

## THE FIRST ASCENT OF THE TRIFTHORN

BY D. F. O. DANGAR AND T. S. BLAKENEY

THE history of the Trifthorn provides one of the minor puzzles of Alpine history. At various times three different people have been credited with making the first ascent.

In the first edition of Studer's *Ueber Eis und Schnee*, vol. iv., p. 290, it is stated that so far as is known the summit was reached for the first time in 1872 by 'Herr Béranek, vater.'<sup>1</sup> At the end of the third volume, however, is a list of peaks in the Swiss Alps exceeding 3,250 metres in height with the names of those who made the first ascent in each case. Peak No. 41 (Valais) is the 'Trifthorn (Zermatt) 3737 meter. 12261 Eng. Fuss'; here, the first ascent is said to have been made in 1866 by A. von Wattenwyl, a member of the Diablerets Section of the Swiss Alpine Club. The Conway-Coolidge *Pennine Guide*, published in 1890, attributes the ascent to 'M. Béranek in 1872,' with a reference to the *Jahrbuch S.A.C.*, viii, p. 580.<sup>2</sup> We have been unable to find any evidence in support of von Wattenwyl's ascent in 1866.

The second volume of the second edition of Studer's work was published in 1898 and on p. 503 the Trifthorn is stated to have been first climbed by M. G. Béranek in 1872 from the Triftjoch; no other information about the ascent was available. The third and last volume, however, contains a supplement of additions and corrections including (p. 489) the following paragraph correcting the information previously given about the Trifthorn: 'The Trifthorn was climbed for the first time before 2 July 1865 by Lord Francis Douglas with Peter Inäbnit. See P. Inäbnit's *Führerbuch* p. 62.'

We suggest that this paragraph was written under a misapprehension, but since its appearance Douglas has been generally regarded as having made the first ascent and is so credited by other leading authorities.<sup>3</sup>

Before giving an account of Douglas's movements during his stay at Zermatt the relevant entry in Inäbnit's *Führerbuch* may be quoted<sup>4</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> Georges Béranek, the father of Javelle's friend Edouard Béranek.

<sup>2</sup> See also *L'Echo des Alpes*, 1872, p. 301.

<sup>3</sup> Mumm, *A.C. Register*, vol. ii, p. 119. Dübi, *Guide des Alpes Valaisannes*, 1st ed., vol. ii, p. 133 (giving as his authority P. Inäbnit's *Führerbuch*, p. 62, and adding a note 'the ascent of Georges Béranek designated in the J.S.A.C. as the first on the authority of Studer ii, 503, and *Climbers Guide* is in reality the second ascent'): Kurz, *ibid.*, 2nd ed., p. 146, where the date is given as July 5: the same is repeated in the third edition with the additional information that the ascent was made on the same day as the first ascent of the Wellenkuppe.

<sup>4</sup> We are indebted to Mr. Othmar Gurtner for sending us a copy of the original entry.

‘ Peter Inäbnit may I believe be safely reckoned as second to no guide in Switzerland on ice, & very little behind any on rock. He accompanied me over the *Strahleck*, up the *Wetterhorn* over the *Mönch Joch* & thence to Zermatt. He there accompanied me in the first ascent of the Trift Horn in which he showed great skill. He was with me in two attempts off [sic] the *Gabelhorn* both of 22 hrs duration. They failed because it is utterly impracticable, but in the first attempt we were in some of the most difficult situations in which one is [sic] could possibly be placed, & in these he conducted himself with the most perfect presence of mind.

‘ (Lord) Francis Douglas. A.C.

‘ July 2nd 1865.’

It will be noticed that Douglas makes no mention of the first ascent of the Wellenkuppe which is not—and never has been—in dispute and that the entry is dated July 2.

Douglas was at the Monte Rosa Hotel, St. Niklaus, on June 26<sup>5</sup> and may therefore be presumed to have reached Zermatt the following day, Tuesday June 27, 1865. From then until Monday July 3 (the day after the entry in Inäbnit’s Führerbuch was written), an account of his movements is available, thanks to his own notes subsequently printed in the ALPINE JOURNAL, and to the pamphlet of F. W. Maclean, *Three Weeks amongst the Upper Regions of the Alps* <sup>6</sup> and it can be shown that, in spite of the entry in Inäbnit’s Führerbuch, there is no reason to suppose that Douglas did, in fact, ascend the Trifhorn during that period.

Maclean records <sup>7</sup> that on June 28 he crossed the Col d’Hérens from Bricolla to Zermatt and at 8.30 P.M. the same evening he saw Douglas, just returned from an unsuccessful attempt on the Gabelhorn, and spoke to him. The morning of Thursday June 29 Maclean spent with Douglas ‘ who gave us an account of his attempts on the Gabelhorn which proved unsuccessful owing to his Zermatt guide Taugwald <sup>8</sup> having led them by a circuitous route.’

Douglas has left us two brief accounts of his attempts on the Ober Gabelhorn,<sup>9</sup> one in the Visitors’ Book of the Hotel Durand at Zinal<sup>10</sup> and the other included in his account of the second ascent of the Ober Gabelhorn which was found among his papers after his death, addressed

<sup>5</sup> Gos : *Le Cervin*, vol. i., illus. opp. p. 125.

<sup>6</sup> Sir Francis William Maclean 1844–1913 : elected to the Alpine Club February, 1866, resigned 1869.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> ‘ Old ’ Peter Taugwalder.

<sup>9</sup> A. W. Moore confirms that only two unsuccessful attempts were made, *A. J.* 28. 278.

<sup>10</sup> See *A. J.* 32. 25 and 41. 227.

to the Editor of the ALPINE JOURNAL.<sup>11</sup> On this first attempt he set out from Zermatt at 11 P.M. on June 27, but by 3 P.M. next day the party<sup>12</sup> found themselves only at the foot of the Ober Gabelhorn and had to return.<sup>13</sup> It was on this attempt that the first ascent of the Unter Gabelhorn was made<sup>14</sup> and an attempt made to continue along the arête connecting it with the Ober Gabelhorn.

According to Maclean,<sup>15</sup> Douglas set out for another attempt on the afternoon of June 29, but, owing to the rain, was compelled to return to Zermatt the same day.

Maclean tells us that on June 30 he once again passed the morning with Douglas who 'announced his intention of starting again that afternoon.' This he duly did and on the afternoon of July 1 Maclean, returning from an unsuccessful attempt on the Breithorn, met Peter Taugwalder who said that 'they had again been unsuccessful regarding the Gabelhorn but that they were consoled by having made the first ascent of the Trifthorn,' as recorded next day by Douglas in Peter Inäbnit's Führerbuch.<sup>16</sup>

Taugwalder's statement that the Trifthorn had been climbed does not agree with the details of Douglas's account, from which it is clear beyond any possibility of doubt that the Wellenkuppe, and not the Trifthorn, was climbed in the course of the second attempt on the Ober Gabelhorn. 'In the second attempt,' Douglas wrote,<sup>17</sup> 'we reached the summit of another peak of the Gabelhorn, about 13,000 feet in height, which lies immediately to one's left in crossing the Trift Pass from Zermatt, but the arête connecting this with the Gabelhorn was found impracticable. I cannot conceive why this mountain has no name.' The account in the Zinal Visitors' Book is substantially the same and the peak is described as lying 'immediately to ones right in crossing the Trift from here' (i.e. from Zinal). Douglas ranks the Wellenkuppe only as another peak of the Gabelhorn; if he had on the same day also made the first ascent of an entirely separate peak, the Trifthorn, would he not have recorded the fact? Can it be that Taugwalder did not know—or did not care to admit—that the summit climbed was without a name? Douglas may have learned, at some time after he had written in Inäbnit's Führerbuch on July 2, that the name 'Trifthorn' was applied to the peak that would be on his right as he crossed the Triftjoch

<sup>11</sup> See *A. J.* 2. 221.

<sup>12</sup> On both attempts his guides were 'Old' Peter Taugwalder and Peter Inäbnit.

<sup>13</sup> *A. J.* 2. 221.

<sup>14</sup> *A. J.* 32. 25.

<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Carl Egger in *Pioniere der Alpen*, p. 200, does not include the Trifthorn in his list of Taugwalder's new expeditions.

<sup>17</sup> *A. J.* 2. 221.

to Zinal. In his entry in Inäbnit's book he mentions the ascent of only one summit, the 'Trifthorn' of Taugwalder; if this summit was, in fact, the Trifthorn, it is indeed remarkable that Douglas does not also mention the ascent of the nameless peak of the Gabelhorn, several hundred feet higher than the Trifthorn, and now known as the Wellenkuppe.

It seems clear that on June 28 Douglas made the first ascent of the Unter Gabelhorn, and on July 1 the first ascent of the Wellenkuppe, wrongly called 'Trifthorn' by Taugwalder, and so named by Douglas in Inäbnit's Führerbuch; apart from the Führerbuch entry there is nothing to suggest that he ascended the Trifthorn between his arrival in Zermatt on June 27 and July 2, but much to indicate that he did not do so.

It is, however, necessary to discuss the possibility of the Trifthorn having been ascended between July 2 and July 6, the day on which Douglas crossed the Triftjoch to Zinal. On July 3 Maclean left Zermatt about 8.30 A.M. for Visp, Douglas coming from his hotel to wish him 'good-bye.'<sup>18</sup> From that moment, until his shouts whilst crossing the Triftjoch were heard by A. W. Moore on the summit of the Ober Gabelhorn on July 6, we have no record of Douglas's movements. There is reason to believe that he had left Zermatt before the evening of July 4. On that day Moore arrived at the Monte Rosa hotel at Zermatt at 8.20 P.M.<sup>19</sup> after making the second passage of the Sesiajoch. It is most unlikely that he met Douglas: neither mentions such a meeting and Douglas, when he saw men on the summit of the Ober Gabelhorn after he had crossed the Triftjoch, did not know who they were nor whence they had come. Moore, likewise, did not know who was shouting to him from the direction of the Triftjoch.

Since Douglas probably left Zermatt on July 3 or 4, and certainly crossed the Triftjoch on July 6, he presumably bivouacked the intervening nights. It is useless to speculate how he spent the three days. He himself has not told us and the Führerbücher of his guides give no information. There is no evidence, so far as we are aware, to support the statement in *Guide des Alpes Valaisannes*, vol. ii, that he climbed both the Trifthorn and the Wellenkuppe on July 5. As we have already shown, the Wellenkuppe was climbed on July 1.

The entry of 'Trifthorn' in Inäbnit's book cannot be reconciled with Douglas's very clear account of having ascended the Wellenkuppe. Nowhere else does he lay claim to have ascended the Trifthorn and nowhere else, to our knowledge, is there any evidence to suggest that he did so. We are therefore of the opinion that M. Georges Béranek may rightly be credited with having made the first recorded ascent of the Trifthorn as stated in the first edition of Studer and in the Conway-Coolidge *Climbers' Guide* to the Pennine Alps.

<sup>18</sup> Maclean, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>19</sup> *A. J.* 29. 126.