

the route was very much exposed to ice avalanches. Opportunities for a possible retreat were very thin on the whole climb. Descent was long and tiring with a series of rappels (200m) at its end. High concentration of technical difficulties and objective dangers together with high altitude cause the route to surpass the hardest and most famous courses of the Alps or the Caucasus.

Pillar in the right stretches of the NW face of Kohe Škhawr The first ascent was made by Kulis, Waclaw and Wilkonski on 12–16 August, 1977. The height of the whole route amounts to over 2500m of which 2000 account for the pillar itself. To a height of 5800m the route runs up steep easy ice slopes interlaced with some isolated rocks (Grade 4). Higher up, the rock sections (Grade 5) lead to the bottom of a serac barrier (Grade 6, A0). Above the barrier the route goes across very steep ice-fields and over a huge cornice (Grade A0) on to an easy ridge running straight to the summit. All the route is exposed to ice and stone avalanches, just as the central pillar is. A retreat would be very problematical and dangerous, too.

A Whymper pilgrimage

Charles Warren

It was in 1972 that we came down the Val Tournanche to Châtillon one evening and took refuge for the night in the Hotel de Londres where, to our surprise, we found ourselves occupying the very room in which Edward Whymper had lodged more than a century before. We had come from the refugio Mezzalama in the Val d'Ayas over the Breithorn and had dropped down to the Theodule pass and thence to Cervinia, that modern Sodom and Gomorrah of the Alps. There we took the first bus for Châtillon and, unlike Lot's wife, had no temptation to look back. As a young man in my twenties, I had crossed the Theodule pass on my way from Zermatt to Breuil many years before. But nowadays there is no longer romance in this crossing. The path from Cervinia to the pass has been obliterated by the tracks of the snow-cats that career up and down to the Breithorn snow-fields preparing safe runs for the piste bashing visitants of this new Jerusalem. The old chalets of Breuil no longer exist, or if they do, have become engulfed by the concrete and timber faced jungles of buildings so typical of a modern ski resort.

Let into the wall above the balcony leading to Whymper's room at the Hotel de Londres is a spirited sculptural high relief depicting the guide Carrel on high, rope in hand (by gesture) and a bearded Whymper below with knapsack on back looking up at him. An heroic plaque well executed by the sculptor Eugène Mus, father of the well known Valtodensian painter Italo Mus¹ whose beautiful, often Cézanne like, depictions of local peasant life gave us much pleasure when we visited a loan exhibition of his paintings and drawings in the old cheese-tower galleries in Aosta this year.

In the course of our excursions in and around Aosta, that lovely old Roman town in the heart of the Italian Alps from which one can so easily combine the finest mountaineering ambitions with superb off days of culture, we made a pilgrimage to

¹ Benezit, *Dictionnaire des Peintres*.



87 Whympers room (This and next photo: C. Warren)



88 The Wympers Statue

Châtillon to look at the sculptural plaque of Carrel and Whympers once again.

But what a splendid place Aosta is with its Triumphal Arch of Augustus, Roman theatre with the Grand Combin for back-cloth and the Collegiate Church of San Orso with its lovely but neglected cloister. And what ecclesiastical associations. Anselm was bishop there before he came to England; and the local saint, in whose honour the pilgrimage church of San Orso was founded, was probably a Scotsman.² It is a pleasant thought that this saint was held in such veneration that he was given a place amongst the apostles San Pietro and San Andrea on the ridge of mountains known as the Apostoli in the Gran Paradiso National Park; and that he was so popular that a local drink was named after him.³ It was at Aosta that on 2 separate occasions we found ourselves, to our delight, attending international organ festivals in the cathedral there on off days from mountaineering. Evidently the place has had a strong musical tradition over the years. Apparently one of the rare MSS of the great English composer of the Reformation period, John Dunstable, was found at Aosta.⁴

But to get back to Châtillon. The Hotel de Londres is an 18th Century coaching house which was much used in the past by travellers making the crossing of the Grand St Bernard pass. With the construction of the motorway down the Val d'Aosta, however, the traffic by-passes Châtillon and the hotel has now lost something of its former prosperity. It is 3 storeys high and is built round 3 sides of a courtyard. Whympers room, No. 7, is on the third floor of the N wing. The proprietress, Madam Bordon, kindly allowed us to photograph the Carrel-Whympers plaque and then, in a long and fascinating conversation with us over drinks

² King, Rev S. W., *The Italian Valleys of the Alps*.

³ Grappa di St. Orso.

⁴ Marco Pallis, personal communication. Also O.C.M.

in her dining room, gave us a detailed history of the old staging inn. Apparently her family had bought the hotel from the original proprietor, who had previously worked in London (hence its name) in about 1880 at a time when Châtillon was not noted for the excellence of its hostelries. But the new owner quickly made his mark, causing no less an authority than Douglas Freshfield to note that 'the Hotel de Londres has now fallen into good hands and can be thoroughly recommended'.⁵

It was Madame who informed us that the Carrel-Whymper group was the work of the sculptor Eugène Mus, who was clearly a friend of her grandfather who had bought the hotel around 1880. She showed us a set of chairs, a sideboard and an uncomfortable looking settle all of which pieces of furniture had been magnificently carved by the sculptor in the heavy style of the period. Finally, to our surprise and delight, she described how, during the last war, she had personally taken down the cherished plaque from the wall (no mean feat!) and hidden it from the Germans.

There are episodes, unexpected ones, that occur in one's life which leave indelible impressions and this was one of them. Madame was charming and was obviously delighted that 4 strange Englishmen should suddenly appear out of the blue and ask to be allowed to admire the sculptural plaque she had saved from the Nazis.

Nothing could have been more surprising as a climax to our Alpine holiday in the Val d'Aosta than this pilgrimage to the Hotel de Londres at Châtillon with its unexpected revelations and emotive sympathies.

⁵ *AJ* 10 161.

Mountaineering in winter

Some expeditions in the Lake District¹

H. A. Gwynne

The regular habitué of the Alps, who looks forward to the winter months as a period when he cannot indulge in his favourite pastime, and sighs for the return of the summer and the opening of the mountain hotels, may, after all, find some congenial work in the Lake District when the winter snows have accumulated in the gullies, and an ice-axe is a necessity for most expeditions. He may pass some pleasant moments hacking out steps in a hard snow-couloir at angles varying from 45° to 20°. He may have some of the finest rock-climbing to be had anywhere when a few soft, balmy days have melted away the thin incrustation of ice.

The short days of winter are compensated for by the comparatively low elevation of the Lake peaks. In no case is there a mountain which cannot be comfortably ascended and descended within 8 or 9 hours. Indeed, in most cases a man can have a fair amount of climbing and conquer 2 or 3 summits before going down into the valley. For instance, from Wastdale Head the climber can do one of the many routes on the Pillar Rock, can amuse himself among the rocks of Great End, and finish his day by ascending one of the ghylls in the face of Great Gable, and be down again before nightfall.

¹ Reprinted from *Pall Mall Budget* 10 March 1892.