EXPEDITIONS

MOUNT MCKINLEY. First Traverse and First Ascent of South Buttress : Elton Thayer, George Argus, Leslie Viereck, Morton S. Wood. April 17–May 25, 1954.

In *Appalachia* (June 1954) Bradford Washburn analysed a route up the mountain via the Ruth Glacier and the South Buttress; an advance copy of this analysis was taken with him by Elton Thayer to the mountain. No such route had been attempted since Belmore Browne was turned back in 1910.

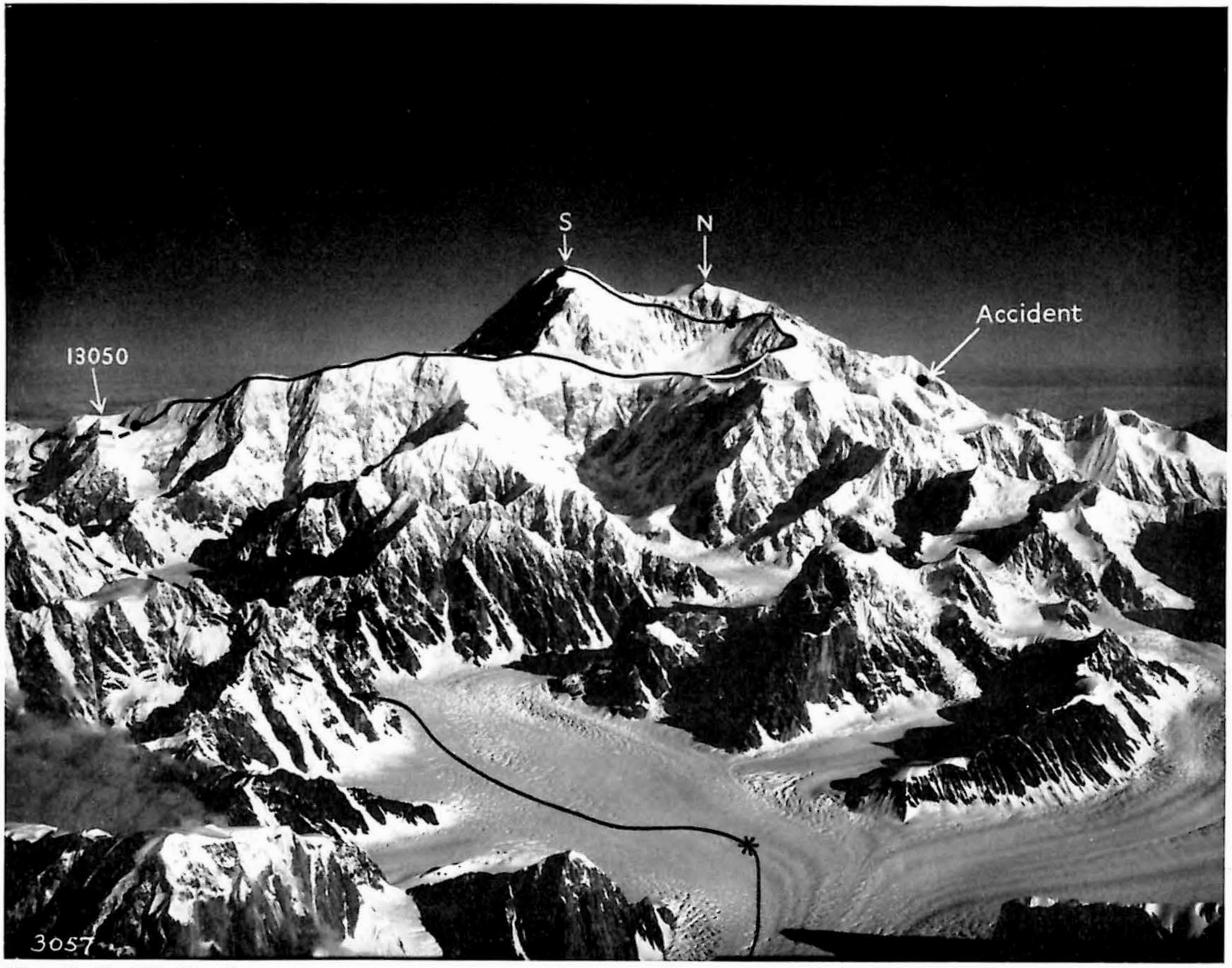
The party left Curry on the Alaska Railroad on April 17 on the 40-mile journey to the Great Basin of the Ruth Glacier. Their packs of 70–80 lb. each contained provisions for 10 days. They were much troubled by wet snow clinging to their snow-shoes ; the journey took 6, instead of the estimated 4, days. On the 24th, Mrs. Morton Wood made two successful air drops of the remaining stores.

Ten days' supplies were cached, and the party began a leap-frog relay of loads which was continued all the way up the South Buttress. The route taken up the West fork of the Ruth Glacier was menaced by avalanches ; it was judged that bad snow conditions would have removed the possibility of safe camp-sites. An immense crevasse which stretched from the north wall of rock to the south wall of ice-blocks was eventually crossed by digging a tunnel up through the overhanging lip. Here the proposed route was seen to be much harder than had been assumed from aerial photos ; the party decided to turn to the right up a slope of about 45°, broken by several ice-falls but offering smooth and apparently safe areas. Light snowfall kept the party in camp on the 29th, but on the 30th they reached the top of the ridge and found a good site for Camp I.

On May 2, they established Camp II, with difficulty in strong wind, on the saddle between Peak 13,050 and the slope of the South Buttress. This slope, about 1,200 ft. high, averaged about 46° ; it required over 1,000 steps and proved a serious obstacle. It was not until May 10 that Camp III was established at the top, though this period included 3 days storm-bound in Camp II.

From Camp III, First Buttress Peak (15,000 ft.) was by-passed by walking and crawling through a long cave formed by an overhanging ice-cornice. Camp IV was then established on the Buttress itself. From this point it was decided not to relay loads but to carry everything together, even though this meant 90 lb. each, including the snow-shoes necessary for the return.

On May 12, they set off down the ridge, at one point traversing on the West side thigh-deep in new snow. They camped on the edge of the Great Traleika Cirque ; next morning they dropped 1,500 ft. into the cirque and established Camp VI at about 14,000 ft. On May 14, they reached the pass above the Harper Glacier, whence a 4-day journey



Photo, Bradford Washburn.]

MOUNT MCKINLEY SHOWING ROUTE TAKEN ON FIRST ASCENT OF SOUTH BUTTRESS.

[*To face p.* 368.

would bring them out to Wonder Lake. This greatly cheered the party as it removed the danger and difficulty of having to return by the way they had come. Here they dumped their packs and set up Camp VII at 17,200 ft.

On May 15, they left camp at 7.0 A.M., practically unladen, and reached the South Peak of Mount McKinley without difficulty at 2.0 P.M.

Next day they descended the Harper Glacier easily in warm sunny weather. Down the Cockscomb on Karstens Ridge snow conditions were poor, with too much loose snow for a firm footing. As the ridge steepened, conditions worsened ; the ice was too soft to hold a piton but too hard for belay with axe-shaft. (Wood's and Argus' axes had both been broken and mended with tape.) They moved one at a time, the other three belaying as best they could with the pick of the axe dug into snow-covered ice. A good fixed rope was found on the steep pitch at 12,800 ft. To avoid a bad section, they skirted below the crest on the north side, Argus leading, then Wood, Viereck and Thayer last. Suddenly Thayer slipped, and the others were pulled off in succession. The heavy packs greatly interfered with attempts to turn face down and dig in the pick. The whole party slid and fell 800–1,000 ft.

Wood and Viereck were shocked and bruised, but otherwise undamaged. Thayer was seen to be hanging on the rope on the face of a 15-foot vertical ice-wall. He was lowered, but found to be dead. Probably his back was broken when the rope suddenly arrested his fall. It was feared that Argus had a broken leg. The snow was strewn with half-buried equipment. Wood's pack still contained sleeping-bags, air mattress and the three-man tent. Argus, half conscious and his front teeth crushed in, was put on the mattress and covered with sleeping-bags. A level platform was hacked out, Argus placed on it and the tent erected over him. Some supper was cooked by Wood, who was in the fittest state.

Argus was reasonably comfortable while lying still, but movement was very painful. It was concluded that his leg was not broken but his hip dislocated or broken. They remained in this camp six days, hoping that Argus would improve and that someone would read messages stamped in the snow. As they were overdue, they knew that Mrs. Wood would be out in the 'plane looking for them. It became clear, however, that the fresh snow involved an increasing avalanche danger and that they must move. On May 22, Wood and Viereck set out to make a trail down which Argus could be dragged. In places a trough had to be chopped through ice-steps. The injured man, with all the padding available, was wrapped in the tent and got safely down to level glacier by sunset. Next morning Mrs. Wood's 'plane was seen searching on the south side of the mountain where she expected them to be.

It became obvious that help had to be fetched. Leaving Argus with food and fuel for 10 days or, at a pinch, a fortnight, Wood and Viereck set off down the Muldrow Glacier hoping to reach Wonder Lake in about 2 days ; they had only some oatmeal, a few bars of chocolate and

five biscuits. They reached McGonagall Pass at 3.30 A.M. next morning, the 24th, slept there for four hours and pushed on down Cache Creek. Walking all that day and the next night they forded the McKinley River at 4.30 A.M. on the 25th. After two hours' sleep in McKinley Bar cabin and cooking food stocked there, they reached the Park Highway, never doubting that they would be able to stop a car since the road was expected to be open in the first week of May at latest. But there were no tracks ; the road was still closed and they 85 miles from railhead.

The only other man in the Kantishna country was Johnny Busia who lived four miles beyond Wonder Lake. They reached his cabin and while resting there, a voice was heard calling across the river. Oscar Dick, the Chief Ranger and Superintendent Grant Pearson had come up on the first trip of the season. The party reached the station at 10.30 that night.

A rescue party was flown up the Muldrow Glacier by helicopter and reached Argus after exactly a week of solitude. He was brought out by sled, helicopter and 'plane.

Morton Wood considers that the successful ascent of the South Buttress route was largely due to unprecedented good luck with weather and snow conditions. The route is not, he thinks, either safe or practical.

[We are greatly indebted to Mr. Henderson, Mr. Morton Wood and Mr. Child of the *American Alpine Journal* for the foregoing information —EDITOR.]

ALA DAĞ.[1] During July 1955, a visit was paid to the Ala Dağ by J. R. G. Finch, F. L. Jenkins, and E. M. Warrick. The following peaks were climbed : Alaca Başi, Karanfil Dağ, Kaldi Dağ (to summit ridge 200 ft. short of the top), and Demirkazik.

The main problems were the inaccuracy of the existing maps and the complexity of the lower ridges. A good general guide to the layout of the area is given by M. M. Blumenthal in *Die Alpen*, April 1950, pp. 135–44.

There is apparently only one route up Kaldi Dağ, which involves a very circuitous approach march. The final short length of the ridge is thoroughly rotten, with scree lying on slabs, altogether most unattractive.

Demirkazik was the best of the peaks visited. The East ridge is the common line of ascent and provides plenty of slab-climbing. Owing to its position on the edge of the range, the summit provides a fine view-point. There is a possibility of a traverse to the West face and down the East ridge. It appears from the *Gipfelbuch* to have been climbed twenty-three times in the past ten years. This was probably the third British ascent and the first recorded in the *Gipfelbuch*.

The weather was dry ; little snow remained at this time of year.

[1] For map, see *A.J.* 54. 236.

Springs for bivouacs were not always easy to find. The sun at the middle of the day was strong, and some of the lower valleys exceedingly hot. It is thought June would be a pleasanter month to visit the area.

Approach was made from Pozanti with pack-horses. Forestry roads are being developed in the area, and used by jeeps and 3-ton trucks. Use of a vehicle after the first ten miles leads to trouble with the irrigation system, which crosses and recrosses the track. However, a week-end shooting party from Ankara brought a Land Rover within five miles of the foot of Demirkazik while we were there.

PENTEDHAKTILOS.[2] The complete traverse of the ridge from east to west was made on May 30, 1955, by J. R. G. Finch, G. G. Crookshank, F. L. Jenkins, E. M. Warrick, J. D. A. Arundel, H. C. Tanton, and R. Shaw.

Most of the ridge consists of rock scrambling. There are four sections of interest.

(1) The East ridge of the Thumb. The red wall at the top of this was climbed by traversing left along the shelf into a crack, and ascending this to an inverted flake. Mild Severe, somewhat exposed.

(2) The West side of the Thumb-Clocktower gap—one pitch up an open chimney ; not more than Very Difficult.

(3) The direct ascent of the Index Finger from the Clocktower—Index gap. Two routes were made. One up the steep slab on the left, the second diagonally to the right, crossing two cracks. Both are exposed, the former is the more severe.

(4) The Vorgipfel Slab. A steep slab with several possible routes on small holds. Very Difficult.

There is one absurd pitch where one shuffles across using two branches of a tree bridging a forty-foot chasm near the summit of the Central Finger.

The end of May was found rather hot for this expedition. The temperature at Nicosia was 95° F.

AIGUILLE D'ARGENTIÈRE, North face. August 16. J. Emery and J. S. Hobhouse. Also done by M. E. B. Banks and F. R. Brooke who had bad snow on the face and a snowstorm on the summit ; they took $14\frac{1}{2}$ hours from Refuge Albert Ier to the Refuge d'Argentière.

AIGUILLE DE BLAITIÈRE, North-west (Ryan-Lochmatter) ridge. T. W. Patey and F. R. Malcolm. July 17, 1955.

AIGUILLE DIBONA, South face. G. J. Sutton, R. O. Downes, E. D. G. Langmuir.

AIGUILLE DIBONA, South-west ridge. July 27. R. R. E. Chorley, E. A. Wrangham.

AIGUILLE DIBONA, West face. M. J. Harris, J. Neill, J. F. Mawe.

[2] See *A.J.* 57. 192, 545.

AIGUILLE DU FOU. South-west ridge. August 4, 1955. A. K. Rawlinson and M. H. Westmacott.

This is a short and pleasant rock climb, hard work, but not of great difficulty if unscrupulous use is made of *étriers*. It is normally reached from the North-west ridge of the Aiguille de Blaitière, across the West face by the 'vires Fontaine.' On this occasion there was heavy snow on the ledges and it was necessary to move singly most of the time. There were two ice pitches of moderate difficulty just below the Col du Fou, which was reached from Montenvers in nine hours, against a guide-book time of five and a half hours.

Some snow fell while we were on the ridge. A high wind and an obviously imminent storm discouraged us from attempting the summit block either by Charlet's exposed and delicate route or by rope-throwing. The traverse towards the Aiguille de Blaitière was started at about 3 P.M. The storm broke shortly after and lasted for about four hours, covering every hold with loose snow, reducing visibility to a few yards and effectively concealing the route. We reached the Rocher de la Corde after a hard struggle as darkness fell and started to descend the ordinary route of the Aiguille de Blaitière. Luckily, the sky started to clear about an hour later and the moon came out. We arrived at Montenvers at 3 A.M.

M. H. W.

AIGUILLES DES GRANDS CHARMOZ, République ridge. July 24. A. Blackshaw, E. D. G. Langmuir, in eleven hours fifty-five minutes from Envers des Aiguilles.

AIGUILLE NOIRE DE PEUTEREY, West face (Ratti-Vitali route). July 23–24. T. D. Bourdillon, H. Nicol.

AIGUILLE NOIRE DE PEUTEREY, South ridge. July 31. M. J. Harris, J. F. Mawe.

AIGUILLE DU PEIGNE, North ridge. The *intégrale* route was done by R. Moseley and others, and also by M. J. Cunnington and R. Goodier. The *grand dièdre* (i.e. variation start as far as foot of *ressaut supérieur*) was done on July 17 by T. D. Bourdillon and H. Nicol, and on July 21 by A. Blackshaw and E. D. G. Langmuir, who took seven and a half hours. The latter route was also done by G. J. Sutton and R. O. Downes.

AIGUILLE DU PLAN, North face. July 15, 1955. T. W. Patey and F. R. Malcolm.

The direct route up the glacier was followed, using Tournier's variation by the right-hand rocks (Aiguille des Deux Aigles) on the upper part.

The initial rock rib was quite straightforward and from its top a steep 100-ft. ice pitch gave access to the glacier proper. Turning the second major ice-fall by steep snow on the left we then veered right across to the right-hand couloir, which seemed to be the key to the tangled upper glacier.

Although the snow was excellent so far, the fact that a very warm sun had just started to strike the upper rocks (8 A.M.) decided us to adjourn to the rib on the right for refreshment. Ten minutes later a colossal sérac broke away and we were convinced by the trail of destruction left in the couloir that our best way lay up the right-hand rocks. These were plastered with snow and ice and constituted the only really hard part of the climb, the last 500 ft. up to the Col des Deux Aigles taking six hours. Total time eleven hours.

There would always be a certain amount of objective danger on this route, but for most of the climb the ice-falls and deep crevasses (which would catch minor avalanches) afford partial protection. The two bounding couloirs to the steep part of the glacier are, however, very exposed to ice-fall. A very early start has the disadvantage of some awkward route-finding on the lower rock rib.

T. W. P.

AIGUILLE DU PLAN. East ridge (Ryan—Lochmatter route). July 31, 1955. A. K. Rawlinson and M. H. Westmacott.

This well-known ridge was perhaps more difficult of access this year than is usual. The night before our ascent, we tried to make a route up the true right side of the glacier d'Envers de Blaitière, said to be practicable in exceptional seasons. In spite of heavy snow earlier in the year, it was not possible to cross the last and largest of the berg-schrunds.

We left the Requin hut at about 2.30 A.M. We lost a little over an hour by taking too high a line across the foot of the glacier, but subsequently made good progress to the head of the upper basin. Here, there was a complex system of large crevasses, which needed both time and care. The last bergschrund was crossed far to the left, after an attempt had been made to ascend directly where a large section of the overhanging upper lip had broken away (probably where a British party had been avalanched a few days previously).

We then ascended the névé of the couloir du Col du Pain de Sucre for two or three hundred feet, before traversing right to reach the secondary couloir between the ridge and the large gendarme to the left of it. The traverse involved the crossing of a number of smooth-sided snow gullies or runnels ranging in depth from five to twenty feet. The rocks at the head of the secondary couloir were difficult, being heavily iced. The ridge was reached at 1.30 P.M.

The ridge itself was straightforward, apart from slight trouble with snow on a few of the pitches. The summit was reached at sunset (7.30 P.M.) and the hut at 10 P.M.

M. H. W.

AIGUILLE DE SIALOUZE, traverse. July 22. J. H. Emlyn Jones and P. Nelson.

AIGUILLE DE TRIOLET, North face (route Gréloz-Roch). August 11. A. Blackshaw and R. O. Downes. Refuge d'Argentière 22.30, *rimaye* 00.01, col 05.30. Some time was saved by steps cut by a French party on the previous day.

AIGUILLE VERTE, Couloir Couturier. July. R. Moseley and E. Dance. And again in August, by C. W. F. Noyce, G. J. Sutton and F. R. Brooke.

DENT DU CROCODILE, East ridge. July 19. T. D. Bourdillon and H. Nicol.

GRAND CAPUCIN, North face. First ascent, July 24–25 with bivouac in *étriers*. G. Bérardini and R. Paragot.

GRAND CAPUCIN, East face. Ninth ascent, July 24–25. R. Asper and M. Bron. This climb was repeated, July 31–August 1, by T. D. Bourdillon and H. Nicol.

MONT BLANC. C. W. F. Noyce, Sir J. Hunt, M. P. Ward, and A. D. M. Cox made a double traverse, from the Durier Hut over Bionnassay and Mont Maudit to the Torino (August 4 and 5), and back up the Sentinelle Route (August 11) and down to Chamonix. 'The excitement was rushing these through in between spells of bad weather.' The Sentinelle was also climbed on August 22 by J. Emery, J. S. Hobhouse and R. Johnson.

MONT BLANC by the Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey. August 6. R. R. E. Chorley and E. A. Wrangham. We bivouacked at the foot of the Gugliermina—a beautiful site and running water to hand. The site is actually on the *vires* that lead on to the South-east ridge of the Blanche above the ressaut immediately above the Brèche Nord des Dames Anglaises. This is certainly a better approach than the couloir up to the Brèche Nord, although we experienced some verglas on the *vires*. Conditions on the Blanche were not good—a lot of snow on the lower part, and both deep powder and ice on the traverse between the summits. Crampons were used on the descent to the Col de Peuterey. This proved a happy arrangement, for although it is mainly steep rock, there were, in 1955, several extremely steep patches of ice (*c.* 65°) which could be descended easily in conjunction with rock hand-holds. Because of the conditions we took the easier and quicker line to the left of the crest of the Grand Pilier d'Angle. The only ice on this part of the route was on the last few hundred feet up to the ridge beyond the Pilier d'Angle. The upper slopes, which were out of the sun when we were on them, were heavily crusted with soft powder snow below; earlier in the day they would have been dangerous. Dep. bivouac 03.45; dep. Col de Peuterey 13.45. Summit 21.00; halts 70 mins.

R. R. E. C.

Mt. Blanc du Tacul, Gervasutti couloir. July 21. G. J. Sutton, R. O. Downes. And again on August 20, by J. Emery, J. S. Hobhouse and R. Johnson.

Pain de Sucre, North face. T. W. Patey and F. R. Malcolm climbed the broad couloir up to where it narrows, then struck left over rather thin ice on smooth slabs. They had almost reached the main upper snow slope, which seemed unlikely to present difficulty, when a party below, who had climbed too far up the couloir in an attempt to get on to the Ryan-Lochmatter ridge of the Aiguille du Plan, met with an accident. The Pain de Sucre party abandoned their climb to go to the aid of the party below. July 21, 1955.

Pain de Sucre, Col du. August 25. J. Emery and J. S. Hobhouse.

Le Pavé (3,825 m.), by the South Face. July 23. R. R. E. Chorley and E. A. Wrangham; M. H. Westmacott, A. K. Rawlinson, D. C. Bull. The initial pitch of V was below the snow-level this year. One and a half hours were lost trying to find the itinerary described in the guide-book at the point where one traverses ('12 m. IV *sup*') to reach the centre of the éperon. The traverse was made at the indicated height and was perhaps II/III, but the route up the centre of the éperon quickly became difficult—V (and looking harder above) and not IV *inf*. as indicated. Instead we continued easily to the top of the ramp (a further 100 ft.) and regained by a chimney (III) and easy scrambling the crest of the éperon at the guide-book's 'petite épaule.' The chimney ('début surplombe') of V *inf*. is really IV *inf*. The other two pitches of V are accurately described and the rock here demands care. As a route it is not perhaps quite as fine as one would expect: much of the route is scrappy and loose and there are only about half-a-dozen exposed pitches.

Petit Dru, West face. Fourth ascent. J. Couzy and M. Demaison.

Petit Dru, South-West buttress. First Ascent 17–22 August. W. Bonatti, alone. Five bivouacs, 200 pegs.

Pic Nord des Cavales, West ridge. July 18. D. C. Bull, A. K. Rawlinson, R. M. Viney, M. H. Westmacott.

The ridge is now rather harder than appears from the guide-book description, owing to a rock fall at about one-third of its height, from the *premier ressaut*. The most obvious way up the *ressaut* is now by a steep and broken chimney in the centre of the scar left by the fallen rocks. This is a pitch of Very Severe standard; there are three pitons in place, but the rock is very rotten. It is probable that a steep wall twenty feet to the left, climbed shortly before us by a French party, provides a better route.

Above the first *ressaut*, it was found best to turn the next section of

the ridge on the left. A traverse of thirty yards to a small rock rib was followed by the ascent of the rib and then of a steep snow-covered rake leading to the ridge itself behind a pinnacle. A delicate step then led to straightforward slabs on the crest.

M. H. W.

PIC SANS NOM (Dauphiny), North-west couloir. J. Hartog, R. Hobhouse.

PIZ BADILE, North-east face. August 6. A. Blackshaw, G. J. Sutton, R. O. Downes, and E. D. G. Langmuir accomplished this climb in thirteen and a half hours from the *rimaye*, without bivouac.

PUNTA GUGLIERMINA, South face. August 1. A. Blackshaw, G. J. Sutton, R. O. Downes, E. D. G. Langmuir. The party took ten and a half hours from the *rimaye*.

RUWENZORI. During the fortnight spent in the area (July–August) Bernard Pierre's party only saw the mountains for three hours. They had no chance of climbing Margherita or Alexandra nor of realising their ambitions on ' the great tooth.' They climbed Moebius, ' not a very difficult mountain, but better than nothing.'

TOUR RONDE, North face. August 1. R. R. E. Chorley and E. A. Wrangham.