FRITZ LOEWE—1895–1974

Fritz Loewe was born in Berlin on 11 March 1895, the son of a Prussian judge. His family and classical schooling background paved the way for his entrance into legal studies in Grenoble in 1913, where he was well aware of the near-by mountains although his scientific and geographical interests remained latent. These were awakened after the first World War in which he saw action with distinction on both the Eastern and Western Fronts, being awarded the Iron Cross, First Class.

The war proved to have provided the break that allowed Loewe to orientate his studies toward a wide range of terrestrial physical sciences, although his love of learning in literature and particularly poetry, in which his recitative abilities were remarkable, remained with him. Whilst formally studying physics and geography, his fascination for flight, both by balloons and the then novel flying machines, caused him to develop an interest in meteorology which led to his becoming Scientific Assistant at the Potsdam Meteorological Observatory from 1922 to 1925, enabling him to obtain a Ph.D. in geography in 1923. His continued activities in mountaineering also led to his becoming the President of the Akademische Sektion of the Deutscher und Österreichischer Alpenverein, a role he paralleled in Australia some two decades later following his co-founding of the Melbourne University Mountaineering Club.

In 1925, Loewe became the first head of the Research Flight of the Prussian Meteorological Service and in the following three years took part in more than 500 flights, ascending to the then dizzying heights of 600 m, thereby pioneering the dangers of navigation under the threat of oxygen starvation.

Loewe's interests were never narrow and he grasped every opportunity to study a wide range of geophysical phenomena in remote and exciting locations and circumstances. These ventures included the observation of cosmic radiation on the Jungfraujoch in 1924, an Atlantic expedition on the *Meteor* in 1925 and heat balance studies on the Grosser Aletschgletscher in the Alps during 1926. There followed journeys to central Anatolia and Iran where he conducted airborne meteorological measurements. This passion for exploration and travel remained with him even in his later years, when his knowledge and practical experience of a multiplicity of unusual flights were eagerly drawn upon by others planning world trips.

In 1929, Loewe's first Greenland visit represented the beginning of a specialized interest in the polar regions that remained dominant for the rest of his life. This had been kindled by Alfred Wegener, who invited Loewe to live in his home and whose encyclopaedic geophysical achievements undoubtedly contributed to Loewe's range of scientific pursuits. Their association continued during Wegener's 1930–31 Greenland expedition during which Loewe was a member of the first party to overwinter in the central Greenland ice sheet at "Eismitte", where frost-bite led to the *in situ* amputation of his toes under gruesomely primitive conditions. The circumstances associated with Wegener's death on his return journey at the onset of winter from "Eismitte" to the coast constitutes one of polar history's great dramas and clearly affected Loewe profoundly as witnessed some forty years later by those audiences who heard his fascinating lectures on Wegener's life and work.

The onset of Nazism brought harassment and experience of concentration camp life for Loewe. Fortunately, however, the limited "amnesty" declared on President Hindenburg's death in 1934 allowed Loewe and his family to flee Germany and accept the welcome of the Scott Polar Research Institute, where as a Research Guest of the University of Cambridge, he worked on polar meteorology until 1937.

The next move was to Melbourne, Australia, where he created the first University Meteorology Department in the country. The meteorological demands of the second World War resulted in his training many of the present senior members of the Australian Bureau of Meteorology. During this time he was also concerned with generating help for those suffering from the consequences of persecution in Europe. When north-western Australia was suggested as a home for international Jewry, he is recalled to have replied to criticism of the unduly harsh climate by stating "The Kimberleys might strike many as hot, but they can never approach the heat of the hell that now is Europe".

Australia's renewed activity in Antarctic exploration provided him with the chance of participation in 1947. Unfortunately, serious mechanical difficulties on the *Wyatt Earp* following a storm resulted in the failure of that voyage. Ever anxious to visit Antarctica, Loewe sailed with the French expedition in the *Commandant Charcot* in 1950 and in 1951, when he overwintered at Port Martin, lucky to escape with the other members when the station was dramatically damaged by fire shortly before the arrival of the relief vessel. His year at Port Martin commenced long-continuing studies of the Antarctic heat and mass balance as well as initiating further Australian work on drifting snow.

The Himalaya had always beckoned and became accessible to him during 1958 as a UNESCO expert in Pakistan, where, apart from setting up a meteorological training school, he also took part in a survey of glaciers in the Nanga Parbat region.

Loewe retired as head of the University of Melbourne Meteorology Department in 1959, acclaimed by the entire Australian meteorological community. He became free to take up a long association with the Institute of Polar Studies at Ohio State University, where as Professorial Research Fellow he had a title that had, amazingly, never been offered in Australia. During these years, he and his wife shared their time between their Melbourne home, enabling him to continue work at the University, and Columbus, U.S.A., devising the most remarkable travels between these two centres partially in order to appear ubiquitously at international conferences. He also twice revisited Greenland and remained physically active to the extent

of ski touring in the wilderness of the Baw Baw Ranges in south-eastern Australia at the age of 72. He was advised to discontinue bicycle riding shortly before his seventieth year.

A total of some 150 scientific publications indicates the prolific nature of Loewe's activity. In spite of a tendency to be a lone worker, as indicated by the fact that most of his papers were written without co-authorship, he readily engaged in scientific discourse and gladly shared with countless students his broad bibliographical knowledge.

The pattern of his working life changed but imperceptibly during his last years and as evidenced by the continued annual production of three or four papers, Loewe never retired. His last day, the 27 March 1974, was spent in his customary manner at the University of Melbourne, where all generations of meteorology and glaciology students, aware that one of the great men of the heroic age of geophysical exploration was in their midst, had always ensured, especially on his return from travels abroad, that his old table and seat were ready. The latter has long been affectionately and respectfully known as the Melbourne Chair of Meteorology.

To Mrs Loewe, who accompanied her husband on many of his journeys, and his two daughters, the Society extends its sincerest condolences.

PETER SCHWERDTFEGER