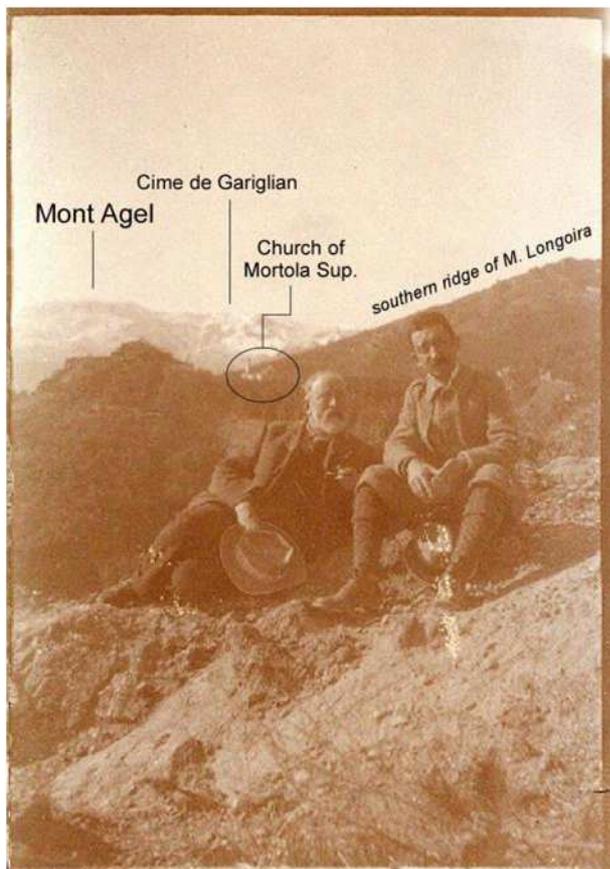
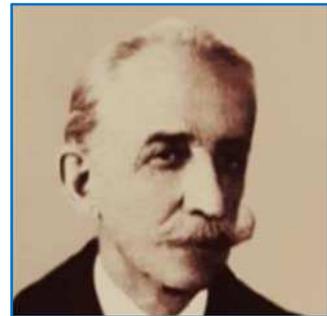


Photographic/geological forensic research: Alberto Pelloux and Clarence Bicknell

Our friend Luca Barale has written a short biography of Alberto Pelloux to be published in the Italian Geological Society 140th anniversary volume and Pelloux's relationship with Clarence Bicknell is mentioned. Clarence admired Pelloux very much and wrote many letters to him; they are stored in the Museo Bicknell in Bordighera and some are summarised on the Clarence Bicknell web site https://www.clarencebicknell.com/images/downloads_news/pelloux_bicknell_letters.pdf. Barale hopes to write more about the Bicknell-Pelloux friendship in a future publication.

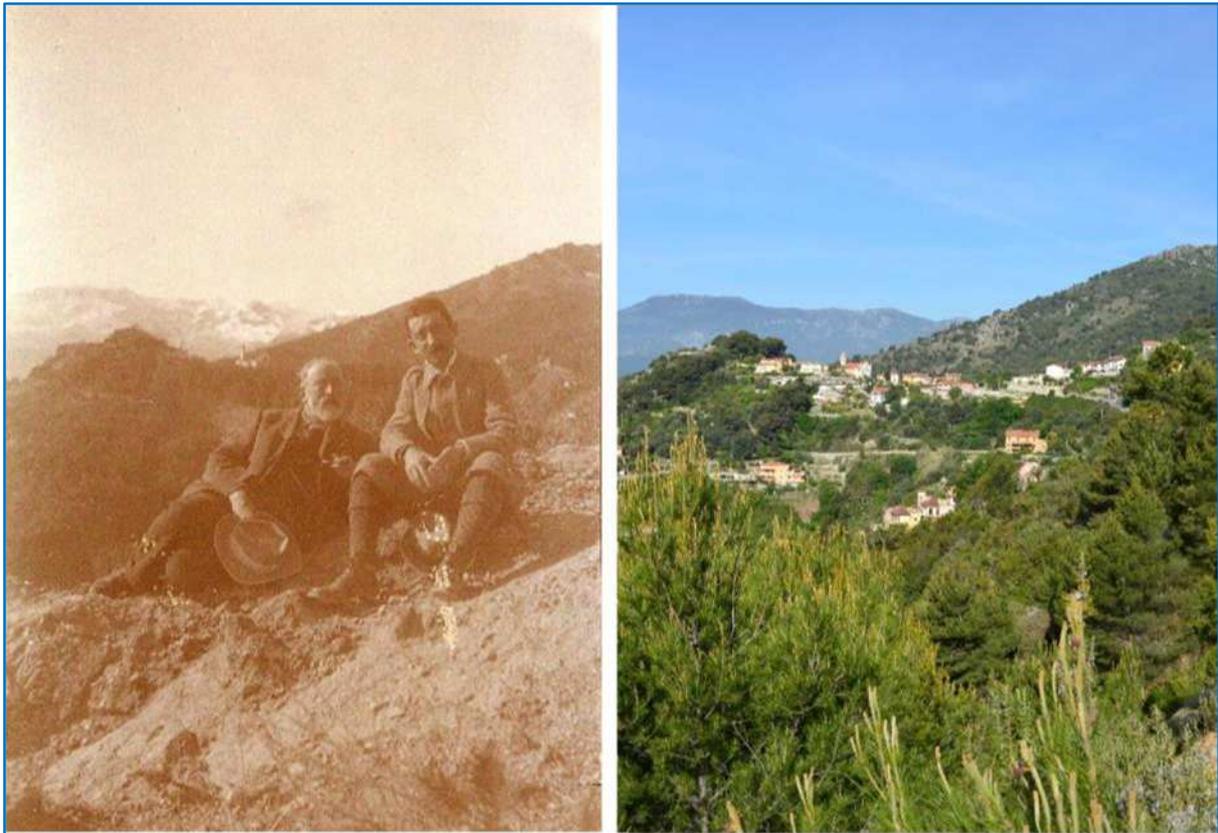
Among the many friendships cultivated by Clarence Bicknell in Bordighera, one of the longest, most continuous and most sincere was the one with Alberto Pelloux, mineralogist and scholar, and with his family. Alberto Pelloux was the son of General Luigi Pelloux, soldier and politician who was president of the Council of Ministers 1898-1900. Alberto Pelloux (photo right), juggled his military and scientific careers brilliantly; he reached the rank of lieutenant colonel of the Italian army, was professor of Applied Mineralogy and Lithology at the University of Genoa and director of the Giacomo Doria Natural History Museum. He described new mineralogical species, contributing, in particular, to the knowledge of the mineral deposits of Libya, Albania and Sardinia. His rich mineralogical collection is kept at the Earth Science Museum of the University of Bari. In his memory, the name of *pellouxite* was given to a mineral found in the Apuan Alps. He entertained a devoted relationship with Clarence Bicknell from 1902, visiting him regularly, especially in summer, at the Casa Fontanalba in Casterino, or on the occasion of visits from time to time in Bordighera.



Our assumption has been that the well-known photo of Bicknell and Pelloux together was taken in the high mountains, maybe in the Mercantour above the Vallée des Merveilles and Casterino. Not a bit of it; the gentlemen are taking an afternoon stroll and are low in the heat of the Italian Riviera, just a couple of kilometres from the Hanbury Gardens which fall into the Mediterranean Sea between Ventimiglia and Menton. Luca Barale spotted the truth of the location and wrote to me in April 2021:

"Here is an annotated version of the photograph (left). The church of Mortola Superiore and the woody hill to its left is quite well recognizable. I do not think the sea to be actually visible in the image, (the furthest thing visible is the snowy Mont Agel ridge), though the shooting point is actually very close to the sea, just a few hundred metres as the crow flies."

By 9th May, Luca has visited the site and has taken a new photo from the same spot...



"Yesterday I went to Mortola, Ventimiglia, to shoot the same landscape visible in the photograph you sent me. The place has since changed a bit, and the rocks where Clarence and Alberto were sitting are now in a thick maquis (dense Mediterranean coastal scrub) with tall pine trees. For this reason, it was not possible to take exactly the same picture, with the rocks on the foreground, but the landscape in the background is exactly the same. I shot several photos and tried to superimpose the old photo on the present day landscape. Some further information: the shooting point coordinates are $43^{\circ}47'28.4''N$ $7^{\circ}32'52.5''E$, the southern ridge of Monte Bellenda (Mortola, Ventimiglia-IM), looking West. The rock the two are sitting on is of Middle Eocene Nummulitic Limestone."

This last element is our two friends having a little joke... Pelloux was such an expert geologist that he would have wanted to find an exceptional rock formation to show Clarence and on which to pose for the photo. Not just any rock; this is limestone composed predominantly of fossil nummulites, giant marine protists whose whorls reached up to 160 mm diameter during the warmest climatic phase of the Cenozoic period.

Another iconic photo of Bicknell and Pelloux from the Bicknell Family Collection and from the Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri: Outside the Casa Fontanalba, left to right: Marco Novello, Clarence Bicknell, Capitano Alberto Pelloux, Signora Bianca Pelloux, Luigi Pelloux. All four guests signed the Casa Fontanalba Visitors' Book on 12 August 1913.





The map shows, close to Mt. Bellenda, the point from which the photo was taken, facing west.

We hope to publish here Barale's bio of Pelloux. In the meantime you contact him at...

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Written by Marcus Bicknell with the photo research by Luca Barale, 11 May 2021
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