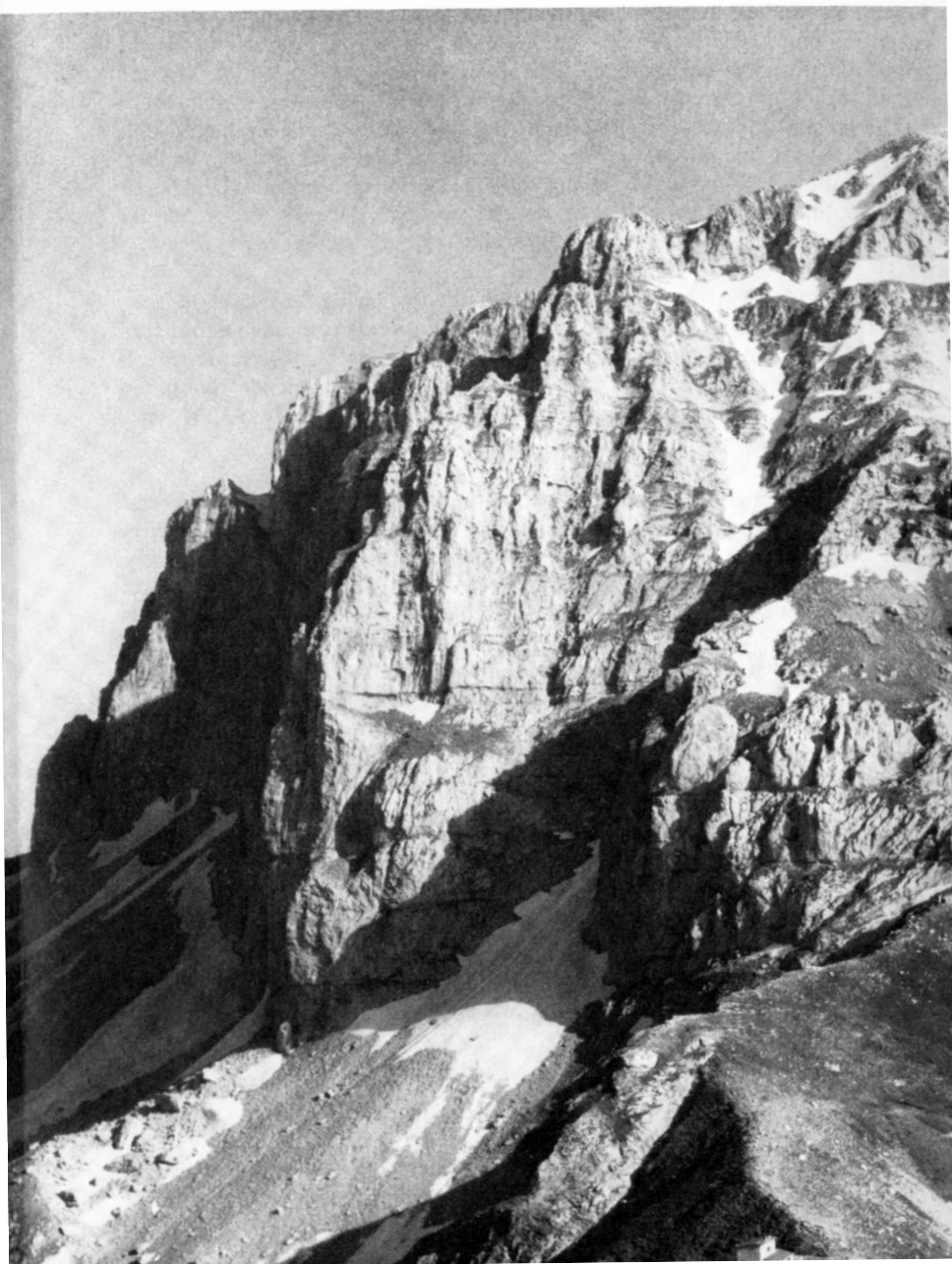


Pindos range: Timfi massif

Robin Fedden



In June 1972 a traverse was made of the Pindos range from north to south, starting some dozen kilometres from the Albanian border at Konitsa and ending at Karpenisi. The route in the main lay to the west of that taken by John Hunt's party in March 1963 (*Fell and Rock Journal*, No. 58, Vol. XX, 1964), and the journey was made in the inverse direction. The weather, unlike that experienced in March 1963, was unbroken.

For all its wild scenery and impressive gorges, the Pindos range, with the exception of a single area, offers little serious climbing. The exception is the Timfi massif, north of Ioannina. The two main peaks, Astraka (2436 m) and Gamila (2497 m), are easily accessible from the south, but some of the climbs on the great north faces are comparable to classic Dolomite routes, with walls of up to 800 m, and a limestone that is compact and reliable. Here is the best rock-climbing in Greece. The major faces are virgin and present a challenge that should appeal to exponents of arduous artificial routes. West of Astraka lie seven more immense limestone cliffs, all apparently unscaled.

In 1966 the Greek Alpine Club established a refuge facing Astraka at 1900 m. With blankets, running water and butane, the comfort is comparable to that of a good Alpine hut. It is used largely for spring ski-ing. The hut book reveals that no British climbing party has visited the area (at least since 1966), and that the only serious climbs appear to have been those made by a CAI party (Section de Gressoney) in 1968.

Two days were spent at the hut in 1972 before starting the southward traverse of the Pindos range, and on impeccable limestone three members of the party (Carl Nater, Renée Fedden and Robin Fedden) climbed one of the more broken lines (Grade III) on the NW face of Astraka: some 400 m and almost certainly a first ascent.

There is access to the massif from Ioannina (plane from Athens, cab from Ioannina). At the unspoilt village of Mikro Papingo, a septuagenarian chamois hunter and skier keeps a modest and agreeable inn, where mules can be hired for the transport of baggage to the hut (2½ hours). A more exciting—indeed, a memorable—approach is from Konitsa. This is impracticable for pack animals and leads up the spectacular Aōos gorge to the abandoned monastery of Stomion. Thence an ill-defined track (local guide essential) climbs through beech and fir forest to the rocky cleft of Drakolimni, and so to the hut across high pastures grazed by Sarakatsán nomads.

Any party contemplating a visit to the limestone walls of Timfi, and in particular to the noble precipices of Astraka, should contact the Greek Alpine Club. They will find Mr Nassos Tzartzanos, the Honorary Secretary-General, immensely helpful.