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## **‘Home is Just Another Range of Mountains’: Constructions of ‘Home’ in Women’s Mountaineering Auto/biographies**

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**Abstract** This article seeks to explore the extent to which, according to Dorothy Middleton, women’s mountaineering and other adventurous travel was the ‘individual gesture of the house-bound, man-dominated woman’ (1965, p. 4). In an earlier article (*Auto/Biography Yearbook*, 2010) I examined the history of women’s mountaineering through an interrogation of unpublished letters, diaries, published auto/biographies and other auto/biographical ephemera. Here, I explore how women mountaineers challenged an established and highly gendered ideology of domesticity which, as Griffin has argued, viewed the home as the rightful place for women and subsequently sought to confine them to its internal environs (2012).

### **Introduction**

McKeon argues that ‘home’ was a concept which evolved over hundreds of years, reaching its apotheosis in the Victorian era through a by then firmly cemented consensus between the Church and the State. The ‘home’ was seen as a sanctified place of marital harmony, where men and women established specific, gendered relationships with indoors (domestic/inside) and outdoors (work/outside) spaces. This distinct delineation of space was appropriated, as Maddrell writes, throughout the nineteenth century by significant cultural institutions such as the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) and the Alpine Club (AC) – founded in 1830 and 1857 respectively – through the simple expedient of disbarring women from membership.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the existence of a powerful and patriarchal ideology which sought to confine women to the home, women mountaineers from the early nineteenth century onwards found many, often canny ways of challenging the gendered status quo, contriving and conniving ways of accessing external

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landscapes. What follows is a consideration of some of the means by which they managed this, and of the complex relationships between women mountaineers and 'home' which emerge in a variety of life-writings from the period 1838 to the 1960s.

**Marie Paradis: 'Lord, it's all for your own good, you're poor, you need the money'**

I have previously written briefly of Marie Paradis and of the importance of this illiterate, working-class servant-woman to women's mountaineering. No discussion of women's mountaineering would therefore be complete without a consideration of Paradis' challenge to nineteenth century hegemony.

Little is known about Marie, apart from a description of her by Countess Henriette D'Angeville in *'Mon excursion au Mont Blanc en 1838'*, D'Angeville's narrative of her climb to the top of Mont Blanc 30 years after Marie's summit success. Invited to D'Angeville's post-summit celebrations, Marie revealed to D'Angeville her reasons for making the climb in 1808, which I paraphrase here:

Ah, I was a poor serving girl, life was terrible hard. One day the guides says to me, 'Marie, we're going up Mont Blanc, you're strong, you walk well, you should come with us'. 'And what business have I up there then', says I, 'I'd never get all the way up, for you tell me it's that dreadful, I surely never could'. (D'Angeville, 1992, p.102).

The guides, perhaps sensing an opportunity of fame if they were to succeed in taking the first woman to the summit of Mont Blanc persisted:

'Lord, it's all for your own good, you're poor, you need the money. It may be that you get to the top, for you're a stout-hearted wench, and then all the world will know that a woman went up. Visitors will want to meet you and they'll pay good money too, and that'll help you'. (D'Angeville, 1992, p.102).

The promise of money proved to be the clincher and that, with the hope of improving her quality of life, along with her own courage and bravery, helped propel the 30 year-old Marie to summit success in July, 1808.

Marie's voice provides the first theme to emerge in this study of the relationship between 'home' and women's mountaineering: that the opportunity to travel to the summit of the highest mountain in the French Alps might lead to possible freedom from domestic servitude, an improvement of her material conditions and the chance to be mistress of her own destiny. A slowly developing alpine tourism meant a growth in visitors to the Chamonix region and as the guides had foretold, they did seek Marie out, avid for tales of high adventure about the snowy tops they could glimpse in safety from the valley floor. Agreeing to accompany the guides was thus a canny move by Marie – her fame enabled her to set up a modest tea-stall at the foot of Mont Blanc, where for a few *sous* she continued to make tea and recount her

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adventures to eager visitors well into her fifties. It is a tale of early nineteenth-century feminine mountain entrepreneurship.

**Henriette D'Angeville: 'Combinations of English flannel, a pair of trousers, a man's shirt, two pairs of thick woollen stockings and two pairs of nailed boots'**

When the 44-year old Countess Henriette D'Angeville declared to her friends and close family early in 1838 her intention of climbing to the top of Mont Blanc in that same year, they predictably reacted with horror. Why, they asked her, was she not content to indulge in activities more suited to ladies of wealth and leisure? A tour of Switzerland by carriage, perhaps, or why not travel to Italy to make some sketches? Her reply was forceful. 'The soul has needs, as does the body, peculiar to each individual', she declared. 'I am among those who prefer the grandeur of natural landscapes to the sweetest or most charming views imaginable'. (1992, p. xx-xxi). Not for her a tour to the usual places.

An adventurous traveller of some years standing, D'Angeville had long desired to climb to the summit of Mont Blanc. From her home just outside Geneva she could, on a clear day, sight its icy slopes and earlier travels to Chamonix at the foot of Mont Blanc had intensified 'my old longing to climb it'. (D'Angeville, 1992, p. xix). For her ascent of Mont Blanc D'Angeville prepared carefully, amassing personal baggage and a considerable entourage of porters and guides. As she stated with some vigour, 'one does not attend the court of the King of the Alps in a silk dress and gauze bonnet' (1992, p. xxi). Mountains were not the place to reproduce the dress codes associated with the home, but neither were they the place to compromise one's femininity. D'Angeville's list of clothing included both practical and feminine articles. To a pair of trousers, 'cut full and corded at the top, with gaiters at the bottom to tuck into the boots' (1992, p. 31) she added a feather boa, a black velvet mask to protect her skin, a large straw hat and a bonnet 'lined and trimmed with black fur, with a green veil attached to the brim' (1992, p. 31). A heavy plaid and fur-lined pelisse completed her ensemble and D'Angeville's essential mountaineering costume, she revealed, together with pelisse and plaid, weighed in at just over twenty-one pounds. Combining common-sense, personal knowledge of the demands of alpine travel and a wish to retain her femininity she had assembled what she believed to be the ideal alpine costume for a wealthy woman of middle age, paying attention to the gendered social rigours of the early Victorian age without compromising on warmth, practicality and safety.

In *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt*, Mary Russell considers at length the extent to which ladies' Victorian dress constrained their ability to move freely and safely. I have previously written that the achievements of Victorian women adventurers and mountaineers were all the more notable due to the clothing they were obliged to wear in deference to gendered dress codes which

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sought to confine women in long skirts, heavy layers of silk, cotton and wool, with constraining whalebone to restrict 'unfeminine' movements. Mary Kingsley, however, disagreed. In her travels around Western Africa in the 1890s, she never once abandoned her strict sense of dress, even when confronted with the vagaries and variances of the West African climate. The blessings of a good thick skirt, in Kingsley's case, could not be over-estimated when the disadvantages of Africa had to be contended with.

Devine and Forsyth (2007) suggest that any woman who sought to free herself from the restraints of Victorian dress would have been perceived as a major 'transgressor' of 'prevailing moral values and social mores' (2007, p. 363). Like Mary Kingsley, the well-travelled Victorian adventurer and mountaineer Isabella Bird was no transgressor. Outraged by a claim, sensationally reported by *The Times*, that she was wearing men's riding breeches during her travels around the Rocky Mountains in the 1870s, Bird went to some pains to reassure her publisher, John Murray and her readership that she had not donned masculine clothing. In the preface of the second edition of *A Lady's Life in The Rocky Mountains*, Bird wrote a stern and terse note to refute the claim. She was furious that she could be accused of such impropriety and added her prefacing note to all subsequent editions of the book, making sure an illustration of her in 'mountain dress' was also included. She wrote:

'For the benefit of other lady travellers, I wish to explain that my "Hawaiian riding dress" is the "American Lady's Mountain Dress", a half-fitting jacket, a skirt reaching to the ankles, and full Turkish trousers gathered into frills which fall over the boots – a thoroughly serviceable and feminine costume for mountaineering and other rough travelling in any part of the world. I add this explanation ... in consequence of an erroneous statement in The Times of November 22nd'. (Bird, 1982, p. vii-viii)

Bird may have taken great pains to reassure her readers that she was not relaxing the strict codes of the day, but she did, nevertheless, challenge the conservative, gendered expectations for her sex by showing that women could succeed in feats requiring substantial and prolonged physical endurance. In a description of her ascent of Long's Peak, Bird affirmed her frailness and femininity whilst exhibiting physical toughness. She did not gloss over the travail, the discomfort, the thirst or the terror that she overcame but still managed to write herself as a fragile and incompetent woman, needing protection and guidance from her guides. Slipping, gasping, being hauled from man to man like a sack of potatoes, sometimes crawling on her hands and knees, bruised and dehydrated 'at last the peak was won'. (1982, p. 113).

By the late nineteenth century, some women mountaineers had devised ways to challenge convention through, for example, taking to wearing knickerbockers underneath their skirts and once out of sight of civilisation taking their skirts off, donning them again on their return. Mary Russell reports on another method, which allowed the skirt to be gathered and lifted out of the

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way of obstacles with comparative ease. The method consisted of: 'sewing into the seam of the dress small rings through which a cord could be passed. The ends could then be knotted together in such a way that the whole dress might be drawn up at a moment's notice to the required height' (1986, p. 93).

Other women mountaineers made no attempt to find ways around the constraints of Victorian domesticity but simply took the manners and dress of the era into the mountains with them. In a description of the mountaineer Lucy Walker (1836-1916, of whom little is known as she never consigned her experiences to print), from notes given to her by one of Walker's friends, the mountaineering historian Claire Eliane Engel stressed Walker's domestic credentials. Walker was, Engel wrote:

in every way the perfect Victorian young lady. She was not an athlete and her greatest asset, when climbing, was her unflinching will-power... She was an expert needlewoman and read a good deal in several languages. She took an active part in the social life of Liverpool, where she lived with her parents. She was a charming hostess and a devoted friend. (Engel, 1952, p. 136)

Lucy Walker carried out her mountaineering with modesty and decorum. Her alpine costume was an ordinary print dress and she always climbed with her father, brother and their trusted guide. She is proof that Victorian women, if endowed with sufficient determination, a sense of adventure, skill and courage, need not let the wearing of a dress prevent them from becoming mountaineers. Perhaps because of her drawing room manners, Lucy Walker was celebrated for her mountaineering achievements and when in July 1871, accompanied by her father and a party of guides, she made the first female ascent of the Matterhorn, her success was publicised widely by the press and a poem in *Punch* appeared in her honour on 26 August 1871 entitled 'A Climbing Girl,' which concluded with the lines:

No glacier could baffle, no precipice balk her,  
No peak rise above her, however sublime.  
Give three times three cheers for intrepid MISS WALKER.  
I say, my boys, doesn't she know how to climb! (Engel, 1952, p. 86)

By the late nineteenth century, it seemed that the popular press had reached an approving consensus about women mountaineers, providing they disported themselves in the mountains with the grace, modesty and decorum of Lucy Walker. An illustration (see Fig. 1) of a woman mountaineer on the front page of a September 1886 edition of *The Illustrated London News* and the accompanying lead article 'Lady Mountaineers' stated unequivocally that:

If a woman has nerve and self-possession, in which qualities, partly moral and partly physical, not a few women are quite equal to men, she can learn to perform a feat of this kind, with her light, firm tread and good balance of the whole body, as deftly as the more robust sex ... this faculty, moreover, of enduring the unusual position of very great

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altitude, without disturbance of the brain and nerves is not always found in men of undoubted courage (1886, p. 299)



Fig. 1. *illus. 'Mountaineering in the Tyrol: turning a Corner'.*  
The Illustrated London News Saturday 18 September 1886.

By the early twentieth century, women mountaineers were demonstrating just how self-possessed they could be by establishing mountaineering clubs of their own.

**The Ladies' Alpine Club: 'At Homes, Teas and a fire for 1/-'**

The Ladies Alpine Club (LAC), a forerunner of the Lyceum Club, was established in 1907 by a group of ladies who wished for a place of their own where like-minded women could come together and share their enthusiasm about mountaineering. The club's headquarters were initially subsidised, rented rooms at the Lyceum Club and then a room at the Great Central Hotel, Marylebone, where tea and a fire could be had for 1/- per member – a replacement of one domestic hearth for another, albeit arguably more congenial. The principles of the LAC, of which the chief architect was its first President, Elizabeth Le Blond, were re-iterated by Le Blond in her Foreword to the first report of the LAC, published in 1913. The LAC, she declared, in language which drew on domestic metaphors, would promote high standards for ladies' mountaineering in an atmosphere that would be 'nourished' by the membership:

A Club such as ours ...must be nourished by the unceasing interest and labour of the members, and above all its high standard must be maintained, so that, as membership carries with it a guarantee of efficiency, it may ever be an honour to belong to it. (Le Blond, 1913, p. 3)



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Constituted during the short Edwardian period, the LAC represented in its values and approaches to women's mountaineering much of the cultural, domestic ideology of the Victorian age which had informed the mountaineering of women like Lucy Walker and Isabella Bird. LAC members were expected to behave with in a manner becoming to upper, middle-class ladies, which made up most of its membership in the early years. Membership of the LAC was not extended to professional, middle-class ladies until the 1920s, delayed by an element of class snobbery about professional women which remained strong into the 1930s and further democratisation of women's mountaineering had to wait until after the Second World War.

The LAC published a yearly report from 1913 to 1924, aimed at publicising the activities of its members together with notifications of the year's social calendar, which included: dinners; teas; 'At Homes'; musical soirees; lectures (flora and fauna being favourite topics); club walks; picture exhibitions; and an annual dinner in addition to the normal general meetings. 'At Homes' enabled women to meet and talk about mountains and allied subjects in a safe haven, with like-minded company, in addition to giving the hostess an opportunity to show off her home to its best effect. They additionally invested the idea of a women's club with a glow of domestic respectability for the benefit of sceptical husbands and fathers. Much more could be written on the extent to which the LAC cleverly subverted the concept of domesticity for its own ends but suffice to say, for the purposes of this article, that 'At Homes' were one successful example of this.

The LAC also provided a means of mitigating the boredom and lacklustre approach to life which sometimes accompanied women who had nothing better to do than, according to Winifred Holtby, 'play golf on a Tuesday afternoon or to take the children out picknicking on a Thursday morning' (1978, p. 110). In providing opportunities for women to gather and talk about mountaineering, the LAC developed what Elizabeth Le Blond, in her article *Alpine Climbing Past and Present*, referred to as women's 'best qualities'. Mountaineering, she wrote, 'brings forth our best qualities – unselfishness, self-reliance, alertness of mind, calmness in moments of danger, infinite patience' (1907, p. 537). These attributes were what the LAC strove to develop in its members.

### **Dorothy Pilley: 'on delightful terms with one's saucepan'**

Griffin has argued that the concept of 'home' was vital in the Victorian age for providing a vision of domestic harmony and accord which fitted the political ideology of the day. Perfect accord at home between husband and wife was the foundation on which wars could be fought, the Empire expanded and the economy improved. For these aims to be realised, both men and women were required to agree on a sexual division of labour and for the home to be the

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place where the principles of 'domestic harmony, marital unity and male authority' (2012, p. 23) would be unified and legitimated. This was the ordained future against which Dorothy Pilley set herself.

Born in 1894, Pilley was the oldest of four children born to an industrialist father and a preoccupied, highly strung mother who was unsuited to the rigours of child-rearing, house-keeping and domestic management. Because of her mother's irregular grasp of household affairs and increasing absence from home on long shopping trips, the young Dorothy became proficient at domestic work from an early age, often intervening in domestic crises due to the high turnaround of servants in the Pilley household. On visits home from school, Pilley undertook an increasing amount of domestic work, loathing it whilst being highly competent. On Friday 26<sup>th</sup> September 1912 she noted vociferously in her diary that she 'did some housework in the morning, am getting quite a good hand at it but can not bring myself to like or even tolerate making beds. I hate it!' (26<sup>th</sup> September, 1914, diary). Holtby has pointed out that young, middle-class women expected to be 'educated, trained and brought out to attract husbands and become mothers of children' (1978, p. 129) and this was no different for Dorothy. Holtby also emphasised the role which parents took in limiting their daughters' interests in activities which might distract their minds from this main purpose' (1978, p. 129).

In 1913, having failed to gain her father's approval to train in horticulture, Pilley bowed to the seemingly inevitable and enrolled for a year's course in domestic science at a London establishment. Throughout 1913, she constantly turned to her diary to work out her frustrations as can be seen in this extract from her diary, dated 19<sup>th</sup> September, 1913:

My first book will be 'From Bad to Worse by One Who Knows'. Really though, to-day I have done all the work including potatoes, cooking them, laying table, washing up – who dares say I am not domesticated! (19th September 1913, diary).

It fell to Pilley to undertake more and more domestic work. Her younger sister, Violet (Vi), away at boarding school, was also expected on each visit home to make up an increasing domestic shortfall as a result of a decline in the numbers of working-class girls entering domestic service in the 1910s. In her introduction to the co-edited collection of her correspondence with Winifred Holtby, Vera Brittain observed the extent to which parents viewed their daughters as an extension to the servants, writing that they tended to regard daughters as 'heaven-sent conveniences upon whom duty laid the combined functions of nurse, companion, secretary and maid-of-all work' (1970, ix). Pilley's diary entry for Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> September 1913 reinforces this:

Did my room, wrote to Miss Donington, dusted the drawing room, practised and did some mending. Then Mother came in after a fruitless search for servants, she was quite desperate. (27th September 1913, diary)



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Pilley's 1913 diary vividly captures her experiences of domestic training, which contained a mixture of practical domestic science, moral training, theology, literature and art history, reflecting the expectations of the skills and knowledge expected of the mistress of a middle-class household. Her diary entries from 2<sup>nd</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> October 1913 provide detailed insight into the nature and content of the training:

Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> October

Had my first lesson in laundry work today but had brought nothing to do so went up and did needlework instead. The demonstration was on the removal of stains, a most useful item to know. We had before that class, Divinity with Miss Paull. I suppose the idea is so that she should get into contact personally and also so that we should have some kind of moral training.

Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> October

Joy, bliss, no dirty work today ... my eyes very bad and head aches, go therefore shopping with Mother.

Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> October

All the morning spent sewing. I am about sick of it.

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> October

Spent a good deal of the morning doing those silly samples and while the others were doing hygiene, copied out essay on Egyptian architecture for Mr. Bannister.

In September, 1914, Pilley received an invitation which was to change her entire life. I have previously written in some detail of Dorothy Pilley's first experience of the mountains which were to become a lifelong love, providing her with the means both to establish her independence and develop a writing career which would include her climbing memoirs, editorship of the Ladies' Alpine Club Yearbook and the Pinnacle Club Journal. Pilley was invited to accompany an aunt and cousin to Snowdonia to celebrate Pilley's 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. Steeling herself for her father's refusal, a delighted Pilley suddenly found herself transported to another world when he gave his unexpected consent. Travelling up by train, everything was an adventure for her, including the unfamiliar, new landscape, which was 'wonderful with cold grey sea on one side and mountains on the other' (11<sup>th</sup> September 1914, diary). 'Home' took on another meaning and Pilley described their cottage accommodation with romantic zeal, finding it a delight, writing on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> September that 'the cottage has splendid views of a giant mountain with a torrential stream running down its face, and always, it seems, a glowing welcoming fire' (12<sup>th</sup> September, 1914, diary).

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On Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> September 1914, the day of Pilley's twentieth birthday, the three women undertook a trip up to Snowdon. Pilley wrote in her diary that they took a 'long drive up to Snowden [sic] behind weary steed, eat sodden sandwiches seated in puddles with utmost relish! Sea amidst glow of brass and copper and Pen y Pass Hotel'. (16<sup>th</sup> September, 1914, diary). On this, her first foray into the mountains, Pilley invested both domestic and mountain landscapes in Snowdonia with notions of freedom and escapism, turning previously ordinary acts of horse-drawn travel and eating sandwiches into high adventure.

She felt a terrible anti-climax on arriving back in London from the Snowdon trip, comparing the excitement of the mountains of North Wales to the 'drab' existence at home. Home in London now seemed increasingly stifling and unbearably restrictive. 'It's dreadful the drab colour existence has when I reach here', she wrote in her diary on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> September 1914. 'Shall I never realise that I live here'? For the first time she had perceived previously unimagined possibilities opening up to her. In *Climbing Days*, Pilley drew on her September 1914 diary to explain that, for her, discovering the mountains:

'was like waking up from a half sleep with the senses cleared, the self released. It was as if I had never seen anything before to strike me as beautiful, I was distraught by the feelings that arose' (1965, p. 2).

In her 1916 diary, Pilley frequently and negatively compared her home life with the mountains. In describing a trip to the summer sales with her mother on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1916, Pilley described the exhaustion of shopping:

'Shopping [sic] is decidedly the most tiring form of exercise. It makes your eyes ache and feet ache, it's exhausting, it's patience trying, it's confusing, it's debasing (at least when you fight with other females at a sale'. (3<sup>rd</sup> July 1916, diary).

Pilley noted her mother's enjoyment, however, commenting, 'still, there is another point of view, saling [sic] is an amusement, real relaxation for the tired housewife and therefore good'. Pilley's diary entry for Monday 17<sup>th</sup> July 1916 contrasted the freedom she felt in the mountains with the constrictions of her home life:

Elsie rang up to know if I would come Thursday. What a question. Everything in me cried to be away in the mountains. At home they naturally do not understand. I felt selfish, even thinking of leaving them again. They all come down in two weeks. Why should I not have the wonder of the mountains in that extra time? To get away from the world, alone on the heights, is a desire which hurts, an agony of longing...I have never felt anything like the call of the mountains, it draws me, it carries me, sober me, off my feet. (17<sup>th</sup> July, 1916, diary)

Some of her diary entries from August 1916 capture a sense of the companionship and camaraderie which Pilley gained through mountaineering and it is interesting to note that illustrations in her diaries frequently draw on

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domestic images such as a warm kitchen, or wet climbers seeking refuge in the dry, to try and explain the sense of conviviality and companionship from being in the mountains as can be seen in the illustration in Figure 2.

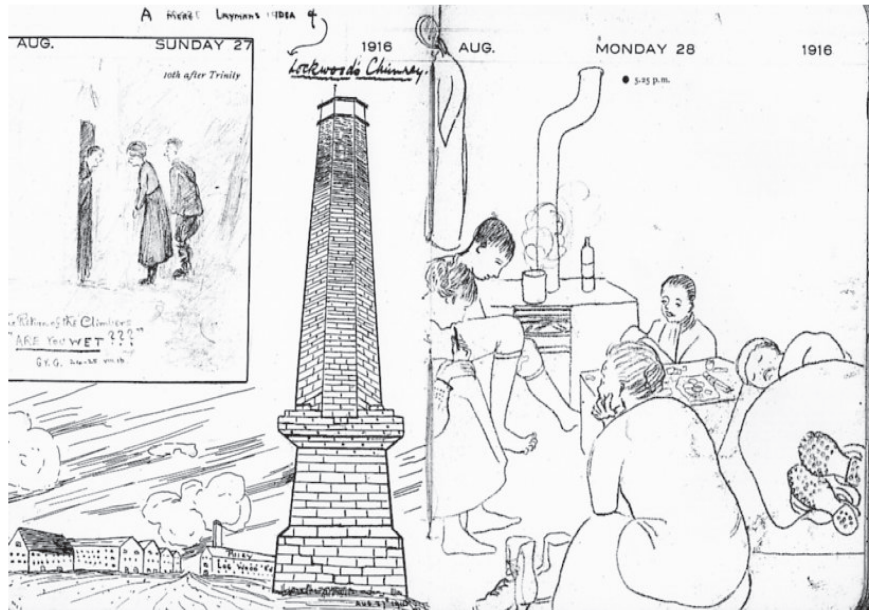


Fig: 2 Pilley's Diary, 27th and 28th August, 1916. Estate of D.E. and I.A. Richards

It was not until marriage to a fellow mountaineer, Ivor Armstrong Richards on New Year's Eve, 1926, that Pilley eventually found a way of satisfactorily harmonising domesticity and mountaineering.

In the auto/biographies and correspondence of the mountaineer, Gwen Moffat, Britain's first professional woman mountain guide, the relationship between women, mountaineering and domesticity, is also written as turbulent.

### Gwen Moffat: 'not steam-rolled into mediocrity'

Variously described by Colin Wells as 'a Beatnik before the term was invented', (2008, 315) and by Dorothy Pilley as 'a brilliant professional woman guide' (1965, xix), Gwen Moffat epitomises the changes in women's mountaineering in the post-war years by challenging the political consensus of the late 1940s which sought to return women to the home. Born in Brighton in 1924, Moffat craved travel from an early age, inspired by an adventurous aunt. She joined the Land Army in the early 1940s then, desperate for adventure, lied about her age and transferred to the ATS, the women's branch of the British army, becoming a motorbike dispatch rider and a military driver.

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Discovering climbing, she deserted from the ATS in the latter stages of the war, finding that the mountains of North Wales met her need for adventure and an unconventional life-style. In a letter to me dated 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011, Moffat wrote of the differences the Second World War had made to the typology of the pre-war, genteel mountaineer. She observed that:

After the war, everyone had known adventure and danger and a number wanted more of it. Ex-servicemen and women were not going to return to factories, offices, domestic service. Spearheaded by former Commandos, eccentrics, the odd rebel, they discovered that their place was in mountains. (Letter, 1st April 2011)

Moffat positions domesticity early on in the first volume of her autobiography *Space Below My Feet*, as a cosy, safe alternative to the hazards of climbing but retained a lifelong ambivalence to it, vacillating between a desire for domesticity and security and a need for adventure and challenge. After one early climbing experience when Moffat and her partner are descending a mountain in the cold, dark and wet, she conjures an image reminiscent of Nicola Humble's description of a 'stylish' and desirable domesticity which is in stark contrast to her current physical discomfort. 'In my imagination I saw the interior of that car ... a soft, warm, dry interior, perhaps two people going to a dance' (1961, 18). In *Space Below My Feet* and her second volume of autobiography, *On My Home Ground*, Moffat alternates between longing for domesticity (and the settled base it offers) and rebelling against it, dreading a slide into what she perceived as 'mediocrity'. Moffat rambles through the landscape of Britain, moving from tumbledown cottages, youth hostels, barns and tents as she walks from one range of hills to the next. 'Home' is used to describe mountains, as in this example, when, on returning to the Welsh Glyders after a long absence, she writes, 'now, walking along the plateau between the Glyders, I knew that I had come home' (1961, 42).

Moving from one temporary base to the next, Moffat travels through Britain, accumulating boy-friends and climbing experience, earning money through an eclectic mixture of odd jobs, one of which includes working for the Forestry Commission with a group of other women helping with tree-felling. When writing of this experience in *Space*, she sees herself as the direct opposite to the *status quo* for her sex:

There were five other girls – and I was wrong from the start ... We were as different as chalk from cheese ... At the weekends I went camping and walking with Ian. The girls were not only astonished at my sleeping on the ground in the open but deeply shocked ... In the bothy the girls read True Romances and knitted. (1961, 81)

Moffat creates a stark contrast between mountains and what she refers to as 'the hearth' (1961, 82). On a bus journey through the Great Glen in Scotland she muses on the contrast between the mountain landscape and the houses she sees in the valley:

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Each little world behind its window, quietly going about its business with the occupants sitting by the hearth ... all aware of the other world – the antithesis of the hearth and the womb and the bed – the cold, empty, inhuman world of snow and rock and space outside. (1961, 82)

In Dorothy Pilley's review of *Space* for the 1961-1962 edition of the *Pinnacle Club Journal*, she notes how Moffat positions the domestic world as a contrast 'against which the mountain ambitions, endeavours and adventures show up' (1962, 75). In Moffat's autobiographies, domesticity and marriage are frequently shown as embodying notions of warmth, security and respectability but also as a trap into which women fall, leading to babies and a confinement to the domestic hearth.

When an initial foray into marriage fails, Moffat returns with her baby daughter to her parental home then moves back to Snowdonia. This return to the mountains brings her at last a feeling of safety:

'To the north lay the sea, and to the south – the outliers of the Carneddau: Pen Gaer, Pen y Gader and Drum, dreaming under the shining sky. Now I knew with certainty that I was safe' (1961, 178).

'Safety', for Moffat is not domesticity or a settled home, but a range of mountains.

### Conclusion

What I have tried to do in this article is to explore the diverse ways in which women mountaineers construe and write their relationship between the domestic hearth and mountaineering: from Marie Paradis' canny weighing up of the financial odds; to Henriette D'Angeville's declaration that the mountains were where she found happiness and fulfilment; to Pilley's desperate envisioning of the mountains as an escape from domesticity; to Moffat's continuing ambivalent relationship to it, the challenges and tensions in the women's relationships to 'home' are many as they seek a resolution between their own desires for freedom and the political, cultural and individual impetus for domesticity. I conclude by suggesting that if there is a common thread which unites the women, it may be as hypothesised by Gwen Moffat in one of her letters to me. It is simply this: 'a desire for lack of conformity'. (Letter, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011).

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### **Note**

- 1 Although the RGS awarded medals in the 1890s to women such as Mary Somerville for her contribution to the development of geographical knowledge and permitted women to attend public lectures as guests of male fellows, they did not admit women as members until 1913. The Alpine Club waited even longer, only formally admitted women to membership when it merged with the Ladies' Alpine Club in 1974.

### **Biographical note**

Karen Stockham cut her outdoor teeth in the north of England in the 1980s and quickly developed an interest in collecting and researching rare mountaineering literature. She has a particular interest in the unpublished correspondence and other life-writings of women mountaineers from the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her current research interests are the diaries of the mountaineer Dorothy Pilley Richards.