

THE SOUTH-WEST PILLAR: BONATTI ROUTE ON THE PETIT DRU

BY HAMISH MACINNES

I HAVE been for some years a devout pilgrim to the derelict Leschaux Hut, moping with hungry eyes round the base of the Jorasses, and cursing the permanent white mantle. The Walker, the citadel of the Leschaux glacier, and its glorious left wall, aptly named the 'Shroud' has been my objective, but, alas, the weather and the old man with the scythe have pulled the strings of fate!

This year as I hailed Chris Bonington in Chamonix, we were filled with the usual enthusiasm and ambitions despite the mid-winter conditions which were prevalent above the town. From a base at Montenvers our petulant attempts were mostly abortive. During a lull in the storms, our piton stock was replenished from the Pte. Albert West face, temporarily converting this climb into a decent free route. However, most of this ill-gotten hardware was restored to Chamonix granite in the cracks of the South-east arête of the Lépiney, which we attempted.

After a bivouac, 150 ft. from the top of the climb, a wooden wedge came out on Chris, who was leading a formidable overhang. I need hardly add that he fell. This, coupled with angry clouds, snow, and poor visibility made prudence prevail, so another new route was abandoned on the doorstep of success.

There was, however, nothing prudent about our descent, which ended after a series of dangerous abseils above a yawning *rimaye*. This had to be jumped from an overhang high above. With heavy hearts, though lightened in ironmongery, we returned to our damp timber hovel amid the dripping pines of Montenvers.

Awaiting us at our primitive abode were two Austrian climbers, Walter Philip and Richard Blach. We had, of course, heard of Philip before, his fast times on the great wall climbs are a byword. The previous year he had even chopped hours off Buhl's time for the West face of the Dru. Friendship was quickly established and soon we were planning climbs. Working on the axiom that if a climb is steep enough, and smooth enough, then not a great deal of snow can lie on it, and as the west face of the Dru is a climb in this category, then the Bonatti route was an obvious choice.

Walter and Richard were to go to the Rognon bivouac on July 16, weather permitting, and Chris and I were to follow a day later.

Though 'D' Day was fine, the following morning the weather broke,



THE PETIT DRU AND SOME OF THE PARTY.

and torrential rain and high winds forced our two friends from the couloir at the bottom of the wall. Their descent of the steep ice was punctuated by frequent stone falls.

A blue sky and a north wind on July 19 saw all four, now decided on a mass assault, trudging up the Chapeau path to the bivouac. We had learned that Don Whillans had arrived and I had a feeling that we were going to see him by nightfall. Surely it was Joe Brown and he who deserved to make the first British ascent. They had attempted the route before Bonatti's successful climb.

By 3 p.m. we were established like troglodytes under our rock. Above us loomed the West wall, a superb sweep of rock, crowned at the summit by wandering cumulus. The Pillar Bonatti stood out naked of snow, like a great bone protruding from the skin of the face. It descended boldly from sight into the depths of the couloir, and above it hid in the cloud as if embarrassed by its own majesty.

We sang and ate a hearty meal and, later as we lay in our sleeping bags, we watched the few fair weather clouds playing in the azure vault. Presently, as twilight stole up the boulders, we heard a shout far below.

On the moraine ridge we could discern two tiny figures; by their bonnets we guessed that they were either Creagh Dhu or Rock and Ice men, so concluded that it was Whillans who was coming. It was Whillans, with Paul Ross.

It seemed as if they had bought the stock of the Chamonix boulangerie, for countless loaves protruded from their rucksacks. As they talked and smoked Walter nudged me and asked. 'Is zis the Whillans of the Blaitière?'

'Hear that you have a description of the Bonatti route,' said Don casually as he lit another cigarette.

'Aye,' I replied, 'we will be getting off at about nine in the morning.' He looked at me from under his cap and smiled.

'Well, lads, we'll no doubt be seeing you in the morning. We will probably be keeping office hours ourselves. We're dossing below the wall.' We bid them goodnight as they continued up the moraine mumbling about their prodigious packs.

The tintinnabulations of the alarm aroused us at three, but threatening clouds made us reluctant to leave the warm sleeping bags. Muttering in various dialects and languages seemed to alleviate the weather, for by five it had cleared sufficiently to warrant a start.

In a short space of time we were ascending the tongue of snow which debouches from the mouth of the couloir, and above we could distinguish two figures. They started to climb when they saw us, and as I kicked up the snow I could distinguish Don belaying Paul up the first pitch.

At the *rimaye*, Walter said that we could postpone roping ¹ for the lower section, whereupon he promptly fell into the moat. Luckily, he managed to prevent a descent into the bowels of the mountain by bridging hurriedly.

Soon we were alongside Don, who like us, had decided that the weather was too uncertain early on and had awaited us before starting.

The climbing was problematical, iced rock and snow with a few difficult moves. Suddenly, Walter, who was in the lead of the caravan, slipped and fell on top of Don, who managed to hold him. Don's mutterings were unaffectionate.

Walter called a halt when we came to a small slab of rock which led on to ice. It was roping-up time, and as I was voted in command of snow and ice I took the lead.

This couloir is normally like a tilted bowling alley; where the 'woods' in the form of assorted rocks sing in pleasant euphony as they descend. They have plenty of time to reach terminal velocity coming down the West face, and have on occasion proved distracting to ascending parties. That morning Zeus smiled on us, for all was quiet. This was probably due to the fact that it had not frozen for weeks.

With 150-ft. run-outs, progress was quite fast. Eventually, however, we ran into hard ice, and as there was only room for one abreast, Don carried on ahead. I followed behind Paul Ross, glad to be relieved of step-cutting, for only Walter and I had crampons on.

After I had run out most of the rope on one steep pitch, Don shouted down instructions on how to negotiate the section I was coming to. It was a small wall, severed by two parallel cracks and covered by a film of *verglas*; it was difficult, especially in crampons. 'That's hard enough for me,' I said to Paul as I reached the peg belay, and I wondered what lay ahead.

Two hundred feet of ice took us to the 'Flamme des Pierres'. At this point, after arbitration, Walter and Richard passed us to start the climb, for we were almost level with the foot of the pillar. It had taken us fully five hours to climb the couloir.

Walter continued upwards on a traverse to the left for three run-outs on snow and ice and gained the foot of the spur. It had been decided that the two Austrians should go in front putting in any pitons that were necessary; Don and Paul would follow to sack-haul and relieve the lead; Chris would lead our rope whilst I de-pegged the climb.

We were pleased to have the treacherous couloir behind us, though we had to admit that it was in good condition with no missiles descending. When Don was on the West face with Joe Brown, they found

¹ It should be noted that it was not the author who advocated climbing unroped, *v. A.J.* 61. 332.

the lower section of the couloir most disconcerting, as they had no ice-axe or crampons, and Don was wearing kletterschuhe.

At the base of the pillar we de-cramponed and I abandoned the remainder of the ice pitons on a ledge. It is rather ironical to see at the bottom of the spur, in a small slot, a walking stick. Somehow I felt it implied, 'well that was a walk, you can expect to climb now'. It was possibly left there by Walter Bonatti, when he abseiled down the Flamme des Pierres.

The sun crept down the rock converting the forbidding granite into a comforting yellowish-red. Our spirits rose. This is what we lived for; solid rock to climb on, and the essence of climbing, the uncertainty of success.

Chris with great celerity followed these established masters of rock without a moment's pause. Here was climbing of a high order, with the very minimum of pitons.

We forced our way up a labyrinth of cracks and chimneys, which are such a common feature of the climb. Presently sounds of hammering came from above and the parties closed up.

Walter was at work. He had climbed a *dièdre* on wooden wedges, and after a difficult crossing under a roof on pegs, he had done a tension traverse down across a smooth slab to gain a small sentry box. Though Walter is a mountaineer of great ability, it took him some time to overcome these difficulties. Once he was established above, Richard ascended with his rucksack on and with a delightful elegance. Don followed in his wake, using his fingers in the blocks and pegs instead of *étriers*, and actually climbing across the tension traverse. This amazing feat of gymnastics did not stop there, for he continued up a new variation, which is more direct than the ones taken by previous parties.

All this desperate climbing seemed contagious, for when it was Chris's turn to lead he excelled himself, though he admitted at the top of the 'Fissure Whillans' that he was tempted to ask for a rope. As I ascended, de-pegging whenever possible (and it was not often possible) I found that final crack the last straw, and indeed it was probably, technically, the hardest part of the whole climb.

The cracks seemed interminable, they went on and on, always more than strenuous, and never easy, mostly hovering above very severe. Soon there was a pitch of six, with a dangerous block perched in a crack. Each person, as they ascended, used this and it must have moved at least a foot by the time I was above it. Paul Ross had led this pitch, and Whillans ascended it with his heavy rucksack on. About 40 ft. up, where the free pitch of six continues on A1, a peg came out on him and he was left hanging on to another and a small hand-hold, but he managed to get up unaided after a fierce struggle.

With a short traverse to the left we found ourselves in another *dièdre*, which Walter climbed by using six large wooden wedges. It was some 60 ft. long and led on to a small ledge on the edge of the spur. From here another narrow chimney led up to a good ledge; it was hard—grade 6, A1, then grade 3.

As I surveyed the precipitous scene above me I could see the end view of Richard ascending a grade 5 chimney with two large rucksacks hanging from his waist loop, and being virtually pulled up by Walter. Don was perched on top of a smooth flake and I wondered how on earth he had got there until I saw an old rope hanging down from the flake, this was a pendulum.

After some elaborate rope tricks Chris did a *pendule* across and disappeared up a hidden crack behind the flake. In a few moments he appeared where Don had been standing and shouted for me to climb.

As I swung across I had a sinking feeling, not caused by the stretch in the rope, or the fact that the couloir was a long way below, but by a premonition that something was going to happen. Soon the chimney of the dangling rucksacks was behind us and we greeted Don and Paul on a large ledge, the size of a very small dance floor. It was eight o'clock and suddenly I realised how many times I had heard the whistle of the Montenvers trains. The day had flown. Walter and Richard had decided to continue for another two pitches to a smaller series of ledges.

We felt sybarites on this great ledge and rejoiced in the freedom of being able to stand up without having to hold on to something. The stove was lit for a much needed brew of tea and great lengths of bread appeared from the voluminous rucksacks of our two companions.

At 9.30 p.m. I signalled to the Chef de Gare at Montenvers that all was well, and from below, at our bottom bivouac came a host of answering lights. 'More people for the West wall,' Chris murmured.

A great rock-fall rumbled down on our left and it seemed as if it would never reach the couloir. As we gingerly peered over the edge which fell vertically to the ice below we could see the sparks as rock hit rock. I think that we all shuddered involuntarily and thought to ourselves, that could have happened to us as we came up.

Soon the lights of Chamonix blinked at us, and in the distance were the flushed summits of Switzerland. A gentle zephyr caressed us as we watched this tranquil scene. On our left the Jorasses stood boldly in their white surroundings, looking like a mediaeval castle, a great stronghold of nature. Surely it is the most magnificent of all alpine faces. Stars appeared like pin holes in the curtain above and the cries of the *choucas* echoed from the cliffs.

The first warning of impending peril was a high-pitched whine; the Valkyries are at work I thought as I ducked my head and threw myself

forward. But it was only to place my head on the spot chosen by the falling stone.

Blackness, stars and blood were the order of events, but soon my friends had a dressing over the wound and I was bundled into a crack at the back of the ledge, lashed to *étriers* with a fractured skull. During that long night I doubted if I was ever going to leave that ledge. Really, I suppose the situation was rather humorous, for Don squatted below me with an anorak wrapped turban-wise on his head. Paul was jammed in the most unnatural position in the crack above me, and stayed in the semi-bridging position all night, whilst Chris risked somnambulism on a sloping ledge which ended in space a couple of feet away.

There was little breakfast, for we all felt rather worried. Though I was willing to continue, I doubted if I could; anyhow it had been decided that if possible I was to climb now in the second party with Don; Chris and Paul would take turns at de-pegging in the rear. Retreat was not in question. After the great rock-fall of the previous night we all dreaded the thought of descending the couloir.

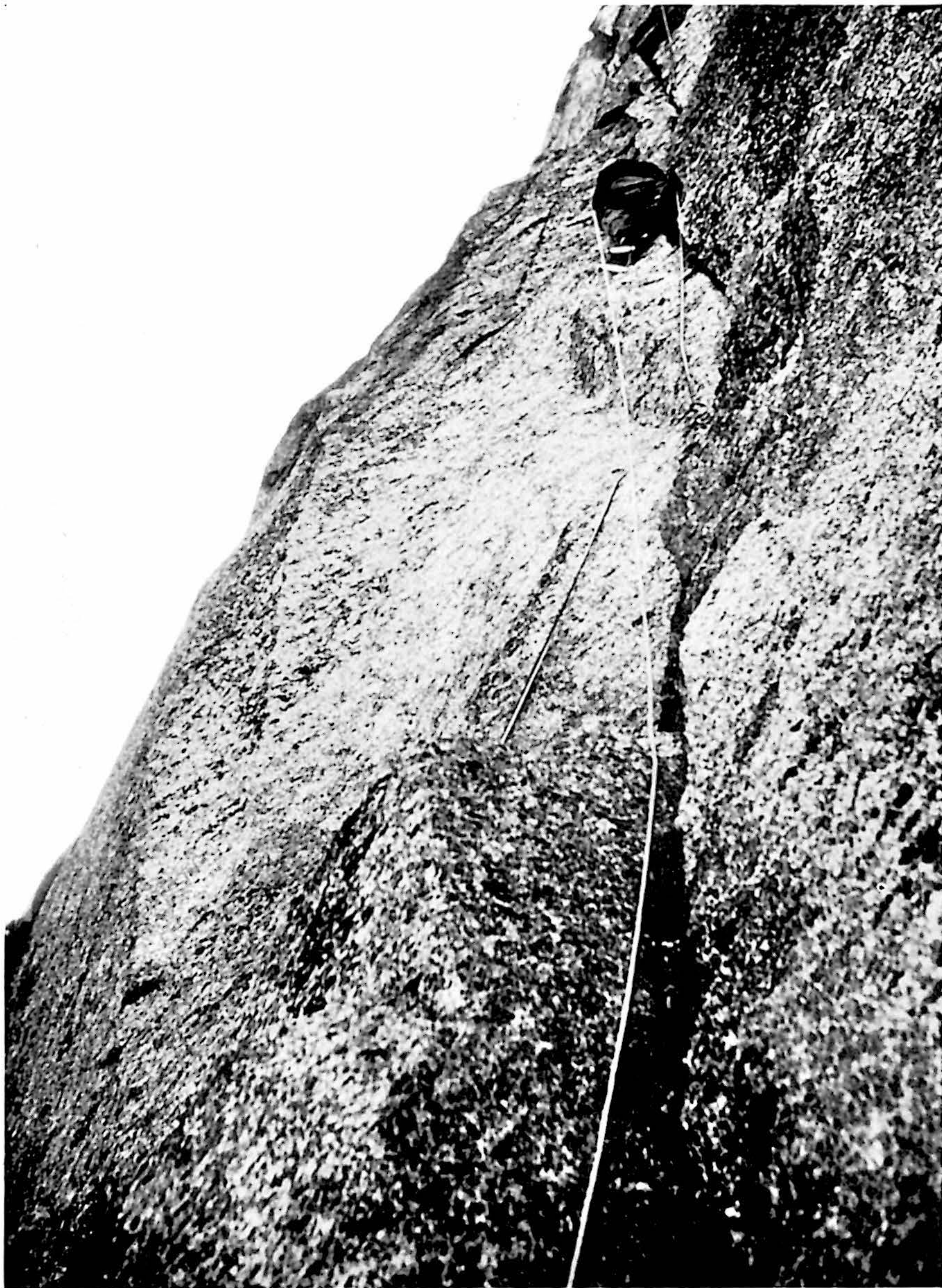
Before the sun had appeared over the castellated ridge on our right, Don was squirming up the chimney which led from our unfortunate ledge. Walter and Richard had now started and they were aware of our predicament.

When Don had climbed a pitch and belayed, I tried to use prusik loops for the ascent, but they were much too slow. I resolved to climb on a tight rope, and if I passed out, Don would be ready to hold me. This was a tremendous task to which he agreed, for during the next two days of the ascent of the wall I was hanging from the rope many times in the most awkward positions. Really this article could be more appropriately called, 'The Long Pull'.

We had now gained the ledges on which Walter and Richard spent the night. Above us were two cracks; Don with great ease climbed the left-hand one for 30 ft., then stepped into the other and reached a small ledge below another overhang. There he belayed me and I ascended with little grace and much effort. From the ledge we continued up over the overhang to another *dièdre* to reach a series of stair-like ledges. Here we caught up with the Austrians.

Walter was half-way up a great *dièdre* which sloped steeply to a great red wall. Now the sun had reached us and the morning cloud dissipated in the valleys. Another day had come; by nightfall we had hoped to reach the summit, but realised that we would now have to be lucky; we had still a long way to go.

Richard looked rather pale when he observed my blood-crusted countenance and I was incapable of cheering him. Soon it was our turn to fight the *dièdre*. It was a wonderful pitch, there were the



NEAR THE 'FISSURE WHILLANS'.

minimum of pitons put in place by Walter's abstemious hand, and though it was not the hardest pitch on the climb it surely was the finest.

At the top of the *dièdre* there was a most delightful ledge to sit on and as Don prepared for the next section I observed the glorious sunrise. The Dent du Requin rose stately as a citadel, the great slabs of the North face shimmering like armour. From the depths of the Montenvers pine woods came the shrill blast of the first train's whistle, carried on the crisp morning air. Above, Walter made his presence known with resounding blows from his hammer, which reverberated from the chimneys.

The cracks above the ledge were quite hard and the pitons insecure. Don, who is shorter than Walter or me, was at maximum stretch as he climbed from peg to peg. Just above this point we came upon another bivouac ledge—Bonatti's fourth, I think. Don told me that Walter had a short fall when a piton came out on an overhanging corner above.

This corner, though we did not know it at the time, was a great *faux pas* on our part. At this point we should have carried on to a similar corner above, or rather a short chimney, but at the time Walter did not see it.

Presently we were established on a fine ledge beside Richard. Above our heads was the continuation of the great red wall. Some 90 ft. up Walter was standing in *étriers*, and his position seemed a hopeless one, for the wall seemed interminable, steeper above and the cracks less frequent.

He called for more and more pegs. Don and I tried a traverse to the left and as we moved along a tapering ledge we grew increasingly conscious of the exposure. We were directly above the start of the couloir. It wasn't at an angle, if anything it was overhanging, and the funny feeling in my head was emulated by my stomach.

Don pointed to an overhanging *dièdre* on the West wall. 'I wanted to bivouac in that when I was with Joe,' he said, 'it was quite a sensible suggestion,' he added hurriedly, 'aye it was coming down cats and dogs. Joe wanted to go on, so we spent the night out in the rain on that wee ledge there.' I noted with some satisfaction that his recent visit with my colleagues north of the border had increased his vocabulary.

We returned to the balcony, where the others were still watching Walter at work. We read and re-read the description of the climb and just could not see where we went wrong. Precious time was being wasted and we began to feel desperate. Walter, by this time had all our pitons, some forty-five, and the afternoon was well advanced.

Don, who is more inclined to action than to waiting, asked me to watch his rope as he disappeared up an edge to the right. Suddenly there was a yell of exaltation, he had found the proper way. He had

found the, 'chimney which leads to a great roof,' as our description put it. Within a few minutes I was following him up a grade 5 chimney after I had done the traverse up and round the edge. Above us loomed the biggest overhang I have ever seen on a climb. I lost all sense of equilibrium when I leant back to gaze at this prodigious mass of rock. Yet pitons were visible some 30 ft. out from the face silhouetted against the cerulean sky. 'Did Bonatti do that solo?' I gasped. 'That's the biggest overhang in the Three Kingdoms.' 'Aye, I've seen a photograph of this,' mused Don. (We later discovered via the Chamonix grape-vine that Bonatti had avoided this overhang by doing a series of *pendules*.)

Walter, by this time beating a hurried retreat from worrying heights, and Chris and Paul joined us on our unstable ledge.

When Don had gathered enough carabiners he set off up the great overhang. With the agility of a trapeze artist he clipped himself on to the pegs as he ascended, following the pitons through the drips which fell from the roof.

By the time he had reached the top Walter was again with us, and suddenly we realised that it would be quite impossible for us to get up that night; it was almost 6 p.m. Don shouted down that the difficulties continued for quite some way above the overhang; he took up another forty carabiners and clipped them on to a peg for use in the morning and started to come down. He descended with the same confidence and dignity.

The question of a bivouac site was the next problem, and after a hurried debate we decided to return to the balcony, where we had been watching Walter. I thought that part of the mountain would be rather congested and resolved to spend the night in a hole in the rock on the grade 5 pitch.

As I endeavoured to secure myself, and to level out the two square feet I had to sleep on, I could see the loaves of bread which littered the lower bivouac site, abandoned due to their weight; they were tantalising, for we had little food.

Half an hour or so later, by lowering a handkerchief on a rope I was able to secure my quota of food—one sausage and a piece of pulverised bread. I then returned to my eyrie, where I tied myself to a piton and struggled into my plastic bag.

I slept fitfully despite the efforts of a piece of basalt, and awoke in the cold grey light of the false dawn to the sounds of 'wakey-wakey'. Clouds enveloped us, but they were fair weather clouds and before I had time to struggle into my boots, which were elaborately tied to another piton, my companions were climbing over me. There was no breakfast.

Walter again took the van, and as he passed me he looked as cheerful

as ever; Don and I followed them up to the overhang. When Walter reached the lip of the overhang he shouted down, 'this is a very nice A1 pitch.' Our description stated that the overhang was A1 and strenuous.

My recollections of that obstacle are not pleasant, it was much too strenuous for me in my weakened state, but I eventually made it. Long cool icicles, which we plucked off as we ascended helped to quench our unsatiable thirst. The pitch following the overhang had been adequately pegged by the Austrians and offered little trouble.

I had taken such a long time climbing the overhang that the two Austrians had gained a formidable lead. Actually, we could not see them anywhere. Don continued up a wide crack, behind a niche, and ascended left up a series of very difficult moves, which were graded as 4 sup., but which we found hard very severe. He belayed on a loose pinnacle where he stood beaming. 'I've found some ice,' he said when I reached him, 'tea at last.' We piled great chunks of this precious stuff into our packs and he climbed up an awkward chimney with an exit on the left and reached a small stance on the edge of the spur. Once established there he pulled up the rucksacks.

Again it was an airy spot; a tiny platform the width of a narrow park bench, a vertical wall above and much space below. With his feet dangling, and the stove between his legs, he carefully assembled the cooking equipment and proceeded to melt the ice—a most amusing picture.

The sun beat down on us now and we seemed to have lost all conception of time. It was now a fight—for me at least, and Don, as he poked a piece of floating ice with a piton and said, 'all I need is a brew and I will get anywhere.' 'And a cigarette,' I added. Below Chris seemed in difficulties, so I dropped him a top-rope, first pulling up his rucksack.

When we were all refreshed by the tea, Don set off again. It was a crack leading to a steeply sloping shelf of grade 5, with two pitons. This was done as a lay back and it was rather exacting. We changed places in the scoop above which was the belay and he continued up easier rock and attempted to ascend a horrible chimney without using *étriers*. He had his heavy pack on all this time and from the language I knew that the difficulties were great.

He told me later how he had his finger through a piton on an overhang in this chimney and of how he had found it difficult to pull up with his heavy pack on. To make matters worse, as his finger occupied the space usually used by a carabiner, the change over was equally perilous. He descended after this gallant effort and did a traverse to the left on less exacting terrain. Some 60 ft. up he caught up with the others.

When I reached their stance I observed that Richard and he were established in an old bivouac. Candles and old wedges were visible and above Walter was still at work trying to force a route through the network of cracks and bulges.

Our way now led up another small *dièdre* to an inclined slab. Here we were high up on the red wall, and above everything was smooth and steep. On our left the rock fell away to the couloir and we had a wonderful view of the West face.

From the slab Don led horizontally right in a series of very technical moves and, after climbing another overhang, belayed in a chimney. I had more trouble than usual following him across that traverse as the climbing was very problematical and delicate. From above Walter shouted, 'I think zat is very nice pitch, Mac.' It was very nice.

Again it was straight up; up a chimney with an awkward exit at the top on to a minute ledge. Here he pulled up all the baggage and it looked more like a scene in a 'left-luggage department' than a big rock climb. The ledge continued round the edge of the pillar and Don made a series of awkward trips to deposit all the equipment on a broad terrace on the other side.

Chris did this section of the climb with his rucksack on, which was a fine feat of climbing, as even the Austrians, the established masters of pack carrying on difficult rock, had sack-hauled.

As I edged my way round the corner of the spur I saw that easier ground lay ahead. High above Walter gave a shout, 'the shoulder,' he pointed above. Sure enough our troubles were over for a short time at least, and within an hour or so we were at the shoulder drinking from melting ice and regarding the next series of problems.

From here Don knew the way. He had traversed from the West wall on to the series of chimneys above and when I joined him he was giving Walter instructions on how to climb them. His hand-waving-pigeon-German was most entertaining.

Now the cloud had come down, the damp cloud which one associates with the Highlands rather than the French Alps, and we felt cold and miserable. The struggle was beginning to tell on me and I felt that I couldn't go on much longer.

I don't remember much about the remainder of the climb, it was difficult and wet, but somehow or other Don managed to get me up, always saying very convincingly that we were almost there.

The first chimney was 90 ft. of 5 sup., with three pitons, and it was extremely awkward. Then there was a traverse of 30 ft. to a vertical *dièdre*—again 5 sup., with one piton, which entailed a very long bridging move.

It was now approaching late evening, but we knew that we could at least reach the summit. Now we moved right and ascended a crack

which led to a poised flake, then a rake to the right took us to more hospitable country. It was the finish of the climb.

We followed a great fault round to the right, just below the summit and on a series of ledges decided to bed down for the night.

Threatening clouds were brewing and, as we pegged ourselves to the rock, we realised how lucky we had been with the weather on the wall. Perhaps Zeus had really smiled on us. I felt as if I was in a kind of a trance, nothing seemed to matter any more.

That evening we had a packet of soup and thankfully we struggled into our bivouac sacks. The ledges were not designed for tired climbers; they never are, and elaborate rope systems were employed with varying degrees of success.

With darkness came the snow and wind, yet we felt reasonably at ease, for Walter had descended the normal route from the Petit Dru the previous year and he was confident of finding it again.

By 6 a.m. the weather had set in really thick and as there was nothing to eat there were no complications in starting. We went down snow-covered rock to the first abseil point.

All went well for two long rope-lengths, then Walter, who was below, shouted through the blizzard that he had gone down the wrong way. He was heading for the wrong side of the Flamme des Pierres. He started to climb up the rope again.

I had by this time joined Richard on a small ledge and I managed to shout to Don to continue over to the right. This he did and disappeared from sight in the enveloping blanket of snow.

My hands were rather cold, for somehow or other I had lost two pairs of gloves. Suddenly, Richard who was tied to an old sling beside me said that he couldn't go on, he was exhausted. This seemed to create in me a new energy and I managed to encourage him to keep trying, though I must admit that I, too, felt like lying down in the soft snow.

Walter had again reached us and without pausing he attempted to cross the small couloir in which we were belayed to catch up with Don and the others. In so doing he slipped twice, but we managed to hold him. Eventually he inserted a peg, which enabled him to do a diagonal abseil, and he reached the rest of the party now installed below. I came down last having to sacrifice a sling and carabiner.

The nightmare descent continued and it looked more like an Eigerwand drama than the normal route down the Dru. Walter had a continuation of his good luck on a pitch some way below. He had put a new nylon sling round a flake and started to abseil over an overhang. The sling suddenly broke and he was held by his companion on the safety rope. The moral of course is—don't put slings round sharp edges.

Don was by this time in command of things; his greater ability was now coming into its true perspective and the descent continued safely, if somewhat slowly. We kept in mind that at least one person from a West wall party had perished on this descent.

As the cracks had seemed interminable on the ascent, so the abseils seemed relentless on the descent. After some time the weather eased and at the bottom of the ridge leading from the face we unroped and descended to the col which leads to the Charpoua glacier.

Though the couloir was soft and avalanchey we descended without incident, and within nine hours of leaving the summit we were glissading down to the Charpoua hut. The gathering clouds did little to dampen our happiness.

I can only add, very inadequately, my appreciation to Don Whillans and to my companions on this climb; without their efforts and self-sacrifice I would never have been able to complete the route.

Technical Note. Walter Philip and Don Whillans, who have done both the West face and the south-west pillar of the Dru, agree that the latter is the harder.

Equipment

- 30 carabiners
- 20 pitons (most of the pitons now in place)
- 3 large wedges (most in place)
- 300 ft. climbing rope
- 150 ft. haulage rope

It is advisable for each person to take crampons for this climb, plus at least one hammer-axe between two climbers

Guide to the route

From the Dru glacier, climb straight up the couloir by the true left slope until you arrive at the upper basin, below the Flamme de Pierres. Cross the top of the basin on ice to the foot of the pillar. 5 hours.

Climb two rope-lengths, 4-5, by obvious cracks until stopped by a *dièdre* with an overhang in it. Climb up to the overhang and traverse right, and by leaning across a smooth wall on the rope gain a long crack. Climb this direct to a good ledge, A2-6. (Fissure Whillans.)

From the ledge traverse horizontally left to the foot of a cracked *dièdre*. Climb the *dièdre* for 60 ft., then go diagonally left to a small rock ledge on the edge of the *éperon*, 5. Round the arête is a narrow chimney. Climb this to a good *éperon* ledge, 6, A1, 3. From here climb an inclined slab over to the left and reach a longer ledge. Climb the crack up the smooth wall to a small ledge, A1, 5 sup.

Cross the wall on the right by a rope move from a piton and climb a crack, 5 sup., 3 pegs. Climb to the top of the pinnacle. Continue up a wide crack which soon becomes a chimney to a large platform. First British bivouac. Beware of stone falls.

From the platform climb a long smooth groove with a small overhang up to a series of terraces, 5. There are two cracks above. Climb in the left one for 30 ft., then step into the right one and continue to small ledge under overhang, A2. Climb the wall, then move a few feet right and continue straight up via two *dièdres*, A1, 5, to terraces at the foot of smooth red wall.

Take the big centre *dièdre*, 140 ft. to a comfortable ledge on the left, A1, 5. Move right and climb the *dièdre* leading right to a section with good ledges, A1, 5 sup.; 2nd British bivouac.

Climb the slab by moving left to the foot of an overhanging corner. Ascend this to several good ledges, A2. Climb the slab for 20 ft., then step round to the right and reach a hidden chimney, 4. Go up this chimney on unstable blocks to a stance beneath a huge overhang, 4.

Climb the overhang to a small ledge on its lip, belay. Continue up the left-hand *dièdre* to a small niche, A1. From this niche take the wide crack, immediately behind the stance. Climb on slabs diagonally left for a rope's length to overhanging corner, 5 sup. There is a large unstable pinnacle here and above another *dièdre*—open. Climb this on the right, and move left at the top, and gain a ledge on the edge of the *éperon*, 5.

Ascend a short wide crack to the foot of a slab. Go up this slab by a lay-back to niche, 5 sup. An easy corner lies above, climb this for 35 ft., then cross the slab on the left and pull over into a good ledge behind a huge block, 4. Ascend the small vertical *dièdre*, 5 pegs to a slab, belay at the top left-hand edge. Leave this slab by a delicate traverse to the right—horizontally, to a *dièdre* with stance and belay.

Climb, then move left to an overhang, pull round this on the right and traverse right and go round the corner on to a huge platform, 5 sup. Go straight up the wall at the back of the platform by a round flake for 120 ft. to terraces littered with small scree, 5 sup. Two rope-lengths right brings you to the end of great terrace. Ascend a small overhanging crack, moving left, then straight up by easy rock, 3, to the shoulder.

A long wet chimney splits the wall in front. Climb this for 90 ft., 5 sup., 3 pegs, then go right to the foot of a 30-ft. vertical *dièdre*, 5 sup., 1 peg. Go up this, move round to the right to the foot of a crack. Climb this crack to a poised flake, then follow the diagonal break to the right to the finish of the rock climbing. Go horizontally right for two pitches. This takes you to the correct line of descent.