

In Memoriam

MIRIAM O'BRIEN UNDERHILL

1899-1976

It was on a Boston-Maine sleeping car back in the 1920s that I first met Miriam O'Brien. We were on our way to the Glen House, at the foot of Mount Washington, for a week of winter climbing with the "Bemis Crew," an Appalachian Mountain Club group. This was the beginning of a long and happy friendship, of companionship among the hills of New England and Europe and gatherings at home.

Miriam was born in Lisbon, New Hampshire in 1899, was graduated from Bryn Mawr in 1920, studied at Johns Hopkins, and when we met, was working at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary. But neither job nor finances kept her from constant summers in Europe from 1926 on. As a child with her mother, she had already made minor climbs in the Alps and was thoroughly at home on our New England hills and cliffs. Miriam's ability as a mountaineer was soon apparent; facile and graceful on rock, her speed on all types of terrain was outstanding. Perhaps her most notable guided climb was the first traverse, in 1928, of all five pinnacles of the Aiguilles du Diable with Robert L.M. Underhill and guides Armand Charlet and Georges Cachet.

Soon Miriam was not content to be a "touriste" and aspired to lead "manless" climbs. In preparation she frequently took the lead from a complaisant guide. In 1929, with Winifred Marples, she led the Peigne and later that summer, the Grépon with Alice Damesme. She started her 1930 season by leading me up an amusing route on Torre Grande in the Dolomites. Later that summer we romped (with guides) over the Leiter-spitz when higher Zermatt peaks were snowed in. There were other manless climbs, and after several attempts, a successful ascent of the Matterhorn.

Miriam and Bob Underhill had been mountain companions for several years and in 1930 they became engaged, putting an end to her manless climbing, but not an end to her outstanding career in the Alps. With Bob, she continued a program of spectacular ascents. Her prowess was early recognized. Membership in the Groupe de Haute Montagne, the Ladies Alpine Club, the American Alpine Club came soon. Recognition particularly pleasing to her was the dedication of a new and difficult route on Torre Grande as "Via Miriam." She wrote articles for the *National Geographic* and European and American alpine journals. As her reputation grew, the Ladies Alpine Club, the Appalachian Club and the American Alpine Club conferred on her honorary membership, and when the

Ladies Alpine Club and the Alpine Club (London) merged, she became an honorary member of the latter, sadly when she was too ill to realize it.

Though the Alps were Miriam's particular playground, starting in 1946 she and Bob did pioneering climbing in the ranges of Montana. For six summers they enjoyed this terrain, so different from Europe. She was a charter member of the AMC's "Four-Thousand-Footer Club," those who had climbed all of New Hampshire's peaks of 4000 feet and over. She invented the game of "Four-Thousanders in Winter." Indefatigable in her love for the hills, she was collecting New Hampshire's "Hundred Highest" at the time of her collapse.

Though mountaineering was a vital part of her life, to view Miriam solely as a climber is to overlook many facets of this remarkable woman. She had a facile pen and authored the autobiographical *Give Me The Hills*, a book which, while sufficiently technical to satisfy her peers, is also enjoyed by the non-climber. For five years she was editor of *Appalachia*. Her photography, used to illustrate her writings and her witty lectures, was superb. The Appalachian Mountain Club's *Mountain Flowers of New England* owes much to her color photos of the little mountain blossoms.

I like to remember Miriam as a hostess, first in her parents' home in Dedham, then, after her marriage, in Concord, Massachusetts, and since 1960 in the attractive home the Underhills built in Randolph, New Hampshire, facing the Northern Peaks of the Presidential Range. It was always fun to be with her whether indoors, planning new ventures, reminiscing on past pleasures, just chatting; or out, scaling cliffs or tramping up snowy ridges.

After a long illness, Miriam Underhill died on January 7. She leaves her husband Robert L.M. Underhill and two sons, Robert of Del Mar, California and Brian of Boulder, Colorado.

MARJORIE HURD

BURGE BICKFORD

1906-1975

September 1975 ended almost a lifetime of adventure in the mountains for Burge Bickford.

His first ventures were with his father who was a guide in the Presidential Range of New Hampshire. Joining the Mountaineers in 1936 and with climbing courses behind him, he climbed with even more enthusiasm. As a climbing leader and lecturer and later as Climbing Chairman he contributed much to the development of the present school. His style and ability to relate to young climbers made him most popular and much in demand.

In the Mountaineers Burge served many areas of responsibility beyond