So after three years of hard work and no pay, the directors were finally able to feel that their faith had been justified.

In 1981 another full-time employee, Steve Green, was taken on (he later attained a cross-country ski instructor's qualification on a Waymark course). Until then, Peggy and Vincent had undertaken most of the administrative work, assisted part-time by some old friends: Jill Hollingworth, who had run the *Austrian Alpine Club* from the offices of RAS, to prepare documents for leaders, and Joyce Coles, to type confirmations for clients. Rosemary Crosbie, a keen cross-country skier who happened to knock on Waymark's door after a visit to Kvitåvatn, sometimes came in to mind the shop when Peggy and Vincent were away. (Rosemary was the second person to lead a Waymark XC holiday and later became a qualified instructor.) Advertisements in local papers had resulted in the services of Pauline, to type letters and maintain the mailing list, and Enid, to clean the offices and make tea in the afternoons.

In 1982, Colin Saunders was recruited from within the travel trade, and in effect became the company's marketing officer, co-ordinating brochure production and advertising. Steve left in about 1984 to set up his own marketing consultancy. Colin left in 1989 to set up a tour operator specialising in walking holidays along Britain's national trails, but continued to assist with brochure production until 1995.

Several people spent time as staff in the Lillie Road basement before their love of the great outdoors drove them to seek natural light and employment elsewhere. They included Rosemary Barnes, Andrew Brenchley, Karen Bruhwiler, Janek Franczak, Lucy Franks, Jill Gates, Nicola Hall, Dion Jackson, Beatrice Jaich and Paul Sibert.

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### **On firm ground**

With business continually increasing, in 1983 it was decided to appoint another director, Peter Chapman, and increase the share capital to £20,000. (Note that this Peter Chapman is not the same as the one who was Managing Director, first of *Ramblers Holidays*, then *Holiday Fellowship*!) Turnover passed the £1 million mark in 1985. A fifth director, Martin Read, was appointed in 1987, and a sixth, Stuart Montgomery, in 1990, by when turnover had reached an impressive (for a small specialist tour operator) of £1.8 million. The £2 million mark was passed in 1992. It fell just short of £3 million at its peak in 1999.

The company was now well established and secure, but (quoting the introduction to the 1984 summer brochure, written by Noel Vincent): ‘Each year we try to include a selection of new holidays to interest those who have been with us before, but as we are a small company, and intend to remain so, this inevitably means removing others.’ (Of course, ‘others’ meant those that had failed to live up to expectations in one way or another.) And: ‘We intend to keep the number of holidays that we offer to that which enables us to give care and attention to the planning, and personal service to our clients.’

The following year’s introduction stated: ‘A gloomy article headed “A wave of failures” has been typical of much press comment about the numerous tour operators who failed in 1984, often leaving their clients stranded abroad. We are pleased we can report a sound financial position and another year of steady, contained growth in 1984; we have always avoided irresponsible expansion; we do not cut prices to attract bookings at any cost; we do not guarantee our prices in a world of constantly fluctuating exchange rates (the big tour operators are now reverting to surcharging!) and we sell directly to the public.’

Although Europe was the destination for the vast majority of the company's holidays, occasional forays were made, both further afield and closer to home. Peggy was born in South Africa, and the spectacular flora of that country provided the theme for a number of tours, but walking holidays in Brittany and bird-watching holidays on the Scottish island of Barra failed to impress. When Spanish-speaker Martin Read joined the company in 1986, the number of holidays in Spain was substantially expanded; he also introduced holidays in North and South America, Turkey and Ireland.

Spectacular failures continued to rock the holiday industry from time to time, but Waymark rose above it all. One of the largest British tour operators, Intasun, failed in 1991, taking its vertically integrated airline, Air Europe, with it. The introduction to Waymark’s 1992 brochure had this to say: ‘In 1991 tourism suffered some severe knocks – the economic recession, the Gulf War and the failure of one of our largest tour operators and airlines – but we are pleased to say that Waymark’s clients have remained loyal throughout. At times our telephone lines were so busy that these problems seemed not to exist, but there were some

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casualties: the Gulf War caused loss of confidence in Turkey and, to a lesser extent, Greece; and Yugoslavia is sadly no longer safe to visit.’

### **A time for change**

Vincent began to feel the effects of advancing years and prostate trouble. He worked full time until 1984, then part time for a further year, and retired completely in February 1985 at the age of 74. In the 1986 summer brochure, he wrote: ‘This is the thirteenth time I have written the introduction to our summer programme and I am writing this personally as it will probably be the last. I have reached the stage where it is better to retire gracefully and let younger and more competent people continue to run Waymark Holidays, even though I shall still be there in the background.’

Peggy started to reduce her day-to-day involvement in 1986, when Peter Chapman was appointed Managing Director, and retired in 1990 at the age of 67.

Amazingly, the company soldiered on in its Lillie Road basement for 17 years, until 1990, when the inconvenience and difficulty of retaining staff made a move imperative. There could be as many as ten people working in those cramped and rather musty conditions at one time. More spacious offices (with windows) were found at 44 Windsor Road, Slough, Berkshire – a location that was convenient for most of the directors. The move to Slough and Peter Chapman's dynamism greatly boosted the company's status in the holiday industry and it went from strength to strength.

In the mid 1980s, a tentative and slightly reluctant nod towards computerisation had been made with the acquisition of an Amstrad 8256 word processor, to which were transferred client information sheets and notes for leaders, previously laboriously amended by cut-and-paste or complete retyping. After the move to Slough, Stuart Montgomery, an IT specialist, introduced computerisation of the company's reservations procedures and address list (formerly held in a massive card index), and in 1995 introduced desktop publishing, so that the brochures could be designed in-house. This was a big step forward in improving flexibility and reducing costs.

Martin left the company in 1999 to set up his own consultancy. Stuart resigned in 2001 and went, ironically as it turned out, to Exodus Expeditions, a company similar to Waymark.

### **Maturity**

Waymark celebrated its Silver Jubilee in 1999 by inviting clients who had taken 25 or more holidays (and there were many) to take part in a draw for a limited edition of 100 Waymark branded daysacks. The Summer 1998 newsletter, in preparation for the celebration, included

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a competition for which the prize was a free holiday at Trins. During the course of this exercise it emerged that Pam and Neil Bailey from Sheffield had been on an amazing total of 113 Waymark holidays between them since 1980.

There was now great pressure to expand the programme, but this was resisted. As stated in the 1999 summer brochure: ‘Some of you have asked us to change our ways of working. You want internet access and email: we are working on it. Many of you disliked our handling charge for credit-card payments: we have removed it. Such changes are important, and we mean to continue to respond to your wishes. But we are immensely gratified to know that what you want, above all, is for us not to change the basics. You tell us that what gives us the edge over our competitors is, to quote one questionnaire respondent, “smaller groups, good leaders and good accommodation”. We will not change that.’ Sadly, the final comment in that year’s brochure introduction – ‘We look forward to another twentyfive years of service’ – was not to be fulfilled.

Waymark’s celebration was shared with the 200th anniversary of the first ascent of *Grossglockner* (Austria’s highest mountain at 3,798m or 12,457 feet) and the company was privileged to be invited to send a representative.

Like its tenure at Lillie Road, Waymark’s time at Slough lasted 17 years, from 1990 to 2007, during which some 36 members of staff came and went. With as many as 12 working there at any one time, conditions became rather cramped again, but this was eased in 1998 when Waymark occupied the adjoining space vacated by a solicitor.

Having risen by an average of 25% a year from the start until 1995, the rate of increase in turnover slowed after that, though it reached a maximum of £2.8 million in 1999. In fact turnover fell slightly in most years after 1996. Rather than a decline in demand, this was due to an inability to obtain aircraft seats at a competitive rate. The directors came to realise that many problems lay ahead for small, independent companies, and in 1996 it was agreed that approaches from other tour operators to take over the business should be examined. Several came up but all were rejected as unsuitable. Eventually, in 2002, a bid from First Choice of £1.6 million was accepted, and the transfer of ownership took place on 10 December 2002.

Subsequent brochures stated that Waymark Holidays Ltd. (still Company Number 1145436) was part of the First Choice Holidays PLC Group of Companies, and the registered office was transferred to First Choice House, London Road, Crawley, West Sussex, RH10 9GX.

### **The First Choice era**

Already in the First Choice stable, having been taken over earlier in 2002, was one of Waymark's rivals, the former Exodus Expeditions, now trading as plain *Exodus*. The travel trade expected that the two would eventually be merged. This did not happen immediately,

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but some Exodus staff were seconded to senior positions at Waymark: Stuart Montgomery (who had left Waymark for Exodus in 2001) returned as Managing Director in December 2002, followed in 2005 by Neil Saunders (no relation to the author), while Claire Etherton then Colette Coleman came over as Product Manager.

A number of new policies and innovations were introduced. Commission was paid to travel agents. For the winter, greater emphasis was placed on family holidays and on a broader range of activities, including winter walking, snow-shoeing, ski orienteering, ski treasure trails and even survival techniques, such as building snow-holes.

For the summer, 'Walk and Talk' holidays in Spain and France included an opportunity to combine learning Spanish or French in the morning with an afternoon's walking. The higher grade walking holidays, touring high in the mountains, had often included stretches of *via ferrata* (Italian for 'iron way'), which consisted of such paraphernalia as ladders, rungs and cables to help negotiate the more difficult scrambles, and more holidays featuring these were introduced. Walking clubs and other organisations were offered tailor-made holidays to their own specifications, with a leader provided by Waymark.

Responding to public concern about environmental issues, brochures published from 2005 to 2007 explained the company's (or rather, presumably, First Choice's) Responsible Tourism Policy: to maximise the financial benefit brought to host economies, minimise the impact on the local wildlife and natural environments, and respect the cultures and local traditions of the host destinations; as well as to embrace good practices at the office. It should be remembered that Waymark had followed this policy throughout its history.

The expertise of Waymark in XC skiing holidays, and the client loyalty this engendered, was recognised by First Choice. Waymark had won the Guardian Observer Travel Award for Best Ski Company in 2002 and 2003, and under new management repeated their success in 2006 and 2007. Even after Exodus totally absorbed Waymark, they continued to use the distinctive **WM** logo in the XC ski pages of their winter brochure.

### Epilogue

Ironically, it seems that the last Waymark holidays to operate in both summer and winter were new to the programme. As far as the author has been able to ascertain, for cross-country skiing, it was to Kvaløya (Tromsø Springtime Touring), from 21 to 29 April 2007, while for walking, and the last Waymark holiday of all, it was French Walk and Talk, at Honfleur, from 30 September to 7 October 2007. (If anybody has more definite information, or if any of those party members should happen to read this, please email the author [colin.saund@btconnect.com](mailto:colin.saund@btconnect.com) – it would be interesting to learn whether you were aware of these momentous occasions.)

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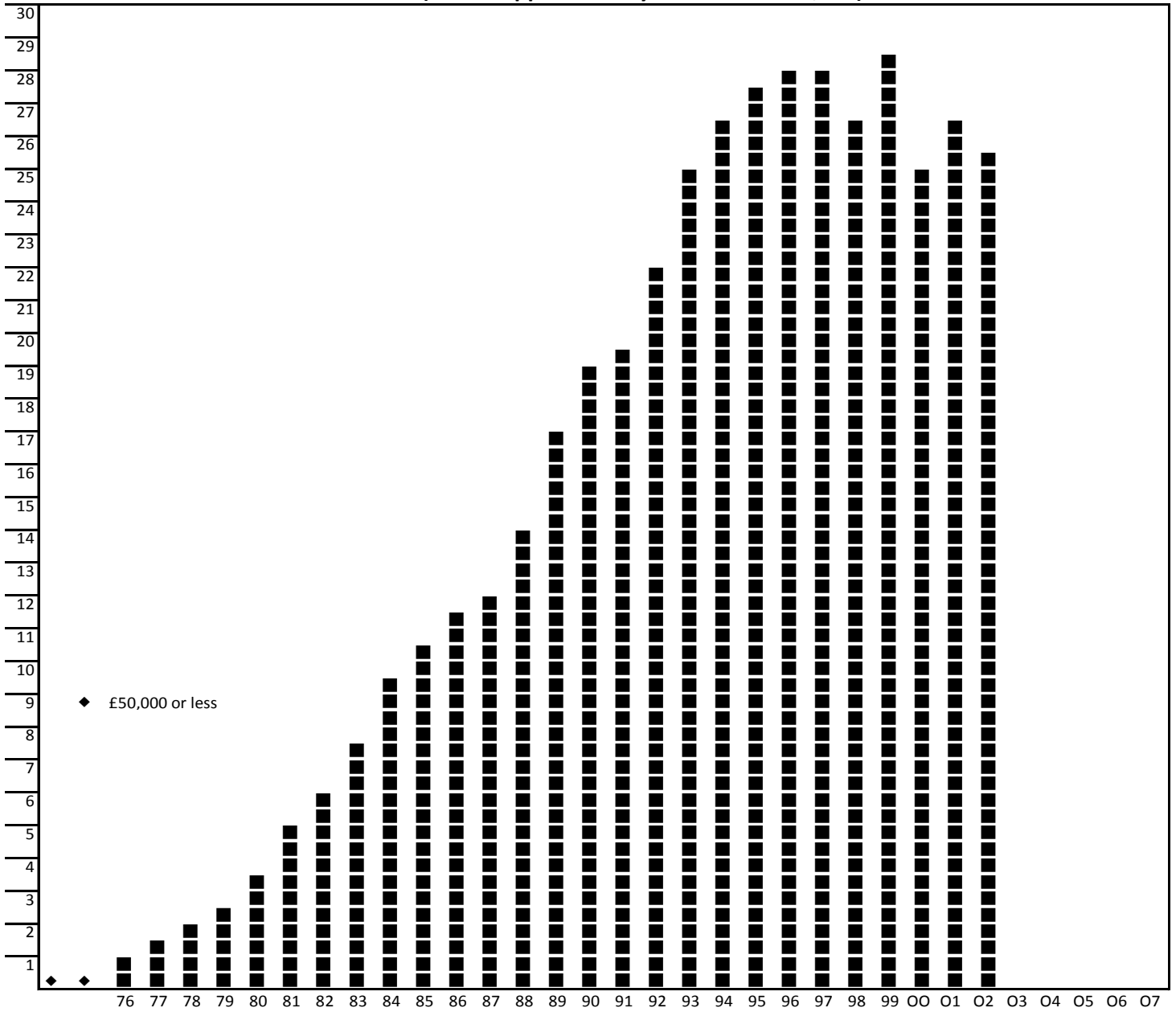
Some of Waymark's painstakingly-researched holidays survived the chop, being offered at least in the 2008 Exodus programme: walking centres Dobbiaco, L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, St.Bonnet and Trins; walking tours Crete - Mountains and Gorges and the Peer Gynt Way; XC centres Äkäslompolo, Dobbiaco, Kvitåvatn, Pertisau, Rondablikk, Seefeld, Sjusjøen, Synnfjell, Trins, Varena and Versciaco. Best wishes to them from all those who were involved with Waymark, and commiserations to the small, family-run hotels that benefited from Waymark's custom over so many years and were dropped in the First Choice era.

Waymark was a somewhat non-conformist organisation, run initially by idiosyncratic and charismatic characters of the kind that abounded in the travel trade in post-war years; and in a style that was totally different from the usual public perception of a tour operator. Perhaps it was this that led to its eventual demise: a refusal to compromise on standards, a reluctance to expand capacity to cope with the need for economy in bulk.

Noel Vincent died in 1996, so did not benefit from the fruits of the First Choice deal. Although Peggy Hounslow had a few years to use her money, she developed breast cancer in 2005, which killed her in twelve months. Others who were involved with Waymark Holidays to a greater or lesser extent are still active in many ways, and you can read what some of them have been up to in Chapter 3.

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WAYMARK HOLIDAYS LTD. : TURNOVER (shown approximately in units of £100,000)



Figures for 2003 to 2007 are not available.

## **CHAPTER 2. POLICY**

### **Operational policies**

#### Parties

Right from the start, Waymark aimed to operate with smaller parties than Ramblers, the reasoning being that this made for more congeniality and better rapport between the leader and party members. For centred walking holidays the maximum would be 16, on hut tours 12. Originally the maximum on skiing holidays was 16 too, but from 1984-85 this was cut to 14 to provide a higher standard of tuition.

Waymark's parties always included a high proportion of single people, and in the early years it was the policy to try as far as possible to have a balance of males and females on parties – indeed the instruction NLF (no lone females) or, less commonly, NLM (no lone males) would sometimes appear on the booking sheets, when a party seemed in danger of becoming unbalanced. This, the directors believed, provided a more congenial atmosphere. This policy was abandoned later on, but inevitably it led to a number of romances and marriages, and the author would like to hear from those to whom this applies: please email [colin.saund@btconnect.com](mailto:colin.saund@btconnect.com).

Many parties organised reunions, and one of them (to the Kamniks and Julians in 1988) met up twice a year for at least the next ten years.

#### Accommodation

Right from the start, Waymark's policy was to use, where possible, small, family-run hotels in attractive, often out-of-the-way places that had a good variety of walking or skiing. Such places were hard to find, though, as most were already fully committed to their regular guests, who mostly wanted to go at the same time as Waymark, when the walking or skiing was at its best. This could sometimes be overcome by booking 'shoulder' periods just outside the high season, or by arranging parties to see alpine flowers in their prime in early summer in the mountains, when there was still too much snow higher up but the meadows below were ablaze with colour. The promise to pay in advance also helped get a foot in the door, though in the first season a cynical proprietor might well have thought, 'I'll believe it when I see it'!

#### Grading

The first season's holidays in 1974 were ungraded, but a grading system was introduced for walking in 1975, and for skiing in 1979. To be different from Ramblers Holidays (which uses letters) Waymark used numbers, where 1 was easy and 5 was difficult. More details of the walking and skiing grading systems appear in Chapter 5.

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### Holiday numbering

The original holiday numbering system was very simple and lasted until after the takeover by First Choice. Initially, for both walking and skiing, the letter W for Waymark was followed by a three-figure number. In 1974 the distinction of carrying the very first number, W001, fell to 'Woodcarving at Engelberg', though this holiday did not operate.

The W numbers were originally used for XC holidays too, but as the programme expanded this became unwieldy, so X numbers were introduced in 1985-86 for XC, and W now stood for Walking. After First Choice acquired the company, a new system was introduced, for winter 2004-05 onwards, consisting of three letters followed by three figures – presumably to satisfy their computer.

### Marketing

Waymark's marketing policy followed a comparatively low road – word of mouth played an important role in getting new business. Advertising usually consisted of relatively small boxes in the classified sections of national newspapers, and rather more prominent ones (rarely more than a quarter page) in the outdoor magazines. (The *Ramblers' Association's* in-house magazines would have been used, but, understandably, the RA refused to accept advertising from tour operators that were in competition with its own Ramblers Holidays.) A higher profile was adopted towards the end; for example, a half page was taken in the Evening Standard's ES Magazine in September 2006, and news releases were sent regularly to the national press, some of which got through to the travel pages and websites.

Initially, advertising was placed directly with the publications concerned, but from the mid 1980s an advertising agency was employed.

The most important marketing tool was, of course, the brochure, and much time was spent on trying to perfect it. During Waymark's 34 year existence, over 100 brochures and leaflets were produced, and their contents are analysed in Chapter 5. Work of some kind was taking place virtually throughout the year on one or other of the two main brochures, summer and winter. It had been the practice to publish the summer brochure in November, but in response to increased demand from clients to book early for holidays between Christmas and April, this was gradually advanced by a month or so. The winter brochure usually came out in July.

Waymark occasionally tried their luck at travel shows, but never found them particularly productive. In 1975 Rosemary Crosbie squeezed into a small stand at the *Daily Mail Ski Show* at London's Olympia. In September 1985 a slightly larger stand was taken at Ski Mart '85, just along Lillie Road at the London West Hotel. From 1997 to 2000, at the end of February, Waymark appeared at the annual *Destinations* holiday show at either Olympia or Earls Court.

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In 1990 and 1991 a Waymark video lasting 27 minutes was offered for loan, featuring ‘old favourites, such as the Pilgrim’s Way, St.Bonnet, Pitztal, Trins, Samos and the Pyrenees tour, as well as more recent additions such as Camino de Santiago, Turkey and Peru & Bolivia’. It was available in either VHS or Betamax format, on payment of a refundable deposit of £15.

A newsletter was started in Summer 1992 and published intermittently. Subjects covered included holidays that were fully booked, ones that needed pushing, what staff and leaders had been doing and other items of interest to clients.

In 2001 the website *www.waymarkholidays.com* was set up. It closed down when the company was absorbed into Exodus in 2007, though at the time of writing keying *www.waymarkholidays.co.uk* into the address bar brings up a message from 1&1 WebHosting: ‘This domain has just been registered for one of our clients!’

Waymark’s Alpujarras holiday in Spain was featured in a 2002 edition of the BBC’s ‘Holiday on a Shoestring’ programme. Presenter Mariella Frostrup and her sister, Daniela, appeared to enjoy it, though on one walk they apparently found the pace too slow as they asked the leader if they could go on ahead.

### Public relations

Dealings with clients were always overwhelmingly conducted by post or phone, and latterly online, so there was never any real need to provide a smart and comfortable reception area. Personal calls took up much more time and were discouraged. Very occasionally a client would call in and be found a seat somewhere, but this was never a satisfactory situation. Bookings from travel agents were also discouraged, as it was felt that few travel trade staff would be able to deal satisfactorily with the technicalities of walking and XC holidays. No commission was paid, so on the rare occasions when bookings were received from an agent they would have to charge the client a booking fee. (Commission was paid after the First Choice takeover.)

During the early 1990s a survey was conducted of Waymark’s winter clientèle, and the results were published in the 1995-96 winter brochure. It found that ‘our holidays are suitable for people of all ages, provided they are reasonably fit and healthy. Age need be no barrier – we cater for families with young children (though we would not recommend that children under six try cross-country skiing) and for senior citizens. And the balance between the sexes is almost equally divided.’ An analysis of the statistics showed that: over 80% of bookings were from existing clients; over 70% of clients had been on three or more Waymark holidays; 50% of all new clients booked through personal recommendation; 95% of clients each winter expressed the firm intention of booking again; and over 95% of clients were non-smokers. It was concluded that ‘these statistics speak for themselves, and we are grateful for the exceptional loyalty shown by our clients.’

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In later years a questionnaire was provided for clients to fill out after their holiday. In answer to the question, 'Why did you choose Waymark in preference to other operators?', one respondent in 1998 said: 'Good range of locations; competitive price; good leaders and friendly atmosphere with other clients; straightforward honest brochure and philosophy and lack of hard sell.' Commented the following year's brochure: 'That, in a nutshell, is what we are about.'

From the mid 1990s Waymark employed a public relations company, WT Associates, who organised press releases and familiarisation trips for journalists.

### Children and family holidays

Waymark never made great efforts to encourage bookings from families, as it was felt that walking and cross-country skiing party holidays did not provide a very suitable environment for children, and that they may spoil the congeniality of a group of adults. The only reference in the early brochures was in the booking conditions: that 'a person under 16' must be accompanied by a responsible adult.

For summer, no other reference to children appeared until 1989, when it was stated, under the heading Children's Reductions: 'Most airlines give reductions for children under 12. Hotels normally only give reductions for children under 12 sharing a room with two adults. Please consult us – we are very willing to advise.' This brief note appeared in every brochure until 2005; then in 2006 and 2007 a quarter-page was devoted to the subject, though the policy on reductions remained the same.

Strangely, perhaps, considering the greater possibility of accidents, there was more encouragement for the skiing holidays, and sooner, than for walking. From 1983-84 the winter brochure stated, under the heading Children's Holidays: 'These are available on all centre holidays as long as the child/children are 12 years and under (Norway) or under 12 (all other countries) and share a room with two adults. Other arrangements can be made if the family is larger. Please consult us.' Later, this was revised to mention that some Norwegian hotels give reductions up to 16 years.

Then in 1985-86 and 1986-87 a special family holiday was offered at Fuschl in Austria 'because we think that this is an excellent area to introduce children to cross-country ski-ing, as well as providing the possibility to visit places of interest. The hotel will arrange suitable entertainment on some evenings.' It seems this was not particularly successful as the special departure was dropped after two seasons.

Later, under First Choice management, further efforts were made, with a 'family-friendly' centre at Rondaplassen in Norway's Rondane National Park, for the final 2006-07 season.

From 1999-2000 until 2004-05, winter holiday prices in the brochure specified the amount of the reduction for children under 12, where available.

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### Surcharges

In the wake of the collapse of Court Line etc. in 1974, a Government Levy was introduced on all holiday prices, to be paid into an Air Travel Reserve Fund, which covered clients against future collapses. At first this was 1%, and most tour operators including Waymark felt able to absorb it, but in 1976 it was increased to 2% and that year's brochure stated: 'We are required to pay a Government Levy of 2% of the [holiday price]. You will be informed of the amount due five weeks before departure.' But by 1977 it was felt that the fund had reached the point where its reserve, together with interest, could stand on its own, and the levy was dropped.

A note in Waymark's 1974 France brochure under the heading Changes in Tour Charges stated, 'We very much regret that we live in an inflationary world. This means that we cannot say that the tour charges given in this brochure are definitive. They are based on air fares ruling at the time of going to press (February 1974), and an exchange rate of 11.30 [Francs] = £1, but should these change we have to reserve the right to make corresponding changes in the tour charge. We shall assess these charges five weeks before departure and either make you a refund (we hope!) or inform you of the surcharge amount, which is then due.'

Similar statements continued to appear in the brochures until 1986, when the following note appeared: 'Although some tour operators prefer to fix their prices at a level which allows them to "guarantee" them, we think it better to surcharge when necessary and refund where possible.' The Winter 1985-86 brochure guaranteed that the surcharge would not exceed 5% of the advertised holiday charge.

However, the introduction to the Summer 1987 brochure, under the heading Guaranteed No Currency Surcharges, stated: 'Our great concern in producing [this] brochure has been the weakness of sterling and the corresponding increase in costs compared with last year. We know that at the end of 1986 the surcharges were much higher than we had ever imagined, and, because of this, we now guarantee that there will be no increase in price due to currency fluctuation. This has been made possible by contracting already for all our foreign currency requirements, but it is expensive to buy forward and this also affects our 1987 prices. Unfortunately airlines will not guarantee air fares and, although they only rarely change them, we have to reserve the right to pass on any such increases.'

The policy of buying foreign currency in advance continued until 2003. Under First Choice management the right to make currency surcharges was reintroduced, but 'any benefits derived from decreases in these costs will be passed on to you'.

### Deposits

The deposit required to secure a booking in 1974 was 10% of the tour charge – so on the French holidays would have been between £6.90 and £11.80 per person. By 1976 this had

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been set to a standard £10, and by the end in 2007 had reached £80 or 10% of the tour charge, whichever was higher (so could have been £245). But there were some special holidays for which a much higher deposit, up to £500, was required where substantial advance payments had to be committed, such as for the *Haute Route* tour where huts and guides had to be booked well ahead.

### Credit and debit cards

Although credit cards had been available in the UK since 1967, it took some time for them to be generally accepted by the travel trade. No mention was made of them in Waymark brochures until the Winter 1985-86 brochure – and then only to regret that they were not accepted!

This policy continued until the 1991-92 winter brochure stated: ‘We can accept payment of your balance (but *not* deposit) by Visa or Mastercard – an additional charge of £15 per person will be collected for this method of payment.’ The introduction to the summer brochure for 1992 stated: ‘Television and newspapers have encouraged clients to seek extra protection by paying with a credit card, and we recognise the validity of this advice. But the credit card companies do not provide this protection for free; so, although we now accept payment by credit card, there is a fee for doing so.’

Eventually the company accepted the inevitable, and from Winter 1999-2000 payment by credit card was accepted without extra charge, though as this incurred commission charges clients were encouraged to use debit cards such as Switch.

### Insurance

The first Waymark brochures in 1974 simply pointed out that the risks of incurring cancellation charges, loss of or damage to luggage, and illness or injury could be covered by insurance. However, the need for insurance in connection with holidays has become increasingly manifest over the years, due to many highly publicised disasters of one kind or another affecting travellers – starting in that year with the collapse of the airline Court Line and several major tour operators.

Waymark continued to advise clients to take out insurance, but the space devoted to the subject gradually increased to the point that from 2001 it occupied a whole page in the brochure. And the cost of premiums multiplied ten-fold during the life of the company, (compared with six- or seven-fold for holiday prices and the cost of living generally).

In 1978, the first year in which premiums were shown in the brochure and when insurance was offered as an optional extra, the amount per person to be added to the deposit for walking holidays was £3 (up to 8 days) or £4 (up to 17 days); and for skiing £6 (up to 12 days) or £6.50 (up to 18 days).

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For 2007, they were £35 (8 days), £45 (17 days), £57 (24 days) or £69 (32 days). The premiums were now the same for walking and cross-country skiing, presumably as XC had been shown to be much less dangerous than the downhill variety. Clients were now also advised to take Form E111 (later *European Health Insurance Card*), which entitles holders to free health arrangements in most European countries.

From 2005 it was a condition of booking that you must be covered by travel insurance, and take evidence of this on holiday; you had to either take the Waymark insurance or provide details of your own arrangements.

From 1978 to 1995 the company's travel insurance scheme was arranged through West Mercia Insurance Brokers, which in 1996 was absorbed into *Harrison Beaumont Insurance Schemes*. From 1997 to the end cover was provided by Paul Hudson Insurance Schemes (later called *Leisureinsure*).

### Booking conditions

The first summer brochure in 1974 included a list of just eight booking conditions, referring to payments of deposit and balance, cancellation charges, bookings from minors, the right to vary holiday charges, the waiving of responsibility for insurable matters, the requirement for clients to declare recurrent health conditions, and arrangements for arbitration.

By the end in 2007, the number of conditions had risen to sixteen – the result of experience gained over the years. The extra conditions covered credit card payments, charges for transferring to another holiday, the authority of the person signing the booking form to commit all persons thereon, the right to cancel the holiday if too few people booked for it, the waiving of responsibility for accuracy of details published in the brochure, the need to inform the leader or other Waymark representative immediately if there was cause for complaint, the responsibility of the client to ensure that valid travel documents are carried, and the right to vary booking conditions by written mutual consent.

### **Waymark and the governing bodies of skiing**

*The author is grateful to Rosemary Crosbie and Adam Pinney (Chairman, Nordic Key Committee of Snowsport England), for much of the following information.*

Waymark became an affiliated member of the British Ski Federation (BSF, now *Snowport GB*) in 1978. The company's eminent standing in the XC world came to be recognised by the BSF as an ideal way to award certificates of proficiency, as leaders could assess party members' abilities over the course of a week or more. BSF considered that leaders appointed by Waymark were capable of assessing XC skiers to bronze standard, and if they had also achieved silver standard themselves and attended certain recognised training courses they would be able to assess skiers to silver standard. Only a fully qualified Nordic instructor of

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the British Association of Ski Instructors (BASI, now *British Association of Snowsport Instructors*) Nordic instructor would be able to assess gold standard.

Consequently, Waymark encouraged its XC leaders to attend such courses, and indeed ran a number of holidays themselves purely for the purpose of training leaders, with the objective of obtaining a BASI instructor's certificate at the end.

The assessment scheme was administered by Waymark's longstanding friend, Rosemary Crosbie, whose calligraphic skills were well suited to adding names to certificates. In the nine seasons for which figures are available, from 1985-86 to 1993-94, some 1,300 clients achieved bronze standard, 180 silver and 3 gold.

A regular XC client, Robert Hovey, became chairman of the Nordic Committee of the English Ski Council – now called *Snowsport England* (SSE) – and donated the Robert Hovey Trophy (which he himself carved), also known as the ESC Nordic Trophy, to be awarded to people or organisations that have made a substantial contribution to the sport of cross-country skiing in England. The first winner in 1993 was Waymark Holidays, so far the only organisation to have received the award.

Since then, the trophy has been presented most years (not 1996 or 1997 when SSE felt that there was no deserving recipient) to individuals or couples for a wide range of reasons, such as developing the SSE coaching scheme, working with blind skiers, event organisation, or their contribution to the SSE Nordic Key Committee. Several of the recipients have been Waymark leaders, including Helen Charlton (1994), Rosemary Crosbie (1995), Paddy Field (1998), Eric Woolley (2001), Trevor Dowe and Marianne Folmer (2003). (A feature on 'Trevor Dowe – ski maker' appeared in the 1995-96 and 1996-97 winter brochures.)

### **Waymark and the blind skiers**

*The author is grateful to Rosemary Crosbie for most of the following information.*

In February 1976 Peggy Hounslow saw a television news item about three blind British skiers who had entered the XC event at the first ever Winter Olympics for the Disabled (now called the *Winter Paralympic Games*) in Örnköldsvik, Sweden. They had little experience of the sport and indeed had been under the impression that they would be downhill skiing. Unsurprisingly, they came last, well adrift of the field, but, like the more famous example of Eddie the Eagle in 1988, the story attracted much media interest and the trio were treated like heroes, as 'plucky Brits trying their best'.

The three Brits (Mike Brace, Graham Salmon and Pete Young - see footnotes below) were all totally blind, came from East London and were members of *Metro* (full name the Metropolitan Sports and Social Club for the Visually Handicapped), which had been

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established in 1974 to offer something more exciting than basket-weaving or typing – often the only activities offered to the blind.

The British team had been entered by the British Ski Club for the Disabled (BSCD – see footnotes below), which had been established in 1974 by a keen skier called Hubert Sturges (who died in 2007). He had just bought a chalet in Switzerland, and woke up one morning to find that his village was hosting ski competitions for the disabled. He decided to introduce skiing for the disabled in Britain, using at first the artificial ski slope at Hillingdon.

Peggy and Vincent wanted to help visually impaired people take part in cross-country skiing. First they asked Rosemary Crosbie to teach the British Paralympic ski team how to do it properly. She sought advice from her friend, Colonel John Moore, who was for many years the leading British XC skier, taking part in the Winter Olympics in 1956, 1960 and 1964. He was head of the Army School of Physical Training at Aldershot, and responded magnificently by inviting them to make use of its facilities, including ski equipment, instructors and home-made ski track.

Then in January 1977 Waymark provided a free ski holiday at Kvitåvatn to Graham Salmon and Pete Young, with Rosemary as their guide. She soon learned that it was just not practical for one sighted person to guide two blind skiers – it had to be one for one – and roped in her son, John, who was working there.

Pete, Graham and Mike were now hooked on racing and took every opportunity to practice and compete. But many more active blind people, no doubt inspired by the trio, just wanted to take part in a ski holiday in the mountains, and once again Waymark stepped in to help. Hubert Sturges was really only interested in downhill skiing himself, but when he heard about the offer readily agreed that the BSCD should become involved by organising the holidays with the help of Waymark.

With flights donated by Waymark and accommodation by Rod Tuck, three blind skiers accompanied by three sighted guides were able to enjoy free holidays at Kvitåvatn each year. BSCD groups stayed at the same time as regular Waymark parties, whose members were amazed at the courage and ability of the blind skiers. So much so that many offered to help by donating or even offering to become a guide.

Demand for these holidays grew rapidly, and other destinations were offered in later years in Austria and Italy. Free accommodation was not so forthcoming there, and it became impractical to provide free holidays, so a request for donations was, initially, sent out with booking confirmations, then from 1980-81 onwards included as an appeal in the winter brochure. The first brochure appeal stated, under the heading Winter Olympics for the Disabled (as the Paralympics were then known): ‘All those who so kindly contributed to the training of the blind cross-country skiers will be pleased to know that they did extremely well in the above event at Geilo. We intend to keep helping them. If you feel you would like to

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assist please send your cheque/PO to us but made out to the National [sic] Ski Club for the Disabled' (see Footnotes below).

The following years emphasised the need for funds to help the blind skiers train for the next Winter Olympics at Innsbruck in 1984. From 1984-85 the emphasis changed, to help blind skiers in general, not just the elite ones, pointing out that each blind skier needs a sighted guide; clients were invited to add an amount to their deposit, or send a separate cheque. Rosemary Crosbie became the administrator for the scheme.

Guiding a blind skier is no easy task, and requires some instruction. For six years Rosemary Crosbie organised training weekends at Pateley Bridge in Yorkshire, and nearly all of its participants were Waymark clients.

The BSCD had always been primarily focused on downhill skiing; they eventually lost interest in XC and the arrangement with them ended after the 1992-93 season. Meanwhile, *Guide Dogs for the Blind*, in association with Ian Jones Adventure Holidays, had started Guide Dog Holidays in 1990, which became Guide Dogs Adventure Group (GDAG). They included XC skiing, for which many guides were Waymark clients.

From 1993-94, now under the heading Cross-Country Skiing for the Blind, the winter brochure raised funds for the Nordic Skiers section of the GDAG, and included an appeal for sighted guides. A separate line was added on the booking form for optional donations to the GDAG. Furthermore, an appeal appeared in the summer brochure from 1993 to 1999 for clients to consider becoming a sighted guide for GDAG walking holidays.

In 1994-95 the amount of brochure space for the appeal was doubled, now under the heading Guide Dogs Adventure Group, and included a note of thanks from Ian Jones for all the support received from Waymark Holidays and their clients (his reminiscences as a participant in some of the holidays appear in Part 2). For 1997-98 the brochure space was doubled again, including photographs of parties of blind skiers, and the name of the organisers was changed to GDBA Holidays. In 2000 Alan Smith took over from Ian Jones as their Activities Supervisor.

Until 1994-95 Waymark arranged two special departures for blind skiers with their sighted guides, but the demand was such that they had to be increased to three in 1995-96, and four in 1998-99. Some centres were more suitable for blind skiers, and those that hosted them included Dobbiaco (Italy), Mösern or Pertisau (Austria), and Geilo, Hallingen or Sjusjøen (Norway).

In 2002 the *Charity Commission* reminded GDBA that their raison d'être was to raise money to buy guide dogs, and they really should not be in the business of organising skiing holidays. A charity called the Winged Fellowship Trust agreed to take over. It was established in 1963 to provide short breaks for people with a variety of physical disabilities in the UK and had expanded into holidays abroad. In 2004 they changed their name to *Vitalise*.

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Waymark continued to include an appeal for donations and guides in their winter brochure until the 2004-05 season, and during the company's existence almost £40,000 was raised in total for skiers with disabilities.

### Footnotes

*Graham Salmon* was born in 1952, lost his right eye to cancer at just six months old, and the left eye a year later. He was an all-round sportsman who, as well as XC skiing, excelled in running, jumping, cricket and golf, in which his achievements included a hole-in-one. He won gold, silver and bronze medals in a variety of events (not just skiing) at Paralympics, World and European Championships. He held the world record of 11.4 seconds for blind runners over 100 metres, and in 1979 became the world's first radio-controlled runner. He was awarded the MBE in 1989, but sadly died of cancer in 1999, aged 47. A play ('Graham - World's fastest blind man' by Mark Wheeler) has been written about his life.

*Pete Young* was born in 1956, lost both eyes to cancer at just a few months old, and became a piano tuner. He excelled at competitive XC skiing and won many medals at major championships for the disabled: bronze in the 5 km event at the 1984 Paralympics at Innsbruck, Austria; then (at 30 km) gold at the 1990 World Championships in the USA and at the 1991 European Championships in Italy. In 1994 at the Paralympics at Lillehammer, Norway, he got the bronze at 5 km, just missing out on the silver by a split second. He won more medals at national championships in Finland and Norway. No British sighted skier was fast enough to guide him, so he had to be provided with Norwegian guides. He too died of cancer in 2002, aged 46.

*Mike Brace* was born in 1950 in Hackney, London. He was blinded aged 10 when a glass bottle containing a lit firework exploded. He went on to represent the UK at five more Paralympics, three World Championships and two European Championships. He has also completed two London Marathons, two ski marathons and the 125-mile Devizes to Westminster Canoe Marathon. He has become one of the leading administrators in disability sport: Chef de Mission at the 1998 Winter Paralympics in Nagano, Japan; Head of Delegation at the Winter Paralympics in Salt Lake City (2002) and the Summer Paralympics in Athens (2004); Board Member of London 2012; and Chief Executive of Vision 2020 UK. In 2005 he was awarded the OBE, and in 2006 the One Vision Lifetime Achievement Award of the Royal National College for the Blind.

*British Ski Club for the Disabled.* It is a mystery that the Waymark XC brochures from 1980-81 to 1984-85 called it the National Ski Club for the Disabled, as the author has been assured that it has been BSCD since its inception in 1974. As the brochure initially requested that cheques be made out to the NSCD, it is amazing that it took so long for the error to be recognised; however, it was changed to BSCD from 1985-86. In 2007 the BSCD was absorbed into DSUK (Disability Snowsport UK), successor to the Uphill Ski Club, which had

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already absorbed two other charities with similar aims: National Handicapped Skiers Association and Scotland's Alternative Skiers.

### Waymark and the cross-country ski clubs

Director Noel Vincent and staff member Colin Saunders had been founder members of the *London Region Nordic Ski Club* in 1982. Then a note appeared in the winter brochure for 1983-84, under the heading Nordic Ski Clubs and Orienteering Clubs, stating that Rod Tuck was sending a special invitation to members of such clubs to join a special departure to Kvitåvatn which would include inter-club races and ski orienteering. So began Waymark's long association with cross-country ski clubs, in which they took every opportunity to encourage clients to join a club, providing them with a list of all known clubs in the UK. It seems that such a list no longer exists, but to find your nearest club now you could key 'Nordic Ski Club' on a search engine such as *Google* (remember to click 'pages from the UK').

The 1988-89 winter brochure included a plug for the *Ski Club of Great Britain* – 'the club for all skiers' – though often regarded as a club for downhill skiers, it also has many XC members.

### Partnerships and associations

A successful business needs to develop a good working relationship with people and organisations that contribute to the operation, and Waymark certainly excelled at this.

One good reason was the company's policy of paying in advance for services provided. This proved persuasive when dealing with the small, family-run hotels that made Waymark Holidays so distinctive from most tour operators. And when bad publicity for the travel trade arose from the spectacular failure of tour operators and airlines, Waymark were able to boast that no such calamity would befall their clients as all payments were made in advance.

When relationships ended, it was usually because of *force majeure*, or perhaps the holiday had simply run its course. The only break in Waymark's 33-year, almost 'lifelong' partnership with *Kvitåvatn Fjellstoge* came in 1993, when it had to close due to bankruptcy.

Other long-lasting relationships included: *Hotel Leon Bianco*, San Gimignano (29 years); the Wallasch family at Gasthof zum Wiener, Trins (27); the von Allmen family at *Hotel Blumental*, Mürren (27); Fru Lien and her colleagues at Fjellheimen Høyfjellssenter, Sjusjøen (26); the Stock family at Pension Finkenhof, Auffach (Wildschönau, 25); André Marcon and his family and colleagues at *La Découverte* in St.Bonnet (25); the Fjellstue and the Spåtind Høyfjellshotell, Synnfjell (25); the Kosmidis family at *Hotel Astir*, Samos (23); *Hotel Central* at Arosa (23); the De Luca family at *Hotel dei Cavalieri*, Amalfi (23); Frau Langen and her

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niece, Christine Denoth at Hotel Aurora, S'Chanf (23); *Hotel Aitone* at Evisa (Mountains & Sea in Corsica, (21); the Muñoz family at Hostal Isabel, El Arenal (Sierra de Gredos, 20); the *Tschurtschenthaler* family at the hotel of that name in Dobbiaco (20); the Hari family at Hotel Erika, Kandersteg (20).

Mention should also be made of the safari tours of Iceland arranged for Waymark by Úlfar Jakobsen for 15 years, and of course the 29-year association in one form or another with DNT (see below).

Many clients took their cars to the departure airport, and arrangements were made with companies offering long-term parking nearby. One such was *Purple Parking*, with which Waymark was associated for 17 years, from 1990 through to the end, and whose one millionth park-and-ride client Waymark happened to book in 2003.

### *DNT*

One of Waymark's most enduring partnerships was with Norway's DNT (*Den Norske Turistforening*, which literally means The Norwegian Tourist Association, so it is incorrect to say 'the DNT'). Their website translates it as the Norwegian Trekking Association, but it is often known to English-speakers as the Norwegian Touring Club or the Norwegian Mountain Touring Association. It was founded in 1868 and currently has more than 220,000 members. DNT is made up of local member associations, which are responsible for maintaining a vast network of trails for walkers and skiers, as well as an extensive chain of mountain huts. DNT also arranges skiing and walking tours for its members.

The first Waymark ski tours using DNT huts, to Rondane and the Jotunheim, appeared in the 1978-79 brochure. It seems that, initially, Waymark booked the huts directly and provided the leaders – these included Alan Blackshaw, author of the Penguin book, *Mountaineering*, and Bill Marshall, owner of ski shops in Aberdeen and Elgin.

From 1980-81 the tours were organised for Waymark by Finn Hagen at DNT and led by their leaders, and the brochure included a plug for 'The Norwegian Touring Club'. The partnership continued in this way for fourteen years, only coming to an end for the 1994-95 season when the brochure included a statement regretting that the tours would not be offered. This was the result of a growing association with Troll Mountain, run by British expatriates, and with Philip Yatman, who were now organising and leading tours for Waymark, but still using DNT huts.

During the 'DNT years', there were one or two tours almost every season in each of the Rondane, the Jotunheim and the Hardanger Jøkul – the latter including a dog-sleigh tour. Participants were warned that, for their own safety, they would not be allowed to carry more than the bare necessities (so men could not even carry shaving gear), and would be expected to carry an item of emergency equipment, such as a shovel for digging snow, a probe for

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locating a body in an avalanche, an axe for breaking ice on a lake, or a collapsible bucket for carrying water.

The brochure stated that prices included membership of DNT – so clients could, if they wished, join other DNT tours in summer or winter. In fact, a special Rondane walking tour for Waymark was included in the 1979 summer brochure, and from 1987 to 1990 clients were offered the opportunity to join DNT's own walking tours; but it seemed that, sadly, Norway was not a country that had much appeal for British walkers.

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## **CHAPTER 3. PERSONNEL**

See also '*Where are they now?*' on the Waymark page of the author's website:

<http://www.colinsaunders.org.uk>.

### **Directors**

From the very beginning until the takeover by First Choice at the end of 2002, Waymark's brochures listed the names of all directors. These were:

*Summer 1974 to Winter 1984-85:* G.H.Chamberlain PhD, M.E.Hounslow FRGS, N.D.Vincent BSc.

*Summer 1985 to Summer 1988:* G.H.Chamberlain PhD, P.J.Chapman, M.E.Hounslow FRGS, N.D. Vincent BSc.

*Winter 1988-89 to Winter 1990-91:* G.H.Chamberlain PhD, P.J.Chapman, M.E.Hounslow FRGS, M.D.Read, N.D.Vincent BSc. (Letters after names were dropped from Summer 1989 onwards.)

*Summer 1991 to Summer 1997:* G.H.Chamberlain, P.J.Chapman, M.E.Hounslow, S.A.Montgomery, M.D.Read, N.D.Vincent. (Noel Vincent died in December 1996 when the Summer 1997 brochure had already been printed.)

*Winter 1997-98 to Winter 1999-2000:* G.H. Chamberlain, P.J.Chapman, M.E.Hounslow, S.A. Montgomery, M.D. Read.

*Summer 2000 to Summer 2001:* G.H.Chamberlain, P.J.Chapman, M.E.Hounslow, S.A.Montgomery.

*Winter 2001-02 to Summer 2002:* G.H.Chamberlain, P.J.Chapman, M.E.Hounslow, S.O'Grady.

*Winter 2002-03:* G.H.Chamberlain, P.J.Chapman, M.E.Hounslow, R.E.Mason\*, S.O'Grady.

*Summer 2003:* G.H.Chamberlain, P.J.Chapman, M.E.Hounslow, S.O'Grady. (Though by the time this programme was in operation the company had been taken over by First Choice.)

Thereafter, the only director's name shown was that of the Managing Director:

*Winter 2003-04 to Winter 2004-05:* Stuart Montgomery.

*Summer 2005 to Summer 2007:* Neil Saunders.

\* Bob Mason was due to become a director when this brochure was published but Waymark were taken over shortly afterwards and the directorship did not take effect.

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Humfrey Chamberlain was a non-executive director and Company Secretary from 1973 until the acquisition by First Choice in December 2002. See also page 14.

Peggy Hounslow was Managing Director from 1973 to 1990, and continued as a director until the acquisition by First Choice in December 2002. See also page 13.

Noel Vincent was an executive director from 1973 to 1985, and continued as a director until his death in 1996. See also page 10.

Peter Chapman led walking holidays for Waymark from 1975, joined the staff in 1983 and was appointed a director in 1985. When Peggy Hounslow stepped down in 1990, he became Managing Director, organising and supervising the move from Fulham to Slough in that year. In 1997 he took a back seat as Finance Director and Stuart Montgomery took over as MD. When Stuart left in June 2001 Peter returned as MD, and when First Choice acquired Waymark in December 2002 stayed on until March 2003 to supervise the completion of the 2002-03 winter programme. Peter has now retired but is a magistrate and a local councillor.

Martin Read first led for Waymark in 1985 in Samos. He joined the staff at Lillie Road in 1986, was appointed a director in 1987 and left the company in 1999. Martin now runs London House Services Heathrow, part of the London House franchise network of investigators and detectives serving the banking, legal and insurance sectors. He and his wife Lynn own a villa in the Alpujarras, southern Spain, which is in good walking country and available for rent through Owners Direct ([www.ownersdirect.co.uk/spain/S1640.htm](http://www.ownersdirect.co.uk/spain/S1640.htm)). In 2008 Martin became a shareholder in the Mosstrond Turisthytte near Rjukan in southern Norway, which is managed by Philip Yatman (formerly at Kvitåvatn and Sundet) (see [www.mosstrondturisthytte.com](http://www.mosstrondturisthytte.com)).

Stuart Montgomery led XC holidays for Waymark from 1988, joined the staff in 1990 and was appointed a director in 1991. In 1997 he became Managing Director, leaving in 2001 to join Exodus. In December 2002 Stuart was seconded to Waymark as MD. He left in 2005 to set up his own tour operator, XCuk, specialising in cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and Nordic walking holidays ([www.xcuk.com](http://www.xcuk.com)). Together with former Waymark leader Paddy Field, he has written *Stride and Glide: a manual of cross-country skiing and Nordic walking* - for further details see the XCuk website and click on 'Our Book'.

Sue O'Grady started leading for Waymark in 1986, joined the staff as a director in 2001 and remained as such until the takeover by First Choice in December 2002. She now leads expeditions for World Challenge, and is self-employed as a tutor for trainee teachers on Birmingham City University's Graduate Training Programme. In summer she combines this with providing holiday accommodation in Cumbria.

Neal Saunders was seconded from Exodus as Managing Director from 2005 to 2007.

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Colin Stump from First Choice became Managing Director during 2007 to oversee the merger into Exodus.

## Staff

With apologies to anyone left out. If you can provide any missing names or information please email Colin Saunders, [colin.saund@btconnect.com](mailto:colin.saund@btconnect.com).

D = Director

MD = Managing Director

\* Part time.

# Leaders who joined the office staff.

### Fulham

From 1974 to 1990, Waymark's offices were at 295 Lillie Road, Fulham, London SW6 7LL. Directors and staff who worked there included: Rosemary Barnes, Andrew Bell#, Enid Boxall\*, Andrew Brenchley, Karen Bruhwiler, Peter Chapman (MD), Joyce Coles\*, Janek Franczak, Lucy Frank, Jill Gates, Steve Green, Nicola Hall, Jill Hollingworth\*, Peggy Hounslow (MD), Dion Jackson, Beatrice Jaich, Jonathan Preston#, Martin Read (D), Colin Saunders, Paul Sibert, Noel Vincent (D); also Pauline\*, Nadine\* and Kathy – sorry we don't have your surnames, please get in touch if you should happen to read this.

### Slough

From 1990 to 2007, Waymark's offices were at 44 Windsor Road, Slough, Berkshire, SL1 2EJ. Directors and staff who worked there included: Kim Belair, Margaret Benton, Helen Brown, Pat Chapman\*, Peter Chapman (MD), Meera Chhatralia, Viju Chhatralia, Colette Coleman, Sameer Dhanji, Jenny Downing, Claire Etherton, Sharon Fullerton, Anna Gillespie, Alison Halladay\*# (née Moore), Chloe Holland, Victor Holland, Beatrice Jaich, Gemma Leahie, Bob Mason#(D), Stuart Montgomery#(MD), Rashida Moosajee, Anna Mount, Sue O'Grady#(D), Lorna Ostler, Peter Purslow, Martin Read#(D), Anne Reader, Melissa Samways, Neil Saunders (MD), Colin Stump (MD), Katia Vignes, Isabelle Waechter, Jim Wood#, Greg Yeoman; also Ayanna, Justin and Natalie - sorry we don't have your surnames, please get in touch if you should happen to read this.

## Leaders

Although the organisation of a holiday was down to the skill and experience of the people in the office, once a party arrived at the centre it was the leader that would make or break it. Waymark were very careful about choosing leaders, though probably not to the extent that would be required today under Health and Safety regulations.

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Leaders were unpaid – the attraction for them was partly that they would get a free holiday, but for most it was also (they hoped) for the congeniality and good company, and many friendships were forged. However, those who were willing to lead two or more consecutive holidays were paid the cost of the air fare(s) saved thereby.

In the early years many leaders were already known to Peggy and Vincent from their time at RAS, and this would be enough to bring them on to the panel, otherwise an extensive interview and references were required. In most cases the directors' judgement was sound, though there were occasional instances of leaders who misbehaved in one way or another, or were just socially inept - complaints from party members soon weeded them out.

Among Waymark's early leaders were the highly respected botanical writer Oleg Polunin (1914-1985) and the leading Indian mountaineer and writer, Dr K.P. Sharma, who jointly led the tour to Darjeeling, Nepal & Sikkim in March-April 1975. The first person to lead a Waymark XC holiday was Patricia Cornforth, who continued leading for most of the company's existence; she had skied with the Sami (Lapps), had several languages and was a real pioneer for Waymark. A party on the Jotunheim DNT ski tour in 1980 was led by Alan Blackshaw, author of the Penguin book *Mountaineering*.

Waymark leaders came from a variety of backgrounds, and also varied enormously in age. Katherine Hurst started leading from the age of 21, but most began their Waymark career much later. Initially there was no upper age limit for leaders, but a policy of retiring leaders at 70 was introduced in the early 1990s, when one leader reached the ripe age of 78 without showing any inclination of stopping. It was felt that it gave out the wrong image if leaders were older than all the clients.

Some leaders lived in the holiday area, and clearly if suitable people could be identified they should be more knowledgeable about the area, have good local contacts and be fluent in the language. Outstanding among such leaders were Rod Tuck and his team at Kvitåvatn, and André Marcon, who ran La Découverte at St.Bonnet and extended his style to several other centres in France.

Very often such leaders were expatriate Britons. As well as Rod Tuck, these included (for walking): Karen and Mike Belton at Kas, Callum Christie for Sierra de las Nieves and Camino de Santiago, Brian and Pat Fagg at Quatretondeta, David Lanfear at Grazalema, Jim MacDonald in Ireland, James and (his Romanian wife) Elena Roberts for Transylvanian Alps; and (for skiing) Brian Desmond for Setesdal, Trevor Dowe with (his Danish partner) Marianne Folmer at Kvitåvatn, Anne and Malcolm Gregory at Bagnères de Bigorre, Philip and (his Danish wife) Maiken Yatman at Sundet. Some of these also provided accommodation in their guest house or converted farmhouse.

In some cases, leadership as well as organisation of local transport and accommodation was put in the hands of an agent. These included *White Mountain Adventures* in British

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Columbia, Le Renard Vagabond (later Vacances Hors Traces) in France, *Trekking Hellas* in Greece, Úlfar Jacobsen or Iceland Safari in Iceland, Troll Mountain and Telemark Ski Express in Norway, *Tambo Treks* in Peru, *Amber Travel* in Turkey, and of course *DNT* (see page 37).

It was important to Waymark that party members should, as far as possible, get on well with each other and with the leader, as clearly this led to a more enjoyable holiday and repeat bookings. If the leader was unsociable or, worse, misbehaved, it was highly likely that the office would hear about it from one or more of the party members. But it was just as important that the directors should know if a party member caused problems, and for this purpose leaders were asked to submit a brief report to the office. Sometimes this led to embarrassing situations: when a leader made an adverse comment and it was serious enough, if the client wanted to book again it had to be explained to them (as diplomatically as possible) that they were not wanted.

Clients often asked leaders about what happened in the office, and leaders were invited to learn this at first hand, by spending some time working there. At Lillie Road, not many took up this invitation (that basement may have had something to do with it) but those that did included Andrew Bell and Jonathan Preston. Several others who started as leaders later joined the staff, including Peter Chapman, Alison Halladay (née Moore), Bob Mason, Stuart Montgomery, Sue O'Grady, Martin Read and Jim Wood.

During the late 1980s, a custom was initiated for an annual weekend conference for leaders and staff, so that they could get to know each other and find out what the company expected of leaders, and what leaders needed from the company. The first, for XC leaders, took place in Glenisla, Scotland, in January 1988 amid such excellent snow conditions that the group was almost stranded by the closure of the railway line. A year later the first weekend for walking leaders took place in Alston, Cumbria. Later, Stuart Montgomery formalised training to improve quality and encourage personal contact with clients.

### Register of leaders And XC ski instructors

With apologies to anyone left out. If you can provide any missing names please email Colin Saunders, [colin.saund@btconnect.com](mailto:colin.saund@btconnect.com). Those marked \* also were or became staff.

Neil Aitchison, Ilse Alt, Roy Anstead, Doug Antoine, Geoff Armitage, Paul Arnold, Ralph Bailey, Andrew Banks, Tony Barker, Anne-Marie Bathmaker, Ron Bayliss, Andrew Bell\*, Judy Bell, Stuart Bell, Karen Belton, Mike Belton, Alan Blackshaw, Tim Booth, Taff Bowles, Martin Bradford, Ron Brown, Gareth Buffett, John Bull, Albert Callewaert, Martin Campbell, Mary Campbell, Allen Carr, Michael Carroll, John Carter, Mike Chalmers, Humfrey Chamberlain, Ruth Chamberlain, Helen Charlton, Peter Chapman\*, Callum Christie, Andy Churchill, Phil Clark, Erick Clement, Peter Collins, Dan Cook, Roger Cook, David Cooper, Patricia Cornforth, Sue Coxon, Molly Creighton, Bobbie Crosbie, John Crosbie, Rosemary Crosbie, Eric Dadey, Garry Davies, Jill Davies, Tim Davis, Toni Davis,

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Simon Dawson, Brian Desmond, Ernest Dixon, Patrick Douzelet, Trevor Dowe, Leslie Downing, Phil Draper, John Earle, Ron Eckersley, Charles Elliott, Jochen Erler, Peter Ess, Brian Fagg, Nick Fickling, Diana Field, Hilary Field, Paddy Field, Michael Fletcher, Marianne Folmer, Carol Forwood, David Foster, Jill Gates\*, Eddie Gibbs, Andy Gordon, Kathy Goulden, Steve Goulden, Ian Gourlay, Steve Green\*, Malcolm Gregory, Peter Gurney, Vince Haig, John Hall, Walter Hand, Bernard Harman, Fred Harper, Kevin Hesketh, David Heyes, Jenny Heyes (née Mills), Tom Higgs, Pip Hockfield, Ron Hodgson, Ove Holst-Larsen, Roger Homyer, John Howie, Claude Huert, John Hughes, Trevor Humber, Katherine Hurst, Pauline Hutchinson, Peter Hutchinson, Michael Hutton, Brian Jamieson, Carol Jamieson, John Jermain, Anthony Jones, Ian Jones, Josie Keegan, Peter Kelly, Richard Kenchington, Neil Kenyon, John Kunze, David Lane, David Lanfear, Bob Lewis, Evelyn Lewis, Einar Ligema, David McArthur, Ashley McCraight, Jim MacDonald, Stuart McNeil, Andy Main, Andy Malcolm, André Marcon, Bill Marks, Bill Marshall, Ewen Martin, Bob Mason\*, Tony Maufe, Garry Metcalf, Carol Mold, Stuart Montgomery\*, Alison Moore\* (later Halladay), John Mordue, Jo Morritt, Monica Nelson, David Nicholson, Mike Nicolson, Peter Orrin, Walter Partington, John Perigo, Derek Pettet, Andrew Podkolinski, Mark Podkolinski, Oleg Polunin, Jonathan Preston\*, Colin Rangeley, Martin Read\*, Elena Roberts, James Roberts, Christine Rowe, Theo Rowlands, Jon Sadler, Arun Sahni, Sally Sahni, Colin Saunders\*, Terry Sayles, Iona Scott, K.P.Sharma, John Sheringham, Nigel Shervey, Alan Short, Phil Simpson, Richard Simpson, Brian Skyrme, Ivar Slettemoen, Alex Smith, Barbara Snell, Colin Southall, David Stephenson, Dick Stevens, David Tansley, Robin Tarry, Sarah Tauwhare, Ric Tingle, Chris Townsend, Rod Tuck, Helen Turton, Peter Verity, Eric Vessey, Paul Walker, Judi Webb, Peter Westrick, Anne White, David Wiles, Jim Wood\*, Eric Woolley, Heather Woolley, Jennifer Wyatt, Alf Yarwood, Maiken Yatman, Philip Yatman.

## **CHAPTER 4: TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS**

### **Airlines**

In order to legally advertise holidays by air to the general public, a tour operator needs an Air Travel Organiser's Licence (ATOL), for which it must lodge a bond (the amount of which rises in line with turnover) with the *Civil Aviation Authority*. Waymark had one of these right from the start (ATOL 624B, which became 624 then 0624). However, an item in Waymark News Issue 1, published in Summer 1992, declared: 'We're delighted to tell you that since 1st April 1992, *all* Waymark holidays involving air travel are now fully protected by our ATOL (Air Travel Organiser's Licence).' Until that date, for technical reasons connected with the type of ticket issued, certain holidays (for example those with flights to Munich, Canada and South America) had been excluded from the bonding arrangements.

In order to sell tickets for scheduled air services, travel agents and tour operators had to be licensed by the *International Air Transport Association* (IATA). Waymark was not licensed until June 1983, as turnover had been insufficient to meet IATA requirements, so until then bought air tickets from the licensed travel agency Fairways & Swinford (now part of *Co-operative Travel Management*).

During its 34 years, Waymark arranged flights with over 60 different scheduled airlines. Unsurprisingly, *British Airways* (still British European Airways when Waymark started) was to the fore, receiving around 20% of the company's business, followed by Swissair/Swiss with 14%, *SAS Scandinavian Airlines* (12% overall, though 28% of winter carryings), *Dan-Air* (11%), *Air France* (5%), *Lufthansa* (5%), *Iberia* (4%) and *Austrian Airlines* (3%). Air France would doubtless have had a greater share, but from 1994 onwards were unable or unwilling to confirm schedules and prices early enough for publication in the brochures.

Swissair went out of business in March 2002, partly as a result of the 9/11 terrorist atrocities the previous year, partly due to competition from budget airlines. As one of the most prestigious names in the travel industry, this was not only a tragedy but a great shock, as Waymark had always enjoyed a close relationship with them. Swissair's business was taken over by another Swiss airline, Crossair, which was then renamed *Swiss International Air Lines* (now marketed as plain 'Swiss'), and Waymark continued to use its flights.

There was also a very close association with Dan-Air, whose smaller and quieter aircraft were able to operate into airports that were inaccessible to the major airlines, due to short runways, difficult approach routes or noise restrictions. Its BAe146 aircraft, with high wings and four Avro RJ turbofan jet engines, proved to be highly suitable for these airports (situated close to many of the mountainous areas in the Waymark programme), very reliable and popular with passengers. But Dan-Air could not compete with other charter airlines that were

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vertically integrated with major tour operators, and lost much of its charter business to them. In November 1992, having gone bankrupt, it was taken over by British Airways – a sad end for a feisty, independent company.

Perhaps the most quirky arrangement was with the Scottish airline *Loganair*, for the Isle of Barra birdwatching holidays from 1981 to 1983: the brochure indicated that flights would depart from Glasgow for Barra around mid-morning, exact time depending on the tide, as the island's airstrip was a long, cockleshell beach on the island's east coast.

### Scheduled v Charter

An item in Waymark News Issue 2 (Summer 1993) set out the company's current philosophy on the scheduled versus charter debate: 'There are many advantages – both for us and for you, our clients – in using scheduled services rather than charter flights.' These included: timetables fixed many months in advance, more convenient departure and arrival times, fewer delays, shorter check-in times, better on-board service. The item continued: 'The only significant disadvantage is that the vast majority of scheduled services to overseas destinations fly out of Heathrow or Gatwick with even the fast-growing Manchester Airport still some way behind.'

Actually, Waymark had started to buy seats on charter flights for its summer programme as early as 1976, by the Yugoslav airline Inex-Adria to holidays in that country, and increasingly in the following years to certain destinations such as the Greek islands, Corsica and southern Turkey, to which no suitable direct scheduled flights operated at that time from the UK. Charter flights were used intermittently for the winter programme from 1985, but from 1998-99 to 2002-03 winter seasons an entire aircraft was chartered from Tyrolean Airways for flights to Innsbruck and accounted for as much as a third of the flight arrangements. Overall, around 5% of Waymark's flight arrangements were charter.

### Flights from regional airports

For many years, one of the favourite topics of clients who wrote to the office, or asked staff who joined holidays, was 'Why don't Waymark make more use of regional airports instead of concentrating on Heathrow and Gatwick?' Issue 2 of Waymark News, published in Summer 1993, addressed this issue, and explained that the usual reason was that, at that time, no suitable direct scheduled flights existed to the foreign destination. But the directors always kept a close watch on proposed airline schedules, and if there were suitable flights from regional airports they would try to make use of them.

In fact, departures from Newcastle had been offered since 1975 in summer and winter, but only for holidays to Norway.

For the summer, during the 1980s, an allocation was taken for a couple of years on charter flights from Manchester to Ljubljana for the Kamniks tour. Glasgow was offered as an

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alternative departure point for Iceland, and the only departure point for Barra. But the response from clients was disappointing.

The response was much better for winter holidays. From 1975-76 to 1983-84, some departures to centres in Norway operated from Glasgow or Newcastle only, and in most years they were offered as alternatives to London. From 1982-83, with just one exception, flights from Manchester (also Birmingham from 1989-90) were offered for many if not most holidays until 2004-05. Departures from Aberdeen and Edinburgh were sometimes offered.

The introduction to the 1991-92 winter brochure was able to report that, in the previous season, 'twice as many clients as ever before took advantage of flights from Manchester and other regional airports'.

It was not until 1993 that regional departures began to feature regularly for the summer. Again, Manchester and Birmingham appeared nearly every year until 2005, with Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow appearing occasionally.

Usually, seats on flights from regional airports had to be requested, but in later years allocations of seats were held on some flights from Manchester and Birmingham.

Until 1994 all London departures had been from Heathrow or Gatwick, then Luton or Stansted were used for some holidays, which would have suited clients living in the Midlands and East Anglia.

Connecting flights to London (or Newcastle for Norway) were offered most years as an optional extra, and special fares were negotiated with British Airways, British Midland and Air UK. But from 1997 the brochure admitted that 'the rates we can offer are often undercut by special deals and local arrangements and we suggest you enquire at a travel agency in your own area'.

Conditions attached to alternative flights from regional airports were rather off-putting. Clients were warned that, if their flight was much earlier than the London one, they may have to wait several hours at the destination airport; and if they missed the scheduled transport to the centre, they would be responsible for making their own way there. Sometimes they would have to spend extra nights near the destination airport before and/or after the holiday – the Hotel Fønix in Oslo especially accommodated many Waymark clients en route to or from skiing centres in Norway.

Clients booking connecting domestic flights via London, and those making their own flight arrangements, were advised not to commit themselves to non-refundable tickets until it was certain that the departure would operate and the times were confirmed.

It was not long before the deregulation in 1992 by the European Union of the air industry in Europe began to affect take-up of departures from regional airports offered by Waymark. The Irish airline, *Ryanair*, very quickly advertised low fares on many routes, and it was

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followed in 1995 by *EasyJet*. The number of routes offered by these and other budget airlines rapidly proliferated, and more and more clients chose to make their own flight arrangements.

In Waymark's final two seasons, for both winter and summer, no special arrangements from regional airports were provided, though the brochures included a very low-key offer to book flights.

### No flights required

A fair number of clients – especially those who lived outside the UK, or who preferred to travel overland, or book their own flights – asked to book just the land arrangements at the destination. Waymark was always amenable to help with this, offering to deduct the air fare element from the price, but did not initially encourage it.

However, demand grew and led to inclusion in the brochures from Winter 1991-92 onwards of a paragraph under the heading 'No Flight Packages' or 'No Flights Required'. People could arrange this, and have the air fare deducted, provided they gave at least a month's notice and on payment of an administration fee. Demand grew, especially after the appearance of budget airlines during the 1990s. From 2000, a no-flights reduction was shown below the holiday prices. For the final two seasons (2006 and 2007), there was an acknowledgement in the brochure that low-cost airlines were drawing people away from the flights that were included in Waymark's holidays, and prices were shown for 'land only' as well as flight-inclusive, so that clients could book their own flights.

### Variations

In the early days Waymark did not exactly encourage clients to vary their holiday arrangements; but they soon became aware that it was in their interest to be flexible and were very willing, within reason, to vary the arrangements to suit a client's needs, for example by extending holidays at a centre, combining two or more holidays or arranging alternative flights. See also 'Independent holidays' in Chapter 5.

### Travel delays

The increasingly litigious nature of society, and some expensively missed homeward flights in previous years, led Waymark to spell out, from 1994 onwards, their responsibility in the event of travel delays: 'If there are delays to your outward or homeward flight, the airline will make the same contingency arrangements for you as for all other passengers. If the party misses the homeward flight because of travel delays, we will take full responsibility for making alternative arrangements to get you back to the airport from which you departed the UK. We regret that we cannot take responsibility for your individual travel arrangements thereafter.'

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## **Transfers**

Transfers from airport to centre and vice versa were usually undertaken by a hired coach or minibus, but most of those in Switzerland and many in Norway were by scheduled train services: not only was it cheaper, but train services in those countries were more reliable and virtually guaranteed to get through on time when roads were blocked by heavy traffic, accidents or snow. The final short leg would be in a vehicle provided by the hotel; or if the hotel was not too far away the party would walk from station to hotel while their baggage was transported.

Occasionally there were some rather more adventurous arrangements. Walking parties staying at La Baita in the Italian Alps travelled by train from Geneva to Domodossola, continued by four-wheel-drive vehicle to Val Devero then walked for an hour to the hotel while their baggage was taken up a goods lift. Those staying at Bettmeralp or Mürren in Switzerland undertook the final stage of the journey by cable-car or funicular railway. Skiing parties to Smuksjøseter in Norway's Rondane went by train to Otta, coach to Høvringen then a tracked vehicle on snow for the final five kilometres.

## **Rail travel**

Waymark tried to encourage travel by rail, but their efforts were hampered by unfavourable circumstances and, it seemed, lack of interest from clients.

The 1984 summer and 1984-85 winter brochures offered, by negotiation with British Rail, a 50% discount off the standard second class return fare for the journey to the airport, on presentation of a voucher supplied by Waymark at the ticket office.

The following year this scheme was replaced by 'Special Rail Fares': under this rather complicated arrangement, Britain was divided into nine zones: people travelling from the Home Counties could travel free in second (later standard) class to the London termini (or to Gatwick Airport if travelling from Greater London, Kent, Surrey or Sussex); those travelling from further afield paid a supplement, which varied according to zone, was usually cheaper than Saver fares and without the restrictions that applied to them. A similar scheme was offered to Manchester and Newcastle for departures from those airports. The offer had to be dropped from Summer 1990 as Waymark did not meet British Rail's minimum ticket sale requirements.

Some short-lived cross-country skiing holidays in Scotland during the 1980s included second class travel by rail from anywhere in the UK.

As described in 'Transfers' above, holidays in Switzerland used, where possible, transfers by train. From 1991 this led, in the summer brochures only, to inclusion in the prices for certain

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holidays of the Swiss Rail Card (now called the *Swiss Card*), which allows half fares on the transfer journeys as well as on local rail and bus services while at the centre, plus reductions on some cable-cars.

Waymark made great efforts to further encourage travel by train to or on the Continent, as an alternative to flying, but the response was lukewarm – perhaps it would have been more enthusiastic now. The Channel Tunnel opened in 1994, and from 1995 to 1997 the option was offered of taking one's own car via Le Shuttle (*Eurotunnel*) for La Découverte holidays in France. In 1998 and 1999 travel by *Eurostar* was offered as an alternative to flying on holidays using flights to Lyon, with a reduction of £20. In 2000 only, for certain holidays in France, clients were flown from a variety of UK airports to Paris Charles de Gaulle and continued directly from its railway station on high-speed *TGV (Trains à Grande Vitesse)* to their destination. In 2006 and 2007, all departures to some holidays in France were by Eurostar.

### **Waymark Transport Limited**

Due to a complication of the VAT rules, in 1995 it was decided to set up a subsidiary company, Waymark Transport Limited (WTL), to buy transport that was zero rated under the rules, and sell it on to Waymark Holidays Limited (WHL). This was not tax evasion – indeed all tour operators were advised to do this by HM Customs and Excise. At the time of writing, WTL still existed as a subsidiary of WHL in the TUI hierarchy, as company number 03138181, incorporated 15 December 1995.

## **CHAPTER 5. THE PROGRAMMES**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is an overview of the holidays that were arranged by Waymark ('the programmes') and the brochures that advertised them. For this, the author has scrutinised the summer and winter brochures for all 34 years of the company's existence. In the absence of any more detailed information, the figures and percentages quoted reflect the number of appearances made in the brochures. More accurate figures would no doubt be based on the actual number of clients that travelled on each holiday, but no such records are available.

### **In and out**

Many holidays only appeared in the programme once or twice, then sank without trace usually when not enough clients (or sometimes none at all) booked up. Indeed, some regular clients booked a new holiday on the basis that they would get to try it out before it disappeared, and accepted the risk that their departure might be cancelled due to lack of bookings. (Clients thus affected would be offered an alternative if possible.)

Lack of bookings was not the only reason for a holiday's disappearance – there may have been insurmountable problems with the accommodation or some other aspect of the arrangements. But, fortunately, most holidays and centres enjoyed a reasonable run, indeed many lasted for most of Waymark's life – more of this later.

### **Names**

Naming the holidays was quite an art, and often the subject of heated discussions in the office. They sometimes revolved around whether the actual name of a centre would sell better than the area it lay in, or vice versa. There was little disagreement when the name was likely to be unpronounceable for, or unappealing to, most English-speakers, so Špindlerův Mlýn became 'The Giant Mountains', Bukowina Tatrzańska became 'Polish Tatras', Mdina and Xaghra became 'Malta and Gozo'. Rather surprisingly, Äkäslompolo made it into the brochure under that name and with some success.

In some cases the choice was between a centre's name in one or other of the languages used there. So Dobbiaco and Sesto (Italian) were preferred, simply because they were thought to sound more attractive to English speakers than their German equivalents (Toblach and Sexten respectively), that were more commonly in use in the Italian province of South Tirol, which had been Austrian until 1919.

Or someone would suggest a fanciful name, perhaps relating the centre to a well known geographical feature nearby (so 'East of...', 'South of...' or 'West of...' might appear, but rarely 'North of...', as anything suggesting travelling northwards was considered unappealing

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to the British); or to some geographical, literary or historical theme (Titlis to Jungfrau, Travels Without a Donkey, Camino de Santiago) or the time of year (Autumn in the Alps, Spring in Morocco).

Arguments sometimes revolved about the use of the definite article; for example, whereas it was common practice among English speakers to say ‘the Tyrol’, ‘the Vorarlberg’, ‘the Savoy’ etc., the article was not used by local people any more than we would say ‘the Cornwall’, ‘the Wessex’ or ‘the Wales’. Similar discussions took place about the names of mountains.

### Photographs

‘Nothing sells better than a good picture!’ goes the oft-quoted maxim of the marketing profession, and this was taken very seriously by Waymark. Nearly 3,500 photographs appeared in the 67 brochures produced in the company’s history: an average of around 50 per brochure (ranging from four in the first year to 140 in the last), and it was hard work finding enough suitable ones.

Some of the early brochures had pen-and-ink sketches. One suspects that they were mostly drawn by Vincent, but one in the very first leaflet (1974-75) for Kvitåvatn, of the Fjellstoge, was signed by Rod Tuck. A pen-and-ink drawing of the Oeschinensee by A.Nunn graced the back cover of the 1996-97 winter brochure. But a good quality photograph of the holiday area, ideally with a happy, smiling group of walkers or skiers in beautiful scenery under blue skies, was the best way to encourage a prospective client to read all about it.

Care was taken to ensure that, if possible, captions related to some aspect of the text.

For the first few years photographs were mostly provided by national or local tourist offices – the Swiss National Tourist Office (now known as *Switzerland Tourism*) was especially helpful, and continued to be so. Occasionally Peggy or Vincent were able to take something suitable themselves during exploratory trips.

But nearly half of all the photographs used over the 34 years were taken by leaders or clients. One suspects that, in the early years, a note was included with confirmations asking clients to send in their holiday snaps for consideration, and from 1982 such a request was included in the brochures, stating a preference for transparencies. As the years went by, more and more clients did just that, and some were of a very high standard – good enough to use in the brochure and even on the front cover. The very first to be credited were a C.Giberne in the 1975 summer brochure, and Ruth Chamberlain, wife of the Company Secretary, in the 1975-76 winter brochure. Quite a few taken by Vincent’s wife, Beryl, also appeared.

Individuals whose pictures were published were usually credited, as were national tourist offices, overseas partners and, very occasionally, photographic agencies – a last resort as they charged a substantial fee. It was the practice not to credit pictures that were supplied by local

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tourist offices or hoteliers; judging by the number that were uncredited, a quarter of all photographs came from these sources.

In the final two years, under First Choice management, the practice of showing credits and captions was abandoned.

Initially, the honour of having one's name in the brochure was incentive enough, but the novelty soon wore off and at some stage it was decided to pay £5 per photograph (£20 if it made it on to the covers). This applied equally to all individuals including directors, staff, leaders and clients – the author clearly remembers writing out dozens of cheques for multiples of £5, including occasionally to himself!

Brochure photographs proved to be a favourite topic of conversation among party members, with some snap-happy ones clearly intending to send theirs in for the brochure. Their efforts resulted in a huge number arriving in the postman's bag. In Lillie Road days, twice a year (for winter and summer brochures) at tea-time, the basement lights would be turned off, then directors and staff would enjoy an extensive slide show to decide what to include.

But by 1992 the incentive to provide photographs was apparently waning, and a new scheme was introduced, offering £20 per photograph published for the first time only, plus a waived deposit (£50) for the senders of the best three photographs. For 1999 the cash payment was replaced by a £25 voucher, redeemable against the next Waymark holiday booked, but the scheme was abandoned the following year.

Some people were extraordinarily successful at providing suitable pictures time after time. By trawling through the brochures, the author has been able to establish who had the most credits over the years, and the winners of this informal competition can now be revealed – not that there are any prizes!

The clear joint winners are directors Stuart Montgomery and Martin Read – who, it must be said, had a clear advantage through the number of exploratory trips they undertook in the course of their work. Actually, Martin's tally was 185, Stuart's 160, but the 1998-99 winter brochure states that most of its uncredited photos were taken by Stuart, so to declare a tie seems reasonable – and diplomatic for the author!

Others whose photographs appeared ten or more times are shown below (\* indicates director or staff, figure in brackets indicates number of front or back covers). Some photos appeared more than once in successive years. It was the custom to initialise the first name so this is followed here.

- 74 G.Elson (1)
- 61 P.Orrin
- 44 P.Chapman\* (1), T.Phillips (3)
- 40 N.Vincent\* (1)

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- 33 R.Mason
- 21 R.Higgins (1)
- 20 R.Kenchington
- 19 C.Mold
- 18 P.Hounslow\*
- 16 D.Hawgood (2), K.Jeans, J.MacDonald, J.Wood\*
- 15 M.Belton, J.Coles\* (1), J.Goldsbrough (1)
- 14 J.Bateson, A.Kitch
- 13 D.Bowyer, A.Callewaert, D.Cuthbert, J.Downing, B.Fagg (1), P.Underhill
- 12 P.Shilston, P.Verity (1)
- 11 W.Derbyshire, G.Downer (1), R.Hoole, M.Owen, C.Saunders\* (1)
- 10 J.Davis (4), B.Harris, B.Snell (1), J.Wyatt (1)

This also provides an opportunity to name the lucky winners of the brochure photograph competitions. The above-mentioned Mr T.Phillips was a winner on no fewer than seven occasions; the others were: Mr J.Adamson, Ms C.Bangham, Mr B.Bloomfield, Mr D.Blow, Mr A.Bluefield, Mr G.Bullough, Mr D.Cuthbert (4 times), Mr R. Douglas, Mr J.L.Downs, Mr C.Duncan, Mr G.Elson (3), Ms C.Fitzpatrick, Mr A.Fleming, Ms J.Goldsbrough (2), Mr S.Goulden (2), Ms A.Henly, Mr W.Henry, Mr J. Higgs, Mr S.Honeyman, Mr D.Hope, Mr D.Jones (2), Mr A.Northcott, Mr K.Oldfield, Mr P.Orrin (2), Mr A.Ozanne and Mr H.Smith.

The 1999-2000 winter brochure has the distinction of being the only one in which a photo-gallery of some directors, staff and leaders appeared (Helen Brown, Martin Campbell, Hilary and Paddy Field, Alison Halladay, Katherine Hurst, Bob Mason, Stuart Montgomery, Peter Purslow, Martin Read, Chris Townsend, Katia Vignes, Jim Wood, Eric Woolley).

### Maps

The 1977-78 winter brochure had a sketch map of Telemark, though despite showing the route from Oslo to nearby Rjukan, it failed to show the actual location of Kvitåvatn. Subsequent leaflets had more detailed maps of Norway, but ones showing centres in and near the Alps only started to appear in the 1982-83 brochure. Maps only started to appear in the summer brochures from 1991, with a separate map for each of the major countries.

### Printers

It is customary for the printer's name to be shown on brochures, usually on the back page, but this did not always happen on Waymark's. However, from the evidence, the following seems likely.

In the early years (until Summer 1985) the printer was Duolith of Welwyn Garden City, who also printed Ramblers' brochures – a natural progression from the directors' previous contacts. From winter 1985-86 until the end, most brochures were printed by Oliver &

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Sadler (later Sadler Print, then *Apex Press*) of Whitstable, but between 1990 and 1996 the summer brochures were printed by Blackburn Print (later *Gemini Press*) of Shoreham-by-Sea – an arrangement that was convenient for Peggy Hounslow, who continued to supervise production of the summer brochures for some years after her retirement.

The author can comment, from his own experience of editing the brochures, that the printers were very patient with the many last-minute alterations that had to be made – twice a year he spent a day at the printers making last-minute changes and checking that everything was in order on the ‘final final galley proofs’. Initially, the printer charged for each change, but latterly an arrangement was reached whereby the price initially quoted included alterations – mainly because it could be demonstrated that the printers made as many mistakes with their typesetting as Waymark made changes!

In 1996 Waymark acquired QuarkXPress publishing software, and thereafter was able to design and typeset the brochures in-house.

### Prices

The very first programme, for Summer 1974, showed prices for short-haul holidays ranging from £33 for a three-night weekend in Basle, through £56 for 7 nights in Flumserberg (Switzerland) to £158 for 14 nights in Iceland. For long-haul, the range was from £375 (Ceylon/Sri Lanka, 16 nights) to £425 (Annapurna, 18 nights). These prices are of academic interest as it seems that none of these holidays operated! If, as implied in the 1975 brochure, the only actual departures were to France, the range was from £69 for a week in St.Jean-Pied-du-Port to £118 for a fortnight in La Grave.

The prices for short-haul holidays in the final brochure in 2007 ranged from £499 for a week in the Picos de Europa to £1059 for two weeks on the Camino de Santiago. The range for long-haul was £1289 for 10 nights in Tanzania to £2449 for two weeks in Peru.

The prices for a week’s cross-country skiing in the first winter brochure (1974-75) ranged from £78 at Bizau to £126 at Saanen, both in Switzerland, while 9 nights at Kvitåvatn cost from £98. The final winter brochure, for 2006-07 offered a week at Kvitåvatn from £650 (11 nights £899), and the full range was from £469 for a week at the Sjusjøen Chalets in Norway to £1585 for a week at Lake Beauport near Québec City in Canada.

By the 1978-79 season some clients had their own skis and if they took them a reduction of £10 was made (£15 for holidays of more than 8 nights); for 2006-07 this had risen to a (much less generous in real terms) £25 and £35 respectively.

It should not be assumed that prices increased every year, though clearly that was the overall trend. The introduction to the summer brochure for 1998 stated: ‘Among the [old favourites] our Titlis to Jungfrau tour is now twenty years old. Like many other holidays it is significantly cheaper than last year thanks to the strength of sterling.’ This was a result of

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buying currency in advance. Sometimes air fares were reduced, and such savings were passed on to clients. And during the late 1990s, when much more use was being made of charter flights than usual, in order to fill the seats, the prices for some XC holidays during the slack months of January were very low.

### Singles

Almost half of Waymark's clients travelled alone, no doubt hoping to find at least good companions for the duration of the holiday – and maybe more! The single room supplement in 1974 ranged from £3 to £5; in 2007 £30 to £345. Brochures conveyed this warning: 'Where single rooms are available.....note that this supplement confers privacy rather than a better room; single rooms are often inferior in position and standard.' It was always the policy to accept bookings from single people to share a twin-bedded room with another person of the same sex, though they were warned that so-called twin-bedded rooms in some parts of the Alps consisted of a single unit with two adjacent mattresses, which could not be separated.

### The booking form

From the beginning until 1986, the booking form was an integral part of the brochure, with booking conditions printed on the reverse. Then people started complaining that this arrangement meant that they had no copy of the conditions after sending in the form, and there was now a legal requirement for clients to be allowed to keep a copy. (This was in the days when photocopies were not easily obtainable, though they were accepted.)

For 1987 an experiment was tried, in which the booking form appeared on the top half of a loose insert. The conditions appeared on the lower half, so could be kept. A chronological list of departure dates was provided on the reverse. Unfortunately, the insert tended to fall out, or get mislaid, so lots of people rang to ask for a replacement. The experiment was a failure and Peggy Hounslow's bright idea to show a chronological list of departure dates fell by the wayside – at least until 1997.

So in 1988 the booking form returned to being an integral part of the brochure, and although clients were able to keep the booking conditions, now the details of one of the holidays appeared on its reverse, so this was still far from ideal. Then from 1994 the booking form was provided as a centrefold, which proved much more satisfactory, and being in duplicate allowed clients to keep a copy. For 2003 onwards, acknowledging that most people could take a photocopy, the duplicate booking form was replaced by a separate insurance proposal form.

### Supplementary information

General and supplementary information usually appeared in either the front or end pages, but after the introduction of the centrefold booking form, some of it appeared there. In the early

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years, flight information appeared on the same pages as the holidays, then from 1988 on the penultimate page. What to do with the back page had always been a problem (it was often a photograph superimposed with airline logos) but from 1997 the earlier idea of a chronological list of departure dates appeared there and stayed until 2005.

Some holidays were only briefly described in the main brochures – those interested were invited to apply for a special leaflet that provided much more detailed information.

An information sheet relating to one's chosen holiday was sent with the booking confirmation. It included more details of travel arrangements and (for tours) a day-by-day itinerary, accommodation and meals, advice on climate and clothing, currency, shopping and other facilities.

From 1993, a paragraph was prominently displayed in the winter brochures advising on suitable clothing for cross-country skiing. With their confirmations, XC clients were sent details of recommended exercises to encourage them to be fit enough for the rigours of their holiday!

### Advertising in the brochures

It was Waymark's policy not to accept paid advertisements in their brochures, but from 1987 onwards there was some limited advertising, generally provided free as part of an association with a supplier or other organisation.

An eight-year association with the outdoor equipment supplier, *Field & Trek*, started with a small paragraph in the Winter 1987-88 brochure. A 5% discount was offered on their prices for cross-country ski equipment on production or receipt of the holiday confirmation or invoice. For the first five years, a set of their XC equipment was included in the price of one or two departures to Kandersteg. From 1992 to 1995, a half-page Field & Trek advertisement appeared in summer and winter brochures, still offering a 5% discount.

From Winter 1997-98 a seven-year association started with Braemar Nordic Ski Centre (later Mountain Supplies Braemar, then *Braemar Mountain Sports*), who had a quarter-page advertisement in the winter brochures, but offered no discount. They were replaced for 2004-5 only by *Mountain Spirit* of Aviemore. A second equipment supplier, *Euroski* of Brighton (now Seaford), took a quarter page in winter 2003-04.

The 1999-2000 winter brochure included a plug for 'Cross-country skiing – a handbook', recently written by Waymark leader Roger Homyer. The Winged Fellowship Trust (now *Vitalise*) and the English Ski Council (now *Snowsport England*) each had a quarter page in the winter brochures from 2002-03 to 2004-05. A necessarily shortlived association with *The Rollerski Co* was marked by a half page in the final winter brochure in 2006-07; this offered preparation for the snow at that company's dry tracks in London and Windsor.

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Apart from Field & Trek, the only other advertisement to appear in the summer brochures was in 2000, when a full page was allocated to *The Sherpa Van Project*, which, somewhat extraneously, offered to carry luggage along specified long distance trails in Britain.

Airline logos (a form of advertising but standard practice in holiday brochures) appeared from the start until 1996, then again from 2006 to the end.

## Walking holidays

### The brochures

For practical reasons, Waymark's first ever programme, for Summer 1974, was produced piecemeal, in nine separate leaflets. This made economic sense for a start-up company, as most of the holidays were described in what are known as 'shell folders', bought from airlines and national tourist offices. Shell folders come with a few full-colour pretty pictures and lots of blank space, on which the tour operator can overprint its own text as required – obviously much cheaper than printing from scratch.

It seems that the very first leaflet off the production line was one advertising tours to Mount McKinley in Alaska, as this had 53 Oxford Gardens as a temporary address – all the others showed 295 Lillie Road.

For the second year, 1975, just one 16-page brochure was produced at DL size (210 x 99 mm, about 9 x 4 inches), though the late addition of a painting holiday in Spain was covered on a separate sheet. For the next eleven years, 1976 to 1986, the size settled into A5: originally in portrait (upright) format, changing from 1983 to landscape (horizontal). Up to 1979 the covers in this format had been rather bland: a single-colour background with 'Waymark', the logo and the year in a second colour.

Then in 1980 the bold decision was made to go full colour - at least for the cover, though inside pictures remained black-and-white. A note in that year's brochure, under the heading Tuppence Coloured, explained: 'We had hoped to use coloured illustrations in this brochure. When we looked at the cost of this, and the rising cost of holidays, we decided that it was better to keep the prices down – the difference would buy a colour film for every client! So you can take your own colour pictures. We hope that you like our programme – good value, if penny plain.' This seems to imply that a colour film was given to each client, though this is as yet unsubstantiated and unlikely.

However, full colour photographs throughout were introduced the following year, with the reluctant, and somewhat contradictory, admission: 'We have at last yielded to using colour pictures in our brochure for, alas, enough good black and white photographs are no longer obtainable. We hope you will enjoy seeing the countryside as others have seen it, and that it will help you in choosing your 1981 holiday.'

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The directors felt comfortable with the A5 format, which suited their ‘small is beautiful’ philosophy. However, what started at 32 pages of A5 in 1976 had grown to 68 in 1986, and the printers advised that any more would make this format impractical. So, from 1987 onwards, the summer brochures were all A4 and full colour, but the number of pages fluctuated considerably within the range 28 to 48, except for the final year, 2007, going out with a bang at (for Waymark) a whopping 70 pages (equivalent to 140 pages of A5).

### The grading system for walking holidays

The first summer programme in 1974 had no grading system, but the directors knew from their experience with Ramblers that this was desirable, and one was introduced in 1975. A brochure note explained: ‘Among mountains, distance is a poor guide; hours of walking are a better indication of how strenuous a holiday will be, though these exclude stops for refreshment etc.’ To be different from Ramblers, whose grading system used letters, Waymark’s used numbers, and was initially as follows:

*Grade 1.* Walking mostly on paths, sometimes rocky, about 4 hours a day. Good shoes would do, but take boots if in mountains, or if you are used to them. Comparable with the Cotswolds.

*Grade 2.* Walking as Grade 1, but about 5 hours a day. Boots preferable. Comparable with the Yorkshire Dales.

*Grade 3.* About 6 hours a day walking, sometimes off paths. Boots necessary. Comparable with Lakeland summits such as Helvellyn, or Snowdon by one of the tracks.

*Grade 4.* About 7 hours a day walking, some scrambling. Across the snow-line at times. Boots essential. Comparable with Ben Nevis, Bidean or the Cairngorms.

*Grade 5.* Up to 8 hours a day walking, some scrambling. Often above the snow-line, depending on the season. Boots essential.

This grading system, based principally on time spent walking, survived basically unchanged throughout the company’s history, with minor adjustments. The comparison with areas in Britain was abandoned in 1986. The amount of ascent to be expected was added from 1995.

For the first few years, the choice was fairly evenly spread across the grades, but it soon became clear that the majority of clients wanted comfortable walking in Grade 2, and the number of holidays at this grade (or a combination of Grade 2 with Grades 1 or 3) gradually increased to nearly half of the programme.

However, for most of the company’s history the tougher end of the market was well catered for, with around a quarter of all holidays including Grade 4 or higher. From 1976 to 1981 there was a Grade 6, and from 1996 to 2000 Grade 5+, for the very strenuous alpine hut tours where the walking verged on mountaineering and included glacier-travel: participants were

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expected to be familiar with the use of ice-axe, crampons and harnesses. Grade 5 disappeared from 2001 onwards, when the mountain hut tours were dropped.

Holidays on which the duration or difficulty of walking varied each day were described as Grade 1/2, 2/3, 3/4 or 4/5. A handful of lower grade holidays were qualified with the addition of 'Sightseeing', where this formed a substantial element of the itinerary. Others were described as 'Ungraded', where the principal activity would involve observing flowers, birds or other wildlife, though party members were expected to walk to the locations.

Much advice was offered to assist with choosing the most suitable grade, and clients were encouraged to call the office for further help. The advice given in the brochure was sometimes stark; for example: 'We do not accept bookings for walking tours unless we are satisfied that you have sufficient previous experience [*clients were asked to state previous experience on the booking form*]. On walking tours, it is essential that you consider carefully the grade and type of tour chosen. You cannot take a day off unless it is arranged by the leader. A weak link can spoil not only his own, but everyone's holiday. If you are in doubt we are always ready to help you choose the tour that is within your capabilities.'

### The first summer programme (1974)

Although walking was the object of most of the 1974 holidays, other activities were offered, as might be expected of a new company that was not yet sure where its market lay. They were concentrated on the fairly safe bets of Switzerland and France.

Switzerland had two separate leaflets: one for walking (**Adelboden, Orsières, Soubey, Flumserberg** and **Zermatt**), another for other activities: alpine flora, woodcarving, rustic painting, and sightseeing weekends in **Basle, Lucerne, Bern, Zürich** and **St.Gallen**. It seems that this experiment failed as it was never repeated to such an extent.

France was covered in one leaflet: centred walking holidays in the Alps at **St.Sorlin d'Arves** (Savoy) and **La Grave** (Provence), **St.Jean-Pied-de-Port** in the foothills of the Pyrenees, **St.Anthème** in the Loire Valley, and **Le Pont de Montvert** in the Cévennes; then there were two mountain hut tours, in the **Alpes Maritimes** and **High Pyrenees**; a bivouac tour in **Corsica**; plus a bird-watching holiday at **Salin-de-Giraud** in the Camargue.

Two walking tours were offered in the Himalayas – to **Annapurna** and the **Kulu Valley**. A camping holiday in **Iceland** was more of a sightseeing tour, with occasional walking, using four-wheel drive, high ground clearance coaches, specially built for the rough terrain.

The programme included some highly experimental destinations for the time – **Mount McKinley** in Alaska, and **Ceylon** (now Sri Lanka) which apparently were unsuccessful as they were never repeated. (Incidentally, the leaflet for Ceylon included, for the first and only time in a Waymark brochure, an image of a bare-breasted woman – on one of the painted frescoes at Sigiriya.)

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Never repeated, either, was a disastrous programme of **Bicycle Tours in Britain**. A major error in the brochure (incorrect dates) was ominous. Some of the bikes were transported on the roof of the luggage van, and when the driver misjudged the clearance of an archway.....yes, the bikes were crushed, and that was the end of the bicycle tours. *[Author's note: this story was told to me by Vincent in the 1980s, and my imperfect memory may have provided an image that is not entirely correct – anyone who can provide chapter and verse please get in touch.]*

In fact, it seems that the only holidays that actually took place in that first season (apart from the bicycle tours) were those in France. The introduction to the 1975 summer brochure stated: 'We limited [the 1974 programme] to France, because that is a country we know well, and which we think has an increasing appeal'. Nowadays this would be described as 'spin'! The introduction continues, 'In view of the hectic state of the travel trade in 1974\* we think we should say that all travel on our holidays is by scheduled airlines and the tickets you travel on have been paid for before you leave England. No rescue operation will be needed to bring you back.'

\*1974 was the year when the charter airline Court Line and two of the largest tour operators, Clarksons and Horizon, infamously collapsed, leaving tens of thousands of holidaymakers stranded abroad and bringing down many other smaller companies in their wake.

Nevertheless, Switzerland, Iceland and the Himalayas were tried again the following year and remained in the programme for at least six years.

### Domination by France

It is certainly true that France was the destination that Waymark knew best. Probably as a result of Vincent's knowledge of that country and its language, it was to become the bedrock of the company's existence, occupying on average a quarter of the summer programme over the years. Austria, Italy, Spain and Switzerland each hosted around 10-12% of holidays, and Greece 6%. Smaller but valuable contributions were made by Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Malta, Morocco, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Turkey, the High Tatras mountains in either Poland or Slovakia, the Rocky Mountains in Canada and the Andes in South America. Unsuccessful attempts were made to introduce walking holidays in Andorra, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Greenland, Hungary, Russia and Scotland.

Waymark tried hard to make a go of long-haul holidays, and had limited success in South Africa, Canada, the Himalayas and the Andes, but in the end 95% of the summer programme was confined to within and just outside Europe (including Cyprus, Morocco and Turkey). It seemed that the long-haul market had been buttoned up by other operators.

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### Mountain hut tours

Naturally, all tour operators do their best to find holidays that will become best-sellers in the market place, and Waymark hit the target right at the start with their mountain hut tours. Much research is needed to set them up properly, great care must be taken to find a leader who has the right experience, and many letters and phone calls are required to places that are sometimes not easy to contact. So Waymark's ability to organise such complicated holidays was soon recognised by the tougher end of the walking community. The hut and bivouac tours in the 1974 programme were joined soon afterwards by regulars **Round Mont Blanc** (based on the TMB Tour de Mont Blanc route through France, Switzerland and Italy), **Vanoise** (France), **Gran Paradiso** (Italy). Later, **Monte Rosa** (Italy) and others elsewhere in the Alps were added, including a variety of tours in Slovenia, featuring either the **Julian Alps** or **Kamnik Alps**, or both; also for a while a variety of tours in the **Pyrenees** and other mountainous areas. By the end, more than 50 different hut tours had appeared in the programme.

Clients who liked the idea of staying at mountain huts, but were not too sure about it, were catered for by holidays that consisted of a week at a centre followed by a week staying at huts: in the early years this combined Adelboden with huts in the **Bernese Oberland**; later Trins with the **Stubai Alps**.

Demand for the hut tours began to fall off in the late 1990s, and they were dropped altogether in 2001 as the amount of work involved in setting them up had made them uneconomic. They were reintroduced on a smaller scale under First Choice management in 2004.

### Hotel-hopping tours

In 1979 Vincent had the brilliant idea of a walking tour following the itinerary described in R.L.Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes*, and called it **Travels Without a Donkey!** (the exclamation mark being part of the title, at least for the first few years). Though participants would be living out of a suitcase, moving on each night, the heavy baggage was taken by taxi, and the holiday proved very popular, lasting 14 years. (The theme was revived from 1997 for four years as In Stevenson's Footsteps.)

Although more research and administration were needed for a holiday of this kind (for which the brand name 'Hotel-Hopping Tours' was coined in 1995), such was the demand that several similar tours were soon added, of which the most successful were **A Tour in Provence**, **The Pilgrim's Way** (southern France) and its companion **Camino de Santiago** (northern Spain), both tracing sections of the Route de St.Jacques, historically followed by pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela. **Land of the Cathars**, visiting the strongholds in Languedoc of the religious sect that lasted from the 11th to 13th centuries, operated in two separate 3/4-year bursts from 1988 and 1999.

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Although the most successful hotel-hopping tours were located in France and Spain, others were tried with varying degrees of success in Cyprus, Portugal, Romania and Switzerland.

### The 1970s

Two Swiss centres – **Bettmeralp** and **Unterschächen** - were popular from or soon after the start and stayed in the programme for nine or ten years, as did **Mont-Louis** (based at a French civil service holiday centre). Faring even better at 18 years was St.Jean-du-Bruel, masquerading as either **Cévennes** or **Southern Cévennes**. The two-centre holiday **Mountains and Sea in Corsica** was introduced in 1977 and stayed in the programme for 21 years. In 1978 Waymark hit the spot with **San Gimignano**, a remarkably well-preserved walled town in Tuscany, which lasted 29 years. But what should be regarded as champion of champions, as far as walking was concerned, at 31 years was the four-centre **Titlis to Jungfrau** in Switzerland, introduced in 1977 and lasting for the rest of the company's existence, though for the final two years it became a two-centre holiday, Titlis and Jungfrau.

Waymark's love affair with Greece and the Greek islands started in 1976, with a three-centre holiday in Crete. Though failing this time, it was to reappear briefly in the 1980s, and again in the 1990s (as Crete - Mountains and Gorges) with much more success. The country was tried again in 1978 (a two-centre holiday to **Lesbos and Chios**) and remained in the programme to the end. A second bivouac tour was tried out in the **Pindos Mountains** on the mainland - it had only limited success at this time but fared better when reintroduced as a hut tour in the 1990s.

An oddity (for Waymark) appeared in the 1976 brochure: **Cruising on the Canal du Midi** in southern France - it seems there were few takers as it subsequently disappeared without trace.

### The 1980s

More highly successful centres were introduced in the 1980s, especially Auffach (**Wildschönau**), in the Kitzbühel Alps, and Trins, at the foot of Austria's Stubai Alps, which lasted 24 and 27 years respectively, and Hinterzarten (**Black Forest**, 18 years) – the only really successful walking centre that Waymark found in Germany. Others that lasted for at least 10 years were Neukirchen (**Autumn in the Alps**) and Aschau (**Spertental**) in Austria, and Claveisolles (**Beaujolais**) in France.

Prats-de-Mollo appeared as **Eastern Pyrenees** from 1980 to 1986, was dropped, then returned in 1993 under its own name for a further seven years. A highly popular introduction in 1982 was **Amalfi**, based at the Hotel dei Cavalieri, which was of a higher standard than most establishments in the programme and ran for 23 years.

The Greek islands programme was expanded to include **Milos**, **Naxos** and **Samos**, while **Chios** was paired with **Selcuk** on the nearby mainland of Turkey - all these enjoyed great popularity, especially Samos, which lasted 24 years.

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In Switzerland, one of the longest-lasting holidays, at the traffic-free village of **Mürren** in the shadow of the Jungfrau, entered the programme in 1981 and ran through to the bitter end in 2007 - a total of 27 years. Another high standard hotel, the Central in **Arosa**, was introduced the following year and ran for 23 years. Following the outstanding success of Titlis to Jungfrau, another Swiss four-centre holiday, **Four Valleys**, was introduced in 1981 and made 12 appearances.

In 1983 a long association, lasting for the rest of the company's existence and continued afterwards by Exodus, began with 'La Découverte', a concept established by André and Badou Marcon at their hotel of that name in **St.Bonnet** in the Vivarais, which they had converted from a former convent. Unlike most Waymark holidays (with the company's own volunteer leader) the walking was arranged and led by André or one of his team, offering two grades described (with typical French panache) as *sportif* and *tranquille*. They proved one of the most successful holidays ever to appear in the programme, with up to 20 departures in a season.

**Malta** appeared for the first of ten seasons in 1983, first based just at Mdina on the main island, then with the addition of a second centre - Xaghra on **Gozo**.

Waymark had tried several times to add Norway to its summer programme but, compared to that country's overwhelming domination of the XC programme, the response was underwhelming – perhaps a casualty of the aversion to travelling northwards, at least in summer. However, one slightly unusual holiday, called **Geology of the Norwegian Fjordland**, did enjoy some success, appearing in the programme from 1984 to 1992; based at Fjaerland at the east end of Sognefjord, the walking was led by Dr Olav Orheim of the *Norwegian Polar Institute*, who on some evenings also gave talks on geology and glaciation.

In 1984, staff member Colin Saunders, a keen orienteer, persuaded Waymark to offer a Trans-America Tour for Orienteers, which would take in a number of major events across the continent; sadly for him there was not enough interest to operate the tour, and what he hoped would be a new field of operations was quietly dropped. However, the three centres based at La Découverte hotels, mentioned above and below, offered orienteering as an alternative activity to walking.

An attempt to operate to Australia and New Zealand in 1987-88 fell on stony ground.

In 1985 a long association with the Atlantic islands started; first with **Madeira**, which made 15 appearances over the years in various guises as a one-, two- or three-centre holiday; then the **Azores** (three centres) for 11 years from 1987. (The Canaries entered the programme much later.)

Many parts of Spain offer excellent walking, but in the early years only one centre, El Arenal in the **Sierra de Gredos**, had been tried with any success by Waymark – it was introduced in 1983 and ran for 20 years. Then Spanish-speaker Martin Read arrived in 1986 and proceeded

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to add centre after successful centre: Torla (**Ordesa Gorge**), Soller (**Majorca**), Espot (**Picos Encantados**) and **Jimena de la Frontera**; plus the hotel-hopping tour **Camino de Santiago**; more were to follow in the 1990s.

Martin was also responsible in 1987 for reintroducing Turkey, which had been tried previously without success. As well as Selcuk (linked with the Greek island of Chios), a number of tours were operated in various parts of Asia Minor in association with local operator Amber Travel, whose proprietors, Mike and Karen Belton, led some of the holidays. And in 1989 Martin's exploratory visits to South America were rewarded with the introduction of tours in the Andes Mountains of Peru and Bolivia (including **Inca Trail**, **High Cordilleras** and **Patagonia**), with most land arrangements similarly handled by a local operator, Tambo Treks.

The fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 coincided with the appearance of the **High Tatras**, first on the Slovak side for a few years, then on the Polish side, where they continued until 2001.

An imaginative proposal in 1982 to cover a different section each year of the 1,500-mile GR5 (*Grande Randonnée* = long distance walking route) from Holland to the Mediterranean did not take off, even though the part of it to be covered that year was one of its finest sections, southwards from Lake Geneva towards Mont Blanc. (It was tried again in 1997, northwards from Modane to Chamonix, with the same result.)

A centre holiday in Turkish-speaking Northern Cyprus was investigated in 1983 but dropped when the Greek tourist authorities objected.

### The 1990s

The Greek-speaking part of Cyprus made a notable entry into the programme in 1992, with a hotel-hopping tour, **Across the Troodos**, which ran for 16 years through to the end. A few multi-centre holidays on the island were tried but with less success.

In Greece, a five-year collaboration started in 1996 with Trekking Hellas, run by two Britons who also led some of the holidays: the **Taygetos** three-centre holiday and the mountain hut tours **Agrafa & Sterea** and **White Mountains of Crete**.

More hotel-hopping tours were introduced, with **Across the Auvergne** (12 years), **Around the Cerdagne** (6), **Cerdagne to the Sea** (9) and, in a new direction for Waymark, the **Transylvanian Alps** in Romania (9).

New centres included **Bagnères-de-Bigorre** in the Pyrenees (10 years), and **Céreste** (7), one of the calls on the popular Tour in Provence. Following the huge success of La Découverte at St.Bonnet, two similar establishments were added and proved just as popular: **Les Stables** in the Massif Central in 1990, and **Les Fourgs** in the French Jura in 1993.

Ireland was re-introduced to the programme in 1992 (an earlier attempt to Gougane Barra in Kerry had failed) and remained there for 10 years, including centre holidays in the **Kerry**

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**Mountains, Wicklow Mountains, Connemara and Donegal**, and a tour of the **Irish Munros**.

In Italy, the very popular XC centre of **Dobbiaco** was introduced to Waymark walkers in 1990 and remained in the programme in one form or another till the end – popular despite the dauntingly-named Hotel Tschurtschenthaler. Another successful migrant from the XC programme was Soraga in the **Western Dolomites**. In 1993 the three-centre holiday **Southern Tuscany** appeared and enjoyed an unbroken run of 14 years.

Many walkers with a head for heights are enthused by the prospect of tackling a *via ferrata* (a mountainous route supported by a miscellany of fixed ironware such as ladders, cables and pegs) and a holiday exploring the dense network of such routes in the Dolomites was successfully introduced in 1995, based at Dobbiaco.

A five-year association began in 1993 with Fred Harper, a former president of the British Association of Mountain Guides. Under his leadership, the **Haute Route** hut tour was revived (with an optional attempt on Mont Blanc's summit), and two new holidays combining a stay at a hotel followed by a hut tour were added: **Zermatt 4000s** and **Oberland Peaks** (Grindelwald). From 1998 for a further three years these holidays were organised and led by Bob Barton, another qualified mountain guide and former Operations Director of the Outward Bound Trust. Several other new mountain hut tours were well received: **Tour d'Oisans** and **Tour du Queyras** (France), **Monte Rosa** (Italy/Switzerland) and **Picos de Europa** (Spain).

The 'northward aversion' was overcome when yet another popular XC centre, **Hallingen** in Norway, was added to the summer programme in 1997 and stayed for nine years. How delighted Waymark (and Rod Tuck) would have been if Kvitåvatn, that hardy XC perennial from start to finish, could have attracted walkers, but despite several attempts this was not to be. Other Norwegian centres were tried in vain, though a tour in **Spitsbergen**, above the Arctic Circle, incorporating a four-night cruise, enjoyed a brief run.

Meanwhile, heading southwest, clients continued to cross the Atlantic to Madeira and the Azores, and from 1994 clients enjoyed new centres on the Portuguese mainland, at Pinhao (**Douro**), **Montesinho**, **Soaho** and **Ponte de Lima**; also from 1995 at two centres on **Gomera** in the Canary Islands.

A trend developed at this time towards sending parties to small centres that had been established by expatriate Brits, who often also organised and led the walks, and these enjoyed much success. Hostal El Anon at Jimena has already been mentioned, but two other outstanding places were both just inland from Spain's Costa Blanca: Hostal **Sendas**, included in the programme from 1990 to 1998, run by Gordon and Di Saunders, and Brian and Pat Fagg's Fonda Els Frares at **Quatretondeta** (1998-2007).

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Two other new long-lasting Spanish centres, which ran through to the end in 2007, were situated in Andalucia: Bubion (from 1994) in the **Alpujarras** (the southern slopes of the Sierra Nevada) and **Grazalema** near Ronda (1996). Accommodation for both these centres (and for several other less successful ones) was at a Villa Turistica - a new concept of excellence developed by the government of Andalucia, which built a chain of 3-star hotels of this name in some of the most scenic mountain locations, all tastefully constructed in an architectural style typical of the locality

Also lasting out to the end were two new centres in Turkey, **Kas** and **Egirdir**, introduced in 1996.

The popular Travels Without a Donkey theme of earlier years was revived from 1997 for four years as **In Stevenson's Footsteps**.

In 1992 and 1993 potential leaders were encouraged to join a **Learn to Lead** course at Nant, the centre for the Southern Cévennes holiday.

From the late 90s, the brochure offered 'city extensions', where on certain holidays clients could opt to stay for a few extra nights in convenient cities such as Athens, Barcelona, Bologna, Florence, Istanbul, Kraków, Madrid, Marrakech or Seville.

Further afield, a tour in the **Canadian Rockies**, in association with local operator White Mountain Adventures, ran from 1993 to 2001, which made it the longest running Waymark long-haul holiday. A new tour in **Patagonia** ran for seven years from 1991, and a 'Jungle Extension' was offered on the Inca Trail holiday, but high prices resulted in a drop in interest for South America towards the end of the decade.

Another attempt was made to introduce biking holidays in 1997, this time from a range of centres in France, Italy, Austria and Cyprus. Though not suffering the same catastrophe as in the earlier attempt in 1974, they did not sell and were dropped in the following year.

### The Noughties and the First Choice era

In 2000 a significant anniversary was celebrated marking 21 years of cooperation with the Wallasch family, who ran the popular Pension Wienerhof at Trins; Frau Wallasch presented all Waymark clients that summer and the following winter with a specially designed rucksack.

For 2002 an eight-page supplement was printed, to be sent out with the winter programme, containing selections from the walking programme.

As it transpired, opportunities for new long-running holidays were running out, but there was still time for L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue (**Provence**) and a centre holiday in the **Picos de Europa** (based first at Collia then at Espinama) to show some promise. A hotel-hopping tour of the **White Villages of Andalucia** ran for five years.

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Some promising seeds planted during the First Choice era never had a chance to flower. The **Atlas Mountains** in Morocco were starting to attract interest, as were tours of the **Peer Gynt Way** in Norway and the **Catalan Coast** of France and Spain, also centres at Rupit (**Medieval Catalunya**) in Spain and near **Mont St.Michel** in Brittany. Autumn departures to St.Bonnet (**Randonnée et Champignons**) featured learning about (and, of course, eating) mushrooms, and wine buffs could join the **Châteaux and Wines of the Loire** two-centre holiday. Departures to **Davos** offered clients the chance to try the developing sport of Nordic Walking, with two poles.

The covers of the 2005-06 winter and 2006 summer brochures declared that Waymark was 'the best kept secret in travel'.

An imaginative new idea for the final season (2007) was **Walk and Talk**, which invited clients to spend their mornings in the hotel learning either French or Spanish, then visit the local market to practice their newly-acquired skills buying lunch, followed by a walk in the afternoons; given time, that formula could have spread to many other countries. These holidays seemed to catch the client's eye as most of them operated; indeed the one to Honfleur in France on 7 October seems to have been the last ever Waymark departure.

However, although the 2007 brochure was the largest ever, with 70 pages, the season was a disaster as it seems that most of the departures failed to operate, and inevitably First Choice pulled the plug.

### Walking in winter sunshine

Such holidays are sometimes referred to as 'winter walking', but a distinction must be drawn between:

*Walking in winter sunshine*, which includes holidays during the British winter in centres, usually on or near the Mediterranean (hopefully with plenty of sunshine), and:

*Walking on winter snow*, which includes holidays based in skiing centres that have good opportunities for walking (hopefully on plenty of snow). Such holidays are covered in the analysis of winter programmes later.

For the purpose of this exercise, 'winter' is regarded as December, January and February. Many departures were offered in March, and some in November, but in the Mediterranean climate March is really early Spring, and November is still autumn, so such holidays have been largely disregarded here.

In Waymark's first season, tours to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) were advertised to depart on 2 November and 21 December 1974, though presumably they suffered from the effects in that year of the aforementioned collapse of major holiday companies, and this destination never again featured in the programme. Tours to Mount Kenya were advertised in the 1976 brochure to depart in February and December but not repeated.

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There was a gap of several years until ‘walking in winter sunshine’ was tried again, this time in Europe, at **La Turbie** in Provence in February and March 1980, which apparently enjoyed some success as the number of departures was increased for the following year. For 1981-82, **Amalfi** in Italy and **Javea** in Spain joined La Turbie, and a separate leaflet was published for them. A Christmas/New Year departure to **Vaison-la-Romaine** in Provence was offered but not repeated.

This little spurt was short-lived, however, as first Javea was dropped altogether for 1982-83, then La Turbie for 1983-84, and for 1984-85 Amalfi's February departures were dropped, so the winter sunshine experiment came to a temporary halt.

From 1991-92 to 1996-97 departures were advertised in December and February to **Patagonia & Aconcagua** (or just **Patagonia**) in the Andes of Argentina and Chile.

For Winter 1993-94 it was decided to try again in Europe, and departures were advertised once more to Amalfi, and to **Sendas** and **Jimena de la Frontera** in southern Spain. This time round, perhaps because of its now much larger mailing list, walking in winter sunshine really caught on and the programme was extended year by year, in particular adding **Alpujarras**, **Grazalema** and **Quatretrondeta** in Spain, plus holidays in Cyprus, Sicily, Turkey and the Canary Islands. At the peak in 2002-03, twelve winter sunshine destinations were on offer.

The bubble burst after the First Choice takeover, and the winter sunshine programme in the European area had shrunk to just four destinations for 2006-07, though two long-haul departures were also offered. Waymark had arranged a slightly larger programme for the 2007-08 winter season, and departures were shown in the 2007 brochure, but by then First Choice had pulled the chain and these holidays disappeared round the S-bend.

### **Cross-country skiing (and other holidays on snow)**

For simplicity, and as the bulk of the XC programme takes place from January onwards, this summary refers to the seasons by their second year, so 1974-75 becomes 1975 and so on.

#### The brochures

As for the walking holidays, Waymark's first ever season of cross-country skiing, for 1975, was promoted in several separate leaflets. One was a shell folder from Swissair, which provided flights for holidays in Switzerland, France and Austria; two other leaflets covered Kvitåvatn (with SAS) and the Auvergne (with Air France).

A separate smaller insert was printed: entitled ‘About Ski-Wandern by N.Vincent’, it contained a lengthy discourse on the sport, its history and how it differed from downhill. This was, it said, ‘a sport that has a name of its own in nearly every country except Britain. Ski-Wandern, langlauf, ski de fond, ski de randonnée, all have slightly different shades of

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meaning, but ultimately mean the same thing – putting on your skis and going for a walk.’ Interestingly, the term ‘cross-country ski-ing’ was not mentioned. It also introduced prospective clients to the Scandinavian word ‘loipe’ – the prepared track that you ski on. A variation on its contents was subsequently included in the leaflets and brochures.

For the following winter (1976), two separate A4 sheets were printed (one for Kvitåvatn, one for Switzerland), folded twice to produce two dainty leaflets measuring just 150 x 115 mm (about 6 x 4 inches).

From such little acorns did grow the mightiest oak tree of XC holidays that Britain had ever seen. For 1977 and 1978 a 10-page DL size leaflet (about 8¼ x 4 inches) was produced to cover most of the programme, but Kvitåvatn retained its own separate leaflet. For the next six seasons there was just one brochure of this size for the whole programme, but with 20 pages in 1979, growing to 40 for 1984. Full colour was introduced for the cover photograph from 1978, and for all photographs from 1983.

For 1985, the XC programme followed its walking sibling into an A5 size brochure, progressing from 40 to 48 pages, and from 1989 into A4, growing from 28 to 70 pages by the final 2007 season.

### The covers

The front covers for the first season's leaflets all described the activity as ‘Ski-Wandern’ – a practice that was abandoned the following year in favour of ‘Cross-Country Ski-ing’ – could this (1975) have been one of the first appearances of that term, and could it have been coined by Waymark?

The hyphen in ‘ski-ing’ was considered sacrosanct. It was dropped for the 1998 brochure, but from 1999 the the words ‘cross-country skiing’ were omitted altogether on the cover, which carried just a picture of a snowy but sunny landscape, usually traversed by one or more XC skiers, plus ‘Waymark’ (or ‘Waymark Holidays’) and the year. ‘A Winter Selection’ was added for the First Choice era, and the cover of the final bumper-size brochure in 2007 left no doubt as to its contents: ‘Waymark worldwide winter holidays – cross-country skiing, telemark skiing, snowshoeing, winter walking, dogsledding, multi-activity, ski touring, races’. (Though, as explained earlier, ‘winter walking’ in this context meant ‘walking on winter snow’.)

From 1975 to 1980 the covers had a sky-blue background, usually with a colour photograph. From 1981 to 1984, the folded DL brochures had a single colour photograph wrapped around front and back covers. From 1985 to 1988 the front and back covers of the A5 brochure each had a different colour photograph. The 1989 brochure had for its front cover, at Peggy Hounslow’s insistence, a rather odd strip cartoon of an XC skier in a stride-and-glide sequence. From 1990 onwards a photograph always appeared on the front, but until 1997 the back had a variety of uses: colour photograph, calendar, advertising, pen-and-ink drawing.

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From 1998 to 2005 the winter back cover copied its summer sibling in having a chronological list of departures; the final two in 2006 and 2007 promoted the walking holidays.

### Grading of XC holidays

Grading was not introduced for XC holidays until 1979, three years later than for walking. This was mainly because, in the early years, nearly every client on these holidays was a beginner. It was also the case that the main centre, Kvitåvatn, catered for all grades.

A note in that season's leaflet stated: 'As interest in Cross-Country Ski-ing has grown, so has knowledge and ability, and we know that there are a number of people who have enjoyed three or four of our holidays and made very considerable progress. For this reason we are attempting to grade the holidays this year, though it is not easy to describe what each means..... This is the first time we have proposed a scheme of this type, and if you are not quite sure how to choose a holiday we would be pleased to advise.' The attempt was made as follows:

*Grade 1* is ideal for beginners, though at all our centres with this grading there is quite enough to interest people on a second holiday.

*Grade 2* acts as a warning signal to complete beginners; it would be advisable to be able to do a snow-plough well enough to descend a slope at your own speed, and to be able to stop and turn, before joining [a holiday] of this type.

*Grade 3* involves a factor of endurance as well as ability, as these are usually tours on which you have to cover the distance with a full rucksack each day – whatever the weather and snow conditions. We think that walking tour experience, as well as cross-country skiing, is required for a holiday of this nature.

*Grade 5* holidays are special; the experience and equipment required are described under the holiday itself.

All this was buried in a single paragraph in the 1979 and 1980 leaflets, but when more space became available in the 1981 brochure Waymark was clearly more confident about the grading, whose description now occupied half a page. Grade 1 was divided into 1A and 1B, to reflect the type of terrain: 'On Grade 1A you can start on reasonably level loipe, while Grade 1B, although still suitable for beginners, is for those who don't mind starting in rolling country with its inevitable 'ups and downs', or for those who enjoy this type of skiing.' Grade 4 was introduced: as for Grade 3 but with longer days.

In 1981 Grade 2 introduced clients to the concept of testing, stating 'Those who have passed the Bronze Cross-Country Test.....should enjoy these holidays.' It seems that Waymark were not yet ready to promote or give details of the test – this had to wait until 1986.

The grading system went through several modifications over the years. In 1989 the brochure stated, under the heading New Grading System: 'Our clients have told us that they find the

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grading of our ski-ing holidays confusing, especially of the lower grades, so we have taken this opportunity to revise them.’ In effect, Grade 1B became Grade 2, and complete beginners were still accepted on this grade if they were fit and active, but to some was attached the qualification ‘Not suitable for beginners’, where there was too little flat terrain on which to learn the basic techniques.

Also in this season a Grade 5 was introduced: ‘These are mountain hut tours with long days, usually in big mountains, and are only for competent cross-country skiers. Fitness and stamina are essential as well as previous experience of backpacking on foot or on skis. You will have to cover the distance with a full rucksack each day, whatever the weather and snow conditions.’ A Grade 5+ or 6 was introduced in 1991 for four years, to cover a very tough hut tour reaching summits up to nearly 2500m in Norway’s Jotunheim National Park. Grade 5 was dropped after 1997.

The grading section also advised: ‘For any sport the fitter you are when you start, the better, and with your Confirmation of Booking we shall send details of exercises which have been recommended’.

And: ‘We are asked to advise how downhill skiers adapt to cross-country ski-ing. The basic techniques are the same, but you have to get used to lighter and more flexible equipment and skis without metal edges. And you have to get used to ski-ing as much uphill as down! If you have been on one or two downhill holidays, try Grade 1A or 1B. With considerably more recent downhill experience, you should manage Grade 2.’ There were times, too, when one or two members of a party wanted to spend some time downhill skiing (or even when one person wanted XC and a companion preferred downhill) – Waymark were always willing to try to help such people choose a suitable centre.

For the first few years, as with the walking programmes, the choice was spread fairly evenly across the grades, but it soon became clear that, still, the overwhelming majority of clients were beginners, or had no wish to progress to more strenuous skiing, and very soon nearly half of all holidays were either Grade 1 or Grade 2 (suitable for beginners). Of course, this means that the other half was aimed at more experienced and adventurous skiers – they were fairly evenly spread over Grades 2 (not suitable for beginners), 3 and 4.

### The 1970s

Of the centres advertised for the first programme in 1975, apart from **Kvitåvatn**, only **Bizau** (Austria) and **Münster** (Switzerland) survived to the following season, but only stayed two or three years. For the first couple of years Waymark struggled to find anything else to match the success of Kvitåvatn. But they discovered that the Swiss resort of **Kandersteg**, better known for its downhill skiing, also offered a wide variety of excellent XC, put it in the 1977 programme, and there it stayed for 28 years, only being dropped when First Choice acquired the company.

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A ski-tour, **Across the Jura**, was introduced in 1978 and ran for six seasons. Also in that year, a six-year association with BMC guide Bob Lewis saw a high-grade tour introduced along the **Haute Route** - 'one of the most famous and difficult ski highways in the world'.

A special departure was organised in 1979 to include participation in the **Engadine Ski Marathon**, and though being dropped for a while it was later included in most seasons - see also 'Ski Races' later in this chapter.

Encouraged by Kvitåvatn's popularity, Waymark found other centres in Norway, such as **Gjøvik**, **Lifjell** and **Mjølfjell**, which sold quite well but never caught on to the same extent. The first holiday in association with DNT - a hut tour in the Rondane mountains - appeared in the 1979 programme.

Ski-orienteeing was among the activities offered at Kvitåvatn, and some clients were keen to try it. A special departure was offered in 1979 but not repeated.

### The 1980s

As word got around that snow conditions in the Alps were proving reliable, centres there were in demand, and many started long runs in the programme during the 80s. In Austria: **Bad Mitterndorf**, **Fuschl am See**, **Holzgau**, **Mariapfarr**, Mieming (**Mieminger Plateau**), **Mösern bei Seefeld**, **Neukirchen**, **Ramsau**, Sandl (**Freiwald**), **Schwendt**, **Sillian** and Trins (**Three Valleys**); in France: **La Clusaz**; in Germany: **Hindelang**, **Mittelberg**, **Oberammergau** and **Oberreute**; in Italy: **Dobbiaco** and **Nova Ponente**; in Switzerland: **S'Chanf (Engadine)**, **Santa Maria** and **Sedrun**. Even comparatively low-lying places away from the Alps benefited, such as **Hinterzarten** in the Black Forest, **Les Breuleux** and **Les Charbonnières (Vallée de Joux)** in the Swiss Jura, and **Špindlerův Mlýn** in the **Giant Mountains** of Czechoslovakia.

In 1986 and 1987 a special departure for families was offered at Fuschl, as it was considered 'an excellent area to introduce children to cross-country ski-ing, as well as providing the possibility to visit places of interest. The hotel will arrange suitable entertainment on some evenings.'

There was good snow in the French Pyrenees, too, and in 1989 two new centres were introduced there (**Capcir** and **Lac des Bouillouses**), and stayed for half a dozen seasons.

In 1983 a crisis occurred at what had been the very popular Hotel Alpenrose in Kandersteg – the lady who had run the hotel with outstanding efficiency passed on and her daughter, who took over, by her own admission had no flair for the business. Many complaints were received, it became necessary to find a replacement, and fortunately the Hotel Erika proved a very worthy successor.

Meanwhile in Norway, outstanding new centres were proving harder to find. Of the new centres, only **Sjusjøen** and **Synnfjell** lasted more than 10 seasons, though Byglandsfjord

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(Setesdal), Fefor (**West of Vinstra**), Lygnasaeter and Smuksjøseter (**Rondane Centre**) enjoyed reasonable runs. The DNT hut tours continued to appear throughout the 80s, though the chosen itineraries varied from year to year. A briefly popular hut tour along the **Balcons de la Durance** in the Ecrins range in the French Alps was organised for Waymark by local operator Le Renard Vagabond (later Vacances Hors Traces).

One would think that Sweden could have shared some of Norway's success, but despite much research there seemed to be few places that offered the Norwegian style of warm hospitality surrounded by extensive loipe – or suitable ones were too busy to accommodate Waymark. A very pleasant hotel at Vikarbyn (**Dalarna**) was offered for 1985 but no departures had enough takers to operate, and a similar fate befell a later attempt at **Sälen**.

A novelty appeared in 1987 and ran for six seasons: the Finland (later Lapland or Lappland) **Pulka Tour**, arranged for Waymark by locally-based Ernest Dixon; clients took turns to tow the pulka (sledge), which carried much of the gear, and slept in log-cabins or large tents. A tour through the **Black Forest** in Germany attracted many people, but snow there proved unreliable and it sometimes turned into a walking holiday. Venturing further afield, a centre holiday at The Hills resort in **British Columbia** appeared in 1988 and enjoyed some success.

### The 1990s

A deterioration in snow conditions at lower resorts in mainland Europe led to a decline in clients for them and, inevitably, they gradually disappeared from the programme. Waymark tried to compensate by providing transport to places higher up that had better snow, but of course this arrangement was disappointing for clients.

The higher alpine centres, such as Kandersteg, Santa Maria, S'Chanf, Trins and Dobbiaco, continued to prosper. The outstanding success of the 'La Découverte' model for walking holidays had persuaded Waymark to try it in the skiing programme, and although Les Etables and Les Fourgs each appeared nine times the lack of reliable snow eventually led to their being dropped.

There were fewer introductions of special note in this decade. One that caught on (despite its rather clumsy name) was **Äkäslompolo** in Finland, where snow was ultra-reliable. In theory, Iceland should have provided a similar experience, but a holiday based at Landmannalaugur (**Highlands of Iceland**) had few takers.

The senior instructor at Kvitåvatn, Philip Yatman, left in 1991 to set up his own farmhouse holiday centre at nearby **Sundet**, together with his wife Maiken, and Waymark was happy to send parties there for five seasons (sometimes combined with a hut tour led by Philip) until the demands of a growing Yatman family meant they could no longer accommodate guests there. However, Philip and Maiken, together with their friends Ove-Holst Larsen and John Kunze, set up a company called Telemark Ski Express, and continued for another four years

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to lead centre holidays at **Mogen** and **Skinnarbu**, and tours starting and finishing at Mogen or Finse.

Some higher new Alpine centres in Italy had some success, such as **Val Gardena**, and **Moena** or **Ziano**, both of which had previously been used as a base for the Marcialonga race.

Several attempts were made to introduce holidays in the **Vercors** (France), which offered excellent XC, but for one reason or another all had little success. The same fate befell a short-lived holiday in the **Polish Tatras**.

In Norway, the new centres of **Hallingen** and **Gjeilo** proved popular, less so **Haugastøl** and **Hemsedal**.

From 1995 to 2002 Waymark collaborated with a Norwegian company called Troll Mountain, which had been set up by two British ski instructors, Tim Davis and Vince Haig. The holidays they organised for Waymark included the **Ljosland** centre and tours in the **Setesdal Highlands** and the **Jotunheim**, as well as specialist courses.

Two multi-centre holidays in the Canadian Rockies were tried with some success (**Rocky Mountains Tour, Canmore & Lake Louise**), organised on behalf of Waymark by local operator White Mountain Adventures. New England and eastern Canada usually have ideal conditions for XC, but several attempts to enter this area had few if any takers, probably due to the high prices.

The choice of special courses was expanded: **Improve Your Skills** and **Learn to Instruct** were offered at Ramsau or Trins, while Kvitåvatn and Ljosland also catered for budding instructors as well as skiers who wanted to perfect their telemark turns. Kvitåvatn has a good downhill piste, and ‘cross-country downhill’ courses were offered there for downhillers who wanted to try out XC skis on steeper slopes.

During the 1990s fame came to Wildermieming, the centre for the popular Mieminger Plateau holiday, when (quoting the brochure) ‘some Austrian TV producers hit on an idea for a new soap opera. Called “*Der Bergdoktor*”, it would chronicle the joys, sorrows and marital infidelities of the village doctor and the everyday country folk he served. For the fictional village of “Sonnenstein” they chose the innocent settlement of Wildermieming....already a popular base for our skiing parties. The intervening years have been turbulent for the people of “Sonnenstein”, but happily for the people of Wildermieming (and our groups), real life has progressed rather more smoothly.’ (More recent series of the show have been filmed at Kaprun near Zell-am-See.)

### The Noughties and the First Choice era

Several new high alpine centres were introduced, some lasting to the end: in Austria, **Marlstein**, **Pertisau** and **Scharnitz** (which replaced Mösern, Waymark’s longstanding base for the Seefeld Plateau); and in Switzerland, **Zernez** in the Engadine valley. A centre

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introduced for 2006 in Slovenia – Bled in the **Triglav National Park** – was booking well and was retained by Exodus at the end. The speedy technique of ‘skating’ (on very short skis, not skates) was featured on holidays at Dobbiaco and Versciaco, where tracks were prepared specially for this purpose.

The reliability of snow in Norway was acknowledged, and several new centres were introduced (**Brandseth, Espedalen, Fagerhøy, Skeikampen**), while **Fefor** (previously billed a decade earlier as West of Vinstra) was brought back.

The successful collaboration with Troll Mountain in Norway led to their providing leaders for two of the alpine holidays, at Santa Maria and Marlstein.

### Other winter activities

One of the most successful elements of the programme in later years was the introduction of a wider range of winter activities, especially walking on snow and snowshoeing. Some resorts put a lot of effort into preparing routes for these purposes. Waymark found that there were many clients who just wanted to enjoy the beautiful scenery and experience the atmosphere of being in the mountains in winter, and a selection of ‘winter experience’ holidays were offered, on which XC, winter walking and snowshoeing could be tried.

The company had dipped its corporate toes into this concept in the late 90s at La Découverte in St.Bonnet, and although poor snow there led to this centre being dropped after four seasons, the idea took hold at places that had already proved successful for summer walking or skiing, such as Bagnères de Bigorre and Capcir in the French Pyrenees, Dobbiaco, Kandersteg, Pertisau, Trins and Zernez in the Alps, and Kvitåvatn and Sjusjøen in Norway. Engelberg, which had previously only appeared for a woodcarving holiday in the very first programme in 1974, returned in 2004 to provide a winter experience centre for the company’s final four seasons.

### Ski Races

In most years special parties were organised to take part in ski races. The most popular for Waymark clients, included 22 times, was also one of the biggest, the 42-km **Engadine Ski Marathon** held since 1969, starting from Maloja in Switzerland, usually on the first or second Sunday in March. The start is a sight to behold, with 13,000 skiers tearing hell-for-leather along a frozen lake – the fastest aiming to get to the front before the route narrows on to a track. Most years, one of the departures to S’Chanf (where the race finishes) was timed to spend the week prior to the race training, then the leader and willing party-members would take part in the race itself, on the penultimate day of the holiday.

The same pattern was followed for several other races including, notably, the 70-km **Marcialonga** (included 10 times) along the valleys of Fiemme and Fassa in the Trento province of Italy; the 10- to 90-km **König Ludwig Lauf** (8) in the picturesque valleys around

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Oberammergau in Germany; and the 55-km **Birkebeiner** (7), from Lillehammer to Rena or vice versa in Norway, which passes close to Waymark's Sjusjøen centre. Other races to be featured once or twice included the 60-km **Dolomitenlauf** (from Lienz in Osttirol) and the 70-km **Koasa Marathon** (Kitzbühel/St.Johann), both in Austria; the 15- or 30-km **Inga-Låmi** (near Lillehammer, ladies only), the 37-km **Skarverennet** from Finse to Ustaoset and the 42-km **Holmenkollen** (near Oslo), all in Norway; and the two-day, 160-km **Canadian Marathon** (Laurentian Mountains). Sometimes the race formed the climax of a 'Learn to Instruct' course.

Waymark got quite heavily into these events during the early 1980s, when up to six events were offered in a season, the brochures went into great detail about the races and even included a cross-section of the course. Many of these races are included in the *Euroloppet*, a scheme in which, after completing eight designated events within 10 years, successful participants are entitled to be called a 'Euroloppet Champion', and some clients went on to achieve this feat.

### The End

Waymark's winter holidays went out with a bang! Perhaps it was a final desperate attempt to keep the name alive, but the brochure for 2006-07 was the largest ever, with 70 pages offering 60 holidays. They included seven new (and some rather off-beat) centres: **Tannheim** in Austria, **St.Jean d'Aulps** in France, **Font Romeu** in the French Pyrenees, Kvaløya (**Tromsø Springtime Tour**) above the Arctic Circle in Norway, the **Carpathian Mountains** in Romania, Yekaterinberg in the **Ural Mountains** and **Ramundberget** in Sweden; plus a tour in **New England** and weekends in **Davos**, **Engelberg** and **Oslo**. Family-friendly holidays were featured at Rondaplassen in Norway. Snowshoeing and winter walking featured prominently. An effort was made to attract downhill skiers by providing details of nearby pistes.

The final brochure also featured a tie-up with *The Rollerski Co*, encouraging very keen skiers to prepare for the snow by developing 'ski specific strength and fitness, technique and balance' at dry land rollerski tracks in London or Windsor.

A good try, but it made no difference to the final outcome. The last Waymark cross-country ski party left for Kvaløya (Tromsø Springtime Tour) on 21 April and returned on 28 April, 2007.

## Independent holidays

### Walking

Waymark offered independent walking holidays at any of its centres right from the start, subject to suitable travel arrangements being available. But this was something of a hot-and-cold relationship as clearly providing holidays for a small number of individuals was not as profitable as for a group of, hopefully, a dozen or more. There was also a reluctance to take responsibility for people going off on their own into the mountains.

In most years until 1992 the brochure contained, rather grudgingly it seemed, under the heading Independent Holidays, a small paragraph which invited readers to ask for details and stating that 'prices [are] the same as for the party holidays, but there will be no leader at the centre'. Independent clients were not accepted for dates when a party would be present, as it was felt that leaders should not be burdened with handling the inevitable complications of people 'doing their own thing'.

Independents were encouraged to consider Switzerland, as travel there for individuals was both relatively comfortable for the client and easy to arrange for Waymark, using that country's reliable train and postbus services. Furthermore, Swiss maps were of a very high standard and the local tourist offices provided excellent walking maps and information. In 1977 and 1978 a Go as You Please holiday was offered, including either car hire or a Swiss Holiday Pass covering unlimited travel on trains, postbuses and lake steamers.

From 1981 to 1987 independent holidays featured more strongly, with certain centres in Austria, France, Italy, Norway and Switzerland being recommended for individual travellers, while clients were provided with a copy of the walk notes that were given to leaders. In some years specified centres were highly recommended and given their own slot in the brochure: they included at various times **Sion** and **Kandersteg** in Switzerland, **Bulken** and **Fjaerland** in Norway.

Independent walking holidays were dropped from the brochures altogether from 1993, though reappearing briefly in 2003 and 2004 for Cyprus and Switzerland.

### Skiing

At first there was even more reluctance to take responsibility for people going off to ski on their own in mountains in winter. It was not until the 1983-84 season that the brochure rather timidly announced: 'We can arrange [independent holidays] at some Norwegian, Austrian and Swiss centres if you wish to travel on a date when our parties are not there – please ask for details'.

There was no mention of this in the 1984-85 brochure, but for 1985-86 a whole page was devoted to the subject, offering independent holidays at **Glenisla** in Scotland and a dozen

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centres in Austria, Germany, Norway and Switzerland. Thereafter, independent skiing holidays featured every year until the end. Foremost among them were the **Sjusjøen Chalets**, attached to the Fjellheimen Mountain Lodge at Sjusjøen (Norway), introduced in 1987-88 as a self-catering arrangement, though in later years dinner was included at the Lodge.

## **PART 2: REMINISCENCES**

Edited by Colin Saunders

If you would like to add your own reminiscences, please email the author ([colin.saund@btconnect.com](mailto:colin.saund@btconnect.com)). Subject to approval and editing, they will appear first on the Waymark updates page on the author's website [www.colinsaunders.org.uk](http://www.colinsaunders.org.uk), then potentially added to a later edition of this document. You can remain anonymous if you prefer, and you may be disappointed to learn that the editor intends to avoid publishing anything that will embarrass anyone by name! If you are uncertain about your ability to put it in writing, the author may be able to "ghost write" it on your behalf.

### **REMINISCENCES FROM WAYMARK DIRECTORS**

#### **Humfrey Chamberlain**

Company Secretary, 1973-2002

Peggy organised a trip for my wife, Ruth, and me in South Africa, starting from Cape Town. With a hired car we visited all the sights including of course Kirstenbosch botanic garden and the Cape. We visited many of her old friends who had farms or vineyards, before setting off on the garden route, taking in nature reserves and stopping off in Knysna to spend a few days with her oldest friends. Ending up in Port Elizabeth, and hoping for the scenic rail journey back to Cape Town, we were frustrated by violent weather which washed away bridges and closed the line. Return was by ancient bus and then rail from George.

Peggy's oldest friend was Helen Saunders who lived in Cape Town. Always adventurous they came to stay with us in Great Yeldham and I took them flying in my aeroplane. We kept in close contact with Peggy. She came to a party which I organised in Bramber for Ruth's 90th birthday; Beryl and some friends of Ruth were also present. Then we visited Peggy for her birthday but then she was very ill and it was almost a farewell visit for she died shortly afterwards.

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#### **Peter Chapman**

Staff member, Director and Managing Director, 1983-2003

*Leading for Waymark*

I was associated with Waymark Holidays from 1975 to 2003. Now that five years have passed since I was last in the Waymark office, it seems a good time to think back and pick out the most relevant memories.

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In 1974 I was working for Rank Xerox Ltd in Gloucestershire. A colleague named Barbara Snell was doing some translation work for a new project and we found that we had a knowledge of French and German in common. Then Barbara told me how she had led pony-trekking holidays for Ramblers Holidays and told me that her predecessor in that role was Peggy Hounslow who had now just started up a new company, Waymark Holidays, and needed leaders for its walking holidays. So a few months later, in September 1975, after an interview with Vincent one evening downstairs at 295 Lillie Road, I found myself in charge of five clients for a week at St Anthème in the Auvergne.

We flew with Dan Air; I suppose they were the forerunners of today's budget airlines. What they certainly had in common was the use of small airports in parts of rural France which were of interest to walkers. The flight we used operated a triangular route: Gatwick-Clermont Ferrand-Perpignan-Gatwick. Dan Air did not have the reputation for punctuality of today's budget airlines. It was hours late arriving at Clermont Ferrand to pick us up and then we had to go down to Perpignan before returning to Gatwick. However, over the years Waymark formed a good working partnership with Dan Air until they went out of business in 1992.

I led holidays for Waymark in 1976 and subsequent years, gradually increasing the grade as my confidence increased. I was a less experienced walker than many of the clients. When I led the Pitztal holiday in 1979, I had never before spent a night in a mountain hut and then had an alpine start with a guide to ascend the Wildspitze. However I spoke good German and there at least I had an advantage over the clients.

I did not lead a holiday in 1981, using my time instead to be a Waymark client on a skiing holiday in Dobbiaco – it was to be the first of many return trips to Dobbiaco over 25 years. I discovered that I enjoyed cross-country skiing and was quickly proficient at it. I travelled again as a client to Gjøvik in 1982 and on the Black Forest Tour in 1983; but in those two years I also led a walking holiday, so my involvement with Waymark was becoming more intense. In fact, during those years from 1975 to 1983, I developed a kind of inkling that Waymark Holidays was a small company worth cultivating and getting to know better, although I had nothing specific in mind.

That may have been in my mind, however, when in July 1983, just before leading Titlis to Jungfrau, I volunteered to go to the Lillie Road office for a briefing instead of the usual practice of receiving a telephone call. I told Vincent that evening that Rank Xerox was making large numbers of staff redundant and he asked me what I would do if I lost my job. I can remember every word of my reply: I told him that I would go knocking on the door of everyone I knew to see if they had a job and that included his door. I don't know why I said that but it just came out.

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### *Working for Waymark*

After I returned from Switzerland there was a letter from Vincent: was I serious about the idea of working for Waymark? He and Peggy were thinking about the future, now that the company was ten years old. To cut a long story short, I negotiated a redundancy package with compensation of a year's salary tax free, agreed to buy one quarter of the shares and started at Lillie Road on 5 December 1983. I lived in lodgings in Richmond with Jill Hollingworth, her husband John and son Guy until March the following year.

It was no small step, leaving Rank Xerox with its pension scheme and company car for Waymark Holidays. It meant moving house from Cheltenham, and my wife, Pat, and I decided upon Gerrards Cross in Buckinghamshire. Our two children were 8 and 10. Although the manufacturing industry was in severe recession, and that was why I wanted to leave Rank Xerox, I didn't know Peggy and Vincent that well and there was a risk it would not work out between us. I predicted that the travel industry was poised for growth. Exchange controls had been removed by the Thatcher government in 1980, and thanks to the Falklands war in 1982 she was re-elected in 1983 despite the growing numbers of unemployed. I was concerned that a future Labour government would reimpose exchange controls and kill off the growth in travel. However Pat was willing to help reduce the risk: she got a full time teaching post in Beaconsfield so we had another income. It took about two years before I was sure that I had made the right choice.

The Waymark office was unconventional to say the least. Peggy and Vincent would bicker in a way that made an outsider think they could not possibly work together. Having started the company and been its only full time employees for the early years sometimes made them rather dictatorial about how things should be done, and reluctant to listen to advice. I remember one day Peggy decided that the tickets for some departure should have been posted already but Steve Green, who handled ticket despatch, was not there that day, so Peggy decided she would organize it, got all the tickets written and posted out. The next day Steve saw that the wrong coupons had been extracted from the tickets, so the whole lot had to be retrieved from the clients and the error put right.

Gradually we modernized the business. I persuaded Peggy that our clients hated currency surcharges and that we should buy our currency forward and guarantee our prices. It was more difficult to persuade Peggy that we should not refuse bookings from women if there were already more women than men booked on a holiday. For a woman who had a forceful personality, and had led holidays for Ramblers, Peggy had some old-fashioned ideas about women's roles. I remember her once criticizing me for appointing a young female leader to a hut tour with several older men in the group. 'The men won't have any confidence in a female leader!', she said.

I worked in the Lillie Road cellar for seven long years. We worked long hours and it was hard work. The four months from November to February were the worst for me. After trying

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public transport to get to work I eventually settled on driving. I left home at 06.30 and arrived at 07.10. In the evening I left the office about 6 and arrived home about 7. During the winter I saw daylight just for a few minutes if I went across the road to the bank or post office. Seeing daylight all day on Saturdays and Sundays seemed strange to me. Looking back on those seven years, I particularly regret that I have so few memories of my children while they were in their early teens.

There were several reasons why we didn't move. Even after Vincent stopped working, Peggy lived in Chiswick three or four nights a week and didn't want an office move. We were so busy that the effort of making a move seemed insurmountable. The rent was very low and the company was always run on a shoestring so the idea of paying two or three times the rent for something better was never going to be undertaken lightly.

### *The Slough years*

Eventually things changed. Peggy was 65 in 1990 and decided to reduce her hours still further and sell the Chiswick property. We found that the staff we recruited in London only wanted to stay a year or two and we were constantly having to find new people. We moved to Slough in November 1990 and never regretted it. There had been a time when we thought having a London telephone number (ours was 01 385 5015) gave us some status and credibility. However in the late eighties it changed to 0171 385 5015, then when we went to Slough we had 01753 516477; we couldn't believe that we had ever put any value on the London number.

I remember vividly during the first year or so in Slough how I would chuckle to myself at my easy journey home from work. I used to cycle during British Summer Time, five-and-a-half miles each way in about 25 minutes.

It was during the next seven years at Slough until I relinquished the post of managing director on 1 May 1997 that we commenced what I now think of as the golden age of Waymark. The cross-country skiing grew faster than the walking until they were almost equal in size, but the skiing was crammed into four months of the year, whereas the walking was spread over eight months at least.

### *Working with airlines*

We used Dan Air to fly clients into Innsbruck airport for transfer to various resorts in the Austrian Tirol and the Italian South Tirol. Then Dan Air went bankrupt in 1992 and Air UK took over the route, but they had problems making it pay as a scheduled service and told us we would have to buy seats on a charter basis to continue. We always operated on the basis of taking minimal risks, so it was new to us to pay for aircraft seats in advance not knowing if we would be able to sell them or not.

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However, for the winters of 1994-95 and 1995-96, we were committed to 55 seats every Saturday for ten weeks from Stansted to Innsbruck. By agreeing to work on a charter basis, we not only had the financial risk of buying seats, regardless of whether we used them, but we took on risks of flight diversions and picking up the pieces if the aircraft could not land at Innsbruck because of bad weather.

It happened on the very first flight just before Christmas 1994 that the aircraft landed at Munich because of bad weather at Innsbruck. I spent the evening arranging transport and meals for the clients. They all had dinner at the Wienerhof in Trins at about 11pm and then set off for other destinations such as Dobbiaco, arriving at about 2am.

Funnily enough it never happened again, for which I was very thankful. The arrangement with Air UK lasted two winters and then they no longer wished to continue with it. Fortunately our flight broker came up with a contract with Tirolean Airways, who had an 80-seater Fokker available on Sunday mornings. This proved to be an admirable arrangement and it lasted from the winter of 1996-97 to 2002-03, Waymark's last winter of independent operations.

I have to say that I am still proud of how we managed that charter operation and the high quality service we provided to our clients. A number of factors came into play:

- Tirolean Airways were used to operating high quality scheduled services, e.g. from Innsbruck to Vienna and Zurich, and maintained those standards on the Waymark flights, with good hot meals, complimentary drinks and newspapers, and our clients loved the cabin service.
- Stansted Airport, at least in 1996 and the next couple of years, had plenty of spare capacity and had not yet become engulfed by the boom in budget airline travel. Consequently check-in was a quick and relaxed experience and arrival back at Stansted was equally tranquil.
- Innsbruck Airport on a Sunday was even quieter and our clients passed through the airport in just a few minutes.
- Innsbruck Airport is hemmed in by mountains which means that take-offs and landings can be quite an experience. However the Tirolean pilots were using their home airport and it was my impression that this knowledge allowed them to operate in weather conditions that would have caused other pilots to divert to Munich. We enjoyed very good timekeeping all the time we used Tirolean.
- We used very reliable coach operators for our transfers to and from Innsbruck and there would usually be half a dozen leaders waiting for the clients to arrive. The leaders organized themselves in a very slick operation to get the clients through the airport, onto the coaches and away. Some of the leaders who worked so well together doing this were

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Bob Mason, Mary and Martin Campbell, David Cooper, Katherine Hurst and Albert Callewaert; they and others were a formidable management team.

- The aircraft started from Innsbruck at 10am, flew to Stansted and was back in Innsbruck again five hours later. Clients arriving back at Stansted had plenty of time for their onward journey home, and clients got to their destinations with time to collect their skis and relax before dinner the first evening. After a couple of years' experience of doing this we refined the arrangements even further. While the leaders and coaches had five hours to wait at Innsbruck, there was time to send one coach up to Munich Airport with clients flying on the Lufthansa Manchester-Munich service. Although we took the risk of making it too complicated and it all going horribly wrong, in fact the leaders took it in their stride and made it work admirably. It was a really sophisticated operation.

### *Kvitåvatn*

The history of Waymark Holidays and Kvitåvatn Fjellstoge are totally intertwined. When Waymark was being set up, Rod Tuck, an ex-Marines officer and ex-Olympic biathlon competitor, was also just starting his venture on the plateau above the deep Rjukan valley and below Gausta, the highest mountain in southern Norway.

Waymark's first clients went to Kvitåvatn on 1 March 1975. It wasn't an experience for the faint-hearted, but it *was* an experience for those who loved a rugged outdoor life. One of those first clients was John Frith, a retired Army officer, whom I met on my own first trip to Kvitåvatn in April 1984. He and his family were already regulars of ten seasons' standing by that stage and remained so for another ten to fifteen years.

That was the thing about Kvitåvatn: if you liked it, you were passionate about it. The camaraderie, the passion for skiing, the simple, good food, the remoteness from normal town life – all made it incomparable. It became one of the top two or three key centres in the programme and held that place year after year.

Besides client loyalty, another remarkable aspect of Kvitåvatn was the British community that lived there. Rod's business model (although he never called it that!) involved employing enthusiastic young people who wanted to ski without it costing them a lot of money. Basically, you got your board and lodging in exchange for four hours work per day.

Those who got up at 2am to bake the day's delicious selection of wholegrain bread did not regard it as a hardship: by 10 they were out skiing for the rest of the day. The staff were usually British or Danish. The children of some Waymark clients went to work there; my own daughter worked there one Christmas just before her 16th birthday, then returned for a season as a ski instructor/leader after graduating in her early twenties.

Rod was too generous for his own good. He loved to be surrounded by enthusiastic young people, but they ate him out of house and home; they literally ate the profits of the business!

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When the Lithuanian ski team wanted to train for the 1994 Olympics in Lillehammer, Rod invited them to come to stay at Kvitåvatn, but in 1992 (when an earlier credit crunch drove interest rates in Norway up to 17%) Rod was paying 25% of his turnover out in bank interest. In late April of that year, at the close of the skiing season, Rod had had enough and shut the business down, owing the local banks 5 million kroner. I don't think he ever repaid any of the original loans he took out to get the business started.

A year later the banks were able to sell the buildings for just over 2 million kroner to an ad hoc company of 113 enthusiastic skiers, orienteers and friends of Kvitåvatn in Denmark. The Fjellstoge reopened for business at Christmas 1993. Over the winter of 1992-93 Waymark had kept a toe-hold in the market by offering holidays at the nearby Gaustablikk Høyfjellshotell, thanks to a lot of hard work by Trevor Dowe and Marianne Folmer, an Anglo-Danish couple, who had made Kvitåvatn their home some years previously through a shared interest in skiing and leading for Waymark Holidays.

One very fundamental change occurred between Rod's 'old regime' and the new Danish regime. Under Rod we sent the clients to Kvitåvatn and he organized all the skiing and leadership. The new Danish owners did not want to continue with that, so Kvitåvatn became more similar to other Waymark centres where we provided the leaders. Fortunately, during the transitional period, we could rely on leaders of terrific dedication who knew what they were doing and were already very familiar with the area. Some names spring to mind: Trevor and Marianne for starters; Sarah Tauwhare, a New Zealander, niece of Philip Yatman who had been chief instructor under Rod; Katherine Hurst, who had skied at Kvitåvatn for 15 years or so; and Ilse Alt, a young Dutch skier who was hugely popular with our clients.

Then in 1995 we started to write a set of leaders' instructions, which enabled leaders unfamiliar with the area to go there and do what was required. Katherine Hurst and I skied around for a week; she had the knowledge, I wrote the words. We had further contributions from Leslie Downing and Sarah Tauwhare. That was a start. The next year Dave Cooper expressed an interest in leading at Kvitåvatn and he and I explored some routes together, refined the notes, and so it went on from there.

The Danish shareholders appointed Marianne Folmer to be the manager of the Fjellstoge. Another key figure with links to the previous regime was Bjarne Kure, who had helped Rod bring his finances on to a sounder footing. From my observations, the Fjellstoge is now going on from strength to strength.

### *As seen on TV*

In 2002 the BBC television programme 'Holiday on a Shoestring' asked to feature our Alpujarras holiday, to be presented by Mariella Frostrup, travelling with her sister Daniela. We had a hunch that it would be a good idea when the BBC proposed it, although it cost us about £2000 in airtickets and accommodation to send the team and the presenters to Spain. I

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remember feeling pleased with myself that when the contract was drawn up I only offered 5 flights with 20 kg of luggage allowance for each person because when the camera crew checked in they had huge amounts of equipment which cost them several hundred pounds in excess baggage charges.

The BBC warned us to be prepared for a big telephone response, so half a dozen of us stayed after work and I brought a small TV set in to the office. Within 30 seconds of our telephone number appearing on the screen all four lines were taking brochure requests and that continued for 30 minutes with no let up at all. In total we took about 150 requests that evening but even more surprising was that within 24 hours or so we had a couple of hundred email requests even though our email address was not broadcast.

It was very interesting for a small company such as Waymark to see how powerful national TV advertising could be. I say advertising because that was what it was, even though it was on the BBC. The BBC offered us "free" advertising in return for paying for the flights and accommodation to get everyone there. We had very good bookings for the Alpujarras and other late summer holidays that year and put on some extra departures as a result.

### *The 'good old days'*

When clients and leaders talk to me about the 'good old days' of Waymark Holidays it is those years which they are generally referring to, years with high levels of client satisfaction and outstanding teamwork with our leaders. I was proud to be the managing director of that operation up to May 1997 when Stuart Montgomery took over from me and then from June 2001 to December 2002 when Stuart again took over from me on the transfer of ownership to First Choice. (Bob Mason and I stayed on until March 2003 to supervise the completion of the winter programme.)

Before finishing this little monologue, there are two other happy memories from the final years to record. Both concern the staff outings at Christmas 2001 and Christmas 2002.

In December 2001, all the office staff flew one Saturday morning to Venice, had a walking tour led by Jim Wood, caught the train from Venice to Fortezza, then continued by minibus to Trins for a festive meal and overnight at the Wienerhof. The next morning we flew home on the Tirolean flight going empty to Stansted to pick up the first clients of the winter. It was a lovely weekend.

The next year our staff outing was planned for the weekend after the handover to First Choice and we went to Lucerne, organised by Sharon Fullerton, flying with Swissair, travelling on a lake steamer, using the Rigi railway and emerging through cloud at lake level into bright sunshine and a wonderful mountain panorama on the summit.

It was a memorable way of saying thank you to the staff, not only for their efforts in 2002, but for all their time with Waymark Holidays.

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## **Martin Read**

Staff member and director, 1986-1999

### *What's in a name?*

When I first joined Waymark in 1986 Peter Chapman was the managing director. On my first morning I had the honour of finding that he had allocated me a desk in the dungeon, sorry basement, next to his. He told me that he would sort out some jobs for me, but no sooner had he done so than the phone started to ring. It was Monday morning, and as I was soon to find out, all hell broke loose on Monday mornings: leaders would phone with holiday reports, clients would phone with brochure requests or holiday bookings, etc.

After about an hour, during which Peter had been on the phone continuously, he threw me a pile of brochures, telling me to look through them to see what our competitors were offering. The very first one that I opened was a Ramblers Holidays brochure. I knew that Waymark started operating in 1974 as a result of Noel Vincent and Peggy Hounslow leaving Ramblers to start their own business, but I had never previously seen a Ramblers brochure.

Imagine my surprise when, opening up the brochure, I immediately saw a foreword written by none other than Peter Chapman, Chief Executive. My mind boggled: how on earth did Peter find the time to juggle between running two tour operating companies, not to mention the question of the undoubted conflict of interests as he tried to steer two closely competing businesses to profitability. The thought suddenly occurred that he might be doing the two jobs in tandem clandestinely; perhaps he told each company that he had to work from home on certain days when in fact he was raking in two handsome salaries.

I seriously considered reporting my findings to Peggy Hounslow, who was still working part-time, but she was away. In the end I decided to bite the bullet and confront Peter directly – when he eventually managed to get away from the phone. He had a good laugh at my ignorance! Apparently there was another Peter Chapman, who had been appointed to the top job at Ramblers a short time before (he later moved to another competitor, HF Holidays, and ran that company for many years). I often wondered whether any of our clients had spotted this doppelgänger, but to the best of my knowledge nobody ever queried us about it.

### *Blink and you'll miss her*

In 1990, just before the move to Slough, I blinked and almost missed the shortest ever career at Waymark. A young French girl came for a few weeks of work experience. Unfortunately, her first day coincided with the delivery of the brochure, so she spent the whole of her first morning stuffing envelopes. She failed to return after lunch!

### *Millionaire's Row*

Slough does not seem the likeliest place to harbour budding millionaires, but two of Britain's wealthiest men started their spiralling climb to fame in an office immediately below ours.

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Simon Jordan and Andrew Briggs were founders of the Pocket Phone Shop, and their very first shop was on the ground floor of our small block. They moved in not long after Waymark had moved to Slough, and it was clear that the company was going places by the model of car that the two owners were driving. Saloon cars soon gave way to luxury sports cars fitted with all the latest technology. These of course proved to be a lure for the criminal classes of Slough, and it was not uncommon to hear alarms going off in the car park below as kids tried to break into the vehicles for the latest mobile phones and CD players.

It was no surprise that the company expanded exponentially, opening new branches around the country on a monthly basis, and after only a few years the business was sold to a competitor, earning Simon Jordan a place in the Times Top 100 wealthiest men. Later he decided to spend his money on Crystal Palace Football Club.

### *Travel Disaster 1: Dobbiaco January 1996*

One of the most worrying aspects of running a tour operating business is the potential for disasters with travel arrangements. Chief among these is missing a flight, which can potentially be very costly. During my time at Waymark this happened on a number of occasions, usually on busy weekends in the winter when main roads into the Alps were always extremely busy.

In fact I was involved in a case of a missed flight myself in January 1996, after a cross-country ski holiday at Dobbiaco with a Waymark group over New Year. Most of the group were travelling home from Innsbruck on a plane chartered especially for Waymark, however about 15 clients were booked on flights from Verona as the charter flight was full. My wife, Lynn, and I were also flying home from Verona the following day, so had arranged to stay in the city for one night. Although not actually leading the party, I took responsibility for them on the bus transfer to Verona.

The first hour of the journey passed uneventfully, but we hit heavy traffic as soon as we reached the autostrada leading south to Verona. It appeared to be simply sheer volume of traffic, but then the driver informed me that there were also major roadworks on the motorway, and that there was no alternative route. Even though we had allowed 4½ hours for what was normally a 3-hour journey, it soon became apparent that we were likely to miss the British Airways flight at the pace we were travelling, so I phoned the airline's office at Verona using the driver's mobile. I explained carefully that there were 15 passengers on the coach, and could they hold the flight until we arrived? The manager was non-committal but said she would do her best.

Eventually we arrived at the airport at precisely the time that the flight was due to take off. As we ran to the check-in desk we could see the plane pulling back from the stand! I asked if it could be stopped but to no avail. The next flight to London was not until the following afternoon, however that flight was full. The best option was to transfer the party to Milan

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where they could get a flight the next morning. British Airways were very helpful with arranging a minibus to take the group to Milan early next morning, however I had to organise an airport hotel for the group in Verona. This was all sorted after a couple of hours. Waymark had to foot the bill of nearly £2000 for the overnight stay, dinner and minibus to Milan, but fortunately British Airways made no charge for the change of flight.

### *Travel Disaster 2: Blizzards cause chaos*

Most of the travel disasters involved groups returning to the UK from the Alps, but one winter (it may have been 1991) we had serious problems with travel delays to departures from the UK on a busy February weekend due to heavy snowfall. The snow had started to fall in the north in midweek, but by the Friday the whole country was paralysed. Although the motorways and major roads were kept open, many towns and rural villages, especially in the Pennines, were cut off. Clients began phoning us for travel advice early on Friday, and by lunchtime our phone lines were all constantly engaged.

It was clear that, although the worst of the snow had passed, clients would be struggling to reach airports. Also we had no idea whether flights would be operating normally over the weekend. We therefore decided that we needed as many staff as possible to be in the office over the weekend to field calls from clients. I spent the whole of Saturday and Sunday in the office. Fortunately most people showed a bit of resource by travelling early, often staying overnight close to the airport with friends or relatives. In the end, about a dozen people from a similar number of groups failed to travel. Unfortunately this included one of the leaders, who made absolutely no attempt to travel, saying that it was impossible to leave his village; he never led another Waymark group!

### *Leaders*

When the 70 years age limit was introduced, most leaders accepted it, but some quite clearly tried to circumvent it. One leader, whom I shall call R, was without doubt one of our most popular ski and walking leaders. His enthusiasm for the job was legendary, and a bagful of mail was received from clients every year saying what a wonderful leader he was. When R reached 69 he was informed that this would have to be his final year of leading. He pleaded to be kept on, but was told that the rule of retirement had to be strictly enforced in order to be fair to everybody. Soon afterwards letters and phone calls started to arrive from R's fan club exhorting Waymark to waive the rule! These carried on for several months, and it was obvious who was fuelling these clients. Eventually R came to accept gracefully that he would have to hang up his boots, and continued to travel with us as a client for several years afterwards.

Another long-standing leader, whom I shall call P, had led almost from the start of Waymark. According to the details on file, P was due to reach the official retirement age in the late 1990s. However, some information came to light, suggesting that he was in fact

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already well over 70! It eventually transpired that the files had been wrong, and that subsequently P had been economical with the truth about his age knowing that he would be forced to retire. Fortunately, when confronted with the evidence, P accepted the inevitable with good grace.

### *Difficult client 1*

Although 99% of our clients were good company and fitted in well with the group ethos, occasionally you would get an oddball or difficult character. I well remember leading a cross-country ski trip in Finnish Lapland using pulkas (sleds) to carry food and cooking gear. Snow conditions were particularly difficult for waxing the skis (most people use waxable skis in Scandinavia) as temperatures hovered around zero.

One of the party was having terrible difficulty one morning in getting any grip with his skis, especially as he was also pulling one of the pulkas that day – we shared the burden of the three pulkas among the group. He was cursing everything and everybody. Eventually he stopped in the middle of a frozen lake that we were crossing, took off his skis, and theatrically flung them to the ground in a fit of pique. He was going to abandon them right there, but I managed to persuade him that it was not a good idea given that we still had several days of skiing ahead of us. So instead he fixed them to his pulka and completed the rest of that day's route on foot.

Later on in the holiday his evident volatility re-emerged when I realised that I had taken a wrong turning at a junction a couple of minutes earlier. I stopped the group, and admitting my mistake said that we should turn back. This client immediately started to lambast me, saying that I was the worst leader he had ever experienced, and that I had no idea where we were going. I was completely flummoxed, and mindful of not inflaming the situation further, decided to say nothing. Fortunately the rest of the group quickly sprung to my defence, telling this client that he was completely out of order, and thus diffusing a potentially difficult situation.

Further similar, minor incidents occurred during the holiday, and it was amazing to learn that he was a community policeman at home. On subsequent trips he succeeded in upsetting several other clients and leaders with his behaviour, so we finally had to 'blacklist' him.

### *Difficult client 2*

There was another client who regularly came on holiday with us each year, who was notorious for his non-stop chatting. He was a very amiable character, and in no way offensive, but he would not shut up! The problem was made worse by the fact that he insisted on sharing a room rather than taking a single, thus subjecting his unfortunate roommate to a constant barrage of inconsequential small talk.

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We were eventually alerted to the seriousness of this by a leader who found himself sharing with said client. After the holiday he reported that he had found it virtually impossible to do his normal evening preparation for the following day because the client would not give him any peace. After that we delicately told the client each year that he must have a single room.

### *Difficult client 3*

Occasionally we would get unusual dietary requests from clients. These would range from a straightforward vegetarian diet to serious allergies. Usually we would do our best to accommodate them, though we would warn clients about the risks of going to certain hotels or countries.

One day, just before Christmas, I took a call from a client who was travelling to our Trins centre in Austria for a cross-country ski holiday, just two days before departure. The client (who was new to Waymark) informed me that he and his wife had some special dietary requests for the hotel. I enquired what these were, and was advised that because they were so complicated the couple had typed out a menu for each day that they wanted the hotel to prepare for them. I pointed out as patiently as I could that it was unreasonable for them to expect any hotel to cook special meals to order on a half board holiday, particularly with only two days' notice. The client then subjected me to a tirade about the importance of client care and my unbending attitude. I admit that at this point I lost my temper with him, and refused point blank to make any request to the hotel, saying that I would rather refund their money in full if they were unhappy. I was actually quite relieved when he accepted my offer, as I could foresee that this couple were very likely to be making all sort of unacceptable demands on the leader and hotel on arrival.

### *Litigation 1*

It is a sad fact that our society has become increasingly litigious over the years, as people have become encouraged to pursue claims by stories in the press and on TV of huge awards given by courts to successful claimants. Not surprisingly the holiday industry was one of the first to suffer, though it has to be said that many tour operators invited legal suits through blatant mis-selling and poor quality-control.

Waymark was not immune to the trend, though I believe that the company always tried to market its holidays accurately and honestly, and always tried to deal with any complaints fairly.

One claim was made by a client who had travelled to the Alpujarras in Spain. Apparently he had opened the window in his bedroom (the window opened inwards), sat on the bed, then hit his head on the window frame when getting up again. From the report made by the tour leader it seemed clear that this man had suffered nothing more than bruising and minor cuts, but on return to the UK threatened to initiate legal proceedings on the grounds that the hotel should not have fitted windows that opened internally. He seemed to overlook the fact that

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he had been rather careless. Some brief correspondence passed between us, after which the matter was dropped, but it was a portent of what might become more common in the future.

### *Litigation 2*

Another case that comes to mind is that of a cross-country ski holiday in Ramsau (Austria), which was advertised for beginners and those with some previous experience. There were two leaders appointed for the group, one of whom was to look after the beginners. Snow conditions were rather icy as there had been no fresh snow. The leader took the group on the first morning to a completely flat area to show them how to put their skis on and off, before starting to teach them the basics of skiing.

It was sheer bad luck that two of the party fell quite heavily during this first session, and both suffered minor fractures to the lower arm. Of course neither was able to ski again for the rest of the week. After their return home, we received two separate claims from these clients threatening legal action on the grounds of negligence by the leader, saying that he should not have taken beginners on to 'dangerous ground'. It was clear that the two injured parties had colluded to try to get some compensation out of the company. We vigorously defended the leader's actions and handling of the incidents, and the claims never went to court, but again it highlighted the fact that some people were increasingly looking at tour operators as a cash cow for any misfortunes that might occur on holiday.

### *Researching holidays 1*

One of the so-called perks of working for a company like Waymark is that you get the occasional opportunity of researching a new holiday. Most people assume that it is quite glamorous jetting around the world to sample different hotels, culinary styles, and exploring new routes. The reality is somewhat different. Usually you only have a few days to research a holiday, and you have to pack in a lot of driving and legwork to cover all the necessary angles. It can be very tiring, lonely, and at times even dangerous.

I often researched high mountain trips, partly because that was the type of holiday that I most enjoyed. And I often found myself in quite remote places on my own. One holiday that I had to research was called Picos Encantados in the Spanish Pyrenees. I was due to lead the very first departure, but nobody had properly researched the walks, so I was sent out a week early. I had to find enough walks for a fortnight's holiday but only had one week to do this.

The hotel we were using was situated just outside the National Park boundary, but most of the best walks were inside the park, so I had to take one of the jeeps that provided access to the park each morning and evening. Because it was graded as a high mountain centre, I had to find lots of good mountain walks including some peaks. And the walks needed to be of five to seven hours duration. I ended up walking for almost ten hours each day in the attempt to cover as much ground as possible. Although I was young and very fit, after six days I was totally knackered. I remember that I had trouble getting upstairs to my room after dinner on

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the sixth night, and decided that I had to have a rest day before the group arrived, otherwise the leader would not be fit for purpose!

### *Researching holidays 2*

I was particularly keen to develop some long haul tours for Waymark, so I was usually delegated to research these. One of the first was the Peru and Bolivia trip that we successfully ran for many years, even during those when the Shining Path terrorists were very active.

When I flew to Lima with Lufthansa, I had a very tight connection time in Frankfurt, and unfortunately my main luggage missed the onward flight. When I arrived in Lima I was told that the bag would be flown out on the next flight two days hence, and would be sent on to Cusco, where I was joining a trek organised for an Australian group by a local operator owned by a British couple. I bought a few spare clothes in Cusco hoping that my luggage, which contained all my trekking gear including boots and sleeping bag, would duly arrive. It didn't. Calls to the Lufthansa office in Lima brought further promises that would subsequently fail to be honoured. Eventually I had to set off on a high altitude trek for ten days wearing a pair of tennis shoes (it was impossible to buy or hire European size boots in Cusco at that time) and with an assortment of begged, borrowed, and bought equipment. Fortunately I managed to survive with this minimalist gear.

When I arrived back in Lima I was told that my bag had arrived and that it would be put on my flight back to the UK. I arrived at Heathrow eagerly awaiting my reunion with my beloved trekking gear. But what was this on the carousel? A pitiful limp rucksack was circling, with huge slashes down the back. I looked inside: all that was left was a pair of walking boots, the rest having been snaffled by Peruvian customs. Clearly my boots didn't fit any self respecting Peruvian!

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### **Stuart Montgomery**

Staff member, director and managing director, 1990-2001 and 2002-2005

### *The old man with the red nose*

The old man's red nose was like a blind cobbler's thumb. Caused by too much standing around on this open hillside, I guessed, and on even frostier mornings than this one. I leaned my skis against the cramped wooden booth he shared with a gas brazier.

'How much for my group to use your practice-slope for an hour this afternoon?' I asked. Or at least that was what I hoped I had asked. With my halting German I could never be quite sure.

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‘Normally it is twenty-five Schillings for twenty rides on the lift,’ he said, ‘but it is quiet today, so you can have two hours for that price, with as many rides as you like.’

It sounded very reasonable. I said I would tell the group, who were at lunch in the Gasthof along the road, and come back at one-thirty.

‘And your group – they are all English like yourself?’ he asked. I told him the group members were English but I was Scottish.

‘In that case *you* don’t need to pay.’ He smiled for the first time. ‘My wife was Scottish, from Govan.’

‘So we should be speaking English?’ I asked hopefully. But no, he had never learned. Soon after their wedding they had visited Scotland but decided against settling there. Then there had been the war, and then one thing and then another, and they had never returned.

‘But your wife,’ I asked. ‘Did she never miss her own country?’ He opened the door of the booth and came out into the sunshine. He stretched out a hand at nothing in particular, wanting me to take in the whole valley, which narrowed as it climbed westwards. In all directions high jagged ridges formed the horizon. Today, with a deep cover of new snow and under a cloudless sky, it was utterly beautiful.

‘Of course she missed it,’ he said; ‘especially at first. But where would you rather live – Glasgow or here in the Alps?’

It was a very pertinent question. I had been here in the Lechtal, a valley in Austria’s Tirol, for two weeks, on a working holiday teaching cross-country skiing. I was due to go home the next day, and for me too that meant Glasgow. But I was far from enthusiastic about going home. Nothing horrible awaited me. Nothing remarkable lurked in my personal or professional CV. Single bloke, thirty-five, good education, nice house, secure job. Okay, bumpy romantic history, but not noticeably worse than that of any of the friends I shared my weekends with – usually wild camping in the Highlands and ticking off the Munros. However, it all felt a little dull and unfulfilling. And it had felt a little dull and unfulfilling for quite a long time.

So the afternoon skiing class on the slope in the Lechtal was not the best I have ever conducted. True, by the end of the session everyone was snowploughing reasonably well and one or two had moved on to stem turns. But my poor concentration made it hard for them. It was a problem that grew worse each time we drew nearer to the foot of the piste, nearer to the old man with the red nose and the unsettling questions.

That was in February 1988. By the following Christmas I had resigned my job, sold the house and scrapped the hated Datsun, and I was teaching cross-country skiing in Kandersteg in the Bernese Oberland. Waymark, my employers in the Lechtal, had kindly agreed to help me fill a rather belated gap year. There would be six weeks in Switzerland, then some time in

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Austria, and then I'd move to Norway for the rest of the winter season. Then in May I'd go to Andalucia to lead walking parties. By June I would be in the Southern Cévennes in France, and then I'd move up to the Alps for the summer to do two hard months in the high mountains. And then, tanned and fit and speaking fluent French and German, I would return to the UK and try to merge back into normal life.

And that is pretty much how it turned out – except that I stayed out for a second winter season and my German never got very good. And the intention to merge back into normal life was subverted when, at the end of the second winter, Waymark offered me a 'job in the office' which was negotiated up to a directorship. In May 1990 I started work in the office in Fulham. Six months later we moved the company to Slough.

### *Growing the company*

In a small company you have to be a generalist, but there is always some scope for specialisation. From the beginning, part of my own remit was to help develop the company's computer systems – or, rather, to introduce some. Waymark was a child of its time and in 1990 its hardware inventory amounted to one Amstrad word processor. Invoices were typed on a manual typewriter. Client details were kept on index-cards in little plastic boxes: red for summer, blue for winter. To book flights we would call the airline and be held circling in a telephonic stack until an agent was free to talk to us. We wrote all the airline tickets by hand.

Within a few years we had introduced a computerised reservation system to handle mailings, holiday bookings and invoices. Then we signed up to Amadeus, a flight reservation system that allowed us to book seats online and print tickets – no more writing by hand! Then we streamlined our brochure production: by this time desktop publishing software had become more affordable and we bought the QuarkXpress package - no more galley proofs!

I also involved myself in the training of leaders. Waymark's founders had come from Ramblers Holidays and they had brought across the idea of using volunteer, unpaid leaders. I was never entirely comfortable with that. For one thing, although the volunteer leaders had lots of enthusiasm their skills did not automatically match up. So as early as 1991 we ran basic navigation courses for the walking leaders. Then we signed up to the National Navigation Awards Scheme in 1994 and helped many of the leaders through the bronze and silver awards. At the same time as this, colleagues were working on improving the technical and teaching skills of the ski leaders. And we re-introduced the weekend conferences that had been tried in the late '80s to give leaders a chance to share skills and experience, and to give them a forum in which to suggest improvements and new developments.

Over the years our range of holidays expanded, and so did the number of bookings. In the financial year 1998-99 we took just over 4,700 bookings, up from about 3,950 in 1990. Other specialist travel companies grew much more quickly in the same period, and we could have done so too but we were kept small by two factors.

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The first, a healthy one, was a desire to stay close to our clients and our suppliers. We were on first-name terms with many clients and we regarded many hoteliers as personal friends.

The less healthy factor was that we, the company directors, were either unwilling or unable to finance further growth. Mainly this related to the need to tie up personal capital in a bond required by the Civil Aviation Authority: the higher the company turnover, the larger the bond needed to be. Some of the directors were now in their late seventies, however, and the prospect of locking up personal wealth in order to fund long-term growth was naturally unattractive. With hindsight – always a luxury item – we should have seen in this issue a more general problem about the future of the company.

Some of the expansion that we did achieve was in fact forced upon us by outside influences. Our winter business in the Alps, for example, was seriously threatened in the mid-nineties by the cessation of direct scheduled flights between the UK and Innsbruck. So, with a deep breath, we organised our own charter flights to Innsbruck. Initially we shared an aircraft with Crystal Holidays, but when Crystal was acquired by a larger company\* we took an even deeper breath and became sole charterer of an 80-seater. Our charter season ran from Christmas to the end of February and that gave us the challenge of selling high volumes of holidays throughout the traditionally low-season month of January. Previously we would have regarded that as an impossible challenge, but now we just had to get on and find ways of meeting it.

*[\* Crystal became part of the Thomson organisation, which was later taken over by TUI and thus now a stablemate of Waymark! Ed.]*

But if the charter flights were, by a long way, our greatest single cause of grey hair, they also provided some occasional mirth, like the time our aircraft's between-flight cleaning went awry. Our UK-bound service, in mid-morning, was the plane's second flight of the day. Its first was a short hop from Linz and on the turnaround at Innsbruck the toilets were emptied, using a sort of large Hoover apparatus. The Hoover could be set to either 'suck' or 'blow'. Accidents will happen and on that morning the person in charge of choosing the setting chose wrongly. It took a week to get the plane back into service. It shouldn't have been funny, but it was.

Other significant company growth came about largely from increasing the number of double-parties – in which an oversized group would have two leaders offering two different grades of activity. Around 1990 this was something we usually did only at Kvitåvatn, but then we tried it at other Norwegian centres – Sjusjøen, Hallingen and Synnfjell. And we tried it too in the Alps and Dolomites, at Trins and Dobbiaco. It proved popular with clients and leaders, and eventually we had several centres that each handled over 200 clients each season. It was big business for a small company.

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### *Getting around*

Holidays don't organize themselves and we spent long hours in the office – especially in winter, when each year I would anticipate, without enthusiasm, an unbroken run of 70-hour weeks from New Year to mid-February. But outside that period there was time for personal travel – lots of it. Sometimes in a single year I would manage a normal lifetime's worth of travelling: to the high Alps to lead hut tours; to Switzerland to develop new high-grade skiing; to Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Iceland, Sweden and Finland – and Scotland! – to set up new walking or skiing holidays. Once, towards the end, I travelled to Morocco to accept the Guardian/Observer award for the Best Ski Company of 2002.

But most of all I flew to Norway, continuing a love-affair with that country that had started back in the seventies. Then, just out of university, I had worked a summer as a furnaceman in an aluminium factory on the Hardangerfjord. In Norway I flew in winter to Stavanger to tour the mountains of Setesdal; to Torp to visit south Telemark; to Bergen for the Hardangervidda; to Oslo for countless visits to most of the ski areas between Nordmarka and Jotunheimen. I flew in summer to Trondheim and to Bodø, and over Lofoten to Tromsø and up to Spitzbergen. And once I flew to Lakselv and walked in a lonely week to Alta, using the old postal trail over Finnmarksvidda, then took a bus to Lyngen and wandered upon high glaciated peaks with improbably close views of the sea.

And I did occasionally travel to Austria. But I never made it back to the Lechtal, and never therefore had the chance to talk again to the old man with the red nose and to thank him for his unsettling questions.

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### **Sue O'Grady**

Staff member and director, 2001-2002

Before joining Waymark as a director in 2001, I was fortunate to lead some memorable holidays: Guchan in 1986, Vanoise in 1987, Azores and Madeira in 1989, Kackar & Ararat and Malta & Gozo in 1990, Serfaus & Brand and Amalfi in 1991, High Tatras in 1992, Kilimanjaro in 1993, Mount Kenya & Kilimanjaro in 1994, Troodos in 1995, La Gomera in 1996 and Trins in 2000.

As a leader it was wonderful to be involved in the achievements of party members: there was the stalwart 70 year old lady who climbed fearlessly up Pico (the mountain rising up from the sea in the Azores); and a determined older man who tramped up Mount Ararat in the bitterly cold wind. There were interesting lively conversations throughout the day and round the dinner table at nights. The accommodation on the holidays varied from the huts in the Alps,

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which could be crowded and basic, to the luxury of good hotels with swimming pools and three course meals. And I won't forget the wonderful feeling when the sun hit our tents on Mount Kenya and released us from the heart-stopping coldness.

I was also a party member myself at Quatretondeta, Trins and Kvitåvatn. I enjoyed meeting the cross-country ski leaders at Kvitåvatn – they were so professional and encouraging to all the novices in this sport, including myself!

In my all too brief time as a Waymark director, the highlight was to receive our first Guardian/Observer Travel Award for Best Ski Company at Hopetown House in Edinburgh in 2002. Touring to source new holidays in Norway, Halkidiki and Crete was hard work but great fun. I much enjoyed meeting leaders at the weekend meets I arranged for them, and taking part in two staff outings: to Venice and Trins in 2001, Arosa and Lausanne in 2002.

Waymark has been a huge part of my life and I am so grateful for all the many people I have met, all the places I have seen and all the challenges it has given me.

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### **REMINISCENCES FROM WAYMARK STAFF**

#### **Jill Hollingworth**

Staff, 1976-1992

After some years as a holiday rep with Inghams, in 1965 (as Jill Riseley, my maiden name) I was offered a job as secretary for the Austrian Alpine Club's British Section, which had opened an office at Ingham's headquarters in New Bond Street. However, in 1968 Inghams was taken over by Hotelplan, a Swiss company which, not unnaturally, did not look favourably on hosting an Austrian institution, and I was told to find alternative accommodation. I tried places in London with an Austrian connection, but nobody had a spare desk, so I had to look elsewhere.

I thought it would be worth trying organisations with a walking connection, and was delighted when the Ramblers' Association agreed to take it on. I found myself sharing an office at Ramblers Holidays' Welwyn Garden City headquarters with Peggy Hounslow. She was overloaded with work, and sometimes asked me to undertake exploratory trips on her behalf, including to the Lofoten Islands in Norway and Tuscany.

Another unforgettable journey took place on the Lycean coast in southern Turkey. It involved a cruise in a converted marble-carrying boat, in the company of three journalists. Among the crew was a member of Jacques Cousteau's team, and one day I undertook a dive in his company. Also on board was an unfortunate sheep, which was slaughtered for a

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barbecue one evening. Apart from that incident, I very much enjoyed this work, but in 1972 left to get married and the following year had my son, Guy.

A year or two after Waymark Holidays had been set up, I received a call from Peggy. She said they were expanding fast and needed help, and was I interested in working part-time for them, but I said no as I wanted to concentrate on looking after my baby. Eighteen months later, she phoned again and said she was having another go at persuading me to join them. I said I would consider it, and soon afterwards agreed on condition that I would only go in when Guy was at nursery school, which was two mornings a week, and would not come if he was ill.

So in 1976 I started working for Waymark, preparing information packs for leaders. This included repairing a steady stream of maps that were returned much the worse for wear: Sellotaping tears, smoothing creases and removing mud. Peggy was renowned for her frugality, and we kept the maps going for as long as possible, but eventually some were beyond repair and I had to suggest that new ones would be advisable. As Guy grew older and spent more time at school, I was able to increase my time at work, and at busy times went in three times a week.

The office could be chaotic at times, especially when Peggy's three dachshunds – Liesl, Lottie and Rosie – were letting off steam. I had a dog myself, a chow-chow by the name of Cholmondeley (pronounced Chumley), but would not dream of taking him to the office. However, for a few years Vincent and Beryl annually hosted the staff for a day out at their home in Bramber, Sussex, to which I did take Cholmondeley, and with Vincent's black labrador and Peggy's three dachshunds in attendance you can imagine the noise! We would have a walk into the nearby South Downs and follow this with a barbecue in their garden, which was memorable for the whole lamb roasted on the spit that Vincent had constructed himself.

I continued working for Waymark for a while after the move to Slough, but in 1991 felt it was time to call it a day, though with some regret as I had thoroughly enjoyed my 16 years with them. I now keep fit by playing golf and walking with a local group. Guy is now a barrister and a magician! He is a member of the Inner Magic Circle and has appeared at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

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### **Colin Saunders**

Staff, 1982-1989, then editorial consultant until 1995

*The basement office in Fulham*

To work at Waymark when they were based in Fulham, you had to be prepared to sacrifice natural daylight for the full working day, as the main, L-shaped, open-plan office was in the

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basement of 295 Lillie Road in Fulham, London SW6. We also had the ground floor, but this was only used by some of the part-timers, for storing archives, for interviewing and briefing leaders and, occasionally, talking to airline representatives, hoteliers and clients. Peggy and Vincent had desks pushed to face each other, and one of the many entertaining features of most days was their arguments. You might think they were married, but these were the arguments of close friends who had known each other for years. Peggy, a South African, was single, but Vincent was happily married to Beryl.

Some wag provided Peggy with a foam brick to throw at Vincent when, as was usually the case, she lost the argument – Vincent could be very persuasive with his cold logic and vast experience of walking and cross-country skiing. Peggy had done much of this too, but a knee injury had forced her to give up some years previously.

Vincent did get quite absent-minded, though. Sometimes, interrupted by a ringing telephone while poring over maps, he would answer ‘Ramblers Holidays’, then someone (usually Peggy) would shout ‘Waymark!’ at him to force a hasty correction.

Clients must have thought they were phoning a madhouse, as conversations were usually interrupted by the barking of Peggy's smooth-haired dachshund, Liesl, which was spoilt rotten – at least by Peggy. Most of us thought Liesl a rather bad-tempered brute, so kept our distance.

As if one dachshund was not enough, Peggy acquired a second, Lottie, who was totally different, both in appearance (being rough-haired) and in temperament – a real sweetie, in fact. Liesl always had to be carried down the stairs, but Lottie would bravely tackle them on her own – for a human this would be verging on mountaineering. Once she lost her footing and rolled down, but at the bottom just picked herself up, wagging her tail – thought it great fun, obviously. I usually had a piece of cheese in my lunch and Lottie would duly present herself for a treat.

Then, blow me down, Peggy went and acquired a third dachshund, Rosie, who, unfortunately, was another Liesl.

Peggy was notoriously thrifty, and no doubt this contributed to the financial success of the company, but it did seem rather over the top at times. For example, rubbish bags had to be filled to the brim before being tied up with string or elastic bands. There was a story that she bought enormous balls of string, possibly for this purpose, on visits to her family in South Africa, where string was apparently very cheap. I can confirm that I was actually told to put aside the white margins of sheets of stamps, as ‘Vincent does something with them’, though I never managed to find out what.

The offices were rented from the gentleman who lived in the upper floors, Richard Hood, with whom we shared a common entrance. One day, Richard came in and immediately trod

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in a package that had been left on the mat by one of the dogs. The air turned blue as poor Richard vented his opinion of keeping dogs in an office environment.

I eventually fell into more of a marketing role, in charge of brochure production and advertising. The arguments we had about the finer points of the brochures were great fun – at least I thought so, though I suspect the others got rather tired of my insistence on where commas should go and other niceties of the English language.

Despite their idiosyncracies, Peggy and Vincent were enormously kind-hearted and had many friends within and outside the travel trade. Peggy was a close friend of Erna Low, an Austrian whose original name, Löwe, means Lion – and, like Peggy, she was indeed a lion of the travel trade.

In the early days, Waymark had no IATA licence, which meant they had to get their air tickets from another licensed travel agency. Then, in June 1983, we were awarded the licence and planned a big celebration in the office for all our trade contacts. On the previous evening, Peggy, Vincent and I were working late when the bell rang, announcing the arrival of the manager of the Norwegian Tourist Office, who had got the date wrong. I was sent out for bread, cheese and wine and we had a special celebration just for him.

I sometimes (but not too often) fell foul of Peggy's notorious temper, which was mercifully short-lived and no hard feelings. One winter there was heavy snow in London, and I decided to ski from my home in Wood Green to Fulham, using as far as possible a variety of disused railway lines and open spaces. Despite a very early start, this took much longer than expected and I reported very late for work. It did not help to soften Peggy's loud indignation that, en route, I had undertaken a mercy dash to do some shopping for an elderly lady, housebound by the snow.

On a snowy weekend in January 1987, some of the staff and their family and friends ventured on skis into Richmond Park and Wimbledon Common, which proved ideal for XC. If only such conditions were the norm!

Vincent retired in 1985, and shortly afterwards Peggy took on a more low-profile role. After that, office routine became disconcertingly normal, though afternoons continued to be enlivened by the arrival of our lovely cleaning lady, Enid, who provided some entertainment, a welcome cup of tea, and sometimes a piece of cake or a biscuit. She enjoyed sharing the latest gossip, and would surreptitiously pass this on under the pretext of polishing your desk. Hoovering took place during office hours, amid occasional shouts of 'Enid - turn it off!' when the phone rang.

After Vincent retired, he and Beryl kindly invited all the staff down to Bramber for a garden party on two successive years, and after he passed away Peggy did the same to her place in neighbouring Steyning.

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Occasionally, leaders would work in the office for a while. One (whom I shall call ‘A’) bought some fish one Friday lunchtime, intending to take them home to Birmingham for tea. ‘A’ put them on a radiator (cold at the time) then forgot about them. The radiators were storage, so came on at intervals during the weekend. You can imagine the smell that greeted us on Monday morning.

I fondly remember the time when most of the office knives and plates disappeared. After struggling to manage with those remaining for several days, we were on the point of buying replacements when, searching for a file in the desk of a colleague, absent on holiday, a drawer was opened to reveal a stash of said cutlery and crockery. The colleague blamed pressure of work for not returning them to stock.

We took it in turns to be on standby at weekends in case of emergencies. Having moved to a flat just 150 metres from the office, I was sometimes called on, out of hours, to get details from files. There was one sad occasion when two party members (brothers) on a holiday in Austria went off on their own, against the leader's advice. One slipped and fell to his death, so our then managing director, Peter Chapman, had to break the news to the parents and I was asked to get their details.

Soon after I left in 1989, new offices were acquired in Slough, which I visited occasionally when working as a consultant on the brochures. I was quite thrown by the presence of natural light.

### *Trips abroad*

I undertook 27 trips abroad for Waymark, mainly to find new holidays. Staff contracts at that time stipulated that we were to have two free Waymark holidays per year (one walking, one XC skiing) so that we could familiarise ourselves with centres and talk knowledgeably to clients about them. The trip usually included a substantial work element as well, but no complaints – it was fun and (nearly) all expenses paid.

Although friends formed the opinion that I was virtually permanently ‘on holiday’ with so many trips, they were actually hard work, and occasionally involved some rather awkward situations. The main aim was to find a suitable hotel in a suitable resort at a suitable price, with a good variety of walking or cross-country skiing in the area. As Waymark's preference was for small, family-run hotels, this was easier said than done, as such places are usually fully booked with regular guests at the time we wanted to go. So, with a hired car, one would spend nearly all day driving and making fruitless visits to what seemed like ideal hotels or guest houses. Peggy warned me not to be downhearted if a trip yielded nothing suitable – this was something they had all experienced.

In fact, that was what I thought was going to happen on my very first trip, to the Italian Alps, in September 1982. After five days of frustration (not helped by my almost non-existent Italian), on the final day I managed to find a plain but very pleasant little hotel in the

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delightful, off-the-beaten-track village of Feder, which became the centre for a holiday called South of Marmolada. (Waymark liked to use such names, so that potential clients could relate to some well-known feature – Marmolada being the highest mountain in that area.)

A bonus for me on that trip was meeting a young lady in a mountain refuge, who took pity on me, possibly because of my dishevelled appearance after searching for a lost camera on the mountainside. She invited me to visit her family in Bergamo for dinner one evening (where I disgraced myself by my inept treatment of the spaghetti) and we corresponded for a while. Sadly, this was not the pattern for future research trips, which were generally rather lonely affairs.

### *Kvitåvatn*

My first cross-country ski trip with Waymark, a holiday in March 1983, took me to Kvitåvatn in Norway. Included in the party were two fellow members of the Vanguard's Rambling Club. Unfortunately, on the second day one fell awkwardly and broke his arm. He chose to return home early and asked me to make sure his baggage returned with the rest of the party. Like a chump, I completely forgot about it, but the incomparable Rod Tuck, founder of Kvitåvatn Fjellstoge, saved my bacon, cheerfully bringing it with him soon afterwards on a trip to London.

### *Standing in*

Occasionally I acted as a stand-in party leader. The first time this happened, in June 1983, took me back to Feder (South of Marmolada), when the intended leader fell ill a fortnight before departure. The party included a Scotsman and a Lancastrian. When we chanced upon two closely entwined salamanders on a mountain path, the Scotsman said, 'Och, the puir wee things, they're fighting'. 'Fighting be blowed,' retorted the Lancastrian, 'they're 'avin' it away!'

Shortly afterwards, a leader got his dates muddled (he thought departure was a week later) and I was sent at very short notice to take charge of a party at La Chapelle d'Abondance in Haute-Savoie, France. It was a two-centre holiday, with the second week at La Clusaz, but by then the intended leader had arrived, and I went home.

On another rather traumatic occasion the following year, a leader suffered a nervous breakdown at the start of a holiday in Massat in the French Pyrenees. Alerted by a party member, and again with hardly any notice, I shot off to help. The poor chap was clearly in no state to lead, and I ended up leading the rest of the holiday. To make matters worse, the hotel owner took great pride in presenting a local dish, which I think was tripe, but we all thought it tasted awful and left it almost untouched – the small amount I ate actually made me embarrassingly ill. Our reputation was marginally saved by a party member who demonstrated his ability to whistle two different tunes at the same time.

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### *North Cyprus*

In late 1983, Waymark was approached by the state tourist office of the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus, which wanted to set up walking holidays there. I was asked to investigate, and to suggest what could be done there for the benefit of walkers generally. I really fell for the place – there's some great walking in the Kyrenia Mountains, and the coastal resorts had a lovely, relaxed atmosphere. Sadly, although we were willing to give it a go, the Greek tourism authorities made it clear that inclusion of North Cyprus in the programme could adversely affect our very successful operations on the Greek islands. So the plans were dropped, although one of our leaders managed to organise a private group to go there the following year.

I had some slightly alarming adventures in North Cyprus. After visiting a hotel, I crossed the road to a deserted building site and sat down to make notes. A Turkish soldier materialised beside me, wielding a rifle. He spoke no English (and I no Turkish) but made it clear by means of the rifle that I was to accompany him. I was unaware that my perch lay adjacent to an army barracks, and they clearly thought I was planning an attack. After an hour or so in the guardroom, I was able to convince an English-speaking officer that my purpose was peaceful, and was released with a caution.

Later, in my hired Mini Moke, driving along a mountain track, I reached a section that had mostly fallen away. Reversing along that narrow, twisting track with sheer drops to one side was not an option. I thought there was just enough room to drive across the gap, albeit at a rather alarming angle. As the Moke had no bodywork above waist level, I reckoned I could quickly jump out if the vehicle started to slide in the general direction of down. It just about made it, so my theory was not tested. Later on, the Moke ran out of fuel and I had to leave it for the owner to retrieve.

On my final day in Cyprus, the Moke suffered another malfunction and stopped dead. I flagged down a passing motorist who turned out to be an off-duty policeman, again with no English. With much sign language I managed to get it across that I was in trouble. He took me to his station, where an officer arranged for my baggage to be brought from the hotel and for me to be transported from the police station to the airport. I don't know what happened to the Moke.

### *Sweden*

In 1984, I happened to be in the middle of a research trip to Sweden on April 30th. This is Walpurgis Night, the traditional end of winter, and one of the most important dates in the Norse calendar when, they say, witches perform rituals to ward off evil. There was not a bed to be had, it seemed, any closer than Stockholm, several hours' drive away. I chose to sleep in the car in the forest. I saw no witches, but at some point I awoke to find the view through

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the windscreen filled by the massive antlers of an elk, investigating my intrusion into his territory. And, boy, was it cold trying to wash in the icy water of a river next morning.

### *Yugoslavia*

In July of the same year, I was sent to what was then still Yugoslavia, to investigate a two-centre holiday that later enjoyed some success in the programme as Mountains and Sea in Yugoslavia – although actually in Croatia. While exploring Učka, the mountainous region behind the ‘sea’ part of it, and trying to find the path down, I slipped and performed what felt like a double backward somersault with triple salchow, landing on a ledge some way down. With scratches on my hands the only visible result, I sat down in a fit of uncontrollable laughter, wishing that someone had been there to witness and even film the event. The ‘sea’ part also provided my first experience (as a spectator) of nude sunbathing, right outside my hotel window – a room with a view that could not be described in the brochure. Some years later, sales were badly affected by the political situation and fighting that eventually led to the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991, and the holiday was dropped.

### *Innsbruck inaugural*

In December 1985 I travelled on the inaugural flight of the first ever scheduled passenger service from London to Innsbruck, Austria, operated by the now defunct DanAir. The reason why this destination had not previously been served became apparent as we descended along the Inn valley, with snow-capped peaks and mountainsides all around. The capabilities of the BAe 146 aircraft meant that services to such previously inaccessible airports became practical. Innsbruck's mayor and other dignitaries greeted us on the tarmac with, literally, red carpet treatment, including brass band and champagne, and passengers and crew gathered round to hear welcoming speeches.

### *Appennines*

My free holiday in July 1986 took in the Appennines in Italy and the adjoining Apuan Alps, southeast of Pisa. I'm rather apprehensive about the prospect of exposed situations, though usually fine when I actually get there. So the leader's warning about an extremely exposed *via ferrata* (footpath with iron supports) filled me with dread, and he wasn't joking. It consisted of a cable strung along a cliff face, above a long vertical drop. The idea was to grasp the cable, place your feet on the cliff face, launch yourself out over the chasm and proceed crabwise. The other party-members seemed to relish the prospect, but I hung back to last, so that, I told myself, I could go back and summon help if anything untoward occurred. When it came to my turn, apparently I completed the journey in the fastest time - the result of sheer terror. The leader was subsequently reprimanded for not providing harnesses – the consequences of someone losing their grip (or their nerve) were too horrendous to omit such a precaution.

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On the same trip, we were due to stay at a mountain refuge, which turned out to be closed. There was an outhouse with bunks, which we commandeered, and settled down for the night therein. Our leader had previously informed us that the area was the habitat of scorpions, so the sound of invisible creatures scuttling along a ledge beside my bunk had me frozen-limbed the whole night. I never discovered what they actually were.

### *Hungary*

In September 1986 I undertook a fruitless exploration in Hungary, where every place that looked suitable turned out to be fully booked all year round with visitors from Russia. While walking in the wooded hills north of Lake Balaton, I found myself skirting the perimeter fence of an army camp, watched by soldiers and expecting to be arrested, or at least quizzed, at any moment. Surprisingly, this did not happen, but the forest was swarming with horrible large, brown flies and, while undressing at the hotel that evening, I found my pockets full of the blighters - mostly dead. On the final day, my taxi to Budapest Airport broke down and I had to help the driver push it for some distance before another taxi was found.

### *Hardanger*

A DNT ski tour in April 1987 saw me risk life and limb at Finse railway station. With a train due, and wishing to join the rest of the party before it arrived, I skied across the line just as the train emerged from the nearby tunnel. As it drew to a halt, driver, guard and assorted railway staff charged up, surrounded and harangued me for doing such a stupid thing – if I had got stuck or fallen, the train may not have been able to stop in time. Point taken!

Later, in the mountains, our leader thought it would be a good idea to teach us how to make an igloo. The method is to arrange blocks of compacted snow in a circle from base upwards, gradually leaning inwards, and leaving a small hole at the top to be filled with a final block. Someone stands underneath to support this block, while snow is packed into the gaps to provide adhesion. On this occasion, that someone was yours truly. I dutifully stood underneath with hands raised, while the block was levered in. On being told I could now remove my hands, the block dropped on my head, causing my glasses to gash my nose. How they laughed!

### *Czechoslovakia*

On the first of two visits to what was then Czechoslovakia in 1988, in March, I looked at the possibilities for XC skiing in a range called Krkonoše (Riesengebirge in German, translated as Giant Mountains for the resulting holiday). In those Communist days no visiting business people could wander freely, and I was accompanied everywhere by a very pleasant gentleman from Čedok, the state tourist office, whose surname translated as ‘handbag’. Mr Handbag took his duties very seriously and ensured that I went straight to my bedroom last thing. Next morning, he was sitting in a chair outside my bedroom; for all I knew he had spent all night

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there. He was delighted to discover that I liked beer, as this meant he could order it for both of us on expenses.

The only time I was out of Mr Handbag's sight was while skiing, as he was very proficient and I'm not, and was left to struggle down slopes in my ungainly fashion while he sped on ahead. On one such occasion, the piste followed the border with Poland, with armed guards from each country on either side. Several times I found myself being ushered back into Czechoslovakia as I crashed into Polish trees.

The second visit, in August, was to the High Tatras mountains, in what is now Slovakia. My chaperone there, Renáta Náročná, another Čedok employee, and a qualified mountain guide, was more relaxed about leaving me alone (I have that effect on women), but proved a congenial companion. She startled me at dinner on my first evening, by enquiring whether I liked my soap, adding that she was expecting a grope in the morning. Disappointingly, it transpired that the letters 'ou' in Czech and Slovak are pronounced 'oa' (as in soap), so she had been trying to say 'soup' and 'group'. Some years later, we co-operated to write a guidebook in English to walking in the High Tatras, first published in 1994 by Cicerone Press, with a second edition in 2006.

### *Canada*

My final trip for Waymark was to Canada in March 1989, to look for an XC centre. Boy, was it cold – minus 20C at night. One morning I had to summon the emergency service as I, technophobe, had been unaware that car batteries did not like being left outside overnight in such temperatures. Most hotels provide battery sockets and I learned to use them the hard way. Another night, at a motel, I was woken by hammering at the chalet door, to be informed by the man from next door that he and his companions were watching blue movies on the TV, and would I care to join them. I politely declined.

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### **Paul Sibert**

Staff, 1985-1988

I especially remember the ex-army party leader, who was instructed to contact the office if anything happened that he could not handle on the spot. We received a phone call from the relative of a client in the party, who had died of a heart attack. The leader seemed surprised that we were upset at not having been informed. 'Well', he said, 'I could handle it on the spot, so didn't see why I should bother you.'

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## **Viju Chhatralia**

Staff, 1990-2007

I particularly remember Waymark booking Purple Parking's one millionth client for its park-and-ride service at Heathrow in August 2003. This was just a matter of luck, of course, but I was asked to be photographed with their marketing director, Steve Waller, amidst a sea of ski equipment and model minibuses. The pictures then appeared in Travel Trade Gazette and Travel Bulletin.

I also have fond memories of two staff outings: to the London Eye in June 2001, which was most enjoyable despite being a rather misty evening; and to Lucerne, Switzerland, in December 2002, when we travelled on a lake steamer and ascended the mountain railway to the summit of Rigi.

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## **Jim Wood**

Staff, 1993-2005

I had been a client on a Waymark XC ski holiday in 1984 and wrote in afterwards about one or two things. I also asked if they were looking for leaders for their summer walking holidays, and must have written at an opportune moment as they wrote back asking me to come down from my home in Carlisle to London to see them. I arrived at that awful office in Lillie Road, and it struck me as a miserable place to work. I was interviewed for an hour or so, then another person came in, who was introduced as Peter Chapman. This was a surprise as I had thought I was talking to Mr Chapman (with whom I had corresponded) all along, but it turned out the first man was Noel Vincent. Despite that, they took me on and not long afterwards I was given the Ost Tirol holiday to lead. Later I led once or twice a year, in Austria, Switzerland, Italy and the former Yugoslavia, before joining the office staff in 1993 at Slough.

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## **Bob Mason**

Full time leader and staff, 1997-2003

### *My first holiday*

I saw a small advertisement in the Sunday Times (sometime in 1974) for a company called Waymark Holidays offering cross-country skiing - "Learn to walk on skis"! Therefore, on 8 February 1975, I went to Bizau in the Vorarlberg of Austria. This holiday cost £81 plus insurance of £3 and a currency surcharge of £5.50. We had poor snow conditions (even then)

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and learnt to ski on a patch of snow in the middle of a field. The leaders were Ruth and Humphrey Chamberlain!

I continued to go on Waymark Holidays from time to time, although I often went on Ramblers Holidays as they had a better offering at that time and I stopped receiving the Waymark brochure – a long running complaint! However, at some point I asked for the brochure again and booked to go on the winter tour of the Black Forest in 1982. The leader on that holiday (Geoff Armitage) recommended that I became a winter leader. I filled in the forms and got references and was offered the opportunity to be a walking leader as well. This seemed a really good idea to me!

### *My first lead*

And so I was sent to Trins – yes Trins! I departed on 21 August 1982, via Munich airport, for a 14-night stay with twelve guests. It was a great holiday, which I thoroughly enjoyed, but I found it mentally exhausting. The Hotel Wienerhof was run from a day-to-day point of view, by Frau Nagele, Frau Wallasch's mother.

I continued to lead for Waymark, both winter and summer, mostly in German-speaking countries, whilst working for BT. I led up to five weeks a year until I took early retirement in 1996 (with the exception of 1988 & 99, when I was working in Sierra Leone and 1993 when I was working in Thailand), but even then I went on Waymark Holidays. I reckon that I led about forty holidays during this period. From time to time I led at Trins again.

### *Full-time leading*

I had taken early retirement with the objective of doing as much leading as possible and decided to learn Spanish to widen my prospects. This proved to be very successful and in 1997 I did eleven weeks of leading, both summer and winter. This trend continued and I ended up leading virtually on a full-time basis. If you are interested, the number of weeks each year were: 1998 (12), 1999 (15), 2000 (20), 2001 (24), 2002 (22), 2003 (18), 2004 (29), 2005 (28), 2006 (20), 2007 (20), 2008 (21). 2009 (9 to date). I make that about 290 holidays in total since 1982! I have led: summer walking, cross-country skiing, winter walking, snow shoeing and multi-activity holidays during this time.

### *Research*

I also researched quite a few new holidays, especially in Spain, Portugal, Germany and Austria. The most successful of these was the Sierra de las Mambblas holiday, which was well up in the top 10 until Exodus dropped it!

### *Wider Role*

In February 2001, on the resignation of Stuart Montgomery, Peter Chapman wrote to me, while I was still in Trins, to ask if I would be prepared to take on a wider role at Waymark. In particular, he wanted me to run the skiing programme based on the charter into Innsbruck,

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which I did for the winter seasons 2001-02 and 2002-03 whilst still managing to do some leading!

I was very interested in increasing my involvement and took on a wider consultancy role with a view to becoming a director. I did quite a lot of marketing and wider management work, but probably the biggest achievement was designing and project managing the implementation of the first web site. This revolutionised the way that Waymark operated and I feel that it was probably my greatest contribution to Waymark.

Because of the approach from First Choice to purchase Waymark, I did not actually become a director, although this appeared in the brochure and I had got some business cards printed in anticipation!

*The End*

I continued to complete some consultancy work for "New Waymark", before reverting to my leader role again. This has continued under the Exodus banner, although I am now leading mostly in Trins (both winter and summer) as the Spanish opportunities have dried up. I am still known by both leaders and clients as "Mr Trins"! I am not sure how long I shall continue or how long Exodus will want me to continue – but as long as I am enjoying it, I cannot see any reason to change course.

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## **REMINISCENCES FROM WAYMARK LEADERS**

### **Rosemary Crosbie**

*Helping out*

From 1973 to 1976 my husband Gordon, a naval officer, held a NATO appointment in Oslo. In 1975 we visited Rod Tuck's recently established ski lodge at Kvitåvatn, and he was very excited about a deal he had just made with a new company called Waymark Holidays to bring skiers there. Shortly after that Gordon was transferred to London, and I thought nothing more about it. Then, towards the end of October 1976, I happened to be walking along Lillie Road in Fulham, and a small sign on the door of a coal office caught my eye: 'Waymark Holidays'. This rang a bell, so I rang the bell. A rather elderly gentleman with grey hair and beard came to the door. 'Yes?' he said, in a not particularly friendly tone: it was Noel Vincent, and that was his style. I explained that I had met Rod Tuck, and was interested in their activities. His whole manner changed, delighted that I knew about Waymark, and I was invited into their basement office.

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The result was that I was asked to run the stand that Waymark had booked at the Ski Show at Olympia in November 1976. No mention was made of payment for my services, but being at a loose end I readily agreed. Turning up at Olympia on the first day of the show, I found that we had a small stand sandwiched between the much larger and flashier ones of Thomson Holidays and the British Ski Federation (the latter run by Colonel John Moore, who was to play a major role in training the blind skiers). Our stand had just me in an XC ski outfit, a pair of XC skis, a blown-up picture of Gausta (the mountain near Kvitåvatn) and a stock of two tiny leaflets: one for Kvitåvatn, one for Switzerland, which Waymark had added to their minuscule programme.

Though of fairly mature years at the time, I was quite fit. But I lost out, whichever direction people approached from. Those coming from the Thomson direction must have thought I was too old to be offering anything of interest, while those coming from BSF would have thought they were not fit enough. Though I had many conversations with people who seemed quite interested, I was extremely disappointed not to take any bookings at all. However, Peggy was quite relaxed about it: she felt sure that the exercise had served its purpose in drawing attention to Waymark's existence, and I was offered a free holiday at Kvitåvatn in recognition of my hard work.

I sometimes helped out in the office, and soon became trusted enough to be left holding the fort when Peggy and Vincent went off to look for new centres.

### *The blind skiers*

Two weeks after the Ski Show, the phone rang. 'This is Peggy Hounslow of Waymark Holidays. Regarding your free holiday. Vincent and I have had a splendid idea. We would like you to take two of the three blind boys we saw on TV recently competing in the cross-country events at the Winter Olympics for the Disabled. They came in last and we would like you to teach them to ski properly!'

'You're joking,' I said.

'We are perfectly serious,' replied Peggy – and put the phone down. That was her style!

Help! How could I train the blind to ski? I telephoned the British Ski Federation and got in touch with Colonel John Moore – my neighbour at the Ski Show – who was also head of the Army Physical Training School and had represented Britain three times at the Winter Olympics. He invited the three blind skiers, plus my husband Gordon and me, down to Aldershot for a Sunday workout on his home-made ski track, using army ski equipment. It was a great day and without his help and expertise we would not have succeeded.

In January 1977 I joined a Waymark party to Kvitåvatn together with two of the blind skiers: Pete Young and Graham Salmon. On the first day I realised that it is just not practical for one person to guide two blind skiers. Luckily, our son John was on a gap year, working at the

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Fjellstoge, and Rod Tuck readily agreed to free him from various chores to be our second guide. From then on we had lots of adventures, many laughs and great fun.

But Pete Young really preferred competitive skiing, and with help from the British army and Norwegian guides he stood on the podium to receive the bronze medal at the Winter Paralympics at Lillehammer, Norway, in 1994 – just missing the silver by 0.3 seconds. Everyone was so very proud of him beating all those Scandinavians who had the opportunity to ski on snow for much of the year. I was there to see him, as was a Waymark party who skied down from Sjusjø to cheer him on. [*See also 'Waymark and the blind skiers' in Chapter 2.*]

### *Kvitåvatn*

Like most Scandinavian lodges, Kvitåvatn had saunas – one each for males and females. When the new building was added, similarly segregated saunas, side by side, were included, but the builders omitted to instal the dividing wall. This arrangement became so popular that the whole idea of a division was dropped and the sauna remains mixed – though with separate changing rooms at each end.

### *Lost at Mösern*

I was soon asked to lead holidays for both blind and sighted skiers, but one party had a disastrous start. We were staying at what became a classic Waymark centre – Mösern bei Seefeld in Austria. Now, for those who know Seefeld, with its clearly marked, easily followed loipe, it would seem impossible to get lost there, but I managed to lose my party. One afternoon, some young bucks were fed up with waiting for me (there was a long queue at the ladies' toilet) and shot off without me on a circular loipe. Three women in the party had decided to sit out the afternoon in the gasthaus where we had lunch, and were happy to wait for our return. I chased the breakaways, skiing quite fast, but saw no sign of them. It turned out the men had lost their way and ended up down by the River Inn. They were rather sheepish when they eventually returned to the hotel and stayed with me for the rest of the holiday.

### *Me – a VIP?*

Many Waymark leaders liked to remain anonymous until their arrival at the destination airport. This enabled them to survey the scene in the departure lounge and try to guess who their party members might be – a distinctive lot with their rucksacks, red-and-white Waymark labels, mountain boots and (at that time anyway) knee-breeches. On one particular occasion I was flying to Norway with a Waymark XC group. I arrived early and took up a good viewing position in the departure lounge. I travelled in an entirely Norwegian outfit: hand-knitted sweater from the western fjords, elk boots, Norwegian headscarf etc. Not many minutes had passed before the arrival of an attractive, bearded Viking who sat down beside me and proceeded to read the Norwegian newspaper, *Aften Posten*.

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Candidate Waymarkers began to appear – what a lot there seemed to be, at least two dozen and there were only fifteen on the rooming list. While contemplating this predicament, a charming SAS stewardess approached the bearded Viking and said, ‘We would like a couple of Norwegians to travel first class. Are you travelling together?’ The Viking and I exchanged glances and nodded instantly, then he continued in conversation with the stewardess. When she departed, my new travelling companion turned and addressed me in Norwegian, then I had to confess that I was born and raised a Cockney (or at least within earshot of London Zoo) and could not speak a word of his native tongue. From that moment on he spoke fluent English.

On arrival in the first class compartment, a stewardess took our jackets and hung them on coat hangers. Cocktails were offered and napkins were spread on our laps in preparation for a four-course lunch with wine or champagne and liqueurs. Then we were each presented with a large box of King Kong chocolates. Alas, neither of us having travelled first class before, we lapsed into the giggles while seasoned first class travellers looked on in disdain.

Inevitably, the moment came to take a trip to the tail end of the plane to join the loo queue. I passed what looked like a couple of Waymarkers being very rude and unpleasant to a stewardess, and thought, ‘Oh dear, how dreadful to have this couple in the party for the next ten days.’

The flight passed all too quickly, and at Oslo I was brought face-to-face with the party – which turned out to be fifteen, as planned. Fortunately the unpleasant couple were not with us. As we were about to move off, the bearded Viking came up to bid farewell. ‘Well well,’ muttered one of the party, who had obviously seen me emerge from first class on the plane. ‘How interesting that Waymark send their leaders first class.’ Of course they do!

### *Help!*

A catastrophe at Sjusjøen, Norway, in April 1989 ended my career as a Grade 2 leader, though I was able to continue leading at Grade 1. I was in charge of a group of blind skiers. One of them ignored the first rule of skiing: if you go out of control, sit down. She carried on down the slope, gathering momentum, so I shot down and managed to stop her, but she fell on my knee. She was no lightweight, and a loud snap like a gunshot told me I had snapped a cruciate ligament. I couldn't move, neither could my companion, being blind, and with nobody around we faced the prospect of a long and potentially fatal night out in sub-zero temperature.

Then, away in the distance, we saw two tiny figures crossing a large, frozen lake, and shouted to draw their attention. They stopped and look round, but continued on their way. So we pooled our voices and went, ‘One, two, three, HELP!’ This time they turned back, realising something was amiss – the first time they thought it was just someone shouting at a dog or something like that. It turned out that they were two other people from our group, one of

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whom was blind, and fortunately for us the visually impaired usually have excellent hearing. Also the guide was a trained mountain leader and first-aider, so we were lucky to be rescued.

### *Training and testing*

This was not the end of my association with Waymark, however, as I continued to lead Grade 1 parties at Hallingen in Norway, an excellent centre for beginners, using teaching techniques for the visually impaired, which also worked well for the sighted. I ran a sighted guides training weekend for six years at Pateley Bridge in Yorkshire, where the participants were nearly all proficient Waymark skiers – some are still guiding today.

A further association with Waymark was as administrator for the XC proficiency tests on behalf of the British Ski Federation, who had agreed that Waymark leaders could assess party members to determine whether they could be awarded a certificate. Many passed the bronze standard, quite a few silver, and apparently later on a handful of gold. I took a calligraphy course and wrote the names and other details on the certificates.

I miss my old friends at Waymark, but continue to be connected with activities for blind skiers through my association with Vitalise.

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## **Andy Hosking**

### *Pyrenees – July 1985*

Prior to leading the Prenees 1 mountain hut tour, I had informed Waymark that I didn't speak any Spanish, but was told not to worry; there were only two nights on the Spanish side and everyone there spoke French – almost.

On the ninth day we crossed over from the Oulettes Refuge over the Arête de Gaube into Spain and down the Ara Valley to the delightful village of Torla. Here we stayed at the Hotel Bujaruelo. On checking in I took the precaution of getting the receptionist to translate the menu into French. No problem until we went down for supper and realised that the translated menu was for the previous night, and the current waiters didn't speak French. Rather than go back for my Spanish phrasebook, I decided that it would be quicker if I just mimed my way through. The soup was easy to spot, and the salad. A series of 'baaas', 'moos' and 'cock-a-doodle-does' identified the lamb, beef and chicken courses, but by now I was becoming conscious that not only my group, but also many of the other diners, regarded my attempts to work out what was on the menu as having a fairly high entertainment value. I met my Waterloo with the desserts and told everyone to take pot luck.

That evening my room mate admitted that he had a degree in Spanish but was enjoying the show so much that he didn't want to spoil it!

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### *The Four Valleys – July 1993*

Being a solicitor, it was something of a surprise to realise that I had a district judge and a circuit judge as clients - something of a role reversal! While we were crossing a dried up riverbed, the district judge slipped and slid into a sort of very smooth basin. No matter how hard he tried he couldn't get out. I got the rope and fixed it so that he could pull his way out. The judge commented that he thought it was awfully decent of a solicitor to get a judge out of a hole like that!

In Zermatt something had gone wrong in the liaison between the hotel and Waymark about a dessert. The group weren't getting one, so I went to see the head waiter. Fortunately on the holiday I had a friend, who was fluent in German, because what followed was a bit beyond my 30-year-old German O-level.

'No,' he said, 'the arrangement is quite clear.' 'Have Waymark put this in a letter', I asked. 'Yes' was his reply. 'Can you get it? The group has two judges and a solicitor who would like to read it.!' 'Ah', said the head waiter. 'Would fruit salad and ice cream be all right?'

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## **REMINISCENCES FROM WAYMARK CLIENTS**

### **Dulcie Cringle**

#### *Lesbos and Chios, 1980*

This was my first Waymark holiday. A few months beforehand, Noel Vincent phoned me to say that the other people who had booked the same fortnight happened to be considerably older, whereas the people going a fortnight earlier were more my age. He offered to alter my booking, at no cost to me. I did go a fortnight earlier, had a lovely holiday and was hooked on Waymark from then on. I have told this anecdote to many people over the years who were wondering whether to go with Waymark. I was so impressed by the thoughtfulness and kindness shown to me – not an old and valued client at that stage but a complete newcomer – that I was pleased to encourage the waverers to use Waymark.

#### *Gran Paradiso, 1983*

On a Gran Paradiso mountain hut tour there was a Scotsman in the party who walked in a kilt. People of all nationalities were delighted to see this North Briton in national costume up a mountain in Italy, and he quickly became the most photographed person in the national park. The grand finale of the holiday was the ascent of Gran Paradiso itself, the highest mountain in Italy. Most of the ascent was over snow but the summit itself was a jumble of massive rocks with some nasty drops. While we were scrambling over these a sudden wind

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blew up and we had to hang on for dear life. As a result, we all found out what a Scotsman wears under his kilt!

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### **Nancy Johns**

*Soller, Majorca, 1988*

The walking was great but the hotel refused to serve breakfast until 8 am, and the buses all left around 8.15! So we all came down kitted out for walking and ready for the dash to the bus stop. Dinner wasn't served until 8 pm so we would return ravenous at the end of the walk and having to stock up with buns and cakes from shops to assuage our hunger.

*Pertisau, Austria, winter walking, 2001*

Thank goodness the lunch on the outward flight was accompanied by wine, as the approach to Innsbruck Airport was between two very high mountain ranges with what seemed like six inches on either side! I had never seen so much snow as there was in Pertisau - I think three feet had fallen on the previous day – and it was a magical scene. But no paths had been cleared and we could only walk around the lake or stumble up to our knees beside the ski slopes.

*Bagnères de Bigorre, France, winter walking, 2004*

The complete opposite: no snow had fallen and apart from a few sorties to higher levels we walked on grassy paths. We stayed at the modest yet magnificent Hostellerie d'Aste, with superb local cuisine and as much wine as we wanted, and our leaders were a wonderful couple called Malcolm and Anne Gregory, who lived in the area. Anne's wonderful packed lunches included a different variety of cake every day, and the lemon drizzle cake I now make is her recipe. The town is still a health spa, and one street was full of brass plaques advertising the numerous doctors who practised there. One evening we visited a spa establishment, starting with an open air hot tub with view of snow-clad mountains, moving on to thermal springs, Turkish baths and plunge pool.

*Zernez, Switzerland, winter walking, 2006*

We accessed our walks by means of the Glacier Express, a lovely red train which stopped at all the little stations up the valley towards St.Moritz. At this altitude (1500 metres), snow is guaranteed and the scenery is idyllic, and we enjoyed ourselves so much that we decided to book there again for 2008, only to find that these holidays had been axed by Exodus.

We wished we had taken more holidays with Waymark: that aura of caring for you almost as a family, that knowledge of centres acquired over many years, was rarely to be found with

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other companies. For those of us who don't want adrenalin rushes and swinging resorts, Waymark gave us gentle adventures and many happy memories.

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### **Alan Smith (1)**

*[This is not the Alan Smith referred to in 'Waymark and the blind skiers' in Chapter 2, and whose reminiscences appear later.]*

*Travels Without a Donkey, France, August/September 1985*

Our leader was Andrew Podkolinski, who had served in the Polish and British armies. On arrival at our first hotel, in Le Monastier-sur-Gazeille, I found no soap in my room. Andrew told us that most of the hotels we would be staying at didn't provide it (though we had not been warned by Waymark), so I went to buy some. *[This was subsequently added to the information sheet - by me! Ed.]* In the evening there was a *retraite aux flambeaux* (torchlight procession) with a band and majorettes.

The holiday followed in the steps of R.L.Stevenson who, of course, wrote of his *Travels With a Donkey*. Andrew showed us the route we would be taking and how it related to Stevenson's expedition. He told us that the author had written it because he was short of money, and often seemed to have difficulty reaching his intended destination for the night, probably because he had spent the morning writing up his notes from the previous day.

I was sharing a room with the leader, and one night we gallantly exchanged our room with two ladies, who were in a room overlooking a main road, so that they could have a quiet night. My sleep was disturbed by the noise of the fast-moving traffic, and as each vehicle passed its headlights lit up the room - it was like camping in the middle of the Le Mans racetrack!

At Fouzillac we spoke to some children, and were amazed to find that they had never heard of the nearby village of Luc, our destination for that day. At Chasserolles the hotelier said that the English were more intelligent than the French, as they had a socialist government and we didn't! En route to Le Chalet, we appropriately passed a French couple (one of whom was wearing a Leeds University teeshirt) with a donkey carrying all their equipment.

The owner of the Hotel des Cévennes at Le Pont de Montvert was very concerned about a proposal to mine uranium nearby, as it could pollute the River Tarn. He asked Andrew if Waymark could write to object, and our leader obliged by calling the office – I don't know whether they did write or not.

After the holiday I wrote to Waymark to say how much I had enjoyed the holiday, and what a good leader Andrew was.

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I see that the check-in time for our flight from Heathrow was just 45 minutes, compared with the two hours required now. Looking back, the flying process seemed much more relaxed then than it is today.

*Tour in Provence, September 1986*

Our leader was Theo Rowlands, accompanied by her husband John, a very down-to-earth nuclear scientist. Our first meal at Sisteron was *pied pacquet* (foot parcel), a local dish consisting of lamb's feet stuffed with tripe and spices – none of us cared for it much, but the free wine was some compensation. They also provided free carafes of mint water.

On a free day, I walked from Forcalquier to St.Michel and back in a thunderstorm with torrential rain. The following day was much the same, and as we left the hotel a lady passer-by backtracked to look at us in astonishment. Fortunately a café owner let us eat our picnic lunches inside, but we bought drinks of course – he too was amazed that we were walking in such conditions.

Our next hotel, l'Hermitage at La Bégude, was renowned for the unpleasantness of its lady owner, and the manageress at Forcalquier expressed horror when she found out where we would be staying, describing the owner as an 'old bat'. However, Theo had recently visited the hotel and knew that the place was under new management. She got the men worked up by describing how attractive the new lady owner was, and according to my notes I at least was not disappointed, describing her as 'young, petite and pert'. I believe she had some brothers but I can remember nothing about them! However, the plumbing in the hotel was in much need of attention, as every time somebody turned on a tap the room and its adjoining rooms were subject to a loud noise rather like machine gun fire.

Our final night was spent at Fontaine-de-Vaucluse, a town that I didn't care for as it was full of shops with garish souvenirs. Our landlady was very rude, pushing past one of our ladies without an 'excuse me' and slapping the wrist of one of our gents who offered to help her light a candle on the table.

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### **Ian Jones**

*Ian Jones was the Holiday Supervisor of GDBA Holidays, for whom Waymark organised holidays for blind skiers. These extracts are taken from his letters for publication in the Waymark winter brochures.*

*1993-94*

As you know, I have just returned from leading the Adventure Group's cross-country ski holiday in Hallingen, and I felt that I must write and let you know what a great time we had. The conditions were excellent with an embarrassing amount of snow, even in Oslo, and the

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temperature conveniently never rose above minus 5°C. All the participants made full use of the conditions, and on a number of occasions we covered over 30 kilometres. I am sure that many of us guides were thankful that it became dark at 5 pm, as I suspect that some of the visually impaired skiers would have quite happily continued into the night! The holiday was rounded off nicely when we crossed paths with the Olympic Flame, as it arrived in Oslo on its final leg to Lillehammer. Once again, many thanks for your help.

*1994-95*

Once again I write to share some thoughts on the past season's three cross-country ski holidays that we have run in conjunction with Waymark. I think these quotes from two visually impaired participants perhaps best sums up all three holidays, and in particular our week in Sjusjøen:

'Personally I found the holiday to be a huge success. I left home needing and determined to have an enjoyable break and was not disappointed. Holidays such as this do not just happen, many people's efforts combine to make them a success.' And:

'I thought the standard of guiding was second to none. It must sometimes be a rotten job. You need all-round vision, a very loud voice and infinite patience. And you have got to be an excellent skier who can read the track ahead and assess in a split second what feature might or might not derail your charge. All my guides (and from what I heard the rest of the guides too) had all these qualities in abundance. As a result I felt we experienced some of the best cross-country skiing imaginable.'

*1995-96*

I am sure that you would wish to know that our cross-country skiing holidays this winter were enjoyed by all. I was personally involved with one of our weeks at Dobbiaco where we covered many kilometres along the gentle wide valleys of the area. The highlight for me was the 30 km ski to Cortina d'Ampezzo along the abandoned railway track – skiing through the old tunnels was a novel experience; at least half of us were very grateful for the lighting provided in the tunnels! A further challenge awaited us in Cortina when we located some particularly exotic Italian ice creams – like the skiing, we arose to the challenge admirably.

*1996-97*

Our 1997 cross-country skiing programme proved a great success with 50 of our members enjoying the skiing in three different centres. I personally enjoyed a week of unbroken sunshine at Mösern, where our party tackled the many and varied tracks on the Wildmoos Plateau. Even the lure of coffee and cake back at the hotel couldn't entice many of our party back before nightfall on some days.

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1997-98

I am sure you would wish to know that our three cross-country ski holidays were enjoyed by all. A total of 27 visually impaired cross-country skiers took full advantage of the varied conditions encountered this winter. I personally enjoyed a fine week at Dobbiaco where we were lucky enough to have probably the best conditions of the three holidays. With some record low temperatures and clear skies every day the tracks were a joy to ski on. The evening activities also proved a challenge when we took on and beat another Waymark party during a particularly hilarious evening at the local bowling alley.

1998-99

During the 1998-99 winter we organised four holidays. The two groups at Dobbiaco enjoyed good conditions, especially the second week which started with a welcome heavy snowfall on the first day, followed by perfect tracks, blue sky and sunshine for the rest of the week – Dobbiaco at its best! We also had two groups in Norway. The Hallingen party experienced the full range of Norwegian winter. from a breathless sunny day on the Golsfjellet plateau, to a full blown blizzard when the route was a real challenge – the sauna was very welcome that night! A small party also enjoyed a week's superb skiing at Gjeilo. Accompanied by Ivar Slettemoen they ventured off track on many days, a new experience for some of the guides and skiers alike.

Ian has since written to say how helpful and positive Peter Chapman was in working with the blind skiers, impressing with his ability to retain facts and by taking a personal interest in the groups.

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### **Alan Smith (2)**

*This Alan Smith took over in 2000 from Ian Jones as Activities Supervisor of GDBA Holidays, and continues the narrative.*

2000-2001

Once again GDBA Holidays have had a very successful season. Our venues this year were Pertisau, Dobbiaco and Geilo. The conditions experienced were certainly mixed. The beginners at Pertisau were saved by a last minute snowfall which saw us through the week, having arrived in the rain! Progress was mixed but the enjoyment was universal for both the visually impaired and sighted members. The end of the week saw three people attaining their bronze award. The intermediates at Dobbiaco had to suffer clear blue skies, sunshine and lots of fresh snow. How they managed I'll never know! The advanced group in Gjeilo came back very windswept having experienced some harsh weather with blowing snow and cold temperatures. They are a tough bunch though and in that particular British fashion revelled in the adversity!

### AN ANONYMOUS REMINISCENCE

#### **The Intrusive Journalist**

When a well known travel writer turned up at Hostal El Anon in Jimena in the late 1980s, during a long distance walk across Spain, the Waymark party members were at first delighted to meet him. However, when he announced that he was writing a book about his experiences they rapidly disappeared, fearful that they were going to appear in it. (The book, *Walking Through Spain: from the Channel to Gibraltar*, was published by Queen Anne Press in 1991.)

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