

Reproduction of an old print from the collection of R. W. Lloyd showing the Aiguille de Bionnassay.



Vue du Lac de Chede, et du Mont Blanc

swept into the main channel, and soon, for an hour or so, we had a very exciting and dangerous time while running the rapids at terrific speed when a mere touch of the jagged rock shore-line would have capsized our craft and sent all of us to the bottom ; but eventually we got clear of these dangers and swung rapidly around a big bend in the river and close to the inside bank of the curve, when suddenly, without warning, a short cross-stream, flowing at great speed, dashed down upon us and bore the starboard side of our raft well under water. Hastily we jumped to port and took a sea on that side, and, suddenly shifting our weight again, this time the starboard side was washed completely under and we capsized. Carpe and I came up clear, while Foster was thrown under the raft and hit on top of his head, but even that was not enough to keep a good man down and in a moment he came up 10 ft. away and soon joined us on the upturned raft with all our outfit lashed to its under side. Finally running the raft aground at the head of a gravel-bar, we worked for an hour or more in the icy water cutting our outfit adrift and carrying it ashore ; then with the use of the upturned raft we ferried across to the right bank and camped for the night some distance below Short River, about 70 miles from McCarthy. Here, next morning, caching all but the barest necessities, each such process justifying more and more in our minds that declaration that ' Man wants but little here below,' we set out on our long tramp for McCarthy, which we reached at noon of the 15th, just as a relief party headed by Andy Taylor was about to search the Chitina Valley for us. And thus ended our interesting adventure on which Andy and I had spent exactly 180 days to assist in its accomplishment.

The First Direct Ascent of the Aiguille de Bionnassay by the North Face.

By R. W. LLOYD.

(Read before the Alpine Club, December 13, 1926.)

EVERYONE knows the Aiguille de Bionnassay, and no doubt some of you have stood upon its summit, or, rather, have sat upon it *à cheval.* It is nevertheless one of those peaks of the Mont Blanc Range of over 13,000 ft. which is the least frequented during the season. Some years there

are no climbers at all, on others, a number of parties reach the summit by the somewhat easy Miage arête.

And yet there is something peculiarly attractive about the Aiguille de Bionnassay. It is, indeed, one of the most beautiful, delicate and fairylike of mountains in all the Alps, rising as it does over a sea of ice and snow to its point of a needle, with its knife-edged arêtes sweeping down on either side, sharp and clear, like blades of steel.

For years I had desired to climb the mountain.

In 1919, when I made the first crossing of the col from the Glacier de Bionnassay français to the Glacier de Bionnassay italien, I said to Joseph Pollinger that I felt sure that there was a magnificent new snow-and-ice climb to be made direct up the great N. face of the Aiguille de Bionnassay to the summit. He agreed, and we determined to make the attempt the following year.

The lower part of this great N. face had been attacked once before on its W. or right-hand side by Mr. F. Craufurd Grove and party on July 28, 1865, who then gained the Tricot arête and thus made the first ascent of the Aiguille de Bionnassay. He has left a delightful account of this climb in 'A.J.' **2**, 321–32.

This party, as you will there find, rejected the direct climb to the summit as 'obviously impossible' and took a line to the lowest point of the arête between the Aiguilles de Tricot and de Bionnassay some hours below the summit of the latter, along which they crept, painfully and dangerously, balancing 'upon the crumbling insecure snow crest,' crawling 'round pinnacles of slabby treacherous rocks, all shiny with half-melted snow,' and finally hacking and hewing a footway on a 'vast sheet of steeply-rising ice' to the top. The photograph which I am showing supports Mr. Craufurd Grove's vivid description of that difficult and adventurous climb. Those who know such knife-edges, with their overhanging corniches of ice and snow, will no doubt agree with Mr. Craufurd Grove that 'an arête is frequently much less pleasing when it is underfoot than when it is seen from below.'

A mountain is like a fortress; it should be studied before it is attacked. For that study a series of impossible seasons gave us ample opportunity. In 1920, 1921, and 1922, either the great bergschrund which traverses the whole face was bridgeless and uncrossable, or we could not get enough settled weather to make the attempt. We spent our time studying the climb which we could not make.



D. Chalonge

Photo-Réal. Grenoble

Aiguille de Bionnassay from la Tournette

In 1923, a careful examination of that formidable face again offered no hope of crossing the bergschrund.

In 1924 the face looked better, but although we waited with that deferred hope which maketh the heart sick, not once did we get those few days of really fine weather essential to render the snow at all safe.

In 1925, although prolonged bad weather and heavy snow in the latter part of June and early July made the mountain look more favourable in the middle of the latter month, the unsettled outlook continued to baffle us. Three or four times we set out for the Tête Rousse, but the weather always drove us back, sometimes even before we reached the hut.

At last, on July 17, we arrived in a snowstorm, wet through, to find some inches of snow at the cabane. To say the least this was not encouraging. More rain and snow in the night; but in the late morning it cleared sufficiently to tempt us out, so we decided to explore our route, make steps, and then attempt the climb next morning.

And so, on July 18, at 6.45 we left the hut. The snow was hard and good; with our crampons we made rapid progress, so that at 9.30 A.M. we were within a very short distance of the Tricot arête up which the party of 1865 made their climb. It was exceedingly steep here, but we were within reach of the direct route which we proposed to take. This lay at first well to the E. across the face of the mountain and then turned upwards direct to the summit. The hour, however, was late, and the weather looked bad, so Joseph and I had a consultation. We decided that the lateness of the hour and the doubtfulness of the weather made the new route impossible.

In our disappointment, I suggested that we might at least follow and repeat the route of 1865, and that we should anyway go a little further and watch the weather.

In a short time, going up very steep snow, we struck ice, and after further discussion we decided we were much too late. The weather also was growing worse every moment, and so at last, much to Adolph's disgust, we decided to retrace our steps down the very steep snow and ice we had come up, the lower portion showing a deep track as we came down the rapidly softening snow.

We still hoped that the weather would be better next day; but in an hour or so we had the mortification of seeing our steps disappearing under the heavily falling snow.

No, there was nothing to do but return to Couttet's hospitable roof at Chamonix.

It was, I confess, a bitter disappointment, the more as our tracks stood out for some hours to tell the climbing fraternity something of what we were after.

I need not proceed with the narrative of that disappointing year. Sufficient to say that on July 21 and 26 we went again to the Tête Rousse, but on both occasions the weather defeated us, until at last, as we could see the ice appearing more and more clearly from under its shrinking mantle of snow, we decided there was nothing to be done but to leave the climb for another year.

Let no lover of the mountains despise the humble virtue of patience. The mountaineer must know when he *cannot* as well as when he *can* make a climb, if he is to avoid not failures merely, but fatalities. And we were notably consoled for these delays by the experience of this year—first because we found that if we had made the attempt on that day of our disappointment, July 18, 1925, the state of the weather and ice would have placed us in grave difficulties and very considerable danger, without even the possibility of accomplishing our design, and secondly, because these prolonged studies gave us the necessary knowledge when heaven sent us the opportunity.

The dreadful weather of 1926, which lasted into July, filled all the mountains with snow in a way unequalled since 1914 or even then, and we had hopes that these snows would bridge the bergschrund, which had been so long like an impassable moat round the fortress of the Aiguille.

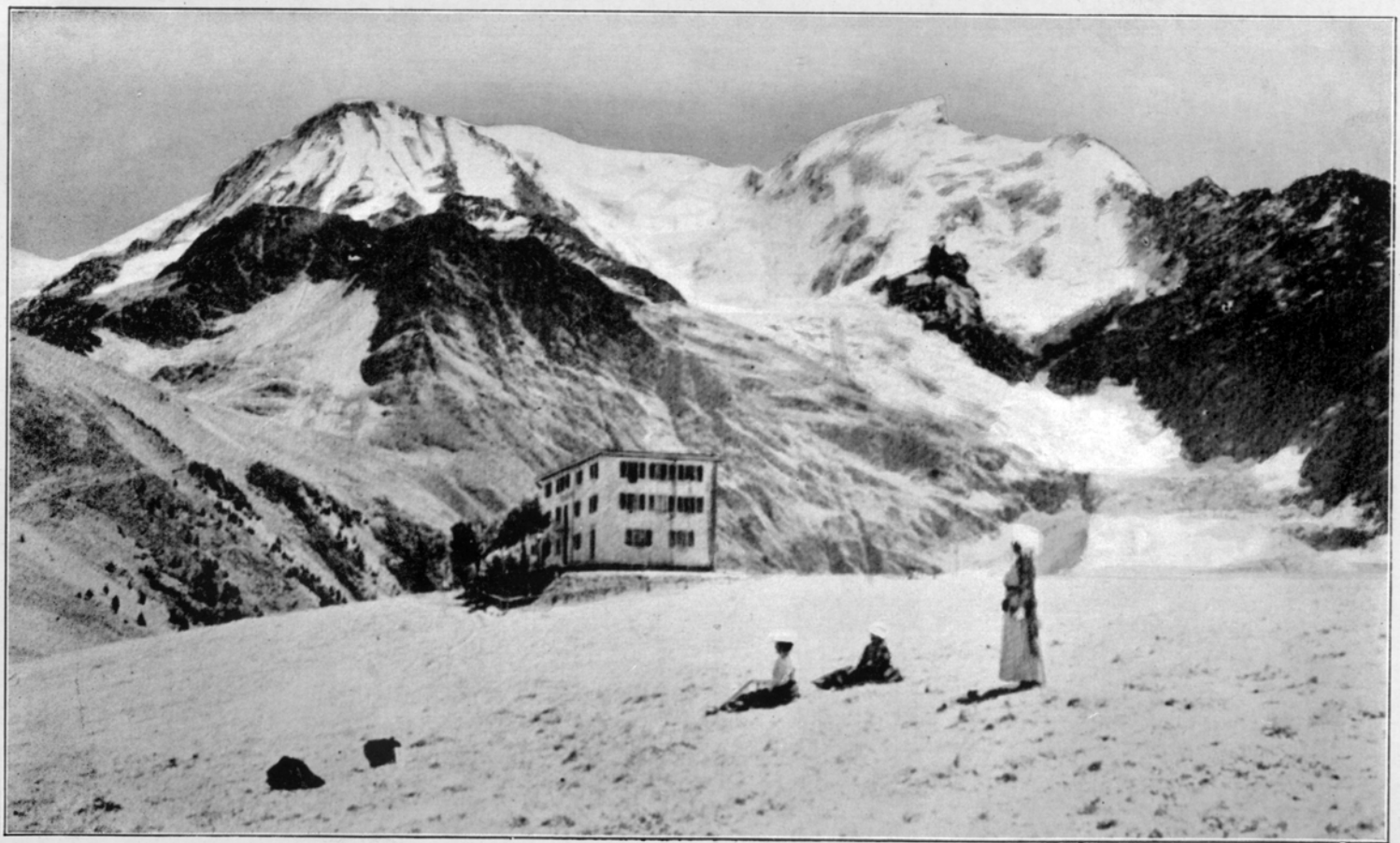
We arrived at Chamonix on June 30, and we were encouraged in these hopes the next day when we went to the Col de Voza to look at our mountain. Certainly the bergschrund looked less formidable.

Joseph went down to see the proprietor of the Tête Rousse, who, knowing us well and remembering some small service we had been able to render him, said he would let us have the key whenever we wished—an unexampled favour.

Then came a fortnight of weather too bad to go out in; but on Friday, July 16, things looking better, we set out for the hut, which we reached at about 7 P.M. on the second day after its opening.

The night was fine but cloudy; at 2 A.M. the snow was soft as water and obviously impossible.

Again we waited; a brilliant day was followed by a clear night, and the snow being much better by 2 A.M. we decided to start.



Aiguille de Bionnassay from Col de Voza.

Photo R. W. Lloyd.

Late the evening before, that fine climber Captain Harold Porter, who seems, from an announcement in the papers, to have had a dual object in visiting New Zealand, which, it is to be hoped, may not result in ending, as is usual, his climbing career, turned up at the cabane with his party.

His intention was to go up Mont Blanc, and his early start in the morning roused us rather too soon. We waited half an hour, and then, at 2.50, quite at the end of our patience, set out and descended by candle-light very slowly to and over the Glacier de Bionnassay, the crevasses of which were covered with very soft and bad snow and ran the wrong way for the direct crossing which we had to make.

We ascended by the same steep slope as last year, now covered with the débris of séracs and avalanche snow; then, turning sharply to our left, we mounted steeply, the snow becoming better the higher we went.

At 4.25, having made good progress, we stopped to put on our crampons, which took us a quarter of an hour; then we proceeded a few yards without cutting, but, the angle becoming much too steep, Adolph had to make steps, and so we ascended a slope of constantly increasing steepness, cutting all the time, until we were under the great séracs which hid the Tricot arête from view.

Here, again turning sharply to our left, E., we traversed a little way up and across very steep snow, and so came on to the great traverse across the face of the mountain.

As I looked at the magnificent expanse of ice and snow, I saw how apt were the words of Mr. Grove about that 'frowning and rugged wall . . . equally offensive and impracticable' where 'in places the snow sheets appeared to fall almost with the curve of a bellying sail.'

Our route may quite probably have been impossible when Mr. Grove so described it in 1865, but in those days ice-craft was perhaps not so highly developed as in these. Certain it is that the traverse across the face to the foot of the final precipitous slope which we had now to face was the most impressive that either Joseph or I had ever seen. As far as we could judge, it extended some 300 metres; it is, however, most difficult on snow to give exact distances, and although the Pollingers are confident that the length of the traverse is somewhat greater, it might either be a little more or a little less. Mr. Oliver, who has since been there, assures me that it is a good deal more.

The traverse is on steep snow, which was in good condition;

in fact, the best snow of the day, but it gave us nevertheless a thrill to look round and see the tremendous slope above and the great precipice falling far below.

At the end of the traverse was something no less formidable ; the bergschrund, which in so many years effectually bars this climb. Anxiously as we looked at it, we could see only one place where it seemed possible to cross.

After a short consultation, Joseph went in front, and we cut our way down to this likely spot, which was quite near its lower and steepest end. Then Adolph again took the lead.

Adolph cut on to the lower lip and then tried to make a good step on the upper side, which was exceedingly steep. Unfortunately the snow here, where we turned upwards, was not only very steep but also extremely soft. His axe, although driven deep, did not hold, so that his first attempt failed and he slipped back on to the lower lip.

In an ordinary place this would have been nothing, but as neither Joseph nor I, situated as we were, could do anything for him, it looked quite sufficiently alarming.

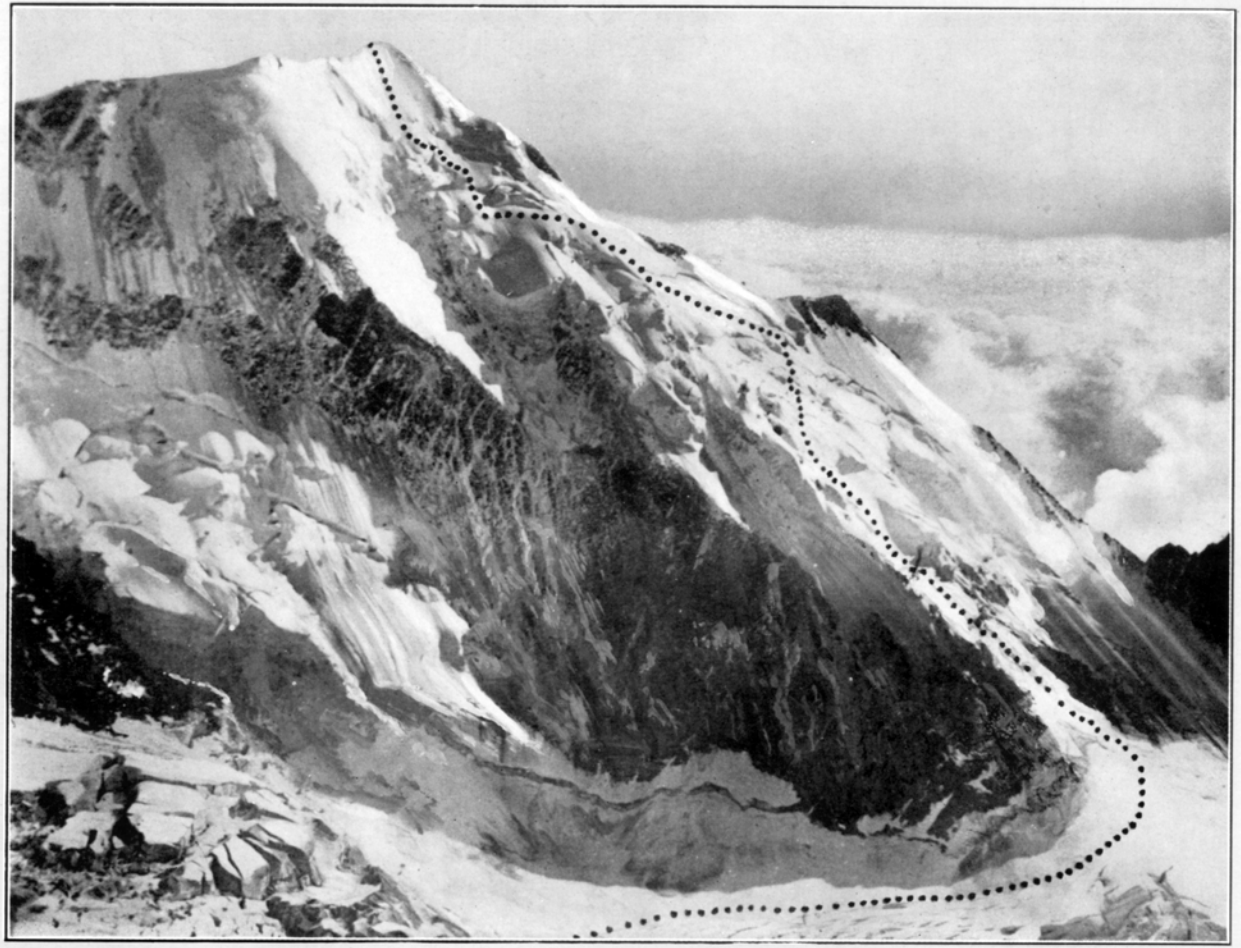
Adolph, nothing daunted, tried again ; with a great effort he got across, and kicking his way up a few steps in the deep soft snow, made himself safe for me to follow. I found the same difficulty as he had encountered, but had the advantage of the support of the rope at the critical moment when I dared not pull on my axe.

Soon Adolph and I were standing together. Then we took Joseph's rope, and, giving him the same assistance, we stood at last, all three, on the upper side of the bergschrund.

We were now approaching those final séracs which we knew from observation were directly under the summit. The snow was soft and bad and very steep, the worst that we had encountered so far, but Adolph stuck doggedly to his arduous work of making good steps, well apart, and at 8.25 A.M we stood on the top of the séracs, almost directly under the summit.

We had now been going 5 hrs. 35 mins. without a stop and were getting fatigued, especially the guides, as they had had so much step cutting. We had not been able to stop before, as on the steep slopes there was no place where we could rest.

Now as we looked up to the summit the remaining climb seemed almost perpendicular, easing off, however, towards the top, which appeared to lean back. We thought half an hour would see us up, and so we rested a quarter of an hour and ate a



Aiguille de Bionnassay, showing R. W. Lloyd's route on July 18th, 1926.

little food. It was a short pause, as we were anxious about the snow.

We had reason; it was very bad and powdery, not at all to our liking.

And so, with great care, Adolph still leading, making good steps deep and wide apart, hay-loft ladder style, going straight up, we climbed towards the summit.

It all took time, and when we reached what we had thought the less steep place we found it almost as bad, with the snow still dangerously powdery, although not so deep, and Adolph cut through it into the ice.

By this time, however, he was obviously tired and stopped to rest when about 20 metres from the top. Being all three, in our dangerous position, very close together, I handed to Adolph the small flask of brandy I always carry in my pocket as a sovereign specific in case of emergency. He took a little and the effect was magical. Just as on our famous climb on the Dent Blanche[1] 17 years ago, when quite close to the top, his father was also tired, and I applied the same remedy—so here. It put, as Adolph said, new life into him, and he went on cutting with such renewed vigour that in a short time we were standing on the summit.

We had debouched on the exact top—without touching any arête—at 10.10 A.M., having taken 7 hrs. 20 mins. over the climb.

The N. face was so nearly vertical that, looking back, except for the last few steps, we could not see our tracks.

The summit was not quite the sort of place one would choose for a picnic; but I reflected that we were more fortunate than Mr. Grove and his friends, who groped their way to the top, straddling on the knife edge of the arête 'as sharp and delicate as the crest of a breaking wave' amid the whirling eddies of a *tourmente*, and who arrived 'so mailed in snow that they looked like uncouth statues put up there as some kind of scarecrow to prevent future trespassers from coming to such places' and could only peer into the gloom 'through the meshes of the blinding snow.'

Well, there we were; but we had to get down again, so after congratulating one another, we began to consider our descent.

To return as we had come, which was our original intention, was so clearly impossible that we did not even consider it. On the S. slope the snow was much too soft to attempt the

[1] *A.J.* **25,** 452–3; **34,** 104–7.



D. Chalonge

Photo-Réal. Grenoble

Aiguille de Bionnassay and Cabane du Goûter

ridge to the Col de Bionnassay. There was a great deal of corniche, and to have put our trust in the steep snow below the arête would certainly have involved us in an avalanche.

The Tricot arête was also very soft and badly corniched on its S. slope, so Joseph decided to descend by the Miage arête as the only way down.

At 10.15 Joseph, his rope carefully held, stepped off the summit and proceeded to kick steps in the soft snow of the steep face towards the arête some distance below, going down face to the snow.

The snow, although soft and wet, was fairly safe, and as soon as the rope was out, I followed him, succeeded by Adolph, only one of us moving at a time.

Thus in a few minutes we reached the Miage arête, where we had a rest of about a quarter of an hour and a drink. On resuming we found that the arête we were on was cut off by a nasty couloir, so we had to make another descent of the same sort as before—very hot and fatiguing we found it—to the true arête below.

We followed this arête, all snow and easy going compared with the N. side, until we arrived at the big ' red rock ridge,' which was full of snow except over on the S. flank. Here, after some searching for the way and some complaint of the sharpness of the rocks—our hands being skinned and tender with the snow—we eventually came to rest on the last rocks above the Glacier de Bionnassay italien, and there had our first meal.

It was by this time 12 o'clock ; we had been going hard for nine hours.

At 12.30 we went on again down and along the upper edge of the Glacier de Bionnassay italien, going backwards, as the snow was soft, watery and steep. Thus we turned the cut-off of the ridge and soon reached the snow arête. Then, after a glance down the couloir to see if it was possible, we went on over the arête to the Miage hut, which we reached at 1.50, having had horribly soft snow and no rock from the time we had left the ' Red Ridge.'

By this time we again needed a rest, so we stayed 25 mins., had a drink and a little food sitting on the platform looking down the Miage valley—we could not enter the hut as the door side was deep in snow and quite out of sight—and then at 2.15 proceeded down the Col de Miage. As a rule this is easy, but the rocks being full of bad snow we had to take great care and for some distance go down backwards.

There was at last an end to these abominable rocks, but then more snow, horribly deep, soft, and, as Mr. Grove described it, ' flaccid.' Down this we kicked our way for an interminable time ; it was 4 P.M. when we reached the Miage Glacier.

Need I describe to you that painful and intolerable weariness, the last hours of a long climb ? We plodded thus along the route you all know and reached St. Gervais about 7.50. Our friend, the *Guide Chef*, was at his office ; we got an automobile to Le Fayet, and never had such a drive seemed so agreeable ; with 1½ hrs. to wait for the Chamonix train we had dinner at the station, and eventually walked into Couttet's at about 11 P.M.

It had been a magnificent day—one of the greatest climbs of our experience. I could not but reflect how much better we had fared than Mr. Grove and his party who were caught first by a furious storm and then by darkness at the head of the Glacier de Miage, and had to spend the night, wet through, on a couch of rocks, alternately thawing and freezing in the bitter cold.

We had made, between early morning and dark, what I think I may describe as one of the greatest snow and ice climbs in the Alps—for the first time—and let me hasten to add that it could only have been done under the leadership of a great guide such as Joseph Pollinger.

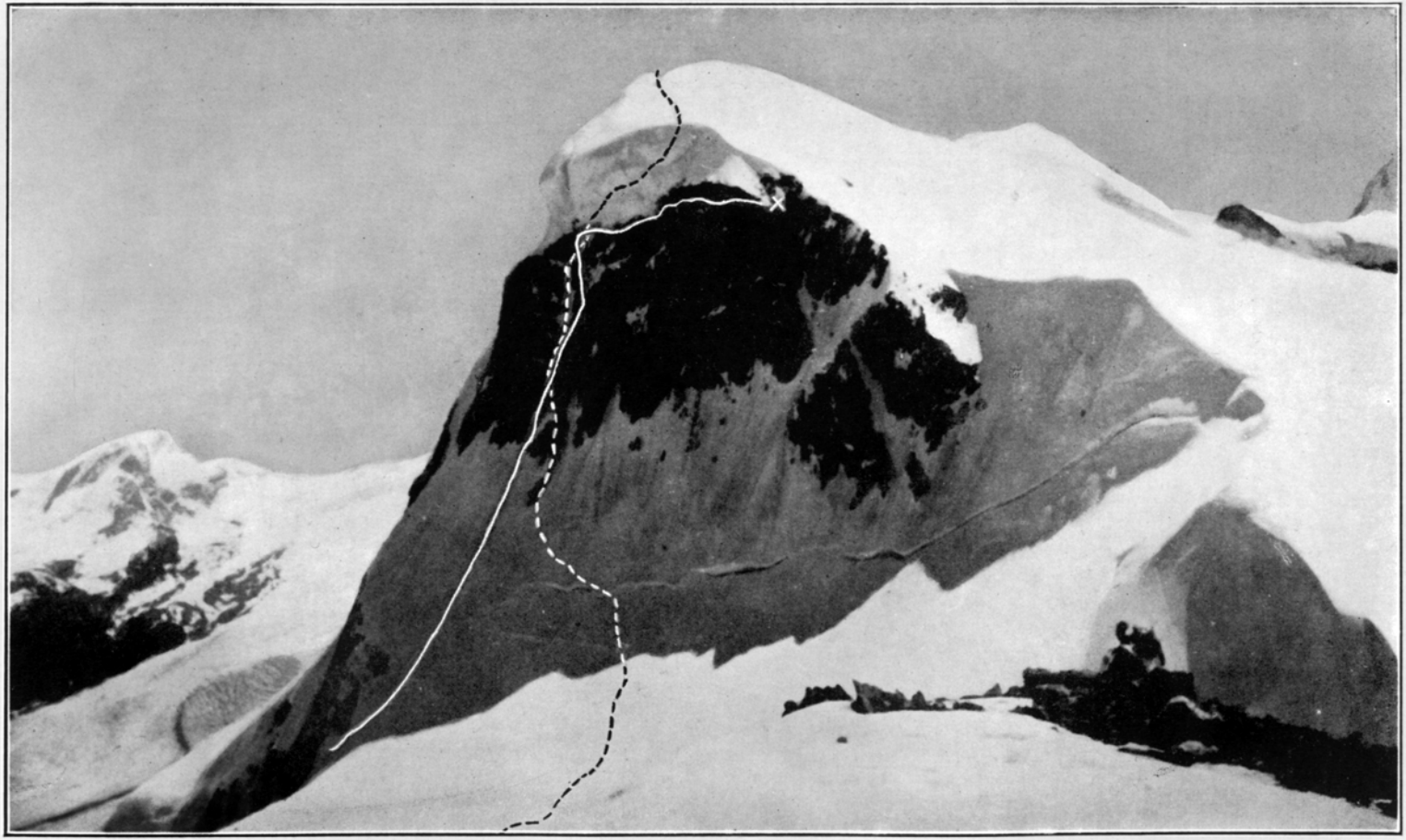
If there was another factor in our success, it was the long study entailed in our preliminary disappointments.

The day of our success in 1926 was, by a happy coincidence, the same day of the same month as the day of our defeat in 1925.

Gentlemen, I thank you for your kind attention. When I was preparing this paper I came to read the delightful narrative of the ascent of 1865. Ah, gentlemen, how willingly would I have exchanged my better fortune in the weather for Mr. Grove's felicity of style ! If you have not already read his paper, there is a literary treat in store for you, and so that you may all enjoy it, we have brought a few copies here to-night. Those who do not already possess the paper may help the Club funds and give themselves pleasure by buying and reading it.

I am pleased to be able to record that on August 13, 1926, Monsieur Pierre Langlois,[2] with two St. Gervais guides, practically repeated the first ascent of the mountain made in 1865

[2] See G. H. M., *Annuaire*, 1927, p. 65.



W. face of Breithorn from Kl. Matterhorn, with line showing R. W. Lloyd's route in 1911, *and dotted line showing route of Monsieur Blanchet's successful ascent on* 16*th August*, 1926.

by the W. arête. M. de Ségogne has kindly sent me a photograph with the route marked upon it.

Mr. Oliver, some days later, on August 17, with the two brothers Aufdenblatten, almost repeated my climb except that they took to the Tricot arête a few minutes from the summit and appear to have avoided the last very steep face.[3]

They occupied 9 hrs. on the ascent, being delayed for about an hour by a thunderstorm which broke when they were about an hour from the summit. One of the party was unwell, and this also caused delay.

They seem to have had—as might be expected later in the season—much better snow than we had in July.

On the descent they had three more severe storms with a heavy fall of hail and new snow, which rendered the Miage arête somewhat unpleasant.

Some day you may be interested to hear the story of an attempt on another mountain,[4] which—at the moment when

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[3] *A.J.* **38,** 310.

[4] The reference is to the ascent of the Breithorn (Pennines) by the W. face. At the time of writing this paper I was not aware of M. Blanchet's successful climb of August 16, 1926 (*A.J.* **38,** 312; G. H. M. *Annuaire*, 1927, p. 97). The following note of our attempt of July 17, 1911, may be of interest:

The party, consisting of Joseph Pollinger, Franz Imboden, and myself, left the Gandegg Hut at 02.35. Crossing the Kleinmatterhorn Glacier (S. map), we attained with some difficulty the well-marked N.W. rib of the Breithorn; this rib, very conspicuous from the hut, steepens considerably near its upper extremity, 04.00. Cutting up the rib, its culminating portion, abutting against an inclined snow plateau at the base of the mountain's W. face, was attained 06.30 (20 mins. halt). From this point bearing E., we mounted steep snow, crossed the bergschrund and then cut up a very steep snow couloir. Several times we tried the rocks to our right, S., but they were—in that hot season—impossibly smooth and polished. '1926' conditions *might* have made all the difference! Accordingly we kept to the awkward couloir, for as long as possible. Eventually we did take to the rocks on the S., which were a little more broken but with undercut holds. They brought us to a long, narrow, and horizontal crevice just below the ice cliff, here some 20 ft. high. There was no foothold whatever on the few feet between us and the ice, the rocks being rounded and smoothed like plate glass by ice friction. Further direct progress was impossible, but the cliff appearing rather lower to the S., we took to a minute ledge in the green serpentine rock and followed it with great difficulty till we could see round the corner to the S. The traverse, however, ended

success seemed assured—ended in failure, and has left a new climb yet to be done, although it may not be by Joseph Pollinger and R. W. Lloyd, who do not like dangerous places !

I desire to express my indebtedness to M. Montandon for the use of some of his photographs and to Mr. Spencer and Mr. Oughton for their assistance in obtaining others for my slides.

[We are deeply grateful to Mr. Lloyd for generously defraying the entire cost of reproducing the two coloured prints and several of the photographs accompanying his paper—EDITOR.]

SOME FAMOUS PASSES.

BY E. G. OLIVER.

(Read before the Alpine Club, April 5, 1927.)

THE word ' Pass ' as a mountaineering term may be defined as a well-marked depression in a range of mountains. Mr. Coolidge limits the mountaineering sense to depressions which have been actually crossed by man. The passes, the crossing of which I propose to describe shortly to-night, are, of course, passes in the mountaineering sense of the word, and they all come within Mr. Coolidge's definition, though the passages by man have not been numerous. They cannot, however, be described as convenient means of access from one place to another.

When I began my mountaineering career some twenty-five years ago, passes were out of fashion—at least as first-class mountaineering expeditions. Their only advantage over peaks was that one must descend into a different valley on the opposite side of the chain to that by which one ascended ; and, after all, in the popular contention, a superior result on the same lines could be obtained by traversing one's peak.

Reasoning on these lines induced me, in my earlier climbs, rather to despise passes ; never to attempt difficult ones, and

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in a horrid splayed-out rock and ice gully which was obviously impossible. The ice cliff here also overhung to such an extent that even if the gully had been overcome, it is doubtful if we could have reached the upper lip. Only a few yards remained, but advance being hopeless, we retraced our steps at 09.20, and, making our way most carefully down the objectionable rocks and couloir, regained the snow plateau at 10.50.