

EXPEDITION

AIGUILLE DE ROC (3,409 m. = 11,147 ft.) AND ROC-GRÉPON TRAVERSE. August 30, 1951. Messrs. D. R. Fisher and G. C. Band. From the Tour Rouge hut rapid progress was made up to the gap behind the Tour Rouge itself, crossing the Charmoz-Grépon couloir on the way. The left side of the Roc-Grépon couloir was climbed for 300 ft. and then the east-north-east ridge of the Roc on the left was rounded. A traverse led to a deep couloir which was ascended first by its bed and later by the left wall until a gap was reached high up in the east-north-east ridge of the Roc. Here we rested thirty minutes. We had moved together mostly but now increasing difficulty forced us to move singly. After walking 100 ft. along a ledge to the left a 20 ft. crack was climbed followed by a smooth cracked wall slightly to the left. A broad ledge was followed to the right for 60 ft. Shortly above this a shallow groove sloping to the left with two small bulges in it was ascended. From the top of this the way appeared doubtful as some pitons above and to the left misled us. An exit to the right was made then a 10 ft. right-hand corner climbed to a ledge and scoop to the right. Progress was made straight up to the south-east ridge of the Roc which was then followed to the spear-shaped summit block. This was cleaved by a smooth 80 ft. chimney somewhat wider than the Monolith Crack but with the added attraction of being open at both sides. It was climbed with an exit to the right at the top and rucksacks were hauled up for the first time. From an exposed perch 6 ft. above, a small mushroom-shaped projection 10 ft. to the left was lassoed, a swing across was made to a crack and the last few feet to the summit were climbed. From a piton a 100 ft. rappel down the overhanging West face using two 150 ft. manila lines was made to a snow-covered terrace. A second 100 ft. rappel was made down the vertical North face to an invisible ledge from which a third short rappel enabled the Roc-Grépon col to be reached. The real difficulties now loomed vertically above, so we lunched. From a small platform 30 ft. up on the Grépon a gently overhanging corner was climbed artificially on a doubled 120 ft. nylon rope which proved just sufficient to reach the first convenient stance, a small sentry box. The original five fixed pitons had been multiplied farcically; it was unnecessary to use any of our own. The leader used ten karabiners and a sling and trailed a second rope for hauling up his rucksack. From the stance the crack above was climbed 15 ft. to a platform. An airy ridge on the right led in 30 ft. to easy rocks whence a rising traverse to the right for 150 ft. led to a large ledge. From the end of this rose the 120 ft. chimney of the ordinary Mer de Glace face route. From its top a short excursion to the right was made and 'Todhunter's crux' on the original ascent encountered. The original line of weakness was rejoined and followed to the Brèche Balfour. From here only the

Knubel Crack separated us from the summit of the Grépon but unfortunately it was late and beginning to snow, so regretfully we decided to descend to the Nantillons glacier in order to complete the descent of the Rognon before dark. This we did and Montenvers was reached in steady rain.

Although probably no single pitch was more than 'mild severe' this standard was often maintained. The route involves more than 3,000 ft. of rock-climbing in the ascent, of which the last 1,200 ft. are difficult. A magnificent climb was enjoyed providing greater difficulty and, in its lassoing, rappels, and artificial climbing, a greater variety of technique than is to be found on the normal East face route.

Times :

Tour Rouge Hut, left at	05.45
Summit of Aiguille de Roc	13.15
Roc-Grépon Col	14.30
Breche Balfour	18.10
Montenvers	21.45

G. C. BAND