

Foreword

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It is both a privilege and a pleasure to be asked to add a few words to this fascinating and meticulously documented commemorative record of the success, often in the face of frustration, of K Fellfarers and High House. The record, as of High House itself, is a lasting tribute, not only to the dedicated enthusiasm and determination of the founding members but also to all those who have since continued to benefit from their initial foresight and to further their aims.

Active support for sporting and leisure activities was always regarded by the directors of K Shoes as playing a most important role in the well-being of the K Shoes Group and everyone in it, and it speaks volumes that, years after the group has gone, K Fellfarers is one of those leisure activities not only still in existence but still continuing to grow in strength.

As small children before World War II my sister and I saw very little of our father, Leslie Somervell, during the working week and so the weekends were precious to us. How often were our hopes frustrated when he disappeared to take a trailer load of bunks up to High House or load picks and shovels into the car to go and lend a hand with the current building project! It was at times like these that he was at his happiest and we quickly understood and forgave him.

May K Fellfarers continue to grow from strength to strength, carry high the name of K Shoes and all it has stood for and benefit from the firm foundations laid down in those early days!



Leslie Somervell on the Cuillin Ridge, Skye, circa 1950

Bill Birkett

This, the K Fellfarers' 75th Anniversary Commemorative Book, is the record of how a remarkable group of like spirited 'Kendalians' have joined together to best enjoy, explore, climb and walk their greatest natural asset – the great outdoors. The old grey town of Kendal stands on the doorstep of both the Lake District and the Yorkshire Dales. It is surrounded on all sides by open and beautiful countryside and, for those who enjoy the challenge of the heights and steep places or simply love the outdoors, it is a wonderful centre. Two of the greatest commentators on the fells and dales, Alfred Wainwright and Harry Griffin, both lived here and I too enjoyed my time in Kendal whilst working for the County Highways.

The development of K Fellfarers is very much linked with the story of shoe manufacture in Kendal. The Somervell family, owners and managers of K Shoes, proved to be both supportive and inspirational to those workers who wished to spend their leisure time actively in the outdoors. Howard Somervell, the son of W. H. Somervell, Chairman of K Shoes, was on the 1922 and 1924 Everest expeditions. Overshadowed by the Mallory and Irvine controversy, little is written today about Howard Somervell and Edward Norton's amazing achievement of ascending to over 28,000 feet without oxygen, supported only by Kendal Mint Cake, tweed jackets and nailed leather boots, before making a safe descent. A stone's throw from the summit they were defeated principally because Howard's larynx became detached!

Likewise it was Lesley Somervell along with William Ingall, who was then Superintendent in charge of Making, who had the vision and the drive to conceive that a bunkhouse base in the Lake District would be of great advantage to energetic outdoor enthusiasts based at K Shoes. The first meeting of the Club took place in 1931 with the aim of beginning the search for a new hostel in the Lakes; a visionary and inspired move because at the time there was only one such club hut in the whole of the Lakes. By 1934 High House, perfectly situated behind Seathwaite Farm in Borrowdale, was complete for use and K Fellfarers officially came into being.

All these fascinating details, the origins and formation of the Club, are told in this book as are the great years which followed. In the chapter on the 1930s I note mention of hut use by my father, Jim Birkett, and with Walter Dennison's encounter with 'a small dark lad' climbing alone – the young Bill Peascod in his formative years. Walter is now in his early 90s and still living in Kendal. Marvellous stuff. Of all the invaluable, varied and exhaustive material included in this book, I particularly enjoyed the chapter on Sid and Jammy Cross, two Kendalians and members of the Club. Both were extremely strong climbers individually, Jammy undoubtedly the best woman climber of her generation, but as a team they contributed not only to the development of rock climbing but also to the support and encouragement of generations of climbers who were to follow. Also, of course, Sid was a formative member of the Langdale Mountain Rescue Team on whose experiences the modern teams of today have developed.

I am very pleased to note that today the K Fellfarers, one of the longest established outdoor clubs in the Lakes, is now open to anyone to join and is thriving. A member of the BMC, it has reciprocal rights with the Oread club based in Derbyshire which, in addition to the wonderful High House, offers access to huts in both the Peak District and North Wales. Members' interests, both at home and abroad, range from hill walking to climbing, canoeing and caving, and there is a full calendar of accompanying social events.

This book, including the fascinating stories of a number of leading climbers who have made their mark on the wider climbing world, is a fascinating record of K Fellfarers' involvement with the landscape and great outdoors. It is a portrayal of the spirit of adventure and sense of freedom to be found amongst the hills. I salute the spirit of K Fellfarers and all members, past and present, who have contributed to the enormous amount of knowledge and information presented.