

Notes 1971 The Alps

Colin Taylor

Summary The summer season of 1971 must be one of the best on record. In the Western Alps the winter snowfall was late and less than usual, so the big classic faces came into condition early and remained in good condition for much of the season, in spite of several quite big storms in late July and August.

A solo first ascent and half a dozen solo ascents of major routes were made by British climbers. British parties also made ascents of important routes such as the North-west faces of the Olan and the Ailefroide in the Dauphiné, the Brouillard Pillars, the Grand Pilier d'Angle, the Central Pillar of Frêney and the Droites North face in the Mont Blanc region, and of the Eiger and the Matterhorn North faces. Many other British parties made notable ascents and the notes below, while not complete, are confined mainly to their achievements. Details of ascents by continental climbers can be found in *Alpine Climbing* and in the continental journals, particularly *La Montagne* and *Alpinismus*. I am grateful particularly to Doug Scott, the Editor of *Alpine Climbing* and to Ken Wilson, the Editor of *Mountain* for collecting much of the information on which these notes are based, and also to many others who sent in information about their routes.

DAUPHINÉ

Probably more English parties climbed in the Dauphiné in the summer of 1971 than ever before. Weather conditions were good, particularly during July, although several big storms occurred in August. As a result, many of the big routes were in condition. Many classic routes, such as the Meije by the South and South-west faces, had British ascents. None of the ice-climbs, however, was done, despite spells of good conditions between the August storms. Particularly notable were an ascent of the Couzy route on the North-west face of L'Olan, reputed to be the hardest route in the Dauphiné, and several ascents of the North-west face of the Ailefroide. Since the English guide to the Dauphiné has probably been used more this season than in any previous one, the list of notable and interesting ascents is longer than usual and we have included comments made on the descriptions in the guide. One fairly general complaint seems to be that the route times are over-optimistic. Several parties praised highly the new two-volume French guide to the Massif des Ecrins by L. Devies, F. Labande and M. Laloue (3rd edition, Arthaud 1971) although few seem actually to have bought copies at 150 francs a set. The list below is based on information from several sources, but especially from John Brailsford, Mike Mortimer and Ian Roper.

L'Olan, North-west face First British ascent and sixth in all by C. Fitzhugh and P. Boardman in twenty-one hours. The route has a high reputation, being

regarded, for example, as harder than the Dru West face. The upper 1500 ft are very impressive and sustained, although the two or three artificial pitches now have some pegs and the A3 roof is fully pegged.

Ailefroide, North-west face Two further ascents by M. Mortimer and H. Brown (fifteen hours, 2–3 August) and in late August by R. Lake and A. Dewison with J. Brailsford and E. Birch. The route has now had something like thirteen ascents and both these parties praise it highly as one of the great routes of the Alps and a serious undertaking. The foot of the face is something like $2\frac{1}{2}$ –3 hours from the Temple-Ecrins hut and it seems best to bivouac just before the Coste Rouge glacier fifteen minutes from the face, although there are no very good sites. The first VI pitch may be avoided on the right. The grey slabs are very sustained and the route is not obvious. The fastest time to date is twelve hours, so the guide book time of ten hours is over-optimistic. In the English guide, diagram 24 of the South face is not correct—see diagram 4 in the French guide. In the descent, (a) the ‘shallow couloir’, is not easy to find in poor visibility and starts about 100 yards along the summit ridge right (south) of where the route finishes.

Pic Sans Nom, West-north-west face (Chapoutot-Lemoine, 1971) First British ascent by C. Fitzhugh and P. Boardman. Most of the rock is very good and the surroundings impressive.

Pic Sans Nom, North face First British ascent by R. Lake and A. Dewison. This is a route with a reputation comparable to the Gervasutti route on the Ailefroide but not, apparently, as hard.

Pic Gaspard, South-south-east ridge (Devies-Gervasutti) First British ascent by T. Jones, R. Allan, I. Roper and D. Walker with one bivouac below the grey tower and later by J. Brailsford and E. Birch in $9\frac{1}{2}$ hours. This is a long difficult ridge and perhaps one of Gervasutti’s least well-known routes.

Aiguille de Sialouze, South-west face (Livanos-Vaucher-Lepage) First British ascent by C. Fitzhugh and P. Boardman in $6\frac{1}{2}$ hours. The route, although short, offers very sustained hard free climbing on magnificent rock.

Les Ecrins, South Pillar M. Mortimer, H. Brown and Robert West 30 July in thirteen hours. The excellent bivouac sites mentioned in the guide are not at the rimaye but on the moraine on the right of the path about 1–1½ hours from the Cézanne hut. A time of ten hours would be an optimistic estimate. This party were disappointed by the quality of the rock, which they found bad—in contrast to a previous party (Brailsford, 1964) which found much of the rock very good.

La Meije, South face M. Mortimer, H. Brown and R. West 27 July. This party point out that it is probably better to go round the base of the Promontoire rib on the snow than to make two abseils down the Couloir du Crapaud. It takes two hours to the rib on the right bank of the Zsigmondy couloir from the hut. The description in the English guide is difficult to follow, but the hut

book contains some useful information and a number of useful diagrams of the direct finish.

Les Bans, North-east Pillar M. Mortimer and party, who remark that this route must be one of the best in the Dauphiné, although made serious by ice in the upper half.

Aiguille Dibona As usual, several ascents by English parties, but particularly two by *cordées féminines*. The *Voie Boell* by Cynthia Heap and Diana McIlreavy and, later, by Margery Allen and Jill Aldersley. The better descent, moving left at the Brèche Gunnery takes $\frac{3}{4}$ hour back to the Soreiller hut and not two to three hours as the English guide suggests.

MONT BLANC

According to André Contamine, 1971 was the best summer he has ever seen, with fine weather from the end of June to the end of September interrupted only by a few storms. The classic routes below 4000 m were in good condition, but the ice did not freeze often enough. The big faces such as Grandes Jorasses,

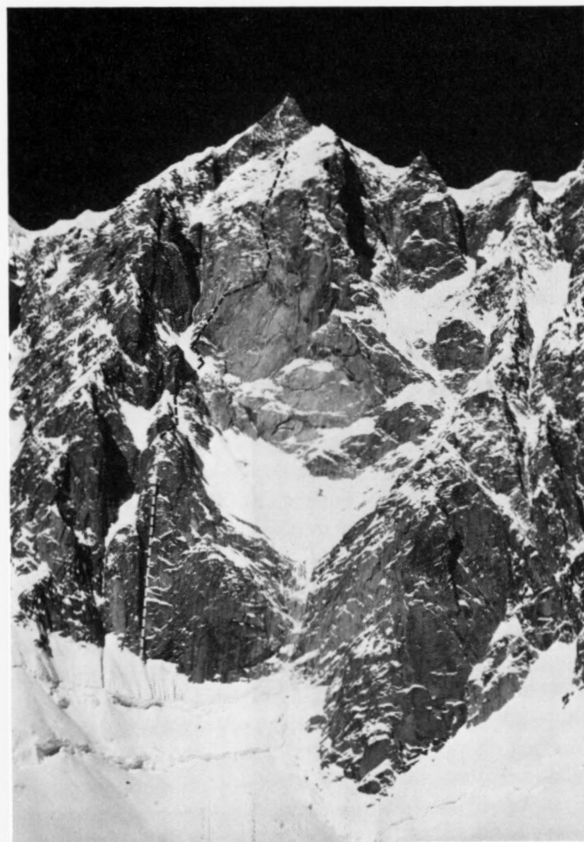


90 Monte Gruetta—
North face

Dru, Droites and on Mont Blanc were in good condition during the major part of the season, enabling a record-breaking number of ascents to be made. On one occasion the Walker Spur had more than two dozen parties on the route.

Cecchinell and Nominé made a major new route on the Grand Pilier d'Angle between Bonatti's two routes. Andrzej Mroz put up three fine direct routes on the South face of Punta Gugliermina with D. Belden (11–13 July), on the North face of Monte Gruetta (31 July–2 August) and on the South-east face of Mont Maudit (17–19 August) both with J-P. Bougerol. On the Brouillard face of Mont Blanc three Polish climbers made a route on the left-hand pillar in addition to the two new routes by British climbers mentioned below (see *Alpine Climbing*).

J-C. Droyer made fine solo ascents of the Central Pillar of Frêne and of the Hemming route on the West face of the Petit Dru. Interesting ski descents include the South face (ordinary) route on the Grandes Jorasses by Sylvain Saudan in May and the North face of the Tour Ronde in late June by Patrick Valencant. The latter is described as a 'short but interesting ice route' in the



91 Mont Maudit—
South-east face

English guide-book and is given a grade of D (which may vary with conditions). Other first ski descents include the North-east couloir of the Aiguille de Blaitière (first ascended in 1963) by S. Cachat-Rosset and the North-west couloir of the Aiguille du Goûter by D. Chapuis and R. Gignoux.

Contamine reports a heavy casualty list of forty-one dead and some eighty-three injured. The helicopter service was called out 105 times. Several English climbers were among those rescued.

Mont Blanc, Brouillard Pillars, Pilastro Rosso First ascent by R. Shaw and A. Burgess (15–17 July) of a direct line right of the Bonatti-Oggioni route of 1959 which is still unrepeated. On their second attempt the party reached a bivouac on top of the pillar after 10½ hours of very hard climbing on superb granite—thirty-five pegs, ED.

Mont Blanc, Central Pillar of Brouillard First ascent solo by E. Jones in July, Difficulties of IV with sections of V and V+, which Jones climbed using his sack as a counter-weight. He bivouacked high on the pillar and again in two nights of storm on the ridge before being rescued by helicopter.

Mont Blanc, Grand Pilier d'Angle (Bonatti-Gobbi route) First British ascent, by R. Lake and A. Dewison in July.

Mont Blanc, Central Pillar of Frêney P. Braithwaite and W. O'Connor (30–31 July) left the Col de la Fourche at 1am and reached the summit of the Chandelle at 4pm, with descent to Chamonix the next day.

Punta Gugliermi, South face First solo ascent by R. Shaw on 19 August in six hours. Several other British parties also did the route.

Mont Blanc du Tacul, Aiguilles du Diable couloir Possible first British ascent by M. Guillard and B. Wynne taking three hours from the bergschrund to the Diable ridge, by the left branch.

Aiguille du Plan, North face Solo ascent by P. Braithwaite on 22 July in six hours.

Aiguille du Fou, South face—American route Attempting to make the first solo ascent. A. Rouse pulled out a rurp two pitches up the diagonal crack and broke his ankle. He was stopped by his back rope and then made seventeen abseils on his knees back down the face into the couloir two pitches above the bergschrund, where a rescue party could reach him.

Petit Dru, North face A. G. Cram with W. Young and G. Smith with A. Webster were among British parties who climbed the face in icy conditions.

Petit Dru, West face (Hemming-Robbins) Ascents by A. Rouse and P. Minks, followed later by P. Littlejohn and S. Jones, the latter in a time of eleven hours.

Petit Dru, Bonatti Pillar M. Burbage and G. Oliver who climbed the route on 27 July point out the extra stone-fall danger in the couloir due to stones dislodged by parties abseiling down from the Flammes de Pierre. The deaths of two British climbers when an abseil block came away during a descent from the Flammes de Pierre underline the care necessary when using this descent to find the correct line.

Aiguille Verte, Cordier and Couturier Couloirs J. Brazington and M. Cunliffe made a fast time up the Cordier couloir in good conditions and then descended the Couturier couloir. Brazington was unfortunately killed by stone-fall when, late in the day, the party was picking up sacks left at the foot of the face.

Les Droites, North face, Direct Route (Cornuau-Davaille) First British ascent by K. Spence and A. Fyffe in twenty-six hours' climbing time with one bivouac. The face was in good condition. Most of the lower half was straightforward snow/ice with poor security, the crux being the middle 500 m rock band which offered Scottish grade III ice climbing. The whole face was climbed in crampons on front points cutting steps only for belays and resting places. The main problems were strain on calf muscles, and the water coming down the face late in the day.

Les Droites, North-east Spur and North face Ascents by J. Fantini with M. Jones, by W. Hepplewhite with R. Renshaw and by C. Fitzhugh with P. Boardman. The latter party spent eleven hours on the route and then traversed the Droites, to reach the Charpoua hut the same day.

Aiguille de Triolet, North face Ascents by A. Rouse and P. Minks, M. Geddes and K. Darbyshire and R. Schipper and another.

Petites Jorasses, West face Solo ascent by C. Phillips in four hours. Other ascents by M. Boysen and D. Little and by J. Fantini and K. Bell.

Grandes Jorasses, Walker Spur Solo ascent by P. Minks, J. Sumner and R. Cully were stopped after Sumner pulled off a block and fell, hurting his shoulder and head 350 m below the summit. Four guides were dropped by helicopter on to the summit ridge and the party was taken off next morning.

OBERLAND

Eiger, North face (original route) Four British parties climbed the face this summer.

Grosshorn, North face A. Collau and S. Timmins in thirty-one hours on 9–10 August with bivouacs on the face and on the summit and descent to the Schmadri hut in bad weather.

Silberhorn, North face Ascent by J. Jones and M. Burrows-Smith.

PENNINE ALPS

Mont Blanc de Cheilon, North face D. Haston and B. Clark in September followed a line to the left of the central couloir with thin ice on the rock in the lower part.

Bouquetins, complete traverse J. Allen and J. H. Russell on 9 August, seventeen hours fifty minutes for the round trip from Plan de Bertol going from south to north, on excellent rock most of the way.

Matterhorn, North face Several ascents by British parties.

Dent d'Hérens, North face (Welzenbach-Allwein) R. Colledge and D. Davis on 6 August in 15½ hours with a bivouac on the descent in poor weather. They found a reasonable chimney cutting through the final ice-cliff to the terrace, but the upper slabs were very serious.

Lyskamm, North-east face (Norman-Neruda) Ascents by P. Braithwaite, Z. Leppart, P. Holden and D. Ingres on 5 July and by J. Wilkinson and J. Afanassief on 6 September. The latter party climbed entirely on the snow-slope right of the rock rib. The variant was in good condition although the rib was in poor condition, and the Welzenbach variant on the left of the rib bare ice.

Castor, South buttress A. Rawlinson and M. Ward, 29 July, following the guide O. Trachey and his client. This is an enjoyable but little-known route taking the middle of the large rock buttress supporting the south summit of Castor (IV–V) with short, well-protected pitches (IV–V). 2½ hours from the Mezzalama hut and 3½ hours for the buttress.

CENTRAL SWITZERLAND

Winterstock, South-east ridge C. Phillips and L. Ware. The route was comparable with the Graue Wand, but harder.

Gletschhorn, Graue Wand Climbed by three parties, a good route on rough rock.

Gross Schlossberg, West ridge First ascent by L. Jones and K. Meldrum 27–28 August in seventeen hours' climbing time—2500 feet TD.

Salbitschijen, South-east Pillar Direct First ascent by A. G. Cram and W. Young, G. Oliver and M. Burbage 21 July in ten hours. The route takes direct the pillar which the route described in the English guide-book avoids on the right up the couloir. 1900 ft mainly V with two pitches of VI.

BREGAGLIA

Piz Cengalo, North ridge Solo ascent by A. Rouse in four hours (possibly the first). Ascent by R. Shaw and A. Burgess also in four hours.

Piz Badile, North-east face (Cassin) Solo ascent by P. Minks in four hours on the same day as Rouse's ascent of the Cengalo.

Piz Badile, North ridge Climbed by W. Kirstein with a guide (see p 48).

Pizzi Gemelli, Bügeleisen Solo ascent by C. Phillips in one hour.

DOLOMITES

Marmolata, South Pillar An ascent is reported by J. Fullalove and another.

Roda di Vael, Rotwand, Via Consiglio First British ascent by P. T. Denny and W. E. Renshaw in August of this 450-m, VI+, A3 route in 8½ hours. An excellent climb.

Civetta, Punta Tissi, Via Diretta (Mazeaud-Piussi-Sorgato) First British ascent by J. Firth, D. Borton, J. Jones and M. Burrows-Smith by mistake in mist when intending to do the Philipp-Flamm.

First Sella Tower, South-west face Direct The brothers A. G. and J. H. Ashton did what appears to be a pleasant new five-pitch route on the 200-m face which they graded VI, with one chock for aid—19 August.

Sassolungo, North pillar Another report from A. G. Ashton indicates that, according to several local guides, the route No 33 in *Dolomites West* does not exist, in spite of a recent comment that it does (Livanos—*La Montagne* 1971, p. 80).

EASTERN LIMESTONE

Lalidererwand, North face (Dibona-Mayer) An ascent by D. Miller and D. Roberts on 25 July in 8½ hours. They found the top two-thirds very loose.

Lalidererspitze, North face (Auckenthaler-Schmidhuber) Probably the first British ascent by D. McDonald, B. Eldrid, K. Rawlinson and L. Wilson, 28–29 July, with one bivouac near the summit in seventeen hours' climbing time. The top two-thirds were loose and serious.

NEW GUIDE-BOOKS

Karwendel, by M. Anderson (West Col Productions, £1.10)

Bregaglia East, by R. G. Collomb (West Col Productions, £1.80)

Kaisergebirge, by J. O. Talbot (West Col Productions, £1.50)

Mountains of the Alps, Vol. 1: Western Alps, by R. G. Collomb (West Col Productions, £1.90)