

	reached the summit 2 days later.		J. Imai, M. Katayama, S. Takahashi.
Aug. 2	MALUBITING CENTRAL, 7260m. Karakoram. H. Atsumi, K. Mori, M. Onodera, T. Takahashi.	Aug. 10	SHERPI KANGRI, 7303m. Karakoram. T. Inoue, T. Ogata.
Aug. 4	URDOK I, c 7300m. Karakoram. K. Hub, R. Schauer, H. & L. Schell, H. Zefferer.	Aug. 11	SKYANG KANGRI, 7544m. Karakoram. Y. Fujiohji, H. Najata.
Aug. 11	GASHERBRUM III, 7952m. Karakoram A. & J. Onyszkiewicz, W. Rudkiewicz, K. Zdzitowiecki.	1977	
Aug. 12	TERAM KANGRI, 7463m. Karakoram. K. Kodaka, Y. Kobayashi.	July 13	OGRE (Baintha Blakk), 7285m. Karakoram. <i>C. J. S. Bonington, D. Scott.</i>
1976		Aug. 10	UDREN ZOM (Central), 7078m. Hindu Kush. Japanese expedition.
June 30	BATURA MUSTAGH I, 7785m. Karakoram. H. Bleicher, H. Oberhofer	Aug. 28	LATOK II, 7110m. Karakoram. E. Alimonta, T. Mase, R. Valentini.
Aug. 7	APSARASAS I, 7245m. Karakoram. Japanese expedition.	June or July	KOH-e-SHAN, 7010m. Hindu Kush. Czech expedition.
Aug. 8	SINGHI 7141m. Karakoram.		<i>Addendum AJ 73 244.</i>
		1966	
		Aug. 10	AKHER CHIOH, 7020m. Hindu Kush. R. Goschl, H. Schell.

Turner—Promethean of Alpine painting

Walter Amstutz

Where there is fear there is little love, and so it is with mountains. Until the Middle Ages, and even beyond, man was in awe of them and lacked any desire to depict them.

Even Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, the great Swiss naturalist of the 18th Century, still believed in dragons hiding in mountain caves. Crossing the Alps in the 1740s, the eccentric Horace Walpole described his experience succinctly in staccato style: 'Precipices, mountains, torrents, wolves, rumblings—Salvator Rosa'; and then he added: 'I hope I shall never see them again.' Samuel Johnson, another man of fame from that epoch, defined a mountain in his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) as 'a vast bulk of earth', all of which is far removed from serenity and beauty.

It needed another great mind, that of Albrecht von Haller, Bernese poet-physician-scientist and precursor of Rousseau, to overcome established opinions. His lyrical poem *Die Alpen*, which appeared in 1729 and was translated into some 30

different languages, praised the panoramic beauty of the Alps and the modesty of its mountain dwellers.

If Haller's poem marked the dawn of Swiss tourism, J. J. Rousseau's writings, pleading for a return to nature, had a universal effect on the intelligentsia of his epoch. Their call came to a climax with the first ascent of Mont Blanc by Dr Paccard and Balmat in 1786. De Saussure's ascent, the fourth, in the following year, and his work *Voyages dans les Alpes* were of further immense influence to this end.

Men of art and letters, men of money and nobility followed the fashion of the time and made the Alps the playground of Europe. It was a different playground from what it is, alas, today. It was not yet a shifting of masses, manifesting their presence through noise and leaving the debris of a changing civilization behind them. This is hardly what Haller and Rousseau had in mind. But they could not foresee what the end of their appeal might be, and that eventually 'tourism will corrupt, and mass tourism will corrupt absolutely', to paraphrase Lord Acton's famous dictum. What insight and foresight was disclosed by a tourist who, in the last century, jotted down in a visitor's book in Interlaken: 'Nach der Klasse kommt die Masse'. But we must not despair, we must reconcile ourselves to the fact that another Turner will never return—and that what he called the 'Sublime' has vanished forever.

Mountains had of course been admired and painted by the chosen few before their beauties were universally appreciated and long before Turner's time. Conrad Witz, for one, had depicted the silhouette of Mont Blanc from the Lake of Geneva as early as 1444, some 360 years before Turner painted a similar view. Mountains are in evidence in drawings and paintings by early Venetian, German, Swiss, Dutch and French masters. But their mountains mainly serve as backgrounds to biblical and allegorical themes, to portraits and battlefields, or are part of architectural or idealized scenes. Dürer was an exception, for he made a special study of mountain forms and shapes, before and during his crossing of the Brenner Pass to Italy in 1505; and few have matched Leonardo's study of a threatening Alpine storm, now in the Windsor Castle Collection (c 1515).

The many illustrators of topographical descriptions of Switzerland in the 17th and 18th Centuries had not studied mountains sufficiently and had learnt nothing from Dürer.

An ever increasing flow of tourists called for illustrators and painters to provide records and souvenirs of what they had seen and experienced, and these were supplied by the many Little Masters. The Bernese publisher Wagner engaged Caspar Wolf, a talented *Wandermaler*, to depict the 'glaciers, ice fortresses, waterfalls and mountain crests in their total ruggedness', which he accomplished by relating the minuteness of man to the overpowering dimensions of mountains. He, and the Tyrolese J. A. Koch, in particular with his 2 versions of the Schmadribach Falls (between 1805 and 1820), introduced new values and a fresh approach to Alpine art; and so did 3 early English water-colourists, with whose work Turner was acquainted. They were William Pars, Francis Towne and Robert Cozens, all remarkable pioneers. Towne and Cozens had visited Switzerland some 20 years before Turner. Pars, a friend of Towne, had accompanied Lord Palmerston (whose grandson was the Victorian Prime Minister) on a tour through the Alps as early as 1770. Pars must be considered as one of the earliest mountain painters of importance; his lyrical renderings are a pleasure to the eye.

Mer de Glace, pencil and water-colour by J. M. W. Turner, 1802 (Trustees of the British Museum; photo: W. Amstutz)





By the end of the 18th Century the beauties of the Alps were at last an established fact. Those in search of adventure and inspiration could find it there in abundance: unscaled peaks, eternal snows, glittering glaciers, precarious passes, Alpine pastures, waterfalls and lakes—the whole condensed into an area not too big to absorb and digest. It was scenery that had been there for aeons of forgotten time, waiting to be depicted in its full flood of light and contrasting shadows. No one had ever yet fathomed its total glory. The time had never been ripe for it, but now, when Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851) stepped on to the stage, the moment had arrived.

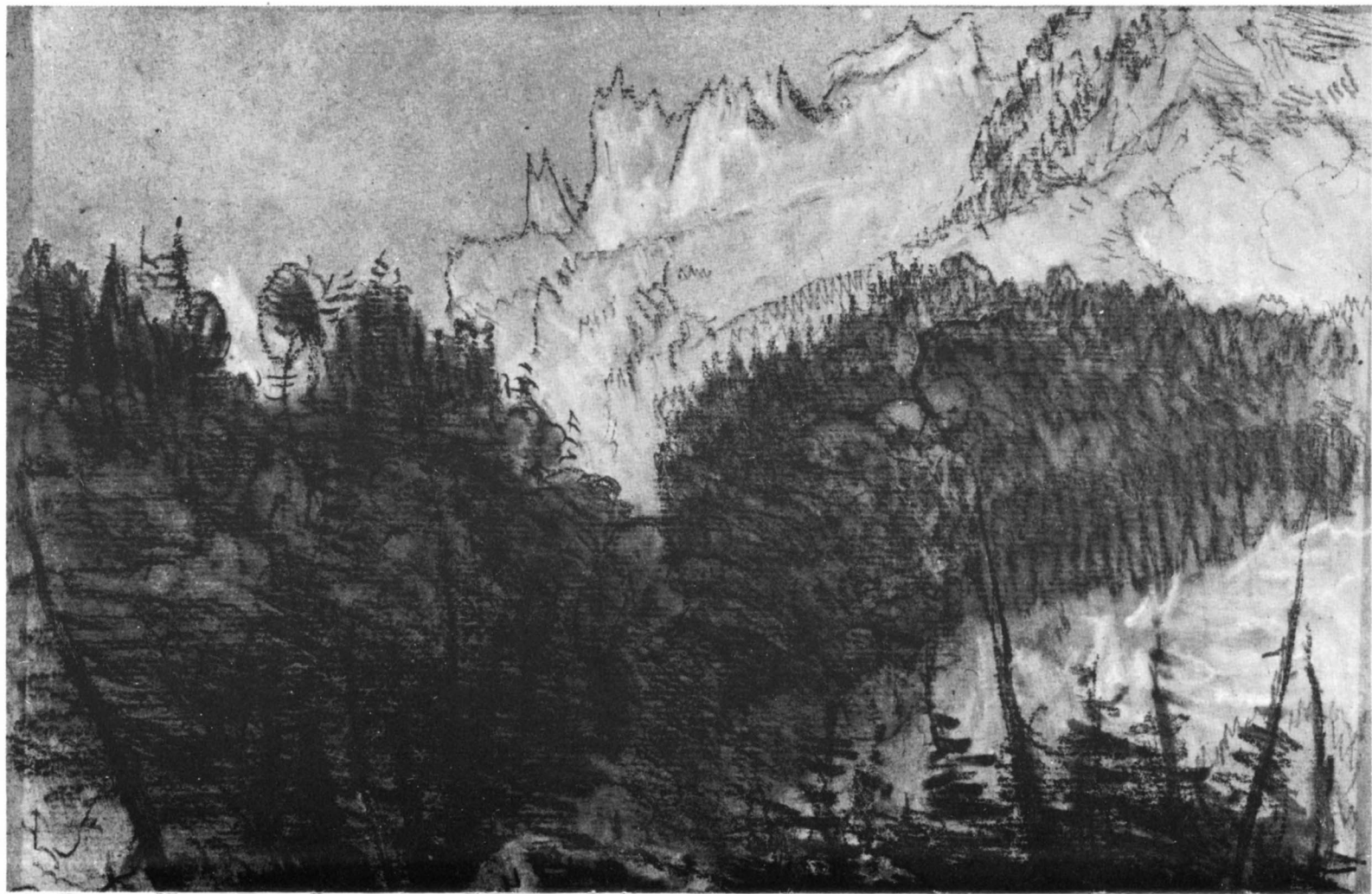
When he was confronted with this revelation for the first time in 1802 he was a young man of 27, already an established landscape and seascape painter and a member of the RA. What he saw was something he had never before experienced, whether in Wales, in the Lake District or in Scotland. It must have made a tremendous impact on his mind, as his renderings reveal to us. It was an impact which Cézanne has described as ‘une sensation forte devant la nature’. It was awe, as well as beauty, that inspired Turner. Mountains can at times be hostile, as many a climber knows from hair-breadth escapes, and Turner sensed it. And apart from that the catastrophic loomed large in his mind, which is evident in many of his paintings and which he showed in *The Avalanche of the Grisons*, one of his very few oil paintings of Switzerland.

Not all mountaineers look at a mountain drawing with the same eyes. Much depends on their artistic sensitivity. Few mountain paintings, if any, can satisfy a climber, who is endeavouring to locate a climber's route, as he can do on a photograph or on a topographical sketch. ‘It is not the literal truth of a theme which is decisive for art,’ Sir Arnold Lunn had stated, ‘but the genuineness of the emotion which that theme inspires and the genius with which that emotion is translated into words, stone or paint, as the case may be.’ And for that reason the relationship of an artist to mountains is different from that of a mountaineer. One is an aesthete, the other an athlete.

It would be difficult to imagine that Shelley or Keats, who wrote poems about Mont Blanc and the Alps, or Byron, who dramatized them in his stanzas, could ever have had the urge to climb any of these peaks. It is equally unthinkable that Brahms, who was inspired by Alpine serenity to compose his C-Minor Symphony, or Wagner, who was led by the plaintive melody of an alphorn to compose *Tristan*, or Turner, Segantini or Hodler, who put their genius into Alpine landscapes, should have had the making of mountaineers in them.

It has been claimed that mountains did not mean much to Turner. But we have only to look at his drawings to have the contrary confirmed, whether he painted them from afar or whether he was close to them and the outcome was a drawing like his grandiose *Mer de Glace* (1802). Here, the Petit Dru and the Aiguille des Grands Charmoz lack none of the characteristic details of their fantastic features, while the whole radiates majestic splendour. Only few, Ruskin said, have the gift of combining facts and art. Turner was one of them, when it suited him. He absorbed the Alpine environment like blotting paper; stored, retained it, and mulled it over; then, at will, transferred it to his drawing paper, giving the impression that his brush had not only been dipped into paint and water, but also into air and light, thus enabling him by means of some magic formula to arrest the moment. Sun and light were God for him.

Glacier and seracs of the Arveiron, water-colour by J. M. W. Turner, 1803
(Collection of Mr and Mrs Paul Mellon, USA; photo: W. Amstutz)



Ruskin's remarks on rendering such mountains are revealing. He had not only made a study of the stones of Venice, but also of those of the Alps, and was no mean artist himself. In his *Modern Painters*, he writes that he found their 'curved cleavage' so confused among others 'that it has taken me ten years of almost successive labour to develop, in any degree of completeness, its relations among the aiguilles of Chamouni; . . . And yet, in his very first journey to Savoy, Turner saw it at a glance, and fastened on it as the main thing to be expressed in those mountains.'

Turner fastened on everything as he saw it, not only on his first visit to the Alps, but equally so on his subsequent journeys in 1836, 1841, 1842, 1843 and 1844. The phenomenal receptiveness of his mind and his retentive memory for colour, shape and form allowed him to conjure up in his studio from his pencil and colour sketches the grandest of Alpine views, which he called his 'finished drawings'. They were in demand by his patrons and were in the taste of his time. Had he not been the genius that he was, the result might have been garish, worthless art; instead of that they are masterpieces: *The Glacier and Source of the Arveiron*, *The Passage of Mount St Gothard*, *The Great Fall of Reichenbach*, *The Blue Righi*, *Goldau*, to mention only a few. We must not forget that they are water-colours and could not be worked over like an oil. It is a further wonder that his hastily coloured studies lost none of their delicacy and spontaneity, whether they were done on the spot, like *The Righi Sunset*, *The Righi at Dawn*, or whether they were inspirations from earlier visits when he had registered the scene in his mind, as is the case with *The Hospice of the Great St Bernard* (visited 1802, painted c 1806).

Turner's energy seemed never to come to an end; he was a tireless traveller and an indefatigable worker. He crossed the Alps backwards and forwards, by cabriolet, on horseback, by boat and on foot; all of which implied much discomfort, as Switzerland then was as famous for its inhospitality as it is today for its hospitality. He crammed his sketchbooks with its peaks and passes, with the lakes and towns in its foothills; he drew on every scrap of paper that was within his reach, recording all, just for the sake of it, or for future elaboration.

For a beautiful landscape, Rousseau wrote in his *Confessions*, 'il me faut des torrents, des rochers, des sapins, des bois noirs, des montagnes, des chemins raboteux à monter et à descendre, des précipices à mes côtés qui me fassent bien peur'. This is not only the epitome of what the Alps implied to him, but also of what they implied to Turner. So much skill and talent in the art of water-colour had never been applied in such profusion by any other artist to this theme. His brush was handed down to no successor, and thus he remains unsurpassed.