

Climbers' playgrounds—Europe

1 Grigna

John Cleare

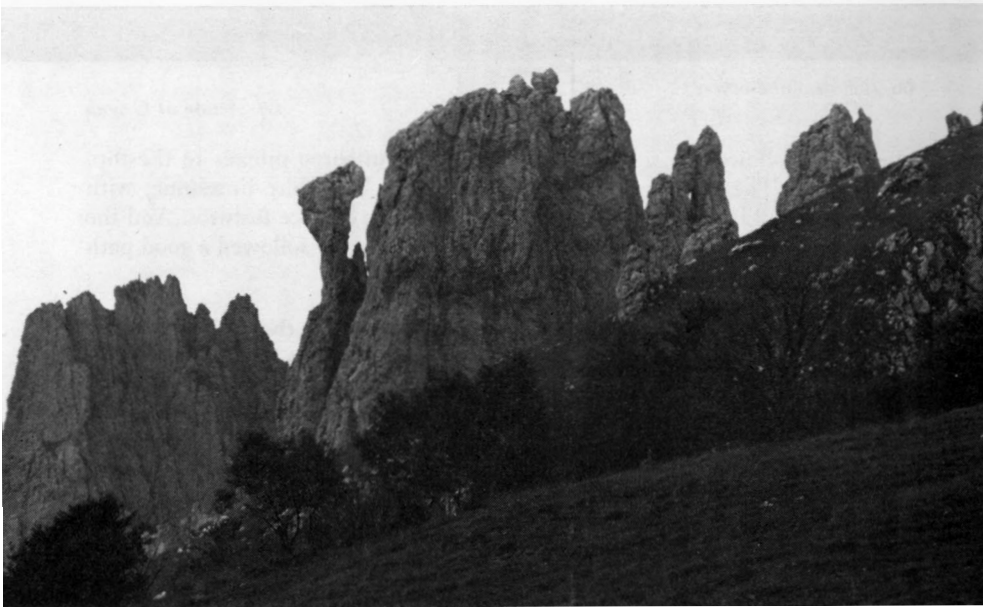
'Once you are over the ridge beyond the rifugio you cannot miss il Fungo . . .' Signor Cassin jabbed his rock-worn finger at the sketch-map on the back of the envelope. 'Molto strapiombo . . .', he chuckled, with obvious glee.

We took the road east out of Lecco up a side-glen and a turning via a toll-gate led steeply into the limestone massif of the Grigna high above the south-eastern arm of Lake Como. The road ended at the Piano Resinatti, a cool belvedere with a cluster of expensive villas, and a little further on through scattered woods of ash and acacia, a C.A.I. hut.

The geography of the Grigna is complex—a tortured area of limestone plateau and wierd pinnacles slashed by deep ravines, often with mists swirling up from the hot lake-side far below. But, as Cassin had assured us, we had no trouble in distinguishing il Fungo from the other towers, the only difficulty lay in reaching it! We tried going cross-country, over green, flower-studded banks, through stiff, knee-high undergrowth which reminded Rusty of the African bundu, and down and round and up the steep and very loose ravines.

We never actually reached our Mushroom, but we did climb the double-headed pinnacle next to it. We started by a bronze memorial plaque and a

65 *The rocks of Grigna.* This and next two photos: John Cleare





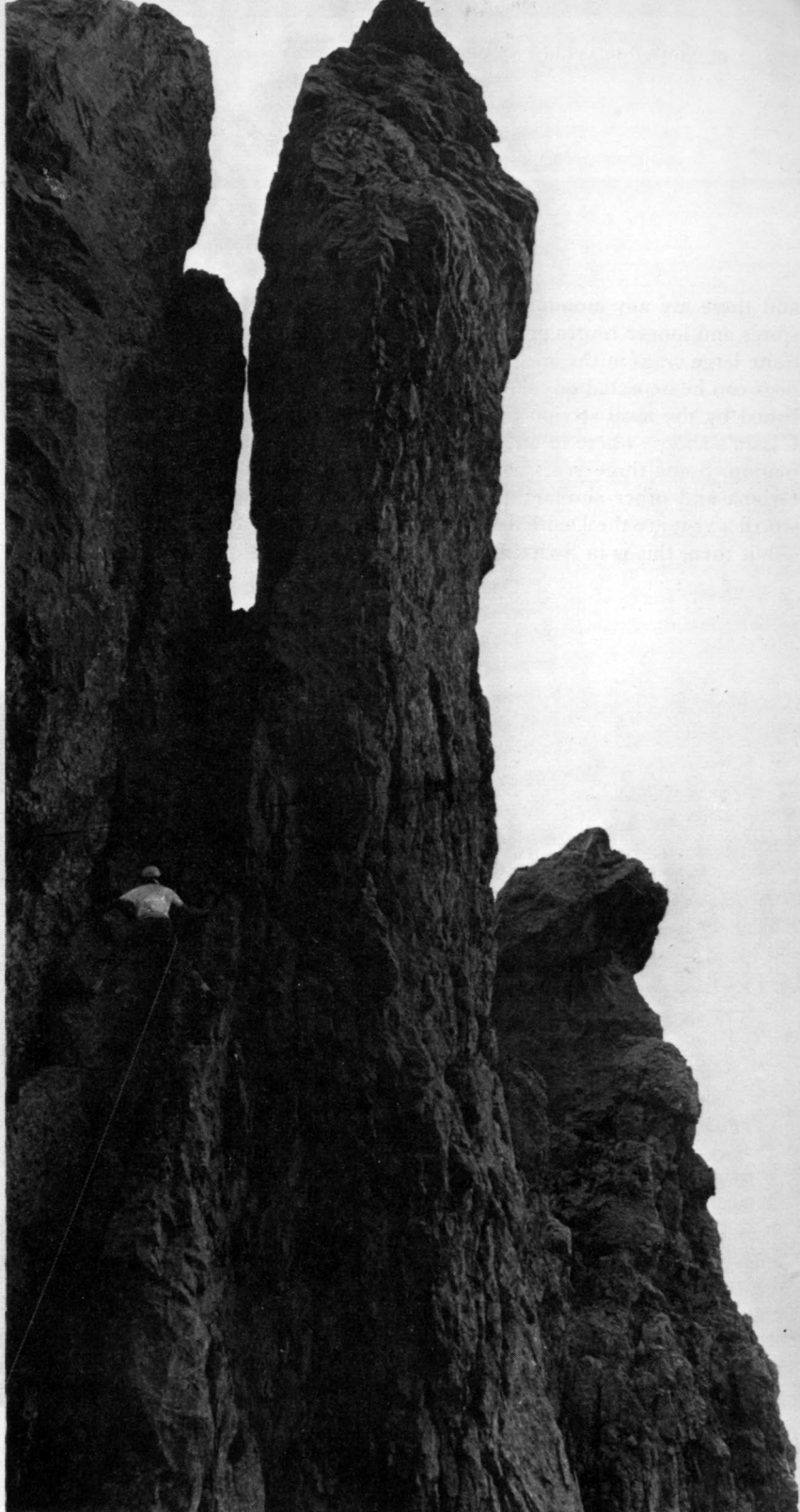
66 *Il Fungo and others*

67 *Action at Grigna*

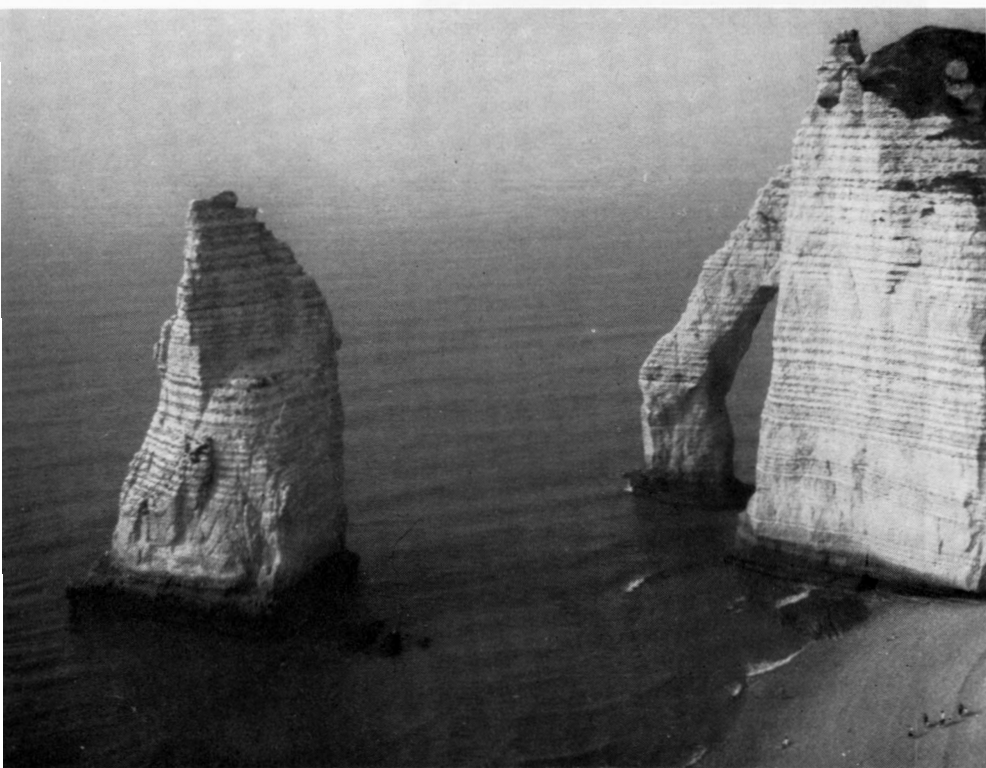
steep wall followed by a wide chimney leading in three pitches to the top. Interesting. The rock was quite fair, not unlike Yorkshire limestone, with plenty of small incuts but a certain amount of loose surface features. And the odd peg in place. On the way back to the car we actually followed a good path—there is a moral here somewhere.

If the weather is poor in the Bergell, the Bernina or even the Dolomites then the Grigna is an unusual and attractive place to which to retreat. It is even worth a visit perhaps for a few training climbs and some swimming and sunbathing, for Lecco is a pleasant place with a first-class and friendly climbing shop.

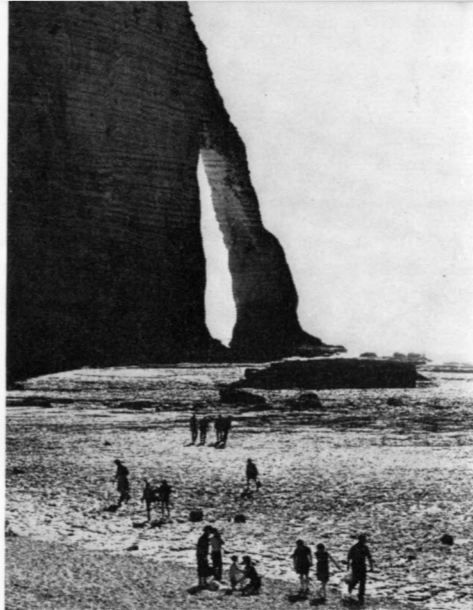
One is unlikely to find first ascents for the area is a popular playground for the numerous local climbers, but mid-week there should be no one there



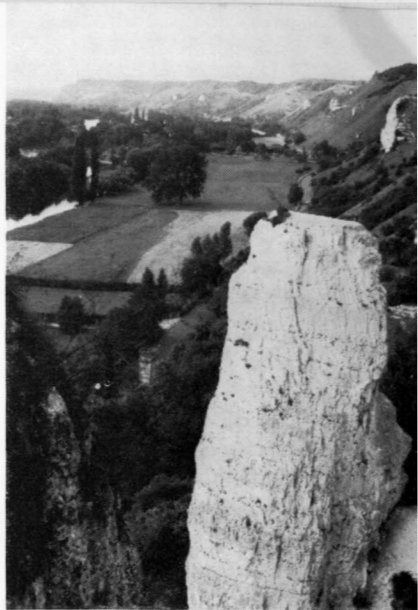
and there are any amount of steep short routes on the forest of limestone spires and longer routes on the main plateau itself. There appear to be some quite large crags in the area, in fact. Many of the climbs will be artificial and pegs can be expected on all of them. There is a guide-book to the area, published by the local section of the C.A.I. and probably still obtainable from Cassin's shop—where in any case they will be delighted to help with information. Some three years ago *Alpinismus* published a major feature on the Grigna and other similar limestone areas in the Italian foothills—another worth a visit are the Dente della Vecchia, the 'widow's teeth', behind Lugano—but then, this is in Switzerland.



68 Chalk cliffs—Etretat. Photo: Edward Pyatt



69 *The arch of La Porte d'Aval.*
Photo: French Government Tourist Office



70 *Chalk towers, Seine valley.* Photo:
Edward Pyatt

2 Chalk Climbing in France

Edward Pyatt

The chalk climbing which has been carried out in France during the last decade is interesting for two reasons. It is readily accessible to climbers in South-east England (or to those travelling to and from the Alps via Le Havre); in view of the large amount of unclimbed chalk in this country it is very important to study what the French have made of very similar material. Will chalk in fact be the ultimate development of rock climbing?

The nearest site with a guide book is at Etretat, sixteen miles along the coast from Le Havre, where the sea-cliffs are 300 ft high and there are three substantial arches. The most spectacular of these, La Porte d'Aval, looks across to a 200-ft pointed sea stack, l'Aiguillette. Several routes are described in Bocianowski's guide book (see below), which is essential for details of techniques and restrictions.

The remaining climbs are on walls and towers of chalk which line the true right bank of the Seine between Jumieges, below Rouen, and La Roche Guyon, near Mantes and only 40 miles from Paris. There are several groups of rocks but the most important is that between Connelles and Amfreville, where 200 routes up to 150 ft are described, many on isolated pinnacles and towers.

Reference

Bocianowski, F. *Falaises de la Seine—Connelles*. Section Montagne du R.S.C.M., 1965.

(Further contributions to this series are invited for future issues—Ed.).

