Glacier to examine the S defences of Thui Zom. A barren rocky bowl, hemmed in by steep walls, we felt glad that circumstances had thwarted our original plan to establish a Base Camp on that rubble-covered glacier. Partly covered in cloud, the S side of Thui Zom looked as impregnable as the N. However, the fine looking surrounding peaks stirred our imaginations, and to the S the Mushk Bar Glacier remains unexplored. The Thui Gol has much to offer strong determined parties seeking Alpine style climbing on a large scale. From our experiences the key lies in making full use of the summer months to ensure complete acclimatization.

The Chartreuse

Jean-Paul Zuanon

Principally known for a very beautiful monastery which gave it its name, the Chartreuse group, near Chambéry and Grenoble, is a little pre-Alpine group which is worth investigation by the climber in the fore- or late-season, when the conditions or the short days forbid access to high mountains.

A little geography

Chartreuse is a limestone group, 30km long and a maximum of 10km wide, which just exceeds an altitude of 2000m. However, it is a true natural fortress, delimited N and E by great cliffs which tower above the Chambéry plain and the Isère valley and which are the more interesting part for the climber. Elsewhere, the boundaries are less typical, even though well pronounced. On the W side, one must cross deep gorges by impressive roads. In the S, Chartreuse is separated from the urban area of Grenoble by the Col de Porte and the Col de la Charmette. There are no vast karstic stretches as in Vercors. In Chartreuse, forest is 'king'. It is one of the main activities of the inhabitants and it gives to the region an original character and even an austerity that are not to be found in other regions of the French Alps.

Rock climbing

Chartreuse cannot pretend to compete with Oisans or with Vercors. However, its mountains are not without Alpine interest and they can offer some fine routes to the climber. They have characteristics similar to those of the Vercors, close at hand. The walls rarely exceed 300m, but the rock is fairly good, especially in the classical routes. Approaches are generally short and made easy by good paths or even forest-tracks. Descents sometimes require abseils. The climbs are to be recommended in spring and autumn; you must be an enthusiast for warmth if you come to climb these E cliffs during summer.

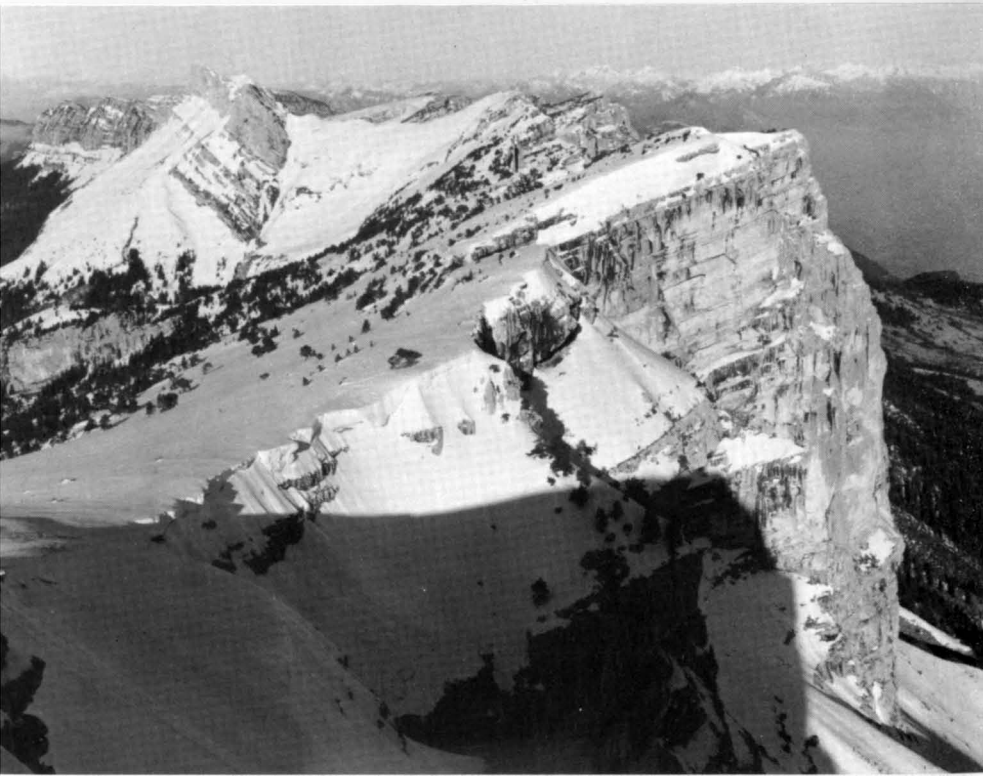
Chartreuse offers plenty of easy summits to the tourist: Dent de Crolles, Charmant Som, Grand Sure. From the early days of mountaineering in Dauphiné, they were the favourite objectives of the members of Société des Touristes Dauphinois (STD) and of the Section de l'Isère of the CAF, the first two

mountaineering clubs of Grenoble, both founded in 1874. But for a long time, a single rather difficult summit held the attention of climbers: Néron, which towers directly above the outskirts of Grenoble. The traverse of its summit ridge was very popular. Before 1940, only 2 other routes of 3rd degree existed on the Dent de Crolles. The 'golden age' of the conquest of Chartreuse walls (although this expression is rather overstated) was in the sixties. During these years the majority of the classical routes were made, mostly thanks to the talents of Serge Coupé and climbers of Grenoble, Chambéry and Geneva. To-day, around 50 routes between 3rd and 6th degrees are to be found in the Chartreuse. Without describing precisely all these routes (there is a very good guidebook), one can draw attention to the more interesting ones. They are for the most part on the E cliff, which presents from NE to SW a number of distinct summits.

Granier (1933m) overlooks the plain of Chambéry region. In 1248, a huge fall of rock took place on the N face. On these blocks a famous vineyard is cultivated to-day. But you must certainly drink much of this 'Apremont' wine to dare to attack this impressive wall, 700m high, with very bad rock. It is an ED sup. route, the climbing of which remains exceptional. Other TD routes on the W face are much shorter (from 120 to 200m high).

Grand Manti (1818m) lies 15km S from Granier. Its remarkable E face, 400m high, called 'Paroi Jaune' (yellow wall) overlooks the village of Le Touvet.

49 From the summit of the Dent de Crolles over the Chartreuse to Mont Blanc and the Vanoise (This and next three photos: C. Charrel)





50 S from the Dent de Crolles over Grenoble to the Vercors and Mont Aiguille

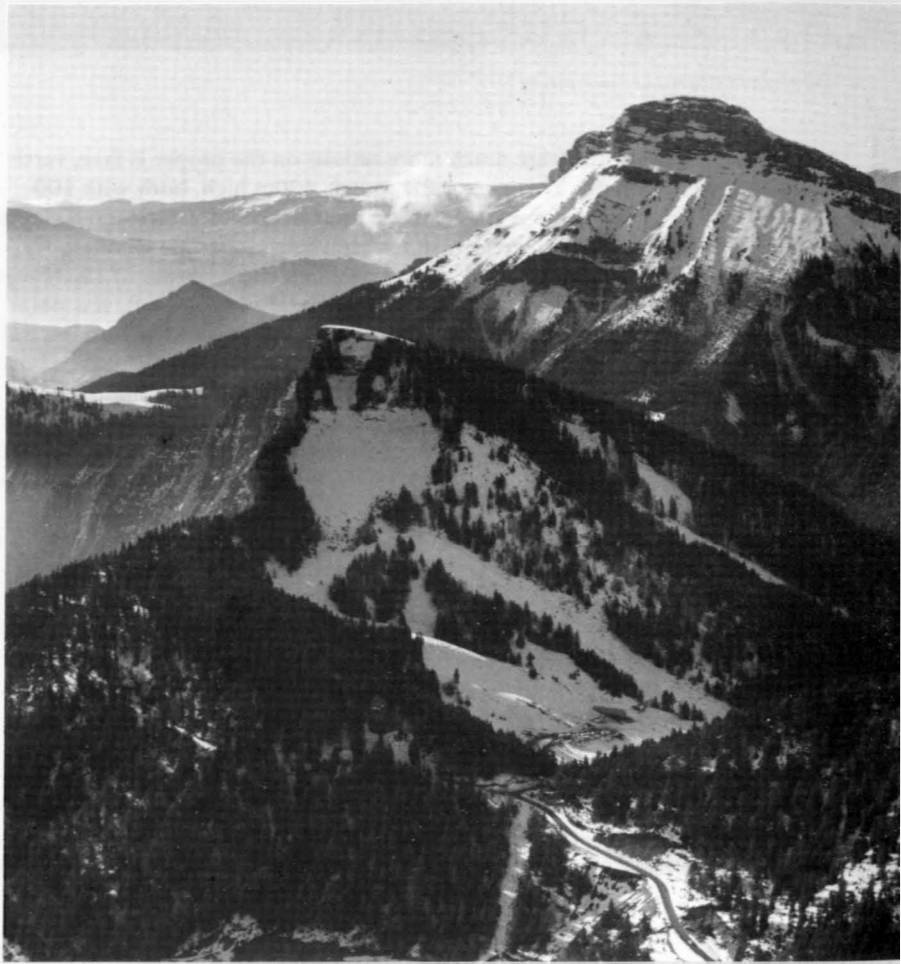
Four routes of standard ED are to be found. The most frequented is 'voie de la Rampe' on the right part of the face, which offers a fine succession of free and artificial pitches. Southwards, and up to Rochers du Midi, the cliff is much less high and not very characteristic. Here are the summits of Aup du Seuil (with several routes, rather short but difficult and with good rock) and Ai-

guillette de Saint-Michel, a very good training climb, nearly completely artificial (ED, 140m, 60 pegs, generally placed). Then the ridge becomes higher, to the Rochers du Midi.

Rochers du Midi (1903m) raise a fine vertical wall, about 300m high, above the Saint-Hilaire du Touvet plateau. There are 5 routes (one of which is due to S. Fulton and G. Heming), which are all of a high standard: the 'easiest' is TD sup! The Coupé and Lion routes are classics.

Dent de Crolles, just S of Rochers du Midi, is the last important bastion of the E cliff. This mountain, indisputably one of the most famous and most typical of Chartreuse, is one of the scarce summits offering climbing routes which are of only average difficulty. On the right side of the E face JB and 9-chimneys routes (AD) were climbed more than 50 years ago. 'Grande Cheminée' and 'GDA' are more recent and very popular, just like the 2 'Y' routes. The right 'branch' is D, the left one only AD. They have a common start, a rope-length of IV+/V, with little holds, rather delicate, which has surprised more than one

51 Chamechaude and the Vercors from the Dent de Crolles





52 Grande Chartreuse monastery

good climber! Difficulties are much more serious on the proper E face, vertically below the summit. There are 2 ED routes, 400m high, both with 100 pegs. A very aesthetic route is found at the intersection of E face and S slopes; it is S-pillar. The first steep section, 180m high, provides a fine climb, fairly free and not very difficult (D sup). A cliff prolongs the E border of Chartreuse S from Dent de Crolle and it ends with Saint-Eynard (a very good view-point over the whole region, accessible by a road). The rock is very bad and the wall, about 5km long, is of no interest for the climber. SW of the main ridge, above Le Sappey, the lonely summit of Chamechaude is the 'roof' of Chartreuse (2084m). By its W slopes, it is a very good ski tour from the Col de Porte. On the E face, 200m high, are several training routes, classical and very frequented: 'Y route', the easiest (AD), Tobey pillar (D sup.) and 'Grey pillar' a short climb (130m) but very sustained and interesting (TD).

The most southern summit of Chartreuse is Néron (or more completely 'Le casque du Néron', 1298m). Once classical, the routes of its E face (one of which is PD with a pitch of V!), and the traverse of its summit ridge have been completely abandoned. Its S cliff, just above Saint-Martin-le-Vinoux, provides severe routes; however, it is really just a practice crag, in very noisy surroundings. Thanks to its low altitude, its easy approach and its S facing orientation, it may be climbed in winter.

And tourist information

The above are general indications for the mountaineer in search of difficulties. However, do not believe that Chartreuse is only a playground for the climber. There is also plenty of walking. Ramblers in training can follow in 2 or 3 days

the 'GR 9' ('sentier de grande randonnée'), which runs the whole length of the group. Trails for nordic ski and attractive little ski resorts (with much snow, for Chartreuse is a very humid region) await the skier: Col de Porte, Col du Coq, Saint-Pierre-de Chartreuse, le Planolet . . . There is even something for the satisfaction of the skilled speleologist, who can visit the remarkable underground labyrinth of 'Trou du Glas', one of the deepest caves of France, not far from Dent de Crolles.

But one cannot talk about Chartreuse without mentioning the famous monastery of Grande Chartreuse, founded in 1084 by Saint Bruno. The numerous buildings, slated and with harmonious outlines, were erected in the 17th Century. It is in fact impossible to visit them for they are still actively occupied. A short distance away at 'la Correrie' a Carthusian museum gives a general idea of the life devoted to praying and working led still to-day by the 'pères chartreux', among fir-trees, in these surroundings of a marvellous serenity, very suited to meditation.

Some practical details

Access: Gresivaudan (Isère valley) between Grenoble and Chambéry is served by trains (on the left bank) and buses (on the right bank, more interesting for the climber). Bus services run between Grenoble and St Pierre de Chartreuse and Grenoble and St Hilaire du Touvet. An original way to reach Saint Hilaire is the cable-railway of Montfort, between Crolles and Lumbin (it is said to be the steepest in Europe).

Maps: from Institut Géographique National (IGN), scale 1/50000, sheets 'Domène' and 'Montmélian'; secondarily, 'Grenoble' and 'Voiron'. At a scale of 1/100000, no 53 'Grenoble/Mont-Blanc'.

Guide-book: 'Escalades en Chartreuse et Vercors' by Serge Coupé (Arthaud, Grenoble, 1972; pp 480, about 75 FF).

To conclude, one must add that 'Chartreuse' is also a famous liqueur yellow or green, discovered by the monks and made with mountain plants. Today, it is made commercially in Voiron, a big town, in the SW part of Chartreuse but the monks still hold the secret of its composition.