

NEW ROUTES IN 1886, AND THE QUESTION OF NEW ROUTES  
IN GENERAL.

BY W. M. CONWAY.

(Read in substance before the Alpine Club, December 14, 1886.)

Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow?—JOB.

OF making many new routes there seems to be no end even in the Alps alone; if other mountain districts are to be explored with anything approaching to Alpine completeness, the task set before the Alpine Club may undoubtedly be described as endless. New routes remaining to be accomplished in the Alps belong to quite a different class from those which our predecessors of twenty years ago accomplished, or from those which have to be undertaken by explorers in the Caucasus and the Himalayas. Every mountain of any note in the Alps has been ascended; most summits have been reached from several sides and by various combinations of routes. In the opinion of some men this is tantamount to saying that the Alps are climbed out. I venture to traverse that statement. It is not till all the obvious climbs have been accomplished that, in my opinion, the final and hardest part of the work of the Alpine Club in the Alps may be said to commence. When all the peaks before a man are virgin it does not require much inventiveness to find a new peak. When all ways are untried the most obvious is as good to be taken as any other. But before a district can be said to be climbed out it is not only necessary that every peak should have been ascended by every possible route, and every pass crossed, but the much more important result must have been arrived at, the knowledge, namely, which peaks are the finest in structure and situation, which routes the most varied and interesting, and what combinations of route are best worth following.

It is advisable that every possible route should once be followed, in order that climbers may be sure for the future which routes are worth avoiding. Until all ascents have once been made there is no certainty possible. Sometimes the very last route chosen proves to be the best of all. The Dent Blanche may be selected as a good example. It has been once ascended from Zinal by the so-called *Viereselgrat*. Now we know that that route is certainly worth while going out of one's way to avoid. On the other hand the Ferpèche

route seems likely to become the favourite one for the future. In the summer of 1886 the ordinary route to the summit from the Col d'Hérens remained impracticable for weeks, but the Ferpèche arête was ascended and descended during that time with perfect safety. Here, then, is an instance of a mountain ascended in the early period of Alpine exploration, fashionable ever since, and yet a very important route to its summit being discovered only in these last days.

I could point to several other mountains in the neighbourhood of Zermatt whose best lines of ascent are not yet, I believe, fixed with final exactness. The best route to the Lyskamm was the last invented, whilst the routes to the Gabelhorn and Weisshorn have been materially altered and improved in the last few seasons.

It was easy enough in the old days to find your new peak; the difficulty was to climb it. The methods of climbing—the Alpine craft—remained to be developed. Guides were inexperienced, difficulties misunderstood were morally greater; in fact, the accomplishment required qualities of pluck and determination which the modern mountaineer little needs. If he lack them he can buy them of any good guide. Nowadays it is hard to find your new peak; once found, the climbing of it is not usually so hard. The man who would spend his summer in new Alpine ascents needs possess a minute knowledge of his district, such as no early climber could possibly attain. If he does not possess that knowledge he may chance now and again on a new route, or he may pick one up from some better informed friend, or buy one from an enterprising guide. Such chances are, however, worthless. The pleasure of new ascents in old days grew out of the peculiar difficulties they involved. The pleasure of them now comes from the exercise of ingenuity they entail. The man who cribs or buys a new route gets no more pleasure out of it than he does out of any other ascent. The pleasure it is capable of giving is reserved for the ingenious discoverer.

So much, then, for the value of a modern new route to the man who discovers and makes it; let us turn to the utility of his work to those that come after him. This utility, again, presents a contrast, when compared with the utility of the work of our predecessors, the great *bahnbrechende Leute*. The main usefulness of the work of the early climbers was not the routes they found out, but the craft they invented by the way. The average of the climbs accomplished up to the year 1870,

say, was not the best \* in the Alps. The easy climbs were of course the first to be done. Most of the obviously fine climbs were accomplished between 1870 and 1880, but plenty remained untouched even after that late date. If a list of all the ascents made in the summer of 1886 were drawn up, I am convinced the majority would be found to have followed routes first taken in the last fifteen years. Perhaps one ought to strike out the fashionable climbs, such as Mont Blanc, the Wetterhorn, the Matterhorn, Piz Corvatsch, and the Breithorn, from such a list. If that were done I believe a limit of ten years might be substituted for fifteen.

The above may be true or it may not; the main point as to the utility of modern new-route making has yet to be stated, and does not depend upon the truth or falsity of what has been said thus far. Let me take my own three new routes of last year as examples: they were the Pizzo del Cervendone in the Binnenthal, the Zumsteinspitze of Monte Rosa from the north, and especially the Windjoch,† which I am thus reminded is the real subject I ought to be writing about. If the making and recording of these ascents was useful climbers will either follow them hereafter or purposely avoid them. The Pizzo del Cervendone was certainly a useful ascent primarily to myself for reasons which I shall not yet make public. The Editor of this Journal, who was my companion on that ascent, 'he knows about it all—he knows—he knows,' as Omar Khayyam has said. The ascent of the Zumsteinspitze from the north had to be done because the Italian guides were of opinion that it was very difficult, and I felt sure it was very easy, as indeed it proved to be. Now it is possible to point out how far and when that route is worth taking—what, in fact, it is good for—as in due course shall be done, when a new edition of the Zermatt Pocket Book appears.

The Windjoch, however, offers just the kind of example I want now, and it shall accordingly be referred to at greater length. It was the one thing I had set my heart on for the

---

\* By 'best' I do not mean most difficult, and certainly not most dangerous. I call that climb the best which leads through the finest scenery, lacks the most disagreeables, affords the greatest variety of scrambling, and without being dangerous is continually difficult. The Matterhorn from Breil is as good an example as I can remember of this kind of climb.

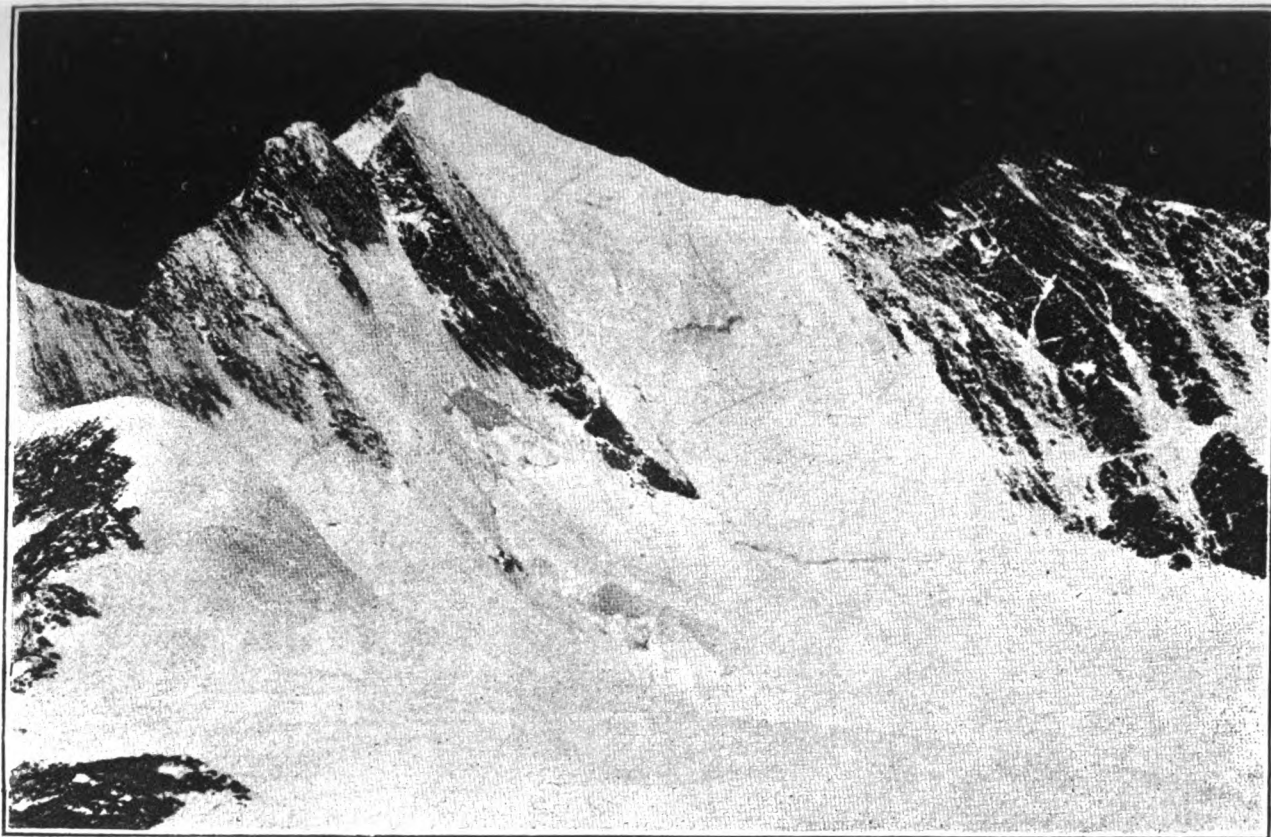
† In the list of New Expeditions in 1886 this pass was called the Ulrichsjoch. The name Windjoch is that by which it is known at Saas, and is certainly a far better designation.

summer of 1886. Accordingly on July 29, with Mr. G. Scriven and Mr. H. West, Truffer, Aloys Zurbriggen, and Joseph Knubel, I started away from the Täschalp huts. That day we failed to reach the summit of the Täscherhorn, but we got to Fee over the Mischabeljoch. Next morning we started from the hotel at 3.30, went through the wood and along the left bank of the Hochbalmbach for three-quarters of an hour till we could cross the stream. Then we climbed for an hour and a half over the slopes of the Schwarzhorn to the foot of the Fall glacier. Here we turned to the right and climbed rocks, grass ledges, and shale patches till the mass of mountain we were on narrowed to a ridge dividing the Fall from the Hochbalm glaciers. We followed this ridge till it humped into an obvious little peak (one hour and three-quarters above the foot of the Fall glacier), whence it is clear that the passage across the névé of the Hochbalm glacier must be commenced. One thing was now certain: for scenery this route ranks amongst the very finest in all the Pennine Alps. Numbers of people have been this way before, but they have not put this fact on record. The view from the rock we now stood on is superb\*—first because the snowfield of the Hochbalm glacier is, for subtlety of curvature and grace of undulating form, one of the loveliest I ever saw, and secondly because the wall joining the Südlenzspitze to the Nadelhorn is surpassingly grand in scale and fine in structure. Mrs. Main afterwards ascended to this point and took some excellent photographs from it, one of which I thankfully employ as illustration to this article. After resting and roping we started across the aforesaid snowfield, mounted a gentle slope beyond, and so reached the lower of the two cols between the Ulrichshorn and Nadelhorn in three-quarters of an hour.† The col we chose was the one nearest the Ulrichshorn. It is well provided with stone ledges, with backs and other conveniences, and is in all respects a desirable col to rest upon for a long time, so much so, in fact, that we gave up all idea of ascending the Nadelhorn, or even the Ulrichshorn, preferring to remain where

---

\* Here let me say that, having been to this point, and again read Mr. Dent's account of his ascent of the Südlenzspitze, and having compared with it Mr. Topham's account of his ascent, I am convinced that the peak ascended by Mr. Dent really was the Südlenzspitze, and I withdraw all that I have ever said in support of any contrary opinion.

† It may here be recorded that Mr. Donkin once ascended directly to the top of the Ulrichshorn from this Hochbalm snowfield.



FROM THE WINDJOCH

we were as long as possible, the view being again quite superb and far superior to that from the Ried pass.

Thus far we had only followed the route usually taken by men climbing the Nadelhorn from Saas, the selfsame route that Ulrich and Curé Imseng and old Franz Andenmatten, then a'lad, followed with so much joy years and years ago when they were making what they thought was the first ascent of the Dom. We only touched new ground when our descent commenced, and who shall say how many a forgotten chamois-hunter, or even traveller, may not have preceded us there also? There was an ice slope (usually snow, I expect) and two bergschrunds to be passed, and then as beautiful a glacier to be descended as you might wish for, with all the snowy wall of the Nadelgrat on our left as we went along. The first thing worth calling a difficulty came when we reached the foot of the Dürrenhorn, and had to negotiate a way round its rocks to the snow slope beyond it that leads up to the Galenjoch. Others had done this also before, on their way from the Ried pass, so here we had come to the end of our novelties. In two hours and a half from the Windjoch the Galenjoch rounded over below our feet, and the majesty of the Weisshorn arose in cloudless splendour before our wondering eyes. The two and a half hours' walk thence down to Randa shall be described else where and when.

It will have been observed that every portion of the ground covered by us which would present the smallest difficulty had already been traversed by one climber or another; nevertheless the route was new. It supplies a much-wanted alternative way between Fee and Randa. That alone is a good deal. The pass is just as important as the Mischabeljoch, and is much more important than the Domjoch, as far as utility goes. Then our expedition enables us to say (for we had previously crossed the Mischabeljoch, the Alphubel, the Fee pass, and the Ried pass) that the Windjoch is, for scenery, the finest pass from Fee to the Zermatt valley. Take it in the reverse direction; sleep out on the beautiful rock plateau just below the Galenjoch on the north side; climb both the Ulrichshorn and the Nadelhorn from the Windjoch and then go down to Fee: you will have done one of the noblest climbs in all the Alps.

I am convinced that multitudes of new combinations of the greatest future utility remain to be discovered in the best known districts of the Alps; and their discovery is of just as great importance as the best first ascent was

twenty years ago. The first passage of the Col Dolent was a feat to be proud of, but the climber who showed that the col could be readily crossed by help of the rocks, and need not involve several hours' step-cutting, was the man who really did the most useful work. He actually opened the way. The only object of recording ascents at all is for the help and direction of aftercomers. The credit due to explorers can only be measured by the utility of their work to others. The first ascent is therefore the first recorded ascent—the first ascent so recorded that others are enabled to follow easily where the first man forced his way in doubt and perplexity. An unrecorded ascent is nothing; one badly recorded is little more. The man who merely ascends a peak and contents himself with stating the fact can only be regarded as swaggering. If he records his route in plain language he deserves thanks. If he so records it that readers can discover its interest and beauty compared with the interest and beauty of other ascents, he deserves much more credit. Many routes long ago followed, many peaks long ago ascended, await the coming of an open-eyed man to describe and value what others have merely boasted about. To the present writer it seems that so far from there being no longer any need for an *Alpine Journal*, the next twelve volumes might be quite as interesting and valuable for the criticism they should contain as the first twelve for their records of adventure.

#### THE RECENT ACCIDENT ON THE MATTERHORN.

It was announced in the '*Schweizer Alpenzeitung*' for December 15 last that Professor F. O. Wolf had, by direction of the '*Staatsrath*' (or executive) of the Canton of the Valais, drawn up a report on this lamentable accident, and that it was to be procured from Gessler, at Sion. We were, however, only able to obtain a copy on January 20, and hasten to lay a summary of it before our readers.

The title runs thus: '*Die Katastrophe am Matterhorn (am 16., 17. und 18. August 1886). Offizieller Rapport im Auftrage des hohen Staatsrathes von Wallis, verfasst von Professor F. O. Wolf. Sitten, Buchdruckerei K. Gessler.*' A short preface, signed by A. de Torrenté, chief of the Department of Justice and Police of the canton, explains that immediately after the accident a judicial enquiry was held by the Visp district authorities (on whom Zermatt is dependent), which resulted in a declaration 'that no one could be further judicially pursued and that none of those who took any part [in the accident or rescue] could be accused of any offence (which was punishable at law)