

continue down to the Grands Mulets hut where we stop to inform the guardian and to have a cup of tea. We set off again. The snow is still in good condition, but further down it has melted and left many crevasses exposed. Snow-bridges which we had crossed a few weeks earlier were no longer there. We find a new way and traverse under the rock face of the Aiguille du Midi, until we reach the Met. station. We return to Chamonix by the cable car as there is no more snow to ski on. The time is 2.00pm.

NOTE: François arrived back in Chamonix three days after setting out, fit and well but very tired. He had a story to tell, but it was not our story!

Specialists on the Eiger

Epicures on the Lauper route

B. W. J. Griffiths

Early in January 1971 Captain Nigel Gifford, A.C.C. revealed his private desire to tackle the Eiger. I matched his ambition and the casual spark which kindles so many adventures began to glow. After talking round the subject we came to a 'I'll climb it if you'll organise it' agreement and 'Eiger 71' was on. We chose to attempt the Lauper route,¹ described as a masterpiece of traditional climbing.

'Eiger 71' is the 'Mod Tag' we tied to our more formally known, A.C.C. Alpine Expedition 1971. The fact that the Army Catering Corps had personnel interested in climbing, let alone demanding mountains, seemed to engender a lot of interest; it may even be rousing similar emotions now. We, on the other hand, found it quite normal.

Nigel needed a strong companion for this route, to compliment his own energetic and advanced climbing ability. This was to be a Marine Commando called Martin Chambers, a stringy, lolloping climber of high grade rock ability. He had experience of snow conditions gained during Norwegian winters and being a Marine Commando there was no doubting his strength and fitness. He had two further qualities we liked. He was too gentlemanly to turn down our invitation and he had an intense interest in expedition catering.

¹ The Lauper route was that taken by Hans Lauper and Alfred Zürcher with Alexander Graven and Josef Knubel when making the first ascent of the North-east face of the Eiger on 20 August 1932 (See *A.J.* 44 318 and 45 53).

The role of the Army Catering Corps can be described as the provision of a military food production service designed to operate anywhere, at any time, under any conditions. For this reason the Corps has a wealth of talent which has cooked in polar regions and in the tropics, in desert and in jungle, has produced teas on balmy Bagshot afternoons and emergency nourishment during Hong Kong typhoons. Members of the Corps have advised other expeditions on food packs. For these reasons we were surprised that others were surprised that cooks would go climbing. Undaunted we pressed on.

The aim of Eiger 71 was to attempt to climb the Lauper route and in this aim the venture was a success. But the ambition of the climbers was to reach the summit and thus make the first ascent by a British military group. Alas, this ambition was frustrated.

Preparations began as soon as we had agreed to mount the venture. We began training; running during the week and climbing at weekends. We began our planning and swung with enthusiasm into a programme of scrounging. In March Gifford and Chambers climbed an A4 overhang on the Old Redoubt Cliff in Torbay 'to get to know each other' and called the new route 'The Curse'. In April Gifford slipped out to Switzerland to make a reconnaissance of the Eiger and obtain answers for a few administrative points. Then as summer approached we found our individual ways to intensive training grounds, I to Scotland, Nigel to Wales and Martin to climb his West Country sea cliffs with Pat Littlejohn.

Because of the nature of our work and our general interest in foodstuffs the expedition provisioning was the subject of interest as intense as that we had in the mechanics of the climb to come. We prepared ourselves for a minor expedition, and food production, in all aspects, was to have the highest priority possible. Even if this had not been a self-imposed discipline it would have been unavoidable. The growing interest in 'cooks who climbed' would have thrust it upon us.

Food production in the mountain environment is not a problem new to climbers and it is solved in a variety of ways. Between the bottles of wine and legs of mutton of the fathers of our sport to pâté and miniatures of whisky enjoyed by some of today's Himalayan giants is a whole trail of ingenious ideas and approaches to mountain meal times, some successful, some failures. One of the most valuable elements of Chris Bonington's book *Annapurna South Face* is the information dealing with provisioning and eating, for it clearly demonstrates the magnitude of the topic.

In my opinion the importance of adequate and balanced meal intake is often dimmed by the very routine nature of eating. Meals happen three or four times a day and many of those eating them are not involved with the cooking or are too bound up in other thoughts to dwell on their nourishment. The skill and expertise of cooking gets lost because it is often expedient to 'grab a snack'. When buying from Pindisport it is all too easy to cross Holborn to one of the timbered pubs for a pie and a pint. Under these attitudes eating on a mountain

can often deteriorate into an approach which accepts that something will be heated up because 'we have the ability to get by'. One only has to recall the wealth of unrepeatable stories woven around man's efforts to avoid being expedition cook to understand what I am trying to say. All too often the attitude that cooking is no less than a chore overrides common sense.

About eight years ago I examined data accumulated from eating experiments performed on car rally drivers. They and their navigators were ready-made subjects with which to study the relationship between organised eating and long periods of arduous endeavour, concentration and strain. The tests showed that those drivers who took regular meals of a suitable kind did perform better than those who did not. But the most interesting feature was that the improved performance drivers would not give credit to the controlled food intake being the improving factor. They would rather have it that 'the car was better prepared' or 'the course was not so demanding this time'.

The body uses nourishment in a variety of ways. It turns food into energy, it extracts minerals and vitamins for the body's organs, it channels off the substances needed to build the body and maintain it in a good state of repair. The body's energy requirement is measured in calories and for this reason diets are often described by their calorific content. We, planning to undertake activity which could be described as very heavy work, decided that our daily diet should be designed to give a minimum of 4000 calories.

Mike Thompson organising the food for the Annapurna expedition, placed calorific content of the diet in second place of importance to acceptability to the eater. This is a realistic point of view. As Don Whillans can testify, no matter how much food value pumpernickel may have, if it is not eaten it supplies no nourishment and is wasted weight. Thus it can be seen that devising our food supply was to take up a good deal of our mental effort, but taking into account the nature of our professional work this was not unnatural. Indeed I welcomed it as an exercise similar to the sort of problems a military caterer faces, yet having elements of a more personal nature.

We approached the problem of selecting actual foodstuffs in a normal way, that is, we devised limits which restricted us to certain things. These limits included weight, water supply, type of cooking equipment available, fuel supplies, location, personal tastes, food values, balance of diet, and cost, but not necessarily in that order. Ultimately we arrived at our 'mix'.

Martin, for instance, has a fixation on Muesli, the continental oat-based breakfast food. He would exist on only that if so required, but submitted to our gourmet inclinations and agreed to include it for breakfast only. Nigel, ever romantic and Everestian, had a passion for sardines in olive oil. Among my inclusions were packets of Barrett's Dolly Mixture sweets.

It was this later item which caused much amusement and comment among those who watched or were involved in our project. The sweets, however, represented a very serious part of our food pack construction. I planned the eating day around starting and finishing a day's climbing. We expected the

start and finish to be at inhospitable locations, therefore ease of preparation was an important factor. Once a day's climbing is under way my companions are always reluctant to stop for any length of time other than a 'breather'. Eating on the march was another requirement. Hence small packets of energy imparting foods which could be carried in pockets.

Food production, by a process of elimination, thus took on a set pattern. A substantial breakfast of carbohydrates, sugars, protein and liquid was the first meal. In down to earth terms this meant at least one pint of Brahma instant tea or coffee each on waking followed by Weetabix muesli, or Readibrek with plenty of milk. A meat breakfast food such as canned sausage and beans followed with bread or biscuit, all topped off with another beverage. The importance of replacing body liquids cannot be over-stressed. The evening meal was even more substantial and having the whole of the night at our disposal it involved a little more elaborate preparation. Mid-day was the occasion for a snack meal of carbohydrates and sugars and liquid and either side of the snack lunch the climbers were encouraged to nibble at least one meal of sugars and protein.

At altitude and under stress or strain the appetite is liable to change. Allied to this is the effect of food on morale and personal welfare. Good food tends to raise spirits or prevent them flagging. One must remember, too, that one 'eats with the eye' as much as with the tongue. Appearance of the food is very important. Hence my inclusion of Barrett's Dolly Mixture. Here was a food consisting of strong colours and flavour, varying shapes and high sugar content, as well as being small and compact. The consumer was immediately availed of the sort of nibbling meal which could be taken during climbing, and which was comfortable in the mouth even when panting with exertion. It was also the cause of much comment and humour which was always good for morale.

In Switzerland Martin Chambers joined our party, having previously spent a couple of weeks in Chamonix where he climbed the North face of the Dru; he had also climbed the North face of Piz Badile. Nigel and I hauled all the expedition gear and foodstuffs out by train. The journey was an epic, but that is another story.

On the fourth day we arrived at Grindelwald and took the afternoon train to Alpighen. We settled into a cheese-maker's hut and then decided to climb the Eiger's West flank. We rapidly assembled our gear, walked up to Kleine Scheidegg in the dark and continued to Eiger Gletscher and a cold bivouac. Nigel Gifford and I started on the West flank at 6am and returned to Alpighen twelve hours later. I am certain that, accounting for the previous hectic days and the lack of altitude acclimatisation, the eating pattern I have described worked exactly as it was intended. Back at our Base Camp we reassessed the meal contents and saw no reason to change. Gifford and Chambers then prepared to tackle the Lauper route.

On 18 August at 01.00hrs I made breakfast for the two while they snatched a few more moments in their sleeping bags. We were perched on a ledge beside

the glacier which marked the beginning of the Lauper route. Having eaten and drunk of the provisions I had carried up from Alpigen it only remained for them to don their packs, amble clanking through the dawn silence on to the ice and begin the attempt. They had food for three days plus an emergency ration. Their water would last one and a half days if not replenished *en route*.

From our sortie on the West flank we knew that the rock was in poor condition. The stable, hot summer weather, delighting the tourists who stumbled up and down the path between Kleine Scheidegg and Grindelwald, had reduced the Eiger's snow and ice to an all-time low. It looked as if the Second Ice-field on the North wall would disappear altogether. The Lauper route looked as if it would be rock climbing most of the way. The Eiger was like an old house without cement between its mouldering bricks. The stone-fall on the West flank had been frightening but on the Lauper route it took on a Nordwand character.

Gifford and Chambers were alone on the route; a self-contained self-supporting team. From their description of the attempt it is quite obvious they climbed hard and in excess of their already high ability. Where an ice filled crack was expected an 80-ft waterfall cascaded. Gifford led up through the freezing water. Receding snow uncovered vast areas of loose, slippery, energy-sapping scree. The hand-holds crumbled, the foot-holds fell away, pitons pulled out with alarming ease.

They climbed on over the debris strewn rock steps above the Hoheneis glacier. Both men were optimistic that they would climb out of the dross as they gained the higher reaches of the route. To concentrate on clean climbing rather than ploughing over energy sapping rubbish was an anticipated pleasure. Their spirits were high and they climbed vigorously to counteract the slowing effect of the mountain's poor condition.

The huge rock buttress, which is a feature of the Lauper route, was in their sights. Up to this point they had been climbing solo. This suited the policy of eating on the move at individual's discretion, as well as maintaining their speed. They had needed only to pause for brief periods of rest and were well on schedule. Unluckily the unusually good and stable weather conditions once again proved to be against them.

Having gained the buttress they expected to climb an icy chimney to gain the Eiger's permanent snow fields. The icy chimney was not there. Where it should have been was a raging torrent of a waterfall. It was impassable. Here they took their longest pause on the climb yet, thirty minutes during which they replenished water, had an instant coffee 'brew up', made a quick meal of cheese, biscuits, fruit and chocolate and took stock of their position.

They were still feeling energetic and had a strong desire to go on, but stone-fall prevented climbing on one side of the buttress and the waterfall precluded climbing on the other side. Their only route lay on the buttress which, as far as they knew, was unclimbed. Undaunted they pressed on roped and climbing

as a matched team, sharing the lead and capitalising on their combined experience.

The route up the buttress was hard and strenuous. It constantly taxed their climbing skills and made even bigger demands on their reserves of nervous energy. The climb was turning against them and they could feel it. At last the final cruel blow came when it was least expected. The route up the buttress led them on to an isolated pinnacle not obvious from below but detached from the main ridge by a drop of about 150 ft. They were marooned. To climb down was to court disaster so friable was the rock ascended. The hopelessness of the situation struck home after an hour of trying and failing to get even one piton to hold for an abseil. So, perched on their narrow downward sloping ledge they sat out the night. The following morning a helicopter dropped in to pluck them from their predicament.

It had been a long night of tension. Under such conditions it can be comforting to eat as well as helping to maintain physical well being. Again the lightweight foods came into their own. Dehydrated stew nourished, warmed and imparted liquid for the bodily function. Dextrose tablets fizzed refreshingly in the mouth and Dolly mixture upheld spirits, so outrageous did they seem in relation to the situation.

Thus with ambition frustrated, both men returned to base with ego and body slightly bruised but otherwise in good physical well-being. The strain of the attempt was clearly evident but it quickly dissolved amid intensive analysis. It was encouraging to see that in at least one aspect we had shown success. Our feeding arrangements, designed for a strenuous climb had been well suited to the needs of a very demanding occasion.

Filming on the Nordwand

Leo Dickinson

I had never seen the Eiger before the summer of 1970, but felt, as I am sure other climbers feel, that I knew more about the route on the Eiger's North face than any other mountain in the world. There are at least five books devoted entirely to the North face, one on the history, one on the first winter ascent, one devoted entirely to a single rescue and two on the Direct Route. All the publicity was channelled to a hungry press and starving public. Kleine Scheidegg was a stage for mass sensationalism made easy by the mountain railway, telescopes and comfortable hotels. The blame does not really lie in any one sector; by nature human beings are disaster-conscious yet they are protected from most natural dangers. It comes about therefore that the appetite of the non-mountaineering public for this sort of sensation is partially or wholly satisfied by the risks and disasters which befall climbers.