

Compared with so many of the splendid and almost superhuman climbs we hear about at the Club, I know that this family chronicle is, with the exception of some of the Graaff climbs, rather small beer. But I have enjoyed assembling it, because it has brought back to me so many good days, so many good friends, and the delight and exhilaration we have all found in the Alps since the day my father first saw the Matterhorn and determined to climb it. And I hope it has also demonstrated that—in the challenge they still offer, the enjoyment they still give—the Alps are *not* yet played out, whatever the Club pessimists were saying in the 1880s.

One hundred years ago

(with extracts from the *Alpine Journal*)

C. A. Russell

‘The weather was clear and unclouded, and as the surrounding hills were completely covered with snow, the view from the top was quite Alpine. Owing to the situation of the mountain, and the lochs by which it is surrounded, a very beautiful feature in the panorama was the effect produced by snowy mountains and sea, almost side by side.’

This description of the scene from the summit of Ben Nevis on 3 January 1882, was recorded by C. D. Cunningham who, on arriving at Chamonix later in the month, was pleased to find that there had been 6 weeks of perfectly fine weather. ‘The winter of 1881-2 was a most exceptional one. On leaving England I had no greater ambition than to cross the Mer de Glace, or possibly reach the Brevent. It was, therefore, a very pleasant surprise to find that the snow was in such good condition that the higher peaks might be attempted.’

Ten days after his arrival Cunningham, accompanied by Léon Simond, Edouard Cupelin and Ambroise Bossoney, completed the 2nd winter ascent of Mont Blanc¹. The summit was reached on 30 January by way of the Grands Mulets hut, the Grand Plateau and the Corridor; Cunningham later wrote that ‘from the corridor to the top took three hours—three hours of hard work. We were in the shade, and at the same time exposed to the wind, which was gradually rising. With one exception this was the only occasion during the entire four weeks we were out that we suffered from cold. The wind seemed to penetrate even my fur cap and muffler, and never shall I forget the contrast when we reached the summit and came into the full range of the sun’s rays; I compared it at the time to going into a greenhouse on a winter’s day. No words can convey any idea of the grandeur of the view. The atmosphere was so wonderfully clear that we saw the distant peaks on the horizon just as sharply defined as if they had been

in a panorama in a guide-book. Not the slightest vestige of mist was to be seen except in the direction of Geneva. It was one of those views which we see but once or twice in a lifetime, which one always remembers and looks back upon.'

The settled weather continued during the early part of the year and on 17 and 18 March, after 2 attempts in February, Vittorio Sella, accompanied by Jean-Anthoine, Louis and Jean-Baptiste Carrel, succeeded in making the first winter ascent and traverse of the Matterhorn. The party reached the Col du Lion at 6 am and began the ascent of the Italian ridge, reaching the Pic Tyndall 4 hours later. 'The passage of the ridge was somewhat awkward, but the rocks of the final peak were free from snow, and the summit was gained at 2 pm. The air was perfectly still and the view cloudless. A flag was hoisted, which was seen from Zermatt. After a short halt the descent of the Zermatt face was commenced, hardly any snow being found on the arête. This side of the mountain was already in the shade, but the way was fairly easy until after the 'shoulder' was passed. From that point numerous serious difficulties had to be overcome, the frozen-in stones giving great trouble. The Swiss hut was reached at 7 pm, and after a very uncomfortable night Zermatt gained the next day. This expedition is beyond a doubt the most remarkable that has ever been made during the winter season, and on behalf of the Alpine Club we most warmly congratulate Signor Sella on his magnificent feat.'

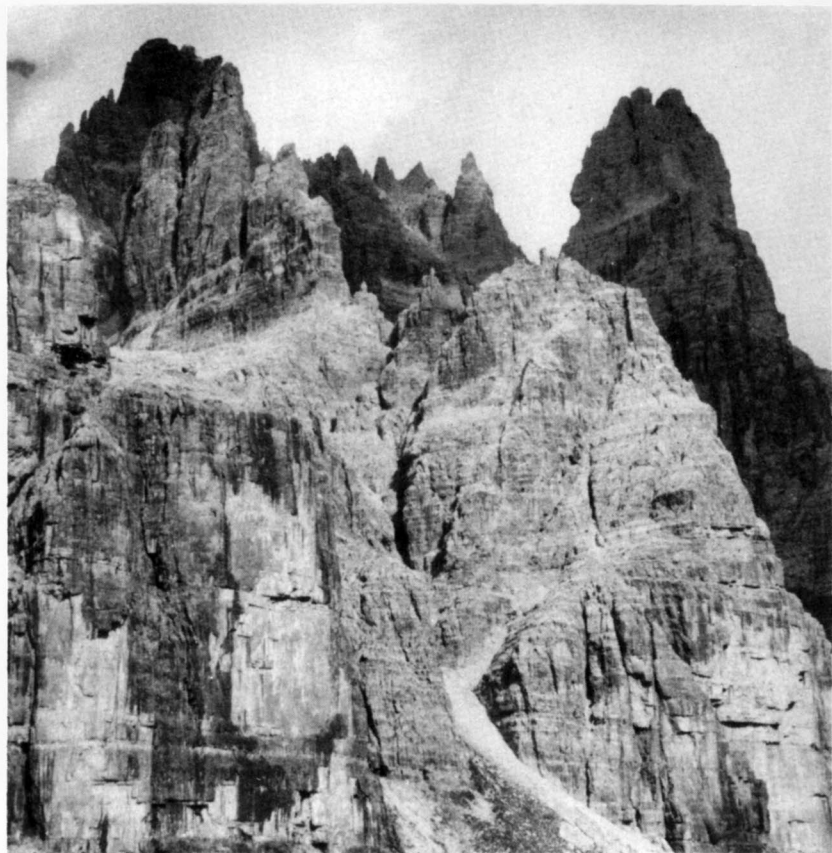
The exploration of mountain ranges in other parts of the world was continued when the Rev W. S. Green arrived in New Zealand early in February with the aim of investigating the Southern Alps and making an attempt to reach the summit of the unclimbed Mount Cook². Approaching from Timaru and the line of the Tasman River on the E side of the range Green, who was accompanied by Ulrich Kaufmann and Emil Boss of Grindelwald, saw ahead 'the great mass of Mount Cook, or Ao-Rangi as it is called in the Maori tongue, its icy peak glittering like a pinnacle of frosted silver against the deep blue sky'.

From a camp on the Great Tasman glacier the party made 2 unsuccessful attempts to reach the summit; the first, by way of the S ridge, ending at a dangerous rock tooth and the 2nd at steep cliffs to the left of the Hochstetter icefall. However, a 3rd attempt, to reach the N side of the Hochstetter glacier by way of the spur descending from the direction of Mount Tasman, was successful and a bivouac was established opposite the main ridge between Mount Cook and Mount Tasman.

On 2 March, after crossing the heavily crevassed Linda Glacier and ascending a dangerous icy couloir swept by avalanches, the party reached the NE ridge of Mount Cook in deteriorating weather at a point high on the mountain but still some way below the summit icecap. Addressing the Alpine Club later in the year Green recalled that 'at 5.30 pm we reached the highest rocks from which an easy slope led up to an iced bergschrund, which starting from the cornice of the arête ran round the cap of the summit from left to right. By bearing away to the left we avoided it, and surmounting the cornice without any difficulty at 6 pm stepped on to the topmost crest of Ao-Rangi'. At this spot, where 'the highest point of



63 *Incident on Mount Cook (Reproduced from The High Alps of New Zealand, W. S. Green)*



64 *The Torre di Brenta, left (this and next photo: C. D. Milner)*

the icecap was about 30 feet higher' and with no view Green wisely decided to descend the highest section of the mountain in the remaining daylight.

While descending the couloir darkness closed in and, as Green later recorded³, the party was forced to spend the night standing 'on a little ledge from which we scraped the snow. It was less than two feet wide and sloped outwards, so that we had to hold on with our hands; and as we were still about 10,000 feet above sea level, it was not all that might be wished for a night's lodging'. Starting at first light on the following day they returned to the bivouac and descended to the Great Tasman Glacier. Although Green and his companions had not stood on the actual summit they had made what may well be regarded as the first ascent of Mount Cook, a fine achievement for the period.

In marked contrast to the settled conditions during the early part of the year the weather experienced in every part of the Alps during the climbing season of 1882 was some of the worst on record and it is not surprising that during much of June and July very little climbing was possible. Nevertheless some expeditions were completed, particularly towards the E end of the chain. In the Brenta Dolomites on 24 June E. T. Compton, with



65 *Dent du Géant*

Matteo Nicolussi, made the first recorded ascent of the Torre di Brenta, while in the Bernina Alps on 19 July the first ascent of Piz Prievlus was completed by Ben Wainewright and J. R. Pennington Legh, with Hans and Christian Grass. In the Bregaglia group 2 of the 3 Torrone peaks at the head of the Forno glacier were ascended for the first time; the Torrone Orientale on 29 July by A. von Rydzewski and R. Paulcke, with Christian Klucker and J. Eggenberger, and the Torrone Occidentale on 12 August by F. Lurani and E. Albertario, with A. Barroni.

Towards the end of July conditions improved slightly and in the Mont Blanc range preparations were made to ascend one of the remaining unclimbed peaks in the Alps. All previous efforts to scale the Dent du Géant, including an attempt to pass ropes attached to rockets over the summit, had failed and both Leslie Stephen and A. F. Mummery were of the opinion that the Dent was inaccessible by any fair means. Finally, on 29 July, the SW summit was reached by Alessandro, Corradino, Alfonso and Gaudenzio Sella, with Jean Joseph Daniel and Battiste Maquignaz. In a letter to the Editor of the *Alpine Journal* Alessandro Sella mentioned that the guides had spent 4 days driving iron stanchions into the rocks of the SW face and laying out some 500 feet of fixed ropes. Sella added that 'the ascent is certainly very difficult, but not dangerous. At a single point the slope is



66 *A section of the panorama taken from the summit of the Matterhorn by Vittorio Sella on 29 July 1882—Dent d'Herens, Mont Blanc, Grand Combin (Photo: Sella family)*

60°, generally from 75° to 80°, and in some parts absolutely vertical. The last ridge which leads to the top is, however, not extraordinarily steep. It was impossible for us, owing to lack of time and rope, to make the ascent of the point nearest the Jorasses. I understand that later in July a party from Chamonix succeeded in scaling it'.

The party in question was that of W. W. Graham who on 20 August, with Alphonse Payot and Auguste Cupelin, reached the NE summit after climbing the SW face by a somewhat different route and using the ropes fixed by the Italians only in the upper section. 'Straight in front of us rose the other tooth, about twenty feet higher, but separated from us by an extremely awkward notch'. Leaving Cupelin on the lower summit Graham and Payot were lowered by him with the rope 'to the little arête between the two teeth'. This was of rock topped with ice and gradually narrowed from a foot to a few inches. Boots had previously been removed, but we were compelled to bestride the arête, which was fortunately short. The other tooth rose perfectly smooth for about ten feet, after which it appeared fairly easy. I as the tallest and lightest mounted on Payot's shoulders, he being astride the ledge. Then with a pull I was up, and with the aid of the rope raised Payot, and in a minute or two more we were on the top'.

All the routes on the Dent du Géant are steep and exposed and it was not

until the turn of the century that the summit was reached without the use of artificial aids.

While the Italians were completing their ascent on 29 July another member of the same family, Vittorio Sella, who had traversed the Matterhorn in March, was climbing the mountain again to take a very fine 12-plate panorama from the summit. This panorama, one of the best ever taken from a mountain top, did much to establish Sella's reputation as one of the greatest of mountain photographers.

Among those who were able to take advantage of the brief improvement in the weather were Charles and Lawrence Pilkington, accompanied on this occasion by Eustace Hulton. In the space of 3 weeks from the end of July this party climbed Piz Bernina without guides and made the first guideless ascents of Piz Kesch and Piz Roseg. They also made the first guideless ascent of Monte della Disgrazia, reaching the summit by a new route up the NE face. Earlier in the year, again with Hulton, the Pilkington brothers had made the first ascent, under snow, of Deep Ghyll on the N face of Scafell.

To the W, in the Graian Alps, the summit of the unclimbed Levannetta, between the E and central peaks of the Levanna, was reached on 7 August by George Yeld and the Rev G. Trundle, with Henri Séraphin and Giovanni Blanchetti. In the Pennine Alps 2 climbs of note were completed during the respite from bad weather. On 3 August W. W. Graham, with Ambros Supersaxo and Theodor Andenmatten, reached the summit of the Lenzspitze by way of the unclimbed ENE ridge. 'Starting from a lofty bivouac above the Fee Gletscher they mounted along the granite ridge which does duty as an arête. The climb was very difficult, and the party were forced on to the face several times'. Today this ridge is often used as an approach to the Nadelgrat traverse, being the most direct way to the summit from the Mischabel hut.

A few days later, on 11 August, J. Stafford Anderson and G. P. Baker, with Ulrich Almer and Aloys Pollinger, made the first ascent of the ENE ridge of the Dent Blanche. After climbing the Zinalrothorn the party spent a day at the Mountet hut enjoying the sunshine, admiring the view and eating well. 'In our list of provisions we had included a fowl, principally to oblige Baker, who was very anxious to show us his culinary powers, which he said were very great, especially in the way of fowl. The art of cooking has no charm for me. I prefer the inglorious part of watching other fellows do this necessary evil, but, as far as I could see, Baker's method simply consisted of dropping the fowl into boiling water and prodding it with a fork at regular intervals, though I must confess that the result amply justified his reputation'.

After reaching the main ridge with some difficulty the party continued slowly upwards. 'For the greater part of the distance, the arête was capped by an almost perpendicular snow wall, crusted with ice, along the base of which we crept with cautious steps, finding precarious footing on dizzy ledges, the interstices filled with snow, the snow wall into which we dug our fingers as we proceeded almost touching our left shoulders, the axe in our right hands planted in every available crevice in the rock below to give



67 *The Vierselgrat of the Dent Blanche (Photo: M. Barnes)*

assistance. Occasionally the continuity of the ledges was broken by steep ice couloirs, varying from 10 to 30 feet wide, necessitating the cutting of large steps; or an incipient gendarme of ice and snow, round which we had to cut our way as well as possible, would intercept us. Sometimes we had to climb the snow cap and work up the other side of it, and in many cases we were out of sight of one another as we wormed in and out in a serpentine manner'.

The last obstacle, a large gendarme, was overcome without difficulty and at 3 pm the summit was reached. 'Our first proceeding was to shake hands all round, then Almer, grasping the situation in its entirety, exclaimed in a loud and solemn manner, "Wir sind vier Esel", a sort of concentrated summary of the day's proceedings, which, it has been suggested to me by a friend, who I hardly need say is not a member of the AC, might be appropriately worked up into a motto for our climb'. The Viereselgrat, as it has since been called, is a long and delicate route notorious for its variable conditions and the party could be justifiably proud of the climb. After descending the S ridge they reached the hut on the Stockji where they found W. E. Gabbett, with J. M. Lochmatter and his son. This meeting was overshadowed by tragedy, as the next day Gabbett and his guides were killed on the Dent Blanche when they fell from the S ridge. In another fatal accident William Penhall, who had made the first ascent of the W face of the Matterhorn 3 years earlier, and Andreas Maurer were killed by an avalanche on the Wetterhorn on 3 August.

In the middle of August the bad weather returned and worsening conditions brought the climbing season to an unusually early close. 'The heavy rains and frequent snowstorms are occasioning serious losses. In the Bernese Oberland the second hay crop is covered by snow a foot deep, and the cattle and their watchers have been compelled to beat a hasty retreat to the valleys. In Appenzel it is as cold as midwinter and a telegram reports that the Simplon Hospice is surrounded by snow 4 feet deep.'

In conclusion it seems fitting to note the following extracts from a newspaper report which appeared on 21 December 1882. 'The Alpine Club have this week celebrated their silver wedding with the mountains. It is just a quarter of a century since a few enthusiastic climbers banded themselves into a society devoted to mountain exploration; and in the course of those 25 years the Club has not only conquered practically all the Alpine summits of Switzerland, but has extended its operations to other regions in all parts of the globe. One active member of the Club, Mr E. Whymper, has not only explored previously unknown districts in Greenland, but has ascended such peaks as Chimborazo and Cotopaxi in the Andes of Ecuador. Others, such as Messrs Grove, Freshfield and Moore, have made expeditions in the Caucasus, and have surmounted the highest summit in Europe; for Mount Elbruz has absolutely dethroned Mont Blanc from the position of monarch of European mountains . . . The Himalayas have not been neglected; and among the most recent conquests is that of Mount Cook, the highest of the New Zealand Alps. The peaks and glaciers of the Tyrol, the Pyrenees and the Carpathians have all received the attention of the Club, and it may be doubted whether, except in the Caucasus, there are more than a very few

summits in Europe above 10,000 feet high that are still left to be ascended. Nor have the achievements of the Club consisted merely in exploring little known ranges and in climbing summits previously supposed to be inaccessible. They have done much in the way of scientific observation and record; and with regard to such matters as glacier motion and the geology of the Alps, they have accumulated material of great value'.

A record which the present members of the Club may look back on with pride.

Notes (1) The first winter ascent was made by Miss M. I. Straton with Jean E. Charlet, Sylvain Couttet and a porter, on 31 January 1876.

(2) 3764m.

(3) In his book *The High Alps of New Zealand*.

(4) The heights of the SW and NE summits are now recorded as 4009 and 4013m respectively.

A winter journey through the western Himalaya

Guy Sheridan

Introduction

In 1977, Odd Eliassen, from Asker in Norway, and I completed a journey on skis across the length of the Zagros mountains in Iran. The experiences of that journey and personal knowledge following visits to Himachal Pradesh in Northern India in 1970 and 1976 convinced us that a similar journey through the Western Himalaya was possible. Indeed the idea was conceived whilst on the journey in Iran and the intervening years were devoted to expanding the original plan not only in scope but also to include a third person—Erik Boehlke an established lawyer from Oslo. After much discussion, most of which was taking place by post across the North Sea, and during several visits to Norway, our concept was evolved. Conscious of the distances and heights involved, we decided on an ultra lightweight journey; we were even more conscious of our intention to enjoy the ski-ing without the distraction of oversized and overweight rucksacks.

Early in the planning the 3 of us had agreed that we would not depend for food on local people in the high valleys through which we would pass. We agreed this for 3 reasons: we wished to maintain our physical performance by having a carefully chosen diet, we wished to avoid the probability of debilitating stomach disorders which local food would cause and more importantly, we wished to avoid having to rely for food on local people who were at a subsistence level existence during the long winter months. Thus