

A TRAVERSE OF THE TÄSCHHORN OVER THE S.E. AND N. ARÊTES,
WITH DESCENT BY THE DOMJOCH.

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BEFORE describing a fine expedition by a combination of routes which was made by my party in 1920, a few words of historical reference will be in place.

The Domjoch (4,286 m. = 14,062 ft.) was first crossed by Messrs. G. E. Foster and Horace Walker, with the guides Jacob Anderegg and Hans Baumann, on July 20, 1869 (*A.J.* i. 130; iv. 369). In his paper Mr. Foster thus describes the descent from the col on the Randa side: 'Turning down the steep wall, we descended in that hideous backward fashion, now kicking and now cutting steps, then climbing down crumbling rocks, which soon forced us again on to the snow. Hour after hour passed by, and we seemed no further from the ridge, no nearer to the glacier. . . . At length we reached a gully, enlivened by falling stones and ice, leading to the glacier below. Towards the bottom the snow was thigh deep, and one after another of us had to be dug out . . . 3½ hours after leaving the ridge, we stood on the Kien Glacier.'

The second passage¹ was made in 1875 by Captain the Hon. Paul Methuen (now Field-Marshal Lord Methuen) and Captain (now Major-General) Montgomery, with Hans Jaun and Andreas Maurer. They left Saas soon after midnight, and reached the col about 5 p.m. A number of steps had to be cut on the Zermatt side, and they were forced to spend the night from about 7 p.m. on a narrow rock ledge, an excessively cold and heavy wind blowing. Both travellers were slightly frost-bitten. Lord Methuen had already two seasons' experience—his first year having been under the guidance of Christian Almer and Peter Bohren.

The third traverse was apparently made by Messrs. Louis Sicard and Paul Vignon, with Alois Anthamatten as guide, and David Andenmatten as porter, on August 4, 1884. This

¹ The Editors are much indebted to Lord Methuen for this information. The entry, September 4, 1875, in Jaun's *Führerbuch* reads: 'Johann Jaun has accompanied Captain Montgomery and myself, during the last month, up Les Ecrins, Pelvoux, Mt. Blanc, L'Aiguille Verte, Rothorn, Gabelhorn, Domjoch, Dent Blanche. . . .'

party (*C.A.F. Ann.* xi. 1884) left the col about 4 P.M., bivouacked on the rocks from 6 P.M. till 7 A.M., and descended the 300 m. to the Kien Glacier, in very bad conditions, by 2 P.M. on the 5th. Their route from the gîte to the glacier was much to the N. of the direct descent from the col—was, in fact, under the Dom itself—and to judge from their tracing on the map cannot be separated from the Dom route of Messrs. A. Seiler, jun., von Mallinekrodt, and O. Eckenstein in 1887 (*A.J.* xiii. 413), or from that of Messrs. G. Winthrop Young and R. G. Mayor in 1906 (*A.J.* xxiii. 330).

The fourth crossing of the pass was made by Dr. C. J. Arkle and Mr. R. N. Arkle, with Alois and Roman Anthamatten. This is all I have been able to learn about passages of the Domjoch; except that of the first four parties two were benighted. Mr. Coutts Trotter's prediction, made in 1863 or 1864, that it could hardly become a popular pass, seems so far to have been justified. The description of the descent on the W. side in Dübi's *Guide des Alpes valaisannes*, vol. iii. p. 237–238, is as follows: 'On descend par des rochers raides, des pentes de neige et des couloirs, en se tenant plutôt à droite sous le Dom, jusqu'à ce qu'on ait traversé la rimaye et atteint le plateau supérieur du bras Nord du Glacier de Kien (environ 2 h. du col). On continue d'abord tout droit, puis à gauche contre les Kienfelsen.'

The Täschhorn's S.E. arête was first ascended by Mr. James Jackson, with the guides Christian and Ulrich Almer, on August 15, 1876 (*A.J.* viii. 345). The description of the route in the *Guide des Alpes valaisannes* (*ibid.* p. 226) says: 'Du col de Mischabel, on suit la crête en pierres brisées en contournant les gendarmes plutôt que de les escalader. En 2 h. on atteint ainsi l'endroit où une crête venant de l'ouest et séparant le glacier de Weingarten en une partie Nord et une partie Sud, rejoint l'arête principale. . . . On continue pendant $1\frac{3}{4}$ h. le long de l'arête S.E., presque horizontale et composée de rochers délités, jusqu'au pied du piton terminal. Ce dernier peut être gravi de deux façons: soit directement (en $\frac{3}{4}$ d'h.) par une arête raide de rochers solides, soit en contournant son premier tiers en hauteur par une pente de neige qui se trouve à droite, du haut de laquelle on atteint le sommet par une varappe d'une demi-heure.'

Mr. Jackson, describing his expedition (*ibid.*), says that his party left Randa at 1.30 A.M., struck the rocks of the arête at 8.30 A.M. and reached the top at 1.10 P.M. They descended to Randa in bad weather by 8.30 P.M.

A variation of the climb by which the ascent is made by the rib which divides the Weingarten Glacier into two parts was first effected by Mr. C. H. Stanley on August 5, 1881 (*Oe. A.Z.* 1881, 273; *S.A.C.J.* xlv. 69). Another variation was made by Dr. R. von Lendenfeld, with J. M. Biener and Clemenz Perren on August 26 of the same year. They ascended an easy rock-ridge which reaches the main ridge about half-way between the Mischabeljoch and the summit, further N. than the point where Stanley's rib strikes it (*Oe. A.Z.* 1881, 273).

The N. arête was first ascended by the Hon. Gerald FitzGerald and Sir F. J. Cullinan, with the guides Peter Knubel and Joseph Moser, on September 2, 1878 (*A.J.* ix. 109). 'Starting from the usual sleeping-place for the Täschhorn (about three hours above Randa), they reached the Domjoch in six hours and twenty minutes, including a halt for daylight of three-quarters of an hour. They then followed the northern arête of the Täschhorn, and gained the summit in two hours and ten minutes from the Domjoch. The arête was found to be difficult from its extreme narrowness, but, on the other hand, the rocks composing it, although very steep, were sound. It reminded the party very much of the Zinal arête of the Rothhorn. In several places along it, a small and treacherous-looking snow cornice overhung the Saas side of the mountain, and had to be carefully avoided.'

On August 10, 1920 we—that is to say, Heinrich Fux, his young brother Albert, a porter, and myself—left the Zermatt road in the early afternoon, with the object of traversing the Täschhorn and Dom next day. We walked up the beautiful path to the Täschalp, passing a part of the hillside where there had been most extensive destruction of the forest by the blast produced by a recent avalanche, all the trees having, in fact, been rooted up over a large area :

‘ filling up

The ripe green valleys with Destruction's splinters.’

After a halt at the inn for tea and to obtain blankets and some additional provisions, we climbed the steep slope above the left bank of the Rothenbach and ascended a crest of moraine, which was not only steep but fell away very sharply on both sides ; and was tiring in the afternoon sun. Above this we halted on a kind of wilderness of stones comparatively level, and having crossed a snow-slope reached a wall of rock which falls away from the left flank of that branch of the Weingarten

Glacier which descends from the Mischabeljoch. We climbed these steep rocks to a spot a few minutes below the top of the wall, where on the true left-hand side of a gulley was a satisfactory gîte, in the shape of a somewhat sloping but fairly wide ledge overhung by a rocky wall (height about 11,000 ft.). The chief drawback to the place, from my point of view, was that the rock exhibited a playful propensity of discharging small cascades of débris over my head. Next morning we easily reached the top of the rocks and ascended the gentle glacier, passing a few large crevasses and the easy snow-slopes above to the Mischabeljoch. I was obviously unfit, however, as a result of a first night at a great height, so after a halt of $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours we strolled quietly back to Zermatt.

Next day, Thursday, August 12, we again set off on our walk in the early afternoon, and in less than $1\frac{1}{2}$ hour reached the Täschalp inn. After a 50-minutes' halt we again, at 4.20 p.m., started for the bivouac. After a halt at the stone wilderness we reached the gîte at 7.52 p.m. (total halts since leaving the inn, $\frac{3}{4}$ hour). It was satisfactory to note that not only had we done the walk up from the Täschalp in nearly half an hour's less time than two days before, but that I was far fresher, and had evidently become acclimatised to the rarity of the atmosphere. Heinrich had been delayed a few minutes by two guideless Swiss climbers, who had gone up on the wrong side of the stream, and whom he was able to help across by means of the rope. The cooking apparatus proved somewhat recalcitrant, but by aid of spirit and wood we cooked at last an excellent meal of eggs and soup.

The weather was fine in our neighbourhood, but lightning beyond the range across the Zermatt Valley was seen at frequent intervals during the night, and caused us some anxiety. After a comfortable night we roped up, took leave of Summermatter, our porter, and started at 3.37 a.m. Having passed the guideless climbers who had bivouacked at the top of the rocks, we reached the Mischabeljoch at 5 a.m., and at 5.20 came to grips with the first rocks of the S.E. arête. The weather, albeit not cloudless, was quite promising. Our route first lay on the Saas side up easy broken rocks, past the old sleeping-place to the actual crest. A cornice of snow hanging over the Saas side soon necessitated a traverse at the head of a very steep snow couloir on the Täsch flank. Young Albert paid out the rope gradually whilst I was engaged in negotiating the ice-steps, Heinrich being by this time safely placed on the other side. We again followed the rocky crest,

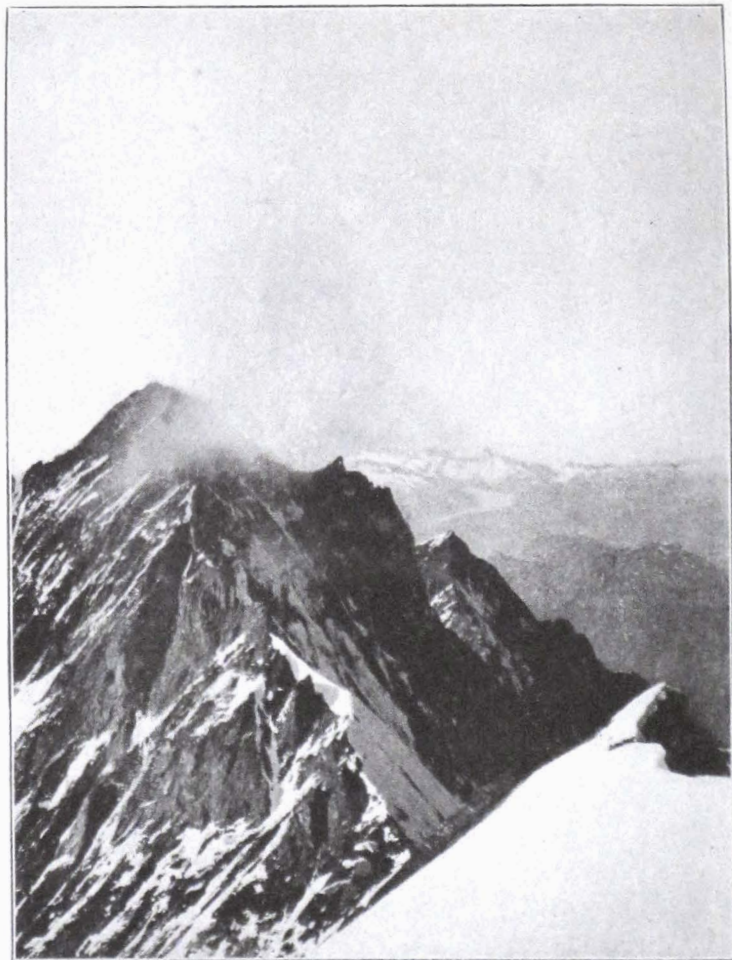
and were ere long obliged to repeat our previous tactics. In fact, we had to turn snow cornices by in all four very steep ice couloirs on the Täsch side, each traverse necessitating a considerable amount of step-cutting. A great cornice now necessitated a flank movement, and forced us to cross a deep-set, very steep and striking icy couloir falling away to the W. Up the far side of this, outcrops from an impressive rocky tower on the left helped our leader Heinrich to obtain safe holds for hands and feet, and an interesting and exhilarating bit of climbing led us again to the ridge near the top of the tower. It was by now quite obvious that the ridge, although it is apt to be corniced in places and is apparently usually a rock climb, on the present occasion held a very abnormal amount of snow, and that our times were unlikely to be fast. Fux had nine days before remarked to me that he had never as late as this date in previous summers known so much winter snow on the Zermatt peaks. The snowy ridge was now followed and a short halt made for photography (22 minutes). The two guideless climbers who had come up by Stanley's rock rib now passed us. One of the last ice traverses on the W. side was across the head of the broad couloir, the white slope so well seen from Zermatt, just to the right of the final peak. From our 'square, precipitous steps in the ridge' we had a marvellous view, bounded by the gulley sides of the blue-green valley shimmering far below. On reaching the crest of the ridge again we were obliged willy-nilly almost at once to leave it, and to make a few traverses under the cornices now on the Saas side. To do this it was necessary to tackle the loose and absolutely rotten rocks at the top of the excessively steep slope. This was to me the only unpleasant part of the day's mountaineering, and necessitated the very greatest care.

Up to the foot of the final peak we had enjoyed nearly continuous sunshine since striking the ridge, but the clouds were now nestling low upon the summit rocks. Steep but firm and easy rocks now led us up at first slightly to the right, then to the left. We halted for lunch from 11.2 till 11.33 A.M., and proceeding in the same direction reached at 11.46 A.M. the partly cloud-wrapped summit. The weather was now tending to deteriorate, but I still had some hopes of traversing the ridge to the Dom, and put any question of descending *vid* the ordinary W. face out of court by at once starting off down the Täschhorn's northern arête. A grand ridge this, narrow and sharp, but beautifully sound. Sometimes we were driven just below the actual crest on the W. side. Very sharp were



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THE TÄSCHHORN
from Saas Fee.



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THE DOM AND SÜDLENZSPITZE
from top of Täscherhorn.

the edges of some of the rocks, as I discovered to the cost of the integrity of my thumb. Some way down a steep drop in the ridge necessitated a difficult and sensational traverse on the Saas side, the rock above bulging out in such fashion that one's centre of gravity was thrown rather uncomfortably outwards, and one had to step across on to a sloping rock without having any very adequate holds. Another traverse had to be made on the same flank, and, turning the last gendarme on the opposite or Randa face, we arrived at about 1.30 P.M. close to the Domjoch. It is of historic interest to note that Mr. Foster, in his account of the first passage of the Domjoch (*ibid.*), gave it as his opinion that the Täschhorn is inaccessible from the Domjoch. Snow was now beginning to fall in large flakes, and Heinrich gave it as his opinion that in the impending bad weather it would be unwise to risk such an exposed position as would be involved in continuing up the Dom's S. ridge. The logical alternative which we adopted was to descend the W. slopes of the Domjoch. These are very steep. At first we were upon snow in good condition. We bent at first rather to the right, but every now and then the snow gave place to ice and we were thus forced to change direction, usually to the left, so as to regain snow. Presently the ice predominated, and as far as possible we took to rocks; these at first were in patches, but for the last thousand feet or so were nearly continuous. One or two of the upper patches were very difficult, the rocks being in the form of slabs, which under the conditions—the snow was thawing nearly as fast as it fell—were wet, the holds were very insufficient (the rocks on this side of the mountain slope the wrong way) and the angle continuously steep. I think it was at the top of these rocks that a smooth and vertical though short pitch led us on to such a slab, and I did not envy Heinrich, who occupied the responsible rôle of last man. My admonition to Albert was, 'Ziehen Sie nicht'; to Heinrich, 'Halten Sie immer das Seil.' I found it best to bring friction into play as far as possible, with the result that the greater part of a certain patch on my knickerbockers had disappeared by the time we reached the bergschrund. I might, in fact, parody the words of the King in *Hamlet*:

'The patch remains, the man climbs down below,
Man without patch cannot to Zermatt go.'

By continuous care any slip was avoided, and continuous care was needed throughout the descent. Near the foot of

the rocks we crossed a small couloir, in whose neighbourhood we had previously seen some stones falling, and went down by the rocks to the right of this, which were under the Dom itself. We thus reached the bergschrund, and crossed it easily at about 4.50 P.M. Snow was now falling steadily as we descended the Kien Glacier, and presently gave place to rain. We traversed towards the Kienfelsen, and were able to shout words of advice to the guideless party who were above some séracs engaged in the descent of the Täschhorn by the ordinary route. Shedding the rope on the moraine we reached the Kien hut, now closed, about 7.15 P.M., and, after nearly losing our way in the overgrown and disused path, reached Randa about 8.30 P.M., the total halts since leaving the top having been only about 15 m. After a hurried 'thé simple,' no train or carriage being available, I walked up to Zermatt, the guides descending to St. Niklaus. I found, however, that my wife had not expected me that night, as Summermatter had told her that we could hardly return so early. The walk up the dark valley was rather a bore, but I reached Zermatt at 11 P.M., fresh and happy.

Times, *excluding* halts :

Sleeping place to Mischabeljoch	.	1 hour	38 minutes
Mischabeljoch to summit	.	5 hours	33 „
Summit to Domjoch	.	1 hour	45 „
Descent of Domjoch	.	3 hours	20 „
To Randa	.	3 „	24 „
To Zermatt	.	2 „	—
Total	.	17 hours	40 minutes

There are few expeditions I can look back upon with greater pleasure, and this one afforded much mountaineering variety. The S.E. ridge is, to my thinking, far finer as regards scenery than the Teufelsgrat—in fact, in my experience, it is unsurpassed in this respect among the great Alpine arêtes. Fux's opinion given against continuing over the Dom was, in the circumstances, probably wise, but it is certainly open to question whether our decision shortened the day's work.

As regards my companions, I can say that Heinrich has evidently derived full advantage from lessons learnt under such masters of the craft as Daniel Maquignaz and Jean Maître, and has confirmed my confident expectations that he would rise to the first rank, whilst his brother Albert played his part admirably.