

of most other mountaineers who have been in this part of the world was in regard to the usefulness of the natives on such expeditions. We found them very keen and interested people. It is only to their courage and many other good qualities that we owe our success so far. Of course it is no good fitting oneself out like a Polar bear if one does not look after the men in the same way. One must always remember that they have no personal interest in the success of the expedition.

The natives whom we found most plucky were Nepalese Tibetans, the so-called Sherpahs. If they are properly taught the use of ice axe and rope I believe that they will prove of more use out here than European guides, as they are guides and coolies in one, and don't require any special attention. My opinion is that if they get attached to you they will do anything for you.

THE BEC DE L'INVERGNAN BY THE E. RIDGE.

BY HAROLD RAEBURN.

THE amazing black precipices of the Bec de l'Invergnan (3,608 m.=11,838 ft.), just S.W. of the village (Notre-Dame de Rhêmes), seem to dwarf everything else and afford one of the most glorious sights in the Alps.' 'The superb summit of the Bec de l'Invergnan.' 'This magnificent peak.' Such is the language of Ball's 'Guide' with regard to this mountain, and the writer, for one, is far from saying that it is not fully justified.

Rising with extraordinary steepness above the village of Notre-Dame de Rhêmes, it slopes more gently, clad in shining glaciers, to the Val Grisanche, on the W. Its summit forms the culminating point in the jagged ridge separating the beautiful valleys of Rhêmes and Grisanche, whose torrents hurry down, to the Dora Baltea, the drainage of many a great glacier clothing the E. slopes of the Franco-Italian frontier. Were it not that it is situated between two valleys, even now quiet backwaters in the stream of Alpine traffic, it would long ago have emerged from the comparative obscurity and neglect in which it has remained since its first ascent in 1874.

The climbing history of the Bec de l'Invergnan is not a long one.

In 1863* it was visited by a party composed of Messrs.

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. i. p. 200.

Nichols, Rowsell, and Blanford, with Joseph Favret, of Chamonix, and Nicholas Jacob chasseur, of Rhêmes. The following year,* Mr. Nichols returned again with Messrs. Neighbour and Cuthbert, and Joseph Favret and Michel Brimod. This party started from the Chalet d'Epines Dessus, in the Val Grisanche, and gaining the S. ridge from the Invergnan Glacier almost reached the top, being stopped by an 'overhanging boulder' '30 ft. below the summit.' It was left to an Italian party to reach the actual peak. This was in 1874, when Signori Martelli, Barale, and Gorret, following the same route, succeeded in passing the 'boulder.'

In 1885, Signor Vallino made the ascent by the N. ridge, and three weeks later, Mr. Coolidge, with Almer, traversed the ridge from S. to N.

At the date of the latest edition of Ball (1898), no further notes on the Bec had appeared in English, and apparently up to last year no traverse from the Val de Rhêmes had been effected.

When my friend Ling and I found our Alpine travel scheme of 1907 somewhat dislocated, owing to a week's bad weather in Dauphiné, we formed the idea of trying to run as direct a line as possible over the mountains and valleys lying between Ceresole, Courmayeur, and Chamonix.

After traversing the Gran Paradiso from the S. we arrived, through thunder and rain, at the charming little inn at Pont, in the Val Savaranche. From Pont we intended to make a pass of the Cime de l'Ouille to the Val de Rhêmes, but the weather, already doubtful at the start, turned so threatening that we changed our plans and merely went over the Col d'Entrelor.

On this occasion we had as porter a young fellow named Elisée Dayné, for whom we are glad to be able to say a good word. Though he does not as yet know the country very well, he is anxious to learn, and possessed of more than average intelligence. At every halt he produced his Italian guide book to the district and studied it carefully. I am glad to say something in commendation of an Alpine porter, for as a guideless climber, I have a deep fellow-feeling for that usually much beladen and unbelauded individual.

How much his scansorial shortcomings might be due to his overweighted condition, was not always, I think, sufficiently allowed for in some of the old Alpine narratives. For a time indeed, no Alpine narrative was considered complete without

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. i. p. 374.

the unfortunate porter being held up to ridicule. He was forced to play the thankless part of pantaloon in the Alpine comedy, written usually by the clown. The guide was, of course, the harlequin whose magic staff caused rock and ice to split asunder, and difficulties to vanish.

From the Col d'Entrelor, we had hoped to get a view and photograph of the E. face of the Bec de l'Invergnan, but dense mist clouds filled the whole Val de Rhêmes, and the mountains opposite us were completely hidden. As we plunged downwards through the fog, the threatened rain storm broke, and it was in a somewhat damp condition that we gained the curé's house at Notre-Dame. We were hospitably received, and an excellent if late déjeuner was speedily served, accompanied by some extra-good Aostan wine.

Thereafter, in view of an early start the following morning, we retired to rest for a few hours. At dinner we met another climbing party, composed of an Englishman, a German, and a guide. As Burns puts it, it is sometimes desirable 'to see ourselves as others see us,' and the English member of the party was very free in his criticism of the Alpine Club. The Club, he alleged, had no climbing qualifications. All that was necessary, was that one should be the son of a bishop or other Church dignitary. It did not seem to him possible that a member of the Club should climb without guides. He also suggested, that the main use of an ideal Alpine Club should be for the purpose of negotiating with railway companies and hotel-keepers for reduced fares and tariffs, to enable young Englishmen to go to the Alps in larger numbers. These opinions I do not endorse; I leave them to the consideration of my fellow members.

One piece of information however our friend gave us. To our disappointment, we learned that the east ridge of the Invergnan had been climbed for the first time by Signor Gayda, with Casimir Thérissod, in 1906.

After an excellent dinner along with the other party and their guide, and presided over by the genial curé, we retired to rest early.

We were all roused next morning, August 11, in good time, and after a breakfast of huge bowls of coffee and milk, both parties left at 3.15.

The others, heavily loaded with all kinds of impedimenta, turned off up the valley. Ling and I, less but quite sufficiently burdened, and with lantern lit, walked down the valley till clear of the village, and then struck off by a track, towards the black gulf, whence came the roar of the waterfalls from the

Fenestra del Torrent, the first pass on the north side of the Bec de l'Invergnan. The night was dark, for clouds veiled the sky, and, as we were absolutely ignorant of the route and of the mountain, we speedily found ourselves on very steep ground with what looked in the dark like impossible precipices on all hands. We were forced therefore to wait for dawn. No doubt we ought, as is our practice, to have explored the first part of the route the previous day, especially as, owing to the mist and storm on the Col d'Entrelor, we had seen nothing of the eastern face of the Bec.

Our excuse is, that we had arrived at Notre-Dame wet, and had shirked the clammy duty of putting on damp clothes again after lunch, and turning out in the rain to explore the lower slopes of the peak.

We had now to pay for it, and got off very lightly with the loss of 15 or 20 minutes. After that period of waiting, the increasing daylight took somewhat from the awe-inspiring nature of the ground, and showed a sheep track that led across a ledge into the proper track, quite a good one, from which we had strayed, or rather, never been on.

This track mounts above the right bank of the stream (there is another on the left bank also), and then, when clear of the lower falls and gorge, slants in towards the narrow green basin of the Torrent Alp, lying below the sharply cut gap of the Fenestra.

On the S. steep rock walls are crowned by the final ice cliffs and séracs of the small Torrent glacier. This glacier lies on a shelf stretching along from the east and below the north arête of the Invergnan.

Above a little rocky hollow on our left, where the last lingering and stunted larch (7,400 ft.) was seen, and where some chamois had lately been feeding, a mossy and rocky ledge led up to form the beginning of the E. arête of the Bec. Here was a board with the notice 'Chasse Réservée.' I am afraid that the chamois must have thought that we had not observed that notice, as we drove a number up the ridge in front of us for a considerable distance. The animals seemed little alarmed and are no doubt seldom molested.

At 8 we gained a point where the ridge becomes almost level for a time, and curves round from its first rather southerly direction, damming back, as it were, the Torrent glacier, just below it. From here a splendid view is obtained of the immense precipices of the east face of the Invergnan. The arête bounds this sharply on the north, and from here the face appears, if not vertical, not far removed from it.

Up to this point there is little or no actual climbing, though the angle is uniformly steep and the rise rapid from the valley. Now, however, it was evident there would be a welcome change.

After a halt for lunch from 8.55 to 9.15, we resumed the ascent. After some gradually steepening scrambling, on a very thin and tottery arête, a point was gained where the direct ascent of the ridge appeared, if not impossible, too risky. The thin edge of the arête shot vertically upward. It was cleft by a crack, it is true, but the rocks were extremely rotten. There was no room for hitching the second man, out of reach of a possible stonefall, so this route was given up. There may possibly have been a traverse on the S. side. Without examining that we descended a few metres and made a traverse to our right or N. This traverse, though only a couple of ropes' length, took nearly 1½ hr. to do.

Seldom or never have I seen such rotten rocks at such an angle, and no step could be taken without careful mining and testing. At the end of the traverse the leader was then able to obtain good standing ground above, and secure the second man, who was carrying both sacks and axes.

Above this the arête was soon regained, and though the scrambling was steep and interesting and the arête so thin as to be transparent in places, no further difficulty was met with and the cairn was reached at 12.52.

The weather was dull, misty, and threatening in the early morning. Even so late as 9 A.M. the mists, boiling up from the gulf below the E. face of the Bec, prevented a photograph being taken. Now it was clear, and splendid views of the great snow wastes of the Rutor, on the other side of the Val Grisanche, backed by the glorious Italian face of the mighty Monte Bianco, were spread before us. In the S.W. the Graians melted into the dim and distant peaks of Dauphiné. The Combin also showed up in all its splendour on the N.E. across the deep depression of the Val d'Aosta.

Whatever may be the opinion of the route of ascent, we agree with Mr. Coolidge, that the N. ridge is the best and most convenient way of descent from the Bec.

The N. ridge is, though somewhat loose in places, not difficult. It is better, as Mr. Coolidge says, to keep to the left (Val Grisanche) side whenever any steep part appears.

After about an hour we turned straight down the shaly face to the small glacier below the ridge. By it, and by standing glissades down snow-beds below it, we gained the

highest grass patches and water springs at 8.5. Here we took 40 minutes off for afternoon tea.

Our original intention had been merely to cross to Fornet, but, as we had got over in good time, we resolved to shorten next day's walk by stopping at L'Eglise instead.

Therein we reckoned without our hosts.

However, instead of taking the track from the chalets soon met with (Nouva ?), down to Fornet, we turned to the right, and through a splendid old larch forest descended to the road about half-way between Fornet and L'Eglise. The forest scenery here, with branch-framed pictures of the Rutor snows, the leaping waterfalls, and narrow, verdant floor of the Val Grisanche, the toy-like village of Fornet appearing far below, is perhaps the loveliest we have seen in the Alps. The trees are splendid, ancient and massive, with great rugged-barked red boles,* and widely enough spaced to allow of the growth of a rich carpet of flowers and berry-bearing bushes.

After a pleasant walk we reached L'Eglise at 6. Here, however, it was impossible to find accommodation at either of the foul cantines. Our appeal to the priest resulted in a young father very kindly coming with us to the next village, again to find no admittance, and we finally got put up at a farm house—'Maison Charles Busson'—at 7 P.M. Some soup, red wine, and an omelet, followed by excellent *café au lait*, provided us with a satisfying evening meal, and the sleeping accommodation was much better than the good lady's somewhat difficult French had led us to expect. A walk next morning in the cool, down the finely wooded gorge of the lower Val Grisanche, placed us at Liverogne. Allowing the crawling diligence to pass, we waited for the forenoon motor from Aosta, which whirled us up in 55 minutes, with magnificent views of Mont Blanc *en route*, to Courmayeur and civilised quarters at the Hôtel Royal.

NOTE ON THE TREE LIMIT, AND ON A DISEASE OF THE LARCH TREES.—We took aneroid heights in six of the valleys of the tree limit. These valleys were those of Arves, Arc, Orco, Savaranche, Rhêmes, and Grisanche. The last trees were always larches, and were met with at heights varying from 7,000 to 7,500 ft. The line was wonderfully uniform in the various valleys, and in the mist one could guess, within 100 ft. or so, the height attained on leaving or coming to the last straggling larch trees. A larch disease we found wide-spread in every valley from Dauphiné to the French and Italian Graians and Mont Blanc. In great

* The circumference of several was over 21 feet.

strips the forest presented the appearance of the leaves having been scorched by fire, all turned brown or yellow. It was caused by a very serious attack of the caterpillar of a moth, one of the *Tinea*, probably *T. levigatella*, I am informed. These ring the young shoots, and the leaves then die.

ASCENT OF THE DENT D'HÉRENS BY THE W.N.W. FACE.

BY W. C. COMPTON.

OF all the mountains of the Zermatt group the Dent d'Hérens is probably the least often climbed, because it is so awkward of access. Yet it deserves a better fate, unless, in these days of mountain railways, the best fate we can wish for a well-loved peak is that it should be out of reach.

Once attain the ridge that connects the peak with the Tête de Valpelline, and the climb is not devoid of interest, whilst the view on a clear day is well worth the expedition. Two in particular of the great mountains assume forms hardly to be seen from elsewhere. The Dent Blanche presents its S. ridge in the form of a symmetrical pyramid, and the Matterhorn towers above us in immediate proximity, much as in Donkin's well-known view from the Col de Tournanche, but enhanced by the greater height of the view-point.

To reach this ridge of the Dent d'Hérens without negotiating the dangerous rocks of the Tiefenmattenjoch has hitherto involved a long march round to Prarayé, or at least over the Col de Valpelline, and so to the Za de Zan glacier.

It was our intention to attempt the ascent by the Tiefenmattenjoch, but, instead of risking the stones by the usual route up the rocks under the Tête de Valpelline, to cross the bergschrund, and, if possible, to cut our way up the steep ice-wall to the ridge of the Col. Our party was made up on two ropes—on one Mr. J. W. Wyatt and the writer, with Joseph Lochmatter and Léon Truffer (of St. Niklaus); on the other Mr. W. H. Gover, with Peter Perren and Joseph Marie Julien.

We left the Staffel Alp at 2 A.M. on August 27, 1907. The sky was clear, and there was a moon not far from the full, though now behind the Matterhorn, so that we had no need of the lantern as we made our way along the level track towards the Stockje. Suddenly the silence was broken by a roar as of thunder, and we could see a huge avalanche