

THE E. OR BALTSCHIEDERTHAL FACE
OF THE BIETSCHHORN.

By J. P. FARRAR.

THE November 'Journal' gives among 'New Expeditions' an account by Mr. Willoughby Jardine of a traverse of the Bietschhorn with descent to the Baltschieder Glacier. This expedition, in point of fact, covered no new ground except when the party, on the descent, left the E. arête and traversed the face N. of it for three quarters of an hour, which was, however, as will be seen below, unnecessary.

It may be useful to give the following analysis of all the routes up the mountain from this side that are known to me.

That portion of the face which is contained between the S.E. and E. arêtes of the Bietschhorn has been called a 'broad snow couloir' (cf. Maund, 'A. J.' x. 21) and a 'broad long gully of snow' (Dent, 'Above the Snow Line,' p. 108). These designations certainly did not lead me to expect to find, as we entered this so-called couloir, that it was at its lower end, from the one enclosing ridge to the other, about 600 yards wide as the crow flies. It is by this portion of the face and by its enclosing ridges that the ascents given below have been made.

The actual trough of this contained portion is much closer to the E. arête than to the S.E. arête, so that its N. flank, bounded by the E. arête, is much steeper and shorter than the S. flank, which leads up to the S.E. arête. The only photos I can find of this face are contained in 'Echc des Alpes,' 1904, No. 1, and 1895, No. 4. The latter shows the main S.E. and E. arêtes on the extreme left of the photo, but the wide snowfield or 'couloir' between them is almost hidden. The frontispiece of the 1904 volume, however, shows the lower portion of this 'couloir' or snowfield very well, as well as the arêtes, and the same number contains several other interesting photos of the Baltschieder Valley.

(1) *First Ascent*.—July 24, 1878, by Mr. C. T. Dent and the late Mr. J. Oakley Maund, with Hans Jaun and Andreas Maurer.

Two interesting narratives of this expedition are extant—the one written soon after its date by Mr. Maund ('A. J.' x. 20 seq.), and the other published some years later by Mr. Dent in 'Above the Snow Line' p. 96 seq.,* both of whom are well known as among the most experienced and enterprising mountaineers of the time.

In both of these, but particularly in the latter, exact topographical details† are somewhat subordinated to that brilliant word-painting and exposition of mountaineering philosophy often so lamentably deficient in our more recent literature, although I ought to except from this criticism certain contributions by one of our most enterprising young climbers, the sparkling brilliance of which quite overwhelms the mere mountaineer.

* See also *A. J.* ix. 111, for a short note.

† See *Jahrbuch S.A.C.* xix. 15, footnote.

From these narratives one gathers that the party found a sheltered bivouac, convenient for water, in the Baltschiederthal at the (? W.) foot of the Fäschhorn, 8 hours from Visp (cf. 'A. J.' x. 20; Dent, p. 105). Leaving this bivouac before daylight, they bore a little N. of E. across the Baltschieder Glacier, [leaving well on their right Point 3098 of the Siegfried Map, which, by the way, appears to show the snow in the great bay contained between the main E. and S.E. arêtes as continuing much higher than it actually does.]

Crossing the Bergschrund, they found the centre of the bay, as was to be expected, dangerous, and immediately bore away to the left up a minor arête so as to reach the main S.E. arête, the crest of which was attained in 8 hours. The rocks between the Bergschrund and this point are described as 'the most difficult crags of any that I have ever met with to climb properly; that is, with a minimum of risk to one's self and one's companions' (Dent, p. 114). They certainly look very uninviting.

The main S.E. arête was then followed in 3½ hours to the summit, the total net time for the ascent being apparently 'over 10 hours.'

This 'final ridge [i.e. the main S.E. arête] looked fairly easy, and indeed proved to be so. The snow was deep and soft . . . the ridge is moderately broad and we were able to flounder along with fair rapidity' (Dent, p. 116).

This ridge, so far as I know, has only been reached once since, and then from the W. side, viz. on September 15, 1893, by Daniel Maquignaz and myself on our ascent of the S. face of the Bietschhorn, when we gained it very high up and took thence 56 min. to the summit ('Climber's Guide to the Bernese Oberland,' i. 72).

The arête, as we found it, was crowned with huge towers, and we therefore left it at once by a traverse on the Bietschthal side. Possibly its first conquerors were so inured to difficulty by their morning's experience that its configuration made too slight an impression on them, for the time they were on it—3½ hours—since they reached it very high up (certainly above the junction of the arête from the Stockhorn and the Thierregghorn,* inasmuch as they looked down into the Bietschthal) ('A. J.' x. 22) shows that it was not quite a 'Spaziergang.'

When Purtscheller and the Zsigmondys led Professor Schulz on his successful attempt on the S. face of the Bietschhorn (September 2, 1884), they did not quite reach this S.E. arête, but traversed below it ('Jahrbuch S.A.C.' xx. 89, 'so wandten wir uns noch unterhalb der Grathöhe').†

I know nothing more of the history of this ridge save that Sir Edward Davidson's party once reached its S.E. foot, and that

* See the diagram, *Jahrbuch*, xvi. 256.

† On his first attempt Professor Schulz crossed this S.E. ridge at its lowest point, having, for an unexplained reason, camped in the Baltschiederthal. I hear that Mr. Nettleton and young C. Jossi descended this S. face in 1905. He owes the Club an account of such an expedition, and will, I trust, make good his obligation.

Mr. G. Winthrop Young when ascending the Thieregghorn ('A. J.' xxii. 823) planned its downfall.

(2) *Second Ascent*.—July 26, 1892, by Herr von Kuffner, with Alexander Burgener and Alois Kalbermatten.

The particulars of this ascent were given in a letter to Mr. Coolidge dated April 25, 1894, and were printed for the first time in 'Ueber Eis und Schnee' (2nd edit. part 1, p. 334), and, in a much condensed form, in the 'Climbers' Guide to the Bernese Oberland,' vol. i. p. 70.

The party bivouacked in an unsheltered position at the N. foot of the Stockhorn rather to the W. of Point 2645 (Siegfried), reached in under 6 hours from Visp. (Their times are very fast throughout.) Leaving their bivouac at 3.30, they made for the great bay between the S.E. and E. arêtes, [leaving Point 3098 to their right, as did the first party.] They crossed the same Bergschrund in 2½ hours, but then, instead of turning upwards to the left to gain the S.E. ridge, they bore to the right, and so eventually gained the main E. arête (which runs from Point 3098 to the S. summit), and followed this or its flank in a further 2½ hours to the top—some step-cutting being required. They descended by the same way, regained the Bergschrund in 2¼ hours (at noon), and were at Visp by 4.20 P.M.

I confess that until I studied Mr. Dent's ascent on the spot I could never make out its line. Doubtless this difficulty explains the designation by most competent authorities of Herr von Kuffner's expedition as 'eine vorteilhafte Variante' (Studer, 2nd edit. i. 334), and a repetition 'with considerable improvements' ('Bernese Oberland,' i. 69) of Mr. Dent's route. Herr von Kuffner himself calls his ascent 'auf einem Wege den ich nicht beschrieben gefunden habe.*' These words appear to indicate acquaintance with the Alpine literature on the subject, and it is fair to assume that he was aware of Mr. Dent's expedition, and so implies that his own route is new. I think that he is perfectly right and that his route cannot be considered either a repetition or a variation of Mr. Dent's.

Starting from different points, the routes converge to the Bergschrund, but from this point absolutely separate, their immediate objectives being always wider apart. Save at the Bergschrund, where they cut each other, or possibly for a short distance below it, the routes never touch.

The photos referred to do not show details of the routes above the Bergschrund, but the complete divergence of von Kuffner's and Dent's routes will be apparent.

(3) *Third Ascent*.—September 1, 1903, by Herr Arno Kirschten, of St. Petersburg, with Joh. Bernet and Peter Jaggi, of Grindelwald.

Bivouac near the Fäschhorn, 6 hours from the mouth of the Baltschiederthal. No details of this or of the following ascent

* Extract from his letter to Mr. Coolidge, who has very kindly read this paper. He must not, however, be held to endorse my argument. Mr. Coolidge also points out the existence of a monograph on the Baltschieder valley by F. Stebler (Zürich, 1907).

have apparently been published. They are taken from entries in the Ried 'Fremdenbuch,' kindly copied for Mr. Reade by Mr. P. V. M. Benecke.

From this it would appear that the party made for Point 3098 at the foot of the E. arête and took to this arête considerably lower down than the level of the main Bergschrund, as the next party (and our party) found an empty bottle on the arête at this point. They took 8 hours to the summit and describe the rocks as bad and covered with ice. They descended by the N.W. arête to Ried. This line of ascent is simply a variation and improvement on von Kuffner's, the difference being that the later party took to the E. arête rather more than an hour lower down than von Kuffner probably did. The lower part of the arête is much more difficult than the higher portion.

(4) *Fourth Ascent*.—September 4, 1906, by Mr. F. Schrempf (?), of Bex, with Joh. Kalbermatten, of Ried, and Ph. Allamand, of Bex.

Bivouac at the Martigschüpfe (see below), whence they reached the summit by the E. arête in 12 hours, including halts. Ascent described as difficult and dangerous. An empty bottle was found at the commencement of the arête. Descent to Ried in $7\frac{1}{2}$ hours. The line of ascent was apparently an exact repetition of Kirschten's route.

On July 20, 1907, Mr. H. V. Reade, Mr. G. Gask, and I bivouacked, in splendid weather, in an open sheep kraal close to the Martigschüpfe. The latter is close to Point 2116 (Siegfried), and is a den under a great boulder (see photo, 'Echo,' 1904, p. 9), offering sufficient shelter in case of bad weather. The kraal, I ought to mention, is, from observations quite convincing to myself, certainly haunted, and I am interested to find that Mr. Ed. Bornand in a charming article recounts the circumstances ('Echo,' 1904, p. 8) to which this indisputable fact is due.* Still, we slept there three nights last summer, and I had, some years ago, passed three nights there, or close by, without permanent evil effects. An expiatory chapel called 'Hobitzo' is to be found close to the moraine, $\frac{3}{4}$ hour above our camp.

Leaving our bivouac before daybreak on the 21st, we traversed round the E. and N. faces of the Stockhorn, left Point 3098 away to our right, and, greatly delayed by soft new snow, reached the crest of the E. arête considerably below the level of the main Bergschrund, probably at the same place as Kirschten, in 5 hrs. 40 min. actual going. This is the most obvious place to strike the arête, as its crest is only about 30 feet above the snow. It is just below a broad tower on the arête, the profile of which on the W. side represents the two sides of an equilateral or isosceles triangle. From here, well led by Reade, we followed this E. arête, on or quite close to its crest for 4 hrs. 20 min., until we were well above the level of the prominent red tooth on the S.E. ridge opposite.

* For other curious tales connected with this valley see *Jahrbuch*, xvi. p. 258. The whole article (by E. v. Fellenberg) is well worth reading.

The lower part of the arête is decidedly difficult—at least, *pace* Mr. Compton,* I thought so at the time—and the whole of it is very interesting. As at 4.15 P.M. we were still about half an hour from the top, and I have good reason to dislike impromptu bivouacs in awkward places, we retraced our steps exactly and got off the ridge in 4 hrs., just at dusk. I expected to find the descent troublesome in places, but it went well. After considerable search we regained our camp at midnight, just as the last remnant of moon disappeared.

The next expedition is that described in the last 'Journal.' The party consisted of Mr. E. G. Oliver (since elected to the Club), of Mr. S. L. Courtauld, and of Mr. Willoughby Jardine, their guides being Heinrich Fuhrer and Kaspar Maurer, of the Haslithal. The arête by which they descended was the main E. arête (it is possibly very slightly S. of E.), and not the S.E. arête (followed by Mr. Dent's party), as stated. The expedition was at the time believed to be new by the whole party, and its successful issue speaks volumes for the enterprise of the guides as well as for the steadiness and powers of all the members. But no portion of it save the traverse to the left, which my party did not find it necessary to make, is new, and the line followed is almost exactly that of von Kuffner's descent. Mr. Oliver writes that Alex. Burgener seemed to think that von Kuffner's party made the ascent by an arête more to the right, *i.e.* nearer the Baltschiederjoch, but this can hardly be. It is in my opinion very desirable to keep to the arête throughout, as the third and fourth parties and our party did, since the final traverse to the right (in descending) practised by von Kuffner and this last party leads one on to a possibly stone-swept face, and misses the most interesting part of the arête.

I venture to express the opinion that the strict ethics of mountaineering demand that new expeditions ought to be *ascents*, and may only be *descents* when serious and continued attempts to *ascend* have failed. Given rope enough one could *descend* most places, so that *descents* by a new route have not necessarily much mountaineering value.†

The expedition is a fine one and, as made by us, perfectly safe, but it is long from the Martigschüpfe, and a very early start is needful since the snow slopes face E. Possibly a higher bivouac could be found on the Jägerthierweidli at the S. foot of the Jäghorn, although I see from a very interesting article by M. Jeanneret-Perret ('Jahrbuch,' xxxi.) that his guides failed to find one there, and that his party consequently camped at the Martigschüpfe, of which he gives (p. 83) a minute and interesting account. The whole article is brilliantly written and apparently

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xxiii. p. 309.

† The notorious cases are the descent of the Mittellegi arête of the Eiger, of the E. arête of the Jungfrau, and of the N.E. arête of the Nord End (to the Jägerjoch). Ascents of the first two had been previously attempted, and the last, I understand, has since been successfully ascended by Mr. V. E. Ryan, led by the Lochmatters.

forms the continuation of M. Gallet's articles in 'Echo des Alpes,' 1895.

There is also an article by Herr X. Imfeld, called 'Baltschiederjoch and Baltschiederthal,' in the 'Jahrbuch,' xvii., which I read with much interest. He mentions a good sheltered bivouac on the slopes of the Stockhorn—presumably on the plateau to the N.W. of Martigschüpfe and much above it. I did not see it.

The whole valley is exceedingly wild and well worth a visit, whilst the traverse of the Lötschthalerbreithorn, first done by Mr. Yeld, forms a splendid route to the Aletsch Hut or to the Belalp, and is in itself a very fine expedition which can be extended by including the Breitlauhorn.*

I ought to include in this note a mention of Mr. Freshfield's explorations of the N.E. slopes of the Bietschhorn in 1866, when he reached by a rib, well shown on the photo in 'Echo,' 1895, p. 109, the main N. arête of the mountain, and was only prevented by an icy gale from completing the ascent (cf. 'A. J.' ii. 363 and x. 21, footnote), making in revenge the first recorded passage of the Baltschiederjoch.†

IN MEMORIAM.

HORACE WALKER.

THE Alpine Club has to mourn the loss of another ex-President, for on the first day of this year Horace Walker passed away, at the age of 69 years, after eighteen months' illness, and we are the poorer by the loss of a very distinct personality of the old school.

He was born in Canada in 1838, and went to a private tutor in Canton Vaud when he was 16 years old, and later to another tutor in Germany, returning to England in 1857.

His first Swiss peak was the Vêlan, which he climbed in 1854, and he told me that it was merely by accident that he was not an original member of the Alpine Club, which he joined in 1859.

His active mountaineering extended over a period of 52 years, and his love for Switzerland was an inheritance from both parents, for his mother delighted in travelling in that country even in the

* See *A. J.* xxiii. 651. The only new portion is apparently the N.E. arête to just beyond Point 3623. The point where the S.W. arête of Lötschthalerbreithorn is attained from the E. is much nearer the Breitlauhorn than where the bottle was found. Mr. Yeld spent three hours on this S.W. arête, as did our party last year, while Maquignaz and I, in 1903, under better conditions, and aided by knowledge gained two days previously, when we had to retire in a snow-storm, took exactly 2 hours.

By the way, the Roththorn expedition, described as a New Expedition in the next paragraph (*A. J.* vol. xxiii. p. 652), is practically a reverse of the descent described in *Alpina*, 1907, No. 17. However, it is an interesting record of endurance.

† See also *Jahrbuch*, vi. and vii., for very interesting articles on this district by Dr. E. J. Häberlin, a great explorer, and *ibid.* viii. 215 *seq.* for a very detailed paper by E. v. Fellenberg, the geologist.