An Ascent of the Central Peak of the Bouquetins (3,848 m.) from the West.

By R. L. G. IRVING.

THE small expedition I propose to describe has no claim to novelty, for in Mr. Larden's admirable guide to Arolla at least one descent by what appears to be the same route is recorded. But as the notice is only a brief one, it is possible there may still be a good number of visitors to the locality who would be glad to know that the Bouquetins may be ascended in a single day from the Mont Collon Hotel.

Very soon after coming out from England in 1905 our party had visited the E. side of the Bouquetins, by which the ascent is usually made. The previous day had been spent in ascending the Za *via* the North Col de Bertol. We had not left Arolla till 9 A.M., and in our untrained condition found the traverse over soft fresh snow very fatiguing. Moreover, the Bertol hut, where we spent the night, was crowded, and a very moderate night's rest left us decidedly unfit for anything at all arduous next day. Two members of our quartette had had very little experience on steep slopes, and when we saw that to reach the glacier that hangs on the E. face of the Bouquetins it was necessary to mount a short ice-wall masked by already melting snow, we very quickly decided to leave it alone, and reached Arolla quietly by the Col des Bouquetins and the N. Col de Mont Brûlé.

The weather during the last week of August was very bad. Three of us managed to get in a traverse of the Perroc and Grande Dent de Veisivi on a thoroughly wet, misty day, and I venture to recommend this expedition to anyone who enjoys a climb on good rocks without any very sensational passages. Fortunately ice did not trouble us at all, and the whole round, including halts and a slight aberration from the right way just before reaching the Grande Dent, occupied just under twelve hours. Two or three hopeless days followed, and the only final chance of avenging our former defeat by the Bouquetins lay in ascending it on our way over to Italy by the Col de Collon. Accordingly it was arranged that I should start with another enthusiast of our party, Mr. E. Mallory, about four o'clock, and attempt to ascend the peak on the W. side, and descend by the same route, so as to meet the rest of the party on the Upper Arolla glacier, as soon after 1 P.M. as possible.

The morning promised splendid weather, and not a cloud was to be seen when we reached the right moraine of the

Digitized by Google

Glacier des Bouquetins. A cold wind blew from the north-west and froze the grit and boulders into a solid mass, rendering this bit of the ascent less toilsome than usual. After halting for breakfast (7.30–8.0) we got without any difficulty on to the steep little glacier. The problem of finding a way up which did not involve step-cutting was nearly solved successfully, and we reached a point just under the bergschrund at 8.45.

The only difficulties of the climb are contained in the next 300 ft. From the gap between the central and north peaks a rib of rock descends, flanked by couloirs on both sides, that on the S. being the more obvious. This rib, like the couloir on the N. side of it, is impracticable in its lower part, and to join it higher up two routes are available. Firstly, the couloir itself, which is very steep and filled with real hard ice; secondly, the rock rib on its S. side.

The great objection to the first alternative is the danger from falling stones. Directly the sun touches the main ridge (very soon after sunrise), the couloir is liable to be swept by these unpleasant missiles. Although it was still freezing hard where we were, we saw several rocks bound right over the lower part of the long rib on the north side of the couloir, into which most of them ultimately found their way. The couloir is very narrow at the bottom, and anyone engaged in cutting steps there when stones fell would have little chance of escaping. Warm west winds had prevented fresh snow accumulating on the rocks during the previous bad weather, and we immediately decided to adopt the second route.

The bergschrund just under the rocks gave little trouble, but we had to cut a dozen steps in a horribly hard mixture of grit and ice before actually getting on to the rib. We found the latter uncommonly steep. For about 20 ft. the way lay on the S. side, and then it became necessary to traverse across on to the crest. There was an awkward stride just getting past the angle, but once this was negotiated, we enjoyed 100 ft. up nice clean rock. Beyond this we began to traverse diagonally upwards towards the couloir on our left, aiming to strike it about one-third of the way up. The traverse is not exactly difficult, but the firm rock gives place to a mixture of mud and ice and semi-detached rock, which is distinctly troublesome to deal with. Late in the day, or in warm weather, stones probably fall frequently from the upper part of this loose rock into the couloir, but the sun does not touch it till the evening, and neither in ascending nor descending did we hear anything come down.

Digitized by Google



G. P. Abraham, photo. *Swan Electric Engraving Co. Ltd.*

THE DENTS DES BOUQUETINS FROM THE AROLLA GLACIER.

Digitized by Google

Once across the couloir, and on the rib on the far (N.) side, we could get along at a good pace, and reached the col between the N. and central peaks without further difficulty. Ascending a few yards to the right, we sat down on the E. side of the ridge, to shelter from the wind and take a short meal in the welcome warmth of the sun (10.40–11). Above this point fresh snow lay on the rocks, but no ice, and we thoroughly enjoyed all the remainder of the climb. I am sure few ridges can afford more exhilarating sport than this of the Bouquetins. The rock is a glorious colour, and has settled itself in a series of beautiful little problems, with plenty of nice trustworthy aids to their solution. As Mr. Larden had led us to expect, the terrors of the great jag in the arête vanished on close acquaintance, and a few minutes after crossing it we reached the summit (11.40). We knew the descent of the lower rib would take some time, and that our friends would not enjoy waiting for us, as the weather had suddenly turned sulky again, and an icy wind was beginning to drive heavy clouds over the sun; so we just stayed a minute or two to put a card in a bottle we found and taste the peculiar sensations of all summit views, and then went down without loss of time to the col (12.15). Our progress was fairly rapid and uneventful till we had crossed the couloir and reached the southern rock rib. I fancy we descended a little too far on its crest, for we had to make a short but exciting traverse over a vertical wall of red rock. There was good holding while Mallory went across. He reached a firm place, and though, if I had come off, I must have fallen 12 or 15 ft. into a little slanting gully below him, he could certainly have prevented my going further.

Those who go in for 'exceptionally severe courses' would make light of the place, but we found it rather too powerful a strain on the finger-tips to be pleasant. The place was very like the lower part of the big slab opposite the Mont Collon Hotel, which provides sport when the weather forbids a better outlet for one's energies. The bergschrund was soon passed in our ascending tracks, and we made our way down gradually in as southerly a direction as possible, so as to strike the Arolla glacier high up. We were soon espied and joined by our friends (2.30). Though they had waited more than an hour for us on the ice in a freezing wind, their greetings were most cordial. With the help of an Alpine rope they had held a sort of athletic meeting. In the skipping match the ladies had carried off all the honours, but some discussion arose as to the fairness of the tug-of-war, in which the men asserted

Digitized by Google

they had been placed on a slope of ice inclined at several degrees to their disadvantage. Mallory and I were kindly allowed a further period for feasting, and then we all started off for the Col de Collon just as the threatened snowstorm descended on us. We reached the primitive but hospitable inn at Prarayé in the best of spirits, but sadly bedraggled garments. However, the landlady ransacked her wardrobes to such good purpose that three beautifully fitting skirts, cut in the latest Valpelline fashion, were found for the ladies, while a male member of the party excited the envy of his less favoured companions by appearing in the curé's best corduroys.*

The Direct Ascent of the Altels from the Balmhorn Hut.

By J. E. JAMES.

ON the afternoon of August 23, 1906, W. F. Reeve, my brother, W. W. James, and I left Kandersteg for the Balmhorn Hut. With us were the two guides Fritz Ogi and Peter Künzi, both of Kandersteg. Our intention in the first place was to discover, if possible, a second climb for which the hut could be used; namely, the direct ascent of the Altels and the descent to the hut by the north-eastern arête of the Balmhorn. If this were not considered feasible we should have to fall back on the only climb so far made from the hut, the traverse of the Balmhorn and the Altels, ascending by the north-eastern arête of the former and descending by the western arête of the latter to the road leading from Kandersteg to the Gemmi Pass.

Accordingly, when we stopped for some minutes at the sign of the brass bowl, which is the 'barber's pole' in Switzerland, Peter did not wait for us, but went on to survey the possible routes and to find out the condition of the rocks. The possibility of attempting the new climb gave us food for much thought on the way, and we looked with interested eyes on the cliffs far above us and slightly to our right hand, up which we might be journeying on the morrow. Certainly, if the comparative difficulties of the path to the hut and the climb beyond the hut were proportionate to those of paths to and climbs beyond other huts in Switzerland, so far as our experience went, the course proposed would not be an

* We are indebted to Mr. G. P. Abraham, of Keswick, for permission to reproduce the accompanying illustration.—Editor *A. J.*

Digitized by Google