S. Top. Summit. N. Top. Col de Chardonnet.

Col du Tour Noir.



W. F. Donkin, photo. *Published by Spooner, Strand.*

AIGUILLE D'ARGENTIÈRE FROM THE GLACIER DE SALEINAZ.

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THE

ALPINE JOURNAL.

NOVEMBER 1896.

(No. 134.)

In the Chamonix District.

By GEORGE H. MORSE.

(Read before the Alpine Club, June 2, 1896.)

> To business that we love we rise betime,
> And go to't with delight.

THE Immortal Bard is said to have foreshadowed most things, but surely he could not have better alluded to the mountaineering mania, even if the Matterhorn itself had been in the vicinity of the Avon, than by the words I have just quoted. We all love the business, and go to it with delight; and possibly Shakespeare himself may often have risen betimes, when starting to perform in some distant town the high art, not of climbing, but of play-acting. But I am wandering, and feel some explanation is needed for my paper to-night, and can think of no reasonable excuse. Nature abhors a vacuum; the Alpine Club must have its paper. I propose, therefore, to record a new route up an old peak; to mention in short detail a mountain not previously described in our Journal, excepting in a note; and to recall a walk with Emile Rey, taken only three days before his death. If there is nothing exciting in my narrative, it may perhaps help to fill a gap; and a plain unvarnished tale about our old friends near Chamonix may still be interesting, in spite of the many new ranges now in process of being conquered.

A great deal of interest attaches to the Aiguille d'Argentière, for in all the old maps, previous to that of Mr. Adams-Reilly, there figured a fictitious mountain, called the Pointe des Plines, a mile and a half distant; and Adams-Reilly was the first to prove, in 1863, that the so-called Pointe des Plines

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was none other than the Aiguille d'Argentière itself. A brief description of the topography of this mountain will, I think, be useful, more especially as the watershed which divides France and Switzerland is very vaguely shown on all the maps hitherto published, with the exception of the Siegfried map.* This, however, depicts the Swiss side only, and is not drawn in sufficient detail to indicate that the Aiguille has three distinct points on its summit ridge, a fact of some importance to anyone wishing to understand the various routes which have been followed.

The central and highest of the three points consists of a snow ridge, while those at the two ends are rock. That nearest to the Col du Chardonnet, and on which the cairn is built, is N.W. of the central snow summit, the other rock point being to its S. For convenience I shall refer to them in this paper as the northern, central, and southern summits respectively, but it must be understood the points of the compass are only approximate. Starting from the Col du Tour Noir, the watershed runs almost due W. up to the S. point, when it takes a northerly direction, and just after passing the central point runs N.W. to the Col du Chardonnet. My so-called N. point is a little to the W. of the true watershed. There is a decided dip between the southern and central points, the ridge remaining nearly level between the central and northern. From both the N. and S. points ridges run in a S.W. direction to the Glacier d'Argentière, while from the central summit a great buttress runs N.E. far out into the Glacier de Saleinaz.† These, with the N.W. arête and the one by which we ascended, form the main supports to the peak.

The mountain has been climbed by several routes, the first ascent being made by Messrs. Adams-Reilly and Whymper in 1864, from the upper or southern branch of the Glacier du Chardonnet. They mounted by rocks and a snow couloir to the N.W. arête, which descends from the summit ridge to the Col du Chardonnet. Then, passing over to the Swiss face, they cut up a steep ice-slope, and emerged between the northern and central points. It is more usual now to quit the ice-slope as soon as possible, and to attack the rocks leading to the northern end of the summit ridge, and to pass along it to the actual top.

It was not till 1885 that the N.W. arête was climbed in its

* M. Albert Barbey's map has since been published.

† See plate, *A. J.* vol. i. p. 280.

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entire length, M. Paul Perret following, as far as possible, the ridge from the Col du Chardonnet to the top. Prior to our visit in 1893 three other routes had been made. In 1881 M. Charlet Straton, with two companions, ascended by the S.W. arête, leading to the northern point; in 1880, the previous year, Messrs. Dècle and Hutchison descended direct from the central summit, 'by steep rocks and a steep ice-slope,' to the Glacier d'Argentière; and in 1884 M. Barbey succeeded in reaching the top from the Glacier de Saleinaz, striking the great N.E. buttress, from the S., about 100 yards below the summit.

The climb which I am about to describe differs from those just mentioned in that it was undertaken from quite a different side, and, as far as we can gather, had never been previously attempted. Starting from the Col du Tour Noir we traversed the peak, and descended by the ordinary route—that is, the one *viâ* the Glacier du Chardonnet.

Wicks, Wilson, and I had commenced our holiday this year (1893) in the Graians, and had come from Courmayeur over the Col du Géant to the Montenvers. On August 2, a cloudless day, we accompanied a large party to the Jardin, the finest snow view, perhaps, in all the Alps for so easy an excursion. Returning to the hotel in good time, we despatched a porter with our sacks and rope to the Chalet Lognan, and followed leisurely in his wake. At 7.30 we were sitting down to an excellent repast, such as only a mountain inn can offer and a mountain appetite enjoy.

Next morning at 3 A.M., with daylight just breaking, we filed out of the chalet, and were soon on the upper level of the Argentière Glacier. The sun was just tinging the tops of the Aiguilles Verte and Triolet, while the wonderful cirque of the glacier basin was still in shadow, the whole prospect making one feel that a fine sunrise in the Alps is worth getting up for. Proceeding up the moraine on the true right of the Améthystes Glacier, we halted near its top at 5.40 for breakfast. This glacier leads to the Col du Tour Noir, and is, as far as I can remember, exceedingly simple. When within about 20 min. of the Col we turned to our left up some easy rocks, ending in a small snow arête, which we followed to the main ridge, and at 8 A.M. were looking down on the great Saleinaz Glacier. The place where we struck the main ridge is easily recognisable, as being the nearest gap on the W. of the Col du Tour Noir, a minor peak studded with pinnacles dividing the two. The ridge, a fine rock arête with great teeth here and there, was then followed

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almost due W. The first tooth gave us some trouble, but was passed on the Saleinaz side, the slope down to that glacier being of extraordinary steepness. All the charm of a good scramble up a rock ridge is to be found on this arête, sometimes on the crest itself, sometimes on a little traverse round some knob; but it is worth mentioning that, with the exception of the first tooth, it was generally easier to move on the side of the Glacier des Améthystes.

We halted again at 9.15 to refresh the inner man, having been forced at this point to pass an enormous rock pinnacle by a traverse round an awkward corner on the French side. We then found it easier to keep below the crest, and presently struck a broadish snow couloir, which lies just under the S. peak. The couloir was followed to its top, and once more we found ourselves on the arête, which now began to rise rapidly, and a small false snow col was gained at 11 A.M. Here we took to the Swiss face to pass the S. peak, and cut steps in ice of the hardest description. The hot summer, after a heavy winter snowfall, had turned the slope into genuine blue ice, and for 2 hrs. 20 min. we were cutting across the Saleinaz face, to again strike the main arête between this point and the true summit. The distance was not more than four ropes' length, and a future party may easily find the slope in better condition, and possibly much more free from ice. Probably, under the circumstances, we should have found it easier to traverse the S. peak itself, for a tempting little ice gully, which we might easily have reached from a point a little below the false col, led well up to it, and the rocks above did not look impossible; but we were on fresh ground, and were not at all sure whether, if we got to the summit, we should be able to descend the other side on to the main arête—a moot point we afterwards settled in the affirmative—at any rate, if the rocks were free from ice. Others following in our footsteps might well try this way, and if they take with them a little extra rope, in case of the descent proving awkward, they will avoid a *mauvais quart d'heure* of over 2 hrs. duration on a slope at an exceedingly steep angle, with the Glacier de Saleinaz some 3,000 ft. below as the next possible resting-place.

We had unpleasant reminders of this possibility as the ice was hacked out of the steps, for it went whizzing down the slope, apparently to eternity; and again, when nearing the arête, by the leader, who put his hand on a big rock which seemed to be part of the mountain, but which immediately began to move. Luckily he was just beyond it, and managed

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to hold it in its place as he shouted to the others to hurry, being afraid lest in its descent it should catch the rope and convey us with it to the Glacier. We quickly closed up, and holding the rope well out of the way, the great stone was permitted to proceed down the mountain side, and it wasted no time in its descent.

A short dip and an easy ascent up the snow arête brought us to the real top at 2 P.M., and presently we went on to the northern rock point, making our halt by the cairn at 2.20. On starting the descent towards the Col du Chardonnet we followed the arête for a few minutes, and then turned on to the N. face, but soon found the ice here was no softer than that which had given us so much trouble in the morning, and it was not till 5.30, after endless step-cutting, that we were down on the shoulder overlooking the Col du Chardonnet. To reach the higher arm of the Chardonnet Glacier two couloirs are available, and we started by keeping to the rock ridge between them, until driven into the one on our left. The snow here was good enough to kick steps face inwards until the schrund was passed, and, hurrying over the glacier, the route from the Col du Chardonnet was soon joined. We unroped on the left moraine immediately above the Argentière Glacier, and marched into the Chalet Lognan at 8.15, just as it was getting dark. A dinner was quickly served, and we left at 9.15 for the Montenvers, the landlord kindly coming down the Argentière mule-track to make sure that we did not miss the path, which turns off some five minutes below the chalet. And a difficult path it is to follow by lantern-light, sometimes through rhododendrons, sometimes over pastures, sometimes through dark pine woods, uphill and downhill and round corners, until at last the steep descent to the Chapeau is reached. We passed that familiar landmark at 11.15 P.M., and it took us 1½ hr. more to make the Montenvers, for we were tired and carried heavy sacks.

Two years later (1895) I was again on the Argentière Glacier, this time with C. H. Pasteur and Emile Rey, and we turned our attention to the Aiguille du Tour Noir. The description of the ascent of this peak, as given in the 'climbers' guides,' is to follow the route to the Col d'Argentière as far as the Col, and then to turn northwards, keeping near the arête until the final perpendicular rocks are reached. Thence one is told to traverse a ledge on the S.E. face, with an awkward projecting rock on it, and presently to climb up the steep rocks direct to the summit. These instructions we most carefully followed, none of us having been on the moun-

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tain before; the only difficulty we experienced being that we could not distinguish the ledge on the S.E. face, possibly owing to the fact that a great deal of snow had fallen during the previous fortnight, and it may have been covered so as to be unrecognisable. Still, we traversed the face, and certainly found a *mauvais pas*. A shelf we were crossing became smaller and smaller, gradually thinning out into nothing, and the next step was some 6 ft. or so further on, rather below us. There was no handhold, nothing but smooth rock above, and the long stride, taking off from about one bootnail, appeared rather awkward. Rey stepped over easily enough; but it was our first walk this season, and we had not yet got our mountaineering feet. On remarking that the handhold was scanty, Rey reassured us, with a smiling face, saying, 'Oui, mais c'est très bon pour les pieds.' This no doubt was true, so we stepped over too. We turned up a secondary rib, and soon reached a very unstable snow-patch, which terminated in the gap between the two summits of the peak. A few minutes then brought us to the highest point, about 6 hrs.' walking from the Chalet Lognan.

The weather was bad, and as it was thundering and snowing, we were not tempted to remain long on the top, but from the position of the peak the view must be very fine. On leaving the summit we were loth to venture on the snow-patch, which was certainly unsafe, so tried a new route on the opposite or French side. A large rock couloir, filled with loose stones, descends from the gap, and we decided it would be far preferable to risk a falling stone than to trust ourselves to the bad snow on the other side. By keeping as much as possible to the true right we avoided the stones, though, when near the bottom of the couloir, we found it necessary to cross over, in order to strike the northern arm of the Tour Noir Glacier. Steps were necessary till past the schrund, and then, by keeping to the extreme right, we passed the icefall in a valley between the glacier and the rocks, and rejoined our morning's route near the junction of the glaciers d'Argentière and Tour Noir. It is perhaps worth recording that Mr. Schintz, with Pollinger, father and son, about a week later ascended this peak. They too failed to discover the ledge on the S.E. face, which I am told is usually very noticeable, so they turned on to the Glacier d'Argentière side, and, cutting down a snow gully, crossed into the bottom of the rock couloir by which we had descended, thus making what is probably the first ascent from that side. There is no real difficulty in the climb, and the traveller who has never

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crossed the Col d'Argentière gains additional interest by traversing one-half of that fine pass, and seeing also the other half from the Col itself; while the view of Mont Dolent, as we saw it from the Col, white with snow, was a vision not easily to be forgotten.

Four days afterwards (August 15) the same trio started for the Grands Mulets, across that region of stones which lies between the Montenvers and Pierre Pointue. Having passed that way on several occasions, I should be sorry to have to decide whether it is easier to keep up over the glaciers themselves close to the Chamonix Aiguilles, to skirt the tops of the woods, or to take the middle course at the foot of the glaciers, over interminable moraines. The views of the said Aiguilles are very fine either way, and there I let the matter rest. In due time we arrived at the Grands Mulets, and were lucky enough to find only two other travellers. Next morning we reached the hut on the Bosses at 3.20, and found it stuffy beyond words, being crammed full of people. All, however, were disappointed, for though the porters who were carrying up the large telescope to the Observatory reached the top later on by way of the Corridor, no one crossed the Bosses that day on account of the furious wind, which, for some reason or other, seems peculiar to those excrescences. Some five or six parties were disappointed, and Rey, I think, most of all, for it was his fiftieth birthday, and he was keen to spend it on the summit of Mont Blanc.

On August 20, Pasteur having returned to England, Rey and I started again for the same expedition, and as the weather was magnificent and the mountain in unusually good condition, all the crevasses being firmly covered or well bridged with snow in first-class order, we decided on a step which, I fear, even this does not justify—we went without a third man. Again we were in luck's way. About twenty people had rested at the Grands Mulets on the previous night, while we had the whole cabane to our two selves. We left at 1.30 A.M., and reached the Bosses hut at 5 o'clock, finding it untenanted, wholesome, and fresh. Here I made a small meal; but Rey, who had a great respect for Mont Blanc, and on principle ate nothing, 'because of the rarefied air,' was anxious to proceed, as sundry whisks of wind were blowing the snow off the Bosses, and he was fearful lest we should again miss our opportunity. Rey's respect for the mountain showed itself in more ways than one, for he always put on two flannel shirts and two pairs of stockings, precautions which I understood him to say he rarely took for any other peak.

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It is curious to note the difference of dress worn at different periods; extremes meet, even on the summit of Mont Blanc. Colonel Beaufoy, who ascended in 1787, a few days after de Saussure, says, 'My dress was a white flannel jacket, without any shirt beneath, and white linen trousers without drawers'* —a costume more appropriately described nowadays as a suit of pyjamas. Probably the Colonel was cold at times during his ascent, and he certainly erred according to our present ideas; but he had no doubt heard Lombard Meunier's account of the scorching power of the sun, who affirmed, after his attempt in 1783, that, if he ever tried again, he 'should only take with him a parasol and a bottle of scent.'† Let me turn to the other extreme. Mr. Floyd, one of Albert Smith's companions in 1851, says, 'Gaiters, fur gloves, and every conceivable protection against the cold, were resorted to. And so we proceeded on our way, swollen by the reduplications of our dress to most unnatural proportions.'‡ And Mr. J. R. Bulwer, who reached the top the following year, thus describes his costume at the Grands Mulets—and he appears to have started in it the next morning: 'My clothing consisted of three pairs of worsted stockings, thick shoes hobnailed and well greased, a pair of woollen drawers, two pairs of tweed trousers, and woollen gaiters. My trunk was enveloped in a flannel waistcoat, two shirts, a double-breasted holland waistcoat, and thin blue coat. Round my neck, in addition to a collar and silk handkerchief, I wore a shawl brought round over my chest, and a red-and-green "comfortable," a gorgeous affair, the property of the waiter at the Hôtel de Londres. On my head I had a double woollen nightcap, pulled over my ears and down to my eyebrows, and over that a broad-brimmed felt hat was tied down by a pocket-handkerchief under my chin; my plaid was fastened over my chest and shoulders Scotch fashion; and, lastly, my hands were snugly encased in two pairs of worsted and a pair of chamois-leather gloves covered with fur.'§

All the old ascents of Mont Blanc are interesting reading, and many are illustrated with the most grotesque engravings; but time will not allow me to trespass further to-night.

To return; 20 min. sufficed for our halt, and, passing the Bosses after all without difficulty, we reached the top

* *Annals of Philosophy*, February 1817.
† *Story of Mont Blanc*, Albert Smith, 1853.
‡ *Fraser's Magazine*, July 1855.
§ *Extracts from My Journal*, privately printed, 1853.

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at 6.45—successful at last, for it was my fourth attempt. We spent ¾ hr. there, enjoying the view in a cloudless sky, the Observatory being the only blot in the panorama. By 8 we were on the Corridor, and here Rey, having descended from the rarefied air of the summit, condescended to break his fast. From this point we were only ¾ hr. reaching the top of Mont Maudit, although it looks so much longer; but the snow last August was in such excellent condition that we had only one short piece of ice to negotiate. The view from here of the E. face of Mont Blanc, with the Brenva Glacier immediately below, is well worth going to see. We descended the N.W. arête for some 20 min. to a sort of col, whence Rey cut down a very steep slope to the unnamed glacier which lies to the N. of Mont Maudit.

Poor Rey! it was on such places as these that he was happiest—places requiring care, and taxing his energy and skill, and where his perfect icemanship gave confidence to the whole party. In the descent of this slope I was taking ordinary precautions, paying out the rope as Rey cut the steps, and, having tightened it a little too much at one period, he looked up, and said, 'Ce n'est pas nécessaire, monsieur; moi je ne glisse jamais.' Three days later a fateful slip on some easy rocks brought his career to an untimely end, and one of the most brilliant of modern guides, one of the keenest for new expeditions, and one of the best companions on the mountain side, met his death almost in sight of his own home, and on a peak which belongs peculiarly to his own village.

We went quickly down over the first half of the glacier, and then the snow turned to ice, and it was not till 11.50 that we were near the col between Mont Maudit and Mont Blanc du Tacul. Another short halt, and at 12.50 we were shaking hands with Mons. Vallot on the top of Mont Blanc du Tacul. His party had seen us on Mont Maudit, and were astonished to hear we had traversed the Monarch himself before arriving there. Favoured by their tracks towards the Col du Midi for the first part of our descent, and by the steps, through the seracs of the Glacier du Géant, of an army of porters who had come up the day before to repair the Midi hut, we reached the Montenvers about 6 P.M., after a snow-climb of almost matchless grandeur.

Such was my last walk with Emile Rey, and it is sad to think that he will never again lead a party up the snowy Alps. I had not climbed much with him, but our friendship extended over several years, and he had by chance now and

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again joined us in isolated expeditions. It is unnecessary for me to dwell upon his qualities as guide, his genial manner, his courteous care, and constant thoughtfulness; but it was ordained that his time should come, and those who called him friend will miss his face for many a year. There is a sad side sometimes to mountaineering, but we may be thankful it is a comparatively rare one; still, it is questionable if it is not a necessary adjunct to all true sport.

> No game was ever yet worth a rap,
> For a rational man to play,
> Into which no accident, no mishap,
> Could possibly find its way;

and mountaineering, pursued according to known rules, is as fine a school for skill, endurance, and pluck as any other sport or pastime, and in these days of great enterprise is a fitting recreation for active and energetic men, no matter what nation they belong to.

My paper is finished, and possibly I have detailed at too great length expeditions of an ordinary character. Mont Blanc is ascended with ease by numerous parties every summer, and the aiguilles d'Argentière and Tour Noire are of comparatively small importance. Still, I think many a member of this Club, in recalling his various climbs, will agree that it was not always the highest point nor the most difficult peak which afforded him the greatest pleasure, and, in remembering many happy days in the Alps, will echo with me the old adage: 'Sometimes little fish are sweetest.'

The Skaptár Jökull.

By TEMPEST ANDERSON.

I HAD long been interested in volcanoes. The Skaptár Jökull was mentioned in all books on the subject as having in 1783 erupted two great lava streams, 40 or 50 miles long, and supposed to equal Mont Blanc in cubic contents. All the books agreed in stating that the eruption, and the famine and pestilence which followed, had caused the death of 9,336 human beings, 28,000 horses, 11,461 head of cattle, and 190,488 sheep—these figures being evidently copied from one another, and traceable to Henderson, a missionary who visited Iceland in 1814 and 1815, while the events were still a matter of living memory. Beyond these statements there was a general consensus of 'no information,' so dear to Alpine

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