The mountain calls – Alpine tourism and cultural transfer since the 18th century
by Burkhart Lauterbach  
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Between the 18th and the 20th century, Alpine peaks were explored and conquered for completely different reasons by equally different groups of actors. They each contributed, however, to the Alpine tourism industry we know today. Simultaneously, there were interactions and intra- and intercultural transfers between “foreigners” and “locals”.

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See also the article "Construction of the first railway routes through the Alps (1848-1882)" in the EHNE.

Preface

In the discourse surrounding Alpine tourism, there is a point of view that recognizes tourism of the last two centuries as a "hub for encounters, for experiences and exchanges of all kinds", and even as a field of experimentation in the sense of a "school of Europe". One speaks of a mutual "give and take", and of the fact that the Alps had clearly benefited from the newcomers, both economically and metaphorically. "In this sense, it both revitalized and strengthened, and developed and modernized, its cultural gestalt". Modernization is tied to literacy, industrialization, urbanization, mobility, complexity, and rationalization. Foreigners come from (proto-)industrialized and urbanized regions at home and abroad, bringing with them their own life experiences and knowledge. They are already literate, and, for instance, can read maps and travel instructions. They possibly assume that the same can be said of the local innkeepers and hoteliers, mayors and mountain guides. Through their activities, they demonstrate their willingness to engage in increased mobility. They themselves introduce social complexity – now typical of their own lives – to the various mountain villages, which are the starting points for their tours. In addition, they show familiarity with rationalized everyday practices, such as in dealing with the locals, the advanced planning of tours, and in questions about their own equipment.

Foreigners import unknown and novel things that change the locals' culture. Conversely, the locals also influence the world of the foreigners as soon as they leave behind their own "gray, metropolitan circle". They enjoy "summer retreats, mountain air, alpine folklore, and alpine customs, right up to the aesthetic", thereby "enriching their experiences". Such transformations take place in many variants of tourist activity, even in alpine tourism and Alpinism, which began at the end of the 18th century. This encompassed "different forms of mountaineering in the Alps and other mountain ranges of the world – from hiking ... to alpine ski tours ... to sport and extreme rock and ice climbing". In the context of sports and tourism, the "breakthrough" of modern mountaineering took place in the second half of the 19th century. This was directly linked to those English mountaineers who successively worked their way through first-time ascents in the 1850s and 1860s. In the literature, this phase is almost always referred to as the "golden age" of alpinism. Some even speak of a "veritable explosion of activities", beginning with the ascent of the Wetterhorn in the Bernese Alps by the British lawyer Alfred Wills (1828–1912) in 1854. It was also reflected in organizational and journalistic achievements: The world's first mountaineering club, the Alpine Club, was founded in London 1857. The first publications also began to appear. For instance, the tour guide Peaks, Passes and Glaciers was published for club members from 1859.

Scientific mountaineering
In the period from the 18th to the 20th century, there were two mountaineering movements – the earlier so-called pre-alpinism and the later sport alpinism. Although they seemed to alternate with each other, they actually overlapped. In the time roughly between 1750 and 1850, alpine peaks were not yet being climbed sequentially as sport. Bringing the activity of mountaineering together with a pursuit of setting records and competition, which recalls the capitalist economic and labor system, would come later. In the Age of Enlightenment, it was rather a matter of finding ways to adequately encounter the "ice deserts" that had never been climbed before. The concern was with making progress in the discovery and rationalization of nature. This included human beings and culture, which existed in highly differentiated forms – from a dynamic, bourgeois city culture in one location, to an age-old, rural alpine culture in another. In the field of mountaineering, these cultures met in an almost symbiotic way:

On the one hand, "burghers" invented the idea of going to the highest mountains and set the objectives. Without these ideas and planning, the systematic subjugation of the mountains was inconceivable. On the other hand, while the "peasants" had at least not developed any sense for the system of mountain conquest, they knew the means for getting up the mountains. Without them, the systematic subjugation of the mountains was impracticable.

This phase, usually called pre-alpinism, marks the "real breakthrough" in humans' interactions with the mountains. The actors tested new ways of accessing them, and felt new "spiritual movements" and "sensations of the body". In order to sufficiently grasp the explorations in the period between the middle of the 18th and the middle of the 19th century, we would do well to use the term "scientific mountaineering". In particular, it brings to mind the interests pursued by the merchants and manufacturers, agrarian writers, and craftsmen who, in the 18th and 19th centuries, embarked on "practical journeys" with economic, technological, social, and educational objectives.

At that time, there was less of an intercultural encounter between locals and foreigners than an intracultural encounter between two groups, specifically the mountain travelers – burghers, cosmopolitan aristocrats, scientists, and independent scholars – and the native inhabitants of the alpine region. Effectively, it was clash of two cultures, which ultimately represented two different branches. This development was marked by the first ascents of the Mont Blanc by the farmer and crystal collector Jacques Balmat (1762–1834) and the doctor Michel Paccard (1757–1827) in 1786, and by the Genevan geologist Horace-Bénédict de Saussure (1740–1799) a year later, and the scientifically equipped and accompanied ascent of Ortler on behalf of the Archduke John of Austria (1782–1859) in the year 1804. These undertakings also included the participation of women, which is frequently glossed over.

Sport mountaineering

Many attempts have been made to explain the reason for the later advent of sport mountaineering. Alleged causes for the emergence of systematic mountaineering include the accessibility of the Alps through the railway, the romantic view of nature, or the compulsion of the newly developed bourgeoisie to create their own identity through "character building, healthy bodies, or hegemony". There is also a contrasting attempt that links sport mountaineering to the emergence of a series of military flashpoints in the mid-19th century like the Crimean War (1853–1856), the Indian Rebellion (1857–1858) against the British colonial power in Northern India, the American Civil War (1861–1865), local insurrections in Jamaica (1865), and New Zealand (1860–1865), and other events that collectively led to a shake-up of the British habitus as a great power and to disputes over its decline. These events created a climate in which middle-class men elevated the exploits of athletes and the adventures of mountaineers into cultural symbols of British masculinity, patriotism, national character, and imperial power. Such fealty was demonstrated, for instance, by the singing of the British national anthem into cultural symbols of British masculinity, patriotism, national character, and imperial power. In the same vein, another tour report speaks of "attacking the Zmuttgrat the next morning". The rhetoric here resembles that of the mountaineers' country of origin, where previous sentiments centered on conquering entire countries and regions. In this particular case, though, the British national flag was not raised as a sign of triumph. Serving this purpose instead (ironically enough) was an item of clothing from French mountain guide Michel Auguste Croz (1830–1865).

All the same, such information says nothing about whether, when, and, if so, how often locals and scientists had previously climbed these mountains in connection with the exercise of their professions: The trick that mountaineers use to affirm that they were the first to ascend the alpine peaks against surveyors, shepherds, and chamois hunters is semantics: What counts is not the first climb ever, but only the first touristic climb.

The ascents presented as mountain conquests were nothing other than the continuation of imperial politics by other means. Beginning in the western parts, and then, somewhat later, in the eastern parts of the Alps, the research repeatedly used formulations such as "Invention of Mountaineering in Mid-Victorian Britain" or "How the English made the Alps". It thus trafficked in stereotypes "which either completely or at least partially contradict (the) reality" that alpine tourism did not take place without the direct or indirect participation of the locals.
In the midst of the general political climate summarized above, the first Alpine Club, with its leisure and sporting orientation, served as a model for the foundation of further relevant clubs in Austria in 1862, in Switzerland in 1863, in Italy in 1867, in Germany in 1869, and in France in 1874. It was equally influential for the establishment of competing foundations, such as the *Austrian Tourist Club* in 1869, the *Société degli Alpinisti Tridentini* in 1872, the *Société des Touristes du Dauphiné* in 1875, and the *Austrian Alpine Club* in 1878. The socio-cultural model of the Alpine Club must therefore be regarded as a British import, just as the specific form of "we-action" can generally be attributed to British traditions – especially those of the 17th century civic-emanicipatory clubs and societies, which were direct forerunners of the club system.

The members of the Alpine Club initially consisted mainly of lawyers (28.1 percent), business people (17.4 percent), members of various educational professions (12.5 percent) and, to a lesser extent, government officials, clergy, doctors, officers and others, i.e. members of the so-called "professional middle classes", who are sometimes even categorized as the "wealthy elite".

British mountaineers not only had economic capital to finance their climbing holidays, but also cultural capital. They were active as scientists and politicians like John Ball (1818–1889), as theology professors and writers like the father of Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), Leslie Stephen (1832–1904), and physics professors like John Tyndall (1820–1893), as engravers and writers such as Edward Whymper (1840–1911), or as a merchants like Horace Walker (1838–1908), to name but a few. They can certainly be regarded as "representatives of the urban-intellectual world" and thus as genuine bourgeois actors. In contrast, the local mountain guides were by no means "professional guides" at first or for that matter simply local peasants. They were chamois hunters or so-called "alpine herders", essentially shepherds of sheep and goats, but also woodcarvers and stonemasons. Nevertheless, in the early phase of mountaineering, they all but lacked any touristic appreciation of their own alpine world.

### Cultural contact – cultural conflict

The earlier scientific and later sporting activities brought with them the emergence of a highly complex intra- and intercultural field. There were direct cultural contacts and cultural conflicts between transient newcomers and local residents as well as extensive everyday cultural transfers of things and activities, that is, material culture and social culture. Among other things, vivid descriptions from the pens of renowned mountaineers, which can be assigned to the narrative genre of autobiography as well as travelogue, give us a palpable idea of what this looked like.

From the time before the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, there are indications that lodgings for travelers adapted to the needs of their British guests in "form and interior design", In Grindelwald in Bernese Oberland, for instance, a hall for Anglican services was constructed in the Hotel Bär, and later (as elsewhere), an Anglican church was built with the help of British and local donations in 1886. Fitting into this context, furthermore, is the construction in 1912 of the Britannia Hut located above Saas Fee in the canton Valais. It was financed by the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club, and later repeatedly expanded.

There are other forms of material culture that British tourists introduced to the high alpine regions. For example, in the late 19th century, they brought with them optical instruments, now in the possession of the German Alpine Association in Munich. In the travelogue of Matterhorn conqueror Edward Whymper, the reader encounters a rather drôle description of his ultimately successful attempt to bring with him a kind of collapsible fire ladder from England for future mountain ascents in France and Italy: "My luggage was highly suggestive of housebreaking." The increasing number of mountaineers was reflected in various remnants that we now call "environmental pollution". There is an "old rusty wall hook" from earlier ascents, masses of empty sardine and meat cans, lost hats, walking sticks, and pipes. In addition, bottles were buried into a self-erected heap of stones at the top of a mountain that had just been climbed. It served a thoroughly informative purpose, retaining notes with the date of the first ascent as well as the names of the top climbers. In other cases, however, bottles were consumed of their contents and simply left behind as trash. Sometimes they were tossed into the valley to test the mountain acoustics: "Throw a bottle down to the Tiefenmatten – no sound returns for more than a dozen seconds."

Whether this form of interaction with nature had any effect on the behavior of the locals remains unclear. It is conceivable, however, as some of them were present on the tours as mountain guides and porters and thus effectively served as eyewitnesses. Or was it perhaps the mountaineers who adapted to the local mountain guides?

Cultural transfer, in any event, also took place in the opposite direction. Crampons were used in alpine agriculture "for centuries" before the British mountaineers adopted them. The same goes for what until the beginning of alpine tourism simply meant "the stick" and now "alpine staff" or "alpenstock" – the latter in both English and Italian, denoting in each an "extraordinarily high, solid stick of ash or hazel wood" which had different functions. Finally, the ice axe – no matter how much its construction underwent specific modifications for use in mountaineering – was likewise an object of cultural transfer.
Conflicting reports have been published on the interactions with mountain guides, who only guided foreigners and carried baggage as spare-time employment.\textsuperscript{60} It has been said, on the one hand, that the locals were independent.\textsuperscript{31} They imposed conditions on their British employers and did not necessarily think them trustworthy. When being scolded by them, they scolded them right back. They allegedly had no understanding of the terrain, deceived foreign mountaineers, and even robbed them. In one instance, they supposedly exploited the deaths of four mountaineers on their first ascent of the Matterhorn by asking their employer (Whymper) to spread false information about their economic circumstances after the accident in order to evoke pity – and thereby create new job opportunities. What is more, they purportedly spoke incomprehensible, barbaric dialects similar to Chinese.\textsuperscript{62} Sometimes they hesitated to climb certain peaks. They were too pious and superstitious and otherwise tried to assert themselves over their respective masters.\textsuperscript{31} Lastly, fault was also found with the hygienic conditions of the mountain guides' villages.\textsuperscript{44}

On the other hand, in the view for example of Whymper and the English mountaineer and author Albert Mummery (1855–1895), some mountain guides had years of experience, excellent skills and manners.\textsuperscript{55} They were strong and robust, and therefore indispensable. They earned high praise from travelers, in part because they were especially cooperative.\textsuperscript{59} They offered instruction, but sometimes they even let their respective masters help them as well. They were regarded as confidants or companions – and also as friends. In such cases the pronoun "we" is preferred.\textsuperscript{55} It was assumed that a friendly relationship was beneficial for both sides. Clear communication, though, depended on unilateral acculturation. In everyday practice, reciprocal transculturation\textsuperscript{59} proved to be unrealistic.

**Conclusion**

During the period under examination, the tourism-induced cultural transfer in the alpine region can be categorized in two ways. We are able to observe, first, both intra- and, increasingly, intercultural transfer processes and, second, spatial, social and, in a narrower sense, cultural mobility processes.\textsuperscript{69} City dwellers headed to distant mountain villages, from where they could ascend alpine peaks. In moving from one place to another, they demonstrated spatial mobility. At the same time, by entering social milieus other than their own, they engaged in horizontal social mobility. The pursuit of an activity in a foreign location that was (still) unknown to their own social reference group back home – e.g. the (first) ascent of a high alpine summit – permitted them to assume a position of "social superiority"\textsuperscript{65} and hence exhibit vertical social mobility. This applies equally to cases when city dwellers would address interested urban audiences with photo presentations and other entertainment programs after returning from a climbing holiday.\textsuperscript{67} One can also speak here of "cultural mobility", or what Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) specifically refers to as the "incorporation of cultural capital". Inherent to this is the "acquisition of education",\textsuperscript{72} manifested in the particular cases in the expansion of one's horizon through travel, improving one's knowledge of foreign languages, testing new forms of leisure, physical culture and sport as well as developing new perspectives on the alpine world. Moments of exemplification and expansion, verbalizing and propagating, belong to these initially self-referential goals and associated practices – not only after one returns home, but also already in the foreign location as a temporarily visited receiving environment. Insofar as the latter also gains new experiences through the encounter with the newcomers "here it is more a matter of an exchange in both directions than of one-sided borrowing".\textsuperscript{23} In addition, the exchange takes place not so much directly between initial and destination systems but rather between special variants – between the holiday culture on the part of the travelers and the service culture on the part of the local hosts. Together, they formed a kind of culture of interaction over the history of alpinism.\textsuperscript{15} This dynamic has not gone without its share of criticism. Themes that are still being constantly negotiated include: Foreign rule and dominance of economic interests, overdevelopment and urban sprawl, environmental pollution and aesthetic desecration, an increase in natural disasters, and an uncertain future for Europe's highest and largest mountain range.\textsuperscript{75}

It is therefore striking that until the turn of the 19th to the 20th century mountaineering was perceived rather as an "emerging" activity, especially in the context of spa tourism.\textsuperscript{26} Nonetheless, even about a century later, real mass tourism only appears in certain places or regions and only at certain times. Overall, it is in fact "not a key industry in the alpine region". About 10 percent of all alpine communities have a tourist mono-structure, another 10 percent have "relevant" but not dominant tourism, 40 percent "little" tourism, and another 40 percent no tourism at all.\textsuperscript{27} As stated at the outset, however, tourism's function as a "hub for encounters, experience and exchange of all kinds" cannot be denied.

**Appendix**

**Sources**

Grimm, Jacob / Grimm, Wilhelm: Deutsches Wörterbuch, Leipzig 1854, vol. 1, online:

Mummery, Albert Frederick: My Climbs in the Alps and Caucasus, New York 1895.


Literature


Notes

1. Lipp, Alpenregion 1993, pp. 49, 58.
2. Lipp, Alpenregion 1993, pp. 52, 57.
5. Meinherz, Alpinismus 2002, p. 244.
10. Scharfe, Berg-Sucht 2007, p. 27 [emphasis in the original].
14. An intercultural encounter takes place when the acting, i.e. communicating and interacting, people come from different cultures or are shaped by different cultures; in an intracultural encounter, the actors originate from the same lifeworld. The related – expanded – concept of culture does not refer to developments in the field of high culture, but to everyday life as a whole. "Culture" can then be defined as an ensemble of human actions and abilities that express themselves spiritually, materially and socially, of associated patterns and evaluations, and finally of meanings. See Roth, Volkskunde 1999, pp. 39–41; Lindner, Identität 1987, p. 8.
32. See Cunningham, Pioneers 1887, p. 34; Zebhauser, Handbuch 1991, p. 205.
34. Im Hof, Das gesellige Jahrhundert 1982, pp. 13, 126, 188–193. See Gidl, Alpenverein 2007: This study is based on a research project on the history of the Austrian Alpine Club for the period 1862–1918 carried out at the Institute of History and Ethnology at the University of Innsbruck and financed by the Austrian Fund for the Promotion of Scientific Research; a volume covering the time period up to the present is in preparation.
36. Frison-Roche / Jouty, Mountain Climbing 1996, p. 61. See Mathieu, Die Alpen 2005. This volume is a result of the research project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, "Die Eliten und die Berge: Alpiner Diskurs und Gegendiskurs seit der Renaissance.
37. Cultural capital comprises both permanent dispositions and acquired and appropriated cultural goods such as books or images as well as institutionalized forms of qualification such as educational titles. See Bourdieu, Kapital 1983, pp. 185–190.
43. Lunn, Century 1957, pp. 72, 78.
44. See Eisenberg, Kulturtransfer 2003, p. 399.
46. Material culture comprises all objects which are used by individuals, groups, or entire societies and which hold a certain meaning for them. Social culture, on the other hand, encompasses all interpersonal relationships which exist between individuals, groups, or entire societies and which hold a certain meaning for them. See Hahn, Materielle Kultur 2005, pp. 18–21; Bourdieu, Kapital 1983, pp. 190–195.
47. Kröner, Grindelwald 1968, p. 47. Williams even writes about "The Need of an 'English' Church": Williams, Church 1999, pp. 13f.
52. Mummery, Bergfahrten 1988, pp. 31, 143.
63. See Mummery, Bergfahrten 1988, pp. 25, 26, 50, 40f., 33.
64. See Whymper, Scrambles 2002, pp. 95, 143, 353, 22f., 148, 231–233.
65. Whymper, Scrambles 2002, pp. 95, 143, 353, 22f. 148, 231–233, 37, 80, 82; Mummery, Bergfahrten 1988, pp. 33, 42, 111.
67. Mummery, Bergfahrten 1988, pp. 182, 185, 188, 55, 97, 16, 331, 71, 95.
68. Mummery, Bergfahrten 1988, p. 86. The category of acculturation initially referred to the one-sided adaptation of individuals and groups to foreign cultures. Meanwhile, it can also be understood in the sense of the category of transculturation, which is about mutual exchange and mixed activities. See Burke: Kulturtransfer 1998, p. 213; Welsch, Transkulturalität 1995.
69. See Vester, Grundbegriffe 2009, pp. 131–137.
70. Warneken / Wittel, Angst 1997, p. 1.
Other mountain sports, such as climbing and mountain hiking are popular, although in the case of the latter some trails need to be cleared during the winter months to ensure they are safe to use. It’s also worth mentioning that summer has prompted a new wave of tourism over recent times. The vast majority of resorts know that tourism is the key driver behind their economy and as such, English will always be spoken. This might not expand to some of the smaller towns, but for those people who are just visiting the tourist areas there shouldn’t be any concerns. What’s the easiest way to reach the Alps? As you would expect from an 11th century building of this ilk, the end result is stunning and is made even more picturesque thanks to the glorious mountains that sit around it.