AN ASCENT OF THE PETER BOTTE MOUNTAIN, IN THE MAURITIUS.

We have received, through the kindness of Sir Sidney Dacres, the following account by a midshipman of a bold feat of mountaineering, which may suggest to climbers several new uses of the rope.

The first authentic ascent of Peter Botte—putting aside that of the mythical hero whose name the peak bears—was made by a party of English officers in 1832, and is recorded in the 'United Service Journal' for 1833, part ii. p. 225.

'Peter Botte, from the sea, looks just like an inverted equilateral triangle, resting on the apex of an isosceles triangle. The real difficulties do not commence till you arrive at the shoulder. Then there is a frightful clamber up the neck; and, lastly, the crowning difficulty of getting on to the head. The first part of our ascent lay up a nearly dry watercourse, formed by a huge ravine between Peter Botte mountain and another; and when we were up level with the shoulder, we had to strike up the side of the ravine to our right, till we landed on its top. At this point we thought it better to put something into our stomachs to work upon. So down we sat, and began eating bread and cheese. Some of my companions smoked and drank rum; but I did neither, as I wished to reserve all my nerve for the ascent of the almost perpendicular rock that now stood bold and defiant against the clear blue sky right above our heads. The negroes whom we had hired to carry our coils of rope up so far had not arrived, so we had plenty of leisure to examine the neck on its only accessible side, and find an advantageous place for ascent. It really looked awful, and I am afraid some of us began to think of going down again; but as the negroes had now arrived with the rope, there was no excuse, so up we must go. Having taken off our boots, we began with hands and feet to creep up the very neck. It was about three feet wide in some places, and a sheer drop on one side of about 3,000 feet on the other into the ravine by which we had just come. When we had crept for about ten minutes we came to the famous Ladder Rock—so called because the last ascenders had brought a ladder up to scale it with. We, in our conceit, thought we could manage it without any mechanical help. But we were very soon undeceived. So after some consultation, back we went to the shoulder, and down the side of the ravine, until we came to some young trees. Two of these we cut down and lashed together, making a length of about twenty feet. With this weapon we returned to the rock. Luckily there was a convenient niche at the base, into which we inserted the heel of our spar; and still more luckily there was another niche on the perpendicular face of the rock, which formed a slight support for its head. Now the question was, "Who will take the rope up?" Wishing to appear very bold, I immediately volunteered; so did X.; but as I argued I was the better gymnast of the two, he gave it to me. Accordingly I tied the end of the inch rope round my waist; and trying to feel as much as possible as if I was only climbing the acacia tree, I

Digitized by Google

commenced the ascent. The fellows at the base held fast on to the heel, and took good care to pass the rope out as I wanted it. It was'nt very hard, and I very soon reached the ledge, just above where the spar left off. I drew myself up to this until my foot rested on the top of the tree; then, taking care that there was plenty of slack rope, I gave a vigorous spring, and landed on my stomach on the ledge. I soon made the rope fast, and the other fellows followed by it. After this we progressed with comparative ease for some hundred feet or so, when we came to a part where a large rock projected from the ridge as if it, too, were climbing up and had stopped. We could not climb over it, and therefore had to get round it, and regain the ridge above it. This was very horrid, as it necessitated getting down the side of the ridge, where the drop was sheer into the ravine some 1,500 feet below. This rock would have floored us, if it hadn't been for a very small root about half an inch in diameter. I am glad to say I was ahead, as I should not have liked trusting to it after four other fellows had passed it. As the last fellow passed the root became so loose as to be unsafe, but of course that didn't matter, as we should be able to descend by the rope, which all this time was dragging by my waist and uncoiling from below. At last we reached the neck. At one time I had quite a narrow escape of falling backwards and being dashed to pieces. It was the most disagreeable feeling I ever remember. Just after passing the dangerous rock, in rather a steep part, I happened to look up for a moment at the head above. There it stood, in sharp bold relief in the clear atmosphere, and just at that moment a small white cloud floated into my field of vision, towards the rock; this made it appear to me gradually toppling over towards me. My head began to swim horribly, and if I had not instantly looked down at my hands, I should have let go and fallen backwards. By the time we had all assembled under the neck, we suddenly became aware of a fact we hadn't noticed in the anxiety of climbing up—it had come on to blow rather hard from the S.E. Now the weather side of the peak was inaccessible, therefore we had to throw our small lead and line over right in the teeth of half a gale of wind. The small line, you will easily understand, was to haul over a bigger one; when, suspended by which, we hoped to swing over into the empty atmosphere, and then shin up to the top. The job of heaving the lead over was not nice, of course; the nearer you got to the edge and the more you leant backwards, the easier it was; so the one whose turn it was to heave passed a bow-line round his waist, and then leant backwards against it, while the other fellows hung on to it. For two weary hours the heaving went on, and every time the lead was hurled spitefully back in our faces by the increasing wind. To add to our discomfort, we were fast becoming enveloped in the huge dark clouds that came sweeping up from the S.E., and a heavy driving rain had set in. At one time, in our despair, we were discussing the possibility of sleeping up there under the lee of the head, and recommencing our attempt in the morning. The heroic party (consisting of two) vowed they would not move in any direction but upwards, if they had to stop there a week. The wavering party (the other three) having before

Digitized by Google

their eyes the fate of the mate of a merchant-ship, who had fallen from the neck a few months before and been dashed to pieces, were fast preparing for descent, when a loud yell from the fellows heaving the lead* announced that it had fallen the other side, taking with it the fishing-line, and sure enough there it hung far out on the weather side, being slightly driven towards us by the force of the wind. By throwing the bight of a rope round the line, we were soon able to seize the dangling object on which we founded all our hopes of final success. You may imagine how carefully we first hauled the same line over double, then four parts; and then having inserted the four ends under the strands of the rope several times, and put a seizing on over all, we began hauling it over, trembling every moment lest it should jam somewhere on the top, and even then prevent us from ever reaching the summit. Fortunately, only one very slight jam occurred, and in a few minutes more we were in possession of both ends of a rope whose bight passed completely over Peter Botte's head, some thirty feet above us. One of these ends we secured firmly round a big boulder, and taking the other firmly in our hands we, one after another, screwed up our courage; and, swinging out into the air, commenced the last performance of our ascent. The rain driving hard against us caused the rope to become very wet and slippery, and the intense cold rendered our fingers more or less numb; so altogether this last bit was about the most disagreeable part of the day's work; and when I tell you it was blowing so hard that we could not hear one another speak, but could only see mouths making frantic shapes, you will be able to form a pretty good idea of how we all felt. It seemed to me a frightfully long rope, although it was only about 30 feet, but after a few minutes' steady climbing, I was delighted to find a most convenient knot to catch hold of just at the edge of the top, and with a grab and a scramble I found myself landed on my stomach on the very highest point of Peter Botte. As we one by one gained the top, as if to reward us for our trouble, the clouds gradually cleared away, and a splendid view opened out before our exultant eyes. Away to the N.W. lay the town of Port Louis, with its fine harbour and docks looking like little pools of water glistening in the evening sun. Far out at sea we could make out the blue outlines of Serpent and Gunner's Groin Islands; whilst as far as the eye could reach inland was one vast expanse of the beautifully contrasted colours of the sugar, cotton and coffee plantations, interspersed here and there with tracts of uncultivated and wooded country. The dense masses of clouds gathering to windward warned us that all would soon again be shut out from our view; so having yelled horribly for about five minutes (it was meant for cheering), we commenced the descent. Nothing much occurred on the way down. Of course we took care to remove the rope over the head, so that no one hereafter may ascend more easily than we. It was nearly six o'clock when we arrived in the village of Moka, at the foot of the mountain. Here we found the inhabitants all ready to receive us

* Not the lead; *that* had already been lost, and we had been using a small piece of lock for some time. I have the piece in my chest.

Digitized by Google

with congratulations upon our success. One old Frenchman, with his national civility, persisted in making us drink claret, although in our wet state something more stimulating would have been more acceptable. He had been watching us all day with a telescope, and told us, with a great deal of acting, that he had trembled for us.'

ALPINE NOTES.

MOUNTAINEERING ON THE PACIFIC.

Ascent of Mount Rainier, Washington Territory.—Mr. Coleman, whose ascent of Mount Baker, in British Columbia, was noticed lately in this Journal, is still active in promoting mountain exploration on the Pacific Coast. We have received from him some account of the first ascent of Mount Rainier, 12,300 feet, the highest mountain of the Cascade Range, distant 120 miles from Olympia, a settlement on the southernmost bay of the Gulf of Georgia. Mr. Coleman himself was unluckily separated from his friends, General Hazard Stevens and Mr. Van Trump, near the foot of the mountain, and was thus prevented from sharing in their ascent of the peak.

Having slept amongst the highest firs, the party started at 6 A.M., August 17, 1870, provided with ice-poles, an ice-axe, 100 feet of rope, long spikes in their boots, a large canteen of water, a lunch, flags, and a brass plate inscribed with their names. The ascent offered all the difficulties of a Swiss mountain. After five miles over snow-fields, 'they climbed a steep ridge of rocks for 500 yards, along the sides of a 1,000-feet precipice for 200 yards in mid-air upon a narrow ledge filled up with loose débris, then for 200 feet they ascended almost perpendicularly, by the gutter formed by the junction of the rocky precipice and the ice-fields projecting from the crown of the mountain, cutting steps in the ice and clinging to each projecting point of rock. The next 150 feet was made wholly upon the steep ice-fields by cutting steps, and the remainder of the ascent was made without material difficulty, over perhaps a mile and a half of snow, on ice-fields, across several crevasses, one of which they surmounted by throwing the rope round an overhanging pinnacle of ice and climbing up to the higher side of the crack some 12 feet by that means.' In ten hours and a half they gained the southern peak, a long exceedingly steep narrow ridge striking out from the main dome. They next ascended the middle and highest peak, about a mile distant. 'Climbing over the rock ridge which crowns the summit, they found themselves within a circular crater, 200 yards in diameter, filled with a solid bed of snow, and with a rim of rocks projecting above the snow all round. As they crossed the crater on the snow, Mr. Van Trump detected the odour of sulphur, and the next instant numerous jets of steam, hot air, and thin smoke were observed issuing from the crevices of the rocks forming the rim on the northern side. Never was a discovery more welcome. Hastening forward, they both exclaimed, as they warmed their thoroughly chilled and benumbed extremities over one of old

Digitized by Google