Guidebook Notes

Compiled by Lindsay Griffin

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THE ALPS

A run of dry summers over the last four years has left most of the snow and mixed routes in very poor and/or dangerous condition during the months of July and August. This, combined with the mixed weather that characterized the 1986 summer season in the Alps, led to fewer *Grandes Courses* being attempted and an increased emphasis on the more easily accessible modern rock-routes.

The recent availability in Britain of Michel Piola's excellent Topo Guide to the Mont Blanc Massif has given direction to many, perhaps too many, as each year the area sees more mountaineers in general and an increasing number of 'crag-style' climbers with little need for mountaineering boots. Stories of seven parties climbing in parallel on the 75m dièdre must take considerable pleasure out of an ascent of the Walker Spur and give a false sense of security. In this particular case, the sheer number of climbers meant that, inevitably, rock was dislodged high on the climb, causing a very serious accident.

Enchainement, the practice of linking together routes in a short time—a penchant of several notable continental climbers—continues to produce some amazing performances and is now being 'played' in the winter arena. Unstable conditions prevailed through most of the winter season and, following the prolonged dry autumn, ice-faces generally remained black and bare. The very high winds associated with most of the storms ensured that the ridges were blown clear and allowed André Georges and Erhard Loretan their remarkable achievement of linking 30 peaks from Saas to Zinal in a 19-day February journey.

Grand Pilier d'Angle Neil McAdie and Andy Perkins climbed the N face on 10 July 1986 by the logical combination of the Dufour-Fréhel Route with the Boivin-Vallençant exit. This takes a line to the L of the Bonatti-Zapelli and has as its major feature a narrow gully directly below the sérac barrier. Although probably the quickest and technically the easiest way up the face, the route is objectively dangerous, as anything falling from the Grand Pilier d'Angle sérac will be channelled down the gully. The hanging glacier L of the 'Pear' is not a serious threat once on the route, as it is felt that the 'twisting rib' of the Bonatti-Zapelli would provide adequate protection. On the day of the ascent the freezing level was well down at around 3500m, and no falling rock or ice fragments were experienced. The party encountered a small bergschrund on the approach that was technically harder than anything else on the route and apparently impassable later in the season.

The Dufour-Fréhel with the Boivin-Vallençant exit. 800m ED: Approach as for Route 65 and from the L side of the glacier slope climb the ice-field between the buttress and the 'twisting rib' for 200–300m (45°–50°) until the central rock-wall is reached. Trend L up steep mixed ground for two or three rope-lengths until the gully line can be seen above. Follow the gully for four or five pitches, the second being the steepest (70° and 5m wide). At the top a 50m high sérac barrier extends a long way to the R and about 100m to the L. Pass it on the L (45°–50° ice) to reach the snow/ice slopes above the Cecchinel-Nominé Route and climb up this for about 200m to the Peuterey Ridge.

(7h from the bergschrund. The steep mixed ground was considered similar to an easier-angled version of Orion Direct's middle pitches, and the hardest section of the gully about Scottish 4.)

Mont Blanc du Tacul, Cecchinel Pillar, Route 123 Richard Emerson and Roger Payne reached the upper section of this route via a variation start from the Albinoni-Gabarrou Couloir which involved four rope-lengths on excellent ice and mixed ground. They found high-quality climbing in exposed situations maintaining interest right to the very end and feel the route to be far better than is suggested by the guidebook description. 12 August 1985. 600m TD.

Start by climbing the easy (40°/45°) snow-slopes of the Albinoni-Gabarrou Couloir, and where these appear to be ending and just above a branch leading off R in the main couloir, take steepening snow and ice up L for 50m. Further mixed climbing, trending L, leads in 100m to the crest of the pillar.

On sound rock, climb at first on the crest, then on the R side for three pitches (III/IV-). A long pitch leads back to the crest at some broken ledges below an impressive-looking and compact pillar. Climb this direct by a system of cracks in one long pitch (IV+/V) with an awkward exit in icy corners. Follow the snowy crest with several rock steps (III), turning difficulties on the R. The ridge becomes very thin and an abseil leads to a short horizontal section. Easy climbing on very broken rock eventually gives way to the final snow-slope and an easily turned cornice.

Mont Blanc du Tacul, Chère Couloir, (N Face Facet, p182) This ever-popular couloir on the R side of the rock triangle now has a pair of bolts (considered unnecessary) at each of the three main belays.

The 1986 February–May edition of the French magazine *Vertical* gives a comprehensive guide to the ice-climbing possibilities in this area.

Aiguille du Peigne M Moran and M Vesely climbed a direct route up the NW face between routes 54 and 55 in Vol II. This follows the approximate line of the Mazars-Rébuffat 1967 route which was partially aided and appears to have fallen into disuse. A topo of the all-free version *Echec et Mat* (TD+ 180m VI b/c) has been included.

Aiguille de Roc Martin Moran recommends the combination of the Cordier Pillar, the upper SE ridge and the traverse of the Roc-Grépon Col as a magnificent mountain expedition of TD+ standard. His topo is included in these notes for comparison.

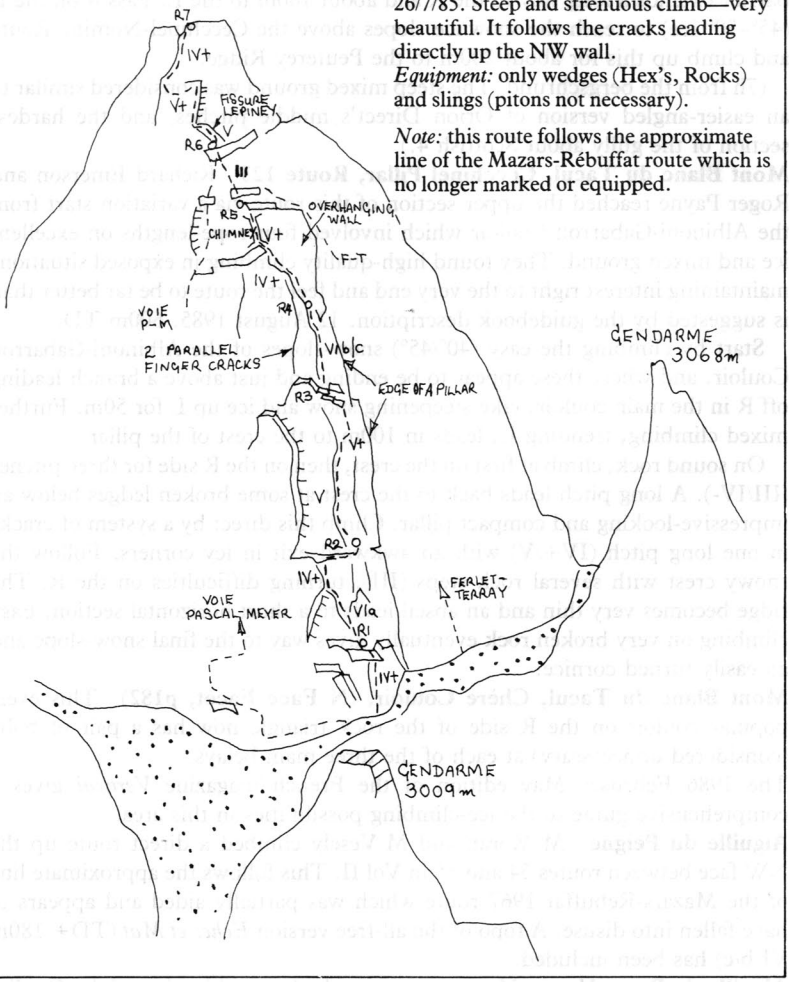
The letterbox manoeuvres mentioned in Route 84 of Vol II are unnecessary, and the description should now read 'from the summit make two abseils down the NW side on to a snowy platform above the Roc-Grépon Col . . .' The 10m

Upper NW Face of Aiguille du Peigne 3192m

Voie 'Echec et Mat' TDsup/180m/VIb/c

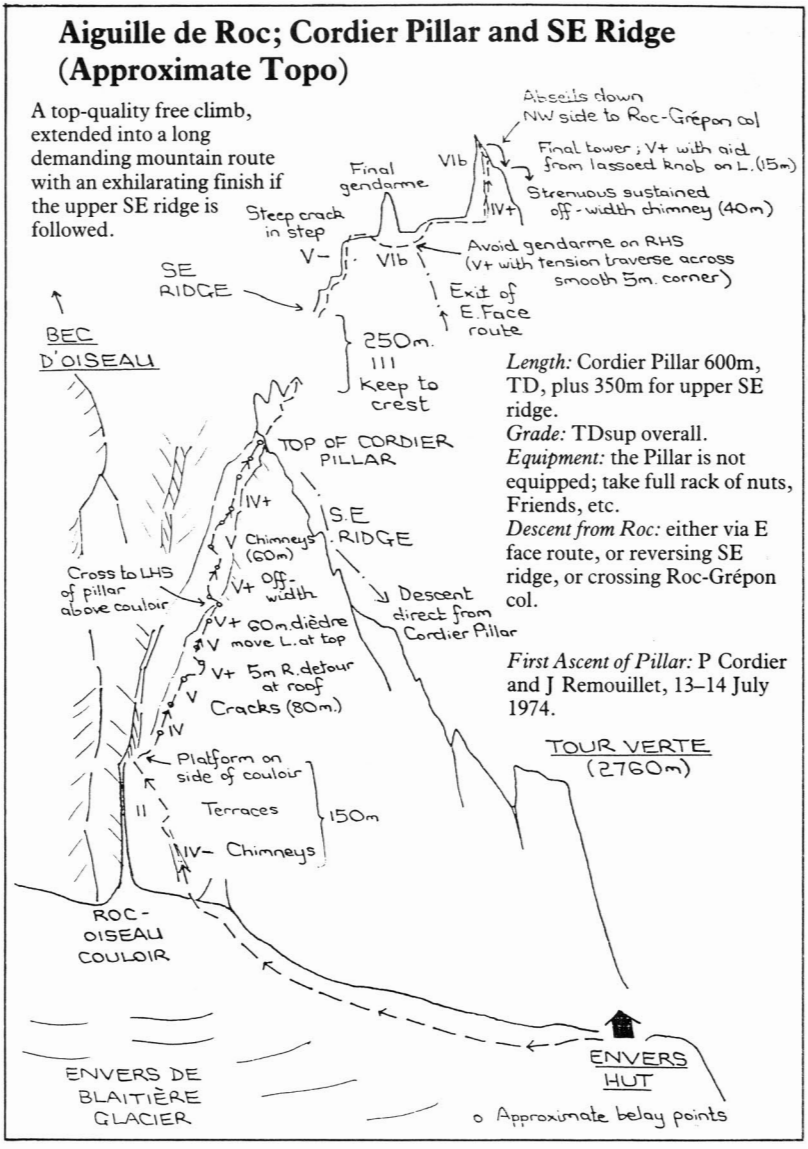
First entirely free ascent:
M Moran/M Vesely (British/Czech), 26/7/85. Steep and strenuous climb—very beautiful. It follows the cracks leading directly up the NW wall.
Equipment: only wedges (Hex's, Rocks) and slings (pitons not necessary).

Note: this route follows the approximate line of the Mazars-Rébuffat route which is no longer marked or equipped.

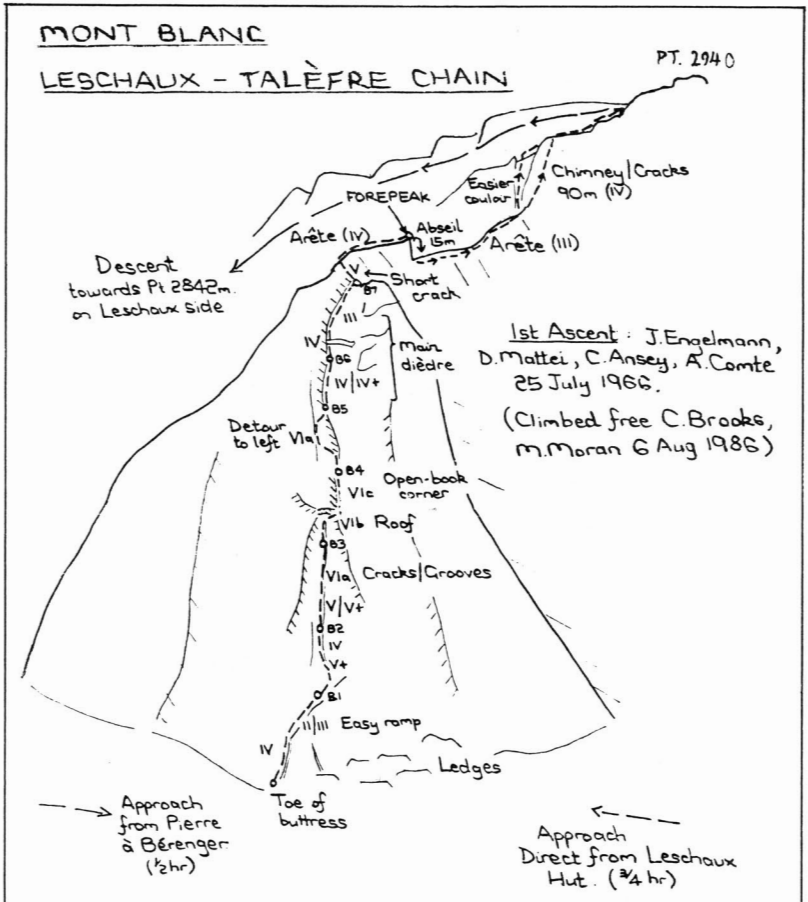


overhanging dièdre on the far side of the col is VIa free or V and Ao with the pegs in place. After reaching the 'easy slabs' above, there is a line of cracks and shallow chimneys (II and III) escaping leftwards to reach the SSW ridge of the Grépon just above the 'smooth groove'. This variant avoids climbing the upper pitches of the Mer de Glace face.

Aiguille de Roc; Cordier Pillar and SE Ridge (Approximate Topo)



Aiguille du Tacul Route 111 in Vol II describes the normal route commencing at the Requin Hut and crossing the badly crevassed glacier of the Périades. This is very rarely done. A recommended and much safer itinerary is to reach the highest point of the dry moraine on the W bank of the Périades Glacier from a camp or bivouac at 'Le Lac du Tacul' (2179m). This gives a fine outing to a superb viewpoint. Routes to the peak via the Glacier du Capucin from the



Leschaux Hut (Vallot Nos 111 and 127) are direct and interesting but can only be recommended under good snow/ice cover such as prevails at present in spring and very early summer. The flanks of the couloir become very loose in dry conditions and do not offer a safer alternative. The grading is AD.

Mont Gruetta, North Face, Central Couloir This has been the scene of several British winter attempts in the past and should not be confused with the Gabarrou-Grassi Route which lies well to the R of the face. The first ascent was

made under cold and snowy conditions which facilitated climbing the ice-covered slabs at the base of the route.

From the Triolet hut reach and cross the horizontal glacier to the centre of the face. Climb the initial easy ice-gully directly below the ice-field, then reach the latter in four hard mixed pitches (Scottish 5/5+). Follow the ice-field for 200m continuing up a snow-gully to below 2m wide overhanging chimneys where the couloir bends to the R and forms a large compact slabby R wall. Above and L is the final headwall.

Climb up L for four mixed pitches (Scottish 5/5+) to the base of a gully. Climb this for two pitches (Scottish 5), then exit through a cave on to the final wall. Two more pitches (V) lead to the E ridge from where the summit is easily reached. (17h. An uncomfortable bivouac was made on the final headwall.)

('Corecrazion'. M Charlton and J Sylvester, 4–5 September 1986. 750m ED/ED+.)

Aiguille de Pierre Joseph, Pte 2842m This lies at the cornerstone of the Leschaux and Talèfre glaciers, and the SW face (Englemann-Comte; Vallot No 365) gives a very fine training rock climb, easily reached from the Leschaux hut, yet very rarely done. The Vallot description is accurate save that the route can be climbed free with the crux roof at V+ and the dièdre above IV+. The overall grading remains at D.

Pte 2940m SSW Face, Ansey-Comte Route This razor-sheared buttress of deep red granite gives an excellent seven-pitch rock-climb to the forepeak. Martin Moran and Choe Brooks made probably the first free ascent on 6 August 1986. Only a few old pegs remain *in situ* and a full rack of nuts and Friends is recommended. The overall grading would probably equate to British E3 and a full topo is included in these notes.

In descent take a long diagonal line down grassy ledges and terraces on the Leschaux side to the brèche immediately below the summit of Pte 2842m from which an abseil of 20m on the Talèfre side leads to easy-angled rock-slabs and scree (by mid-season these are usually snow-free and can be easily negotiated in EBs). By following the scree to the Talèfre moraine and joining the Pierre à Bérenger track it is possible to avoid any contact with the ice on the Talèfre Glacier.

(Vallot No 394 About 300m ED VIc or VIa and Ao.)

The following observations were made by Roger Payne in the summer of 1985.

Les Droites, NE Spur, Route 53 In recent years parties have been finding this rather hard for the grade. Variable conditions and a number of options in the line taken at several points have always led to a wide range of opinions. It is felt that the guidebook description could be improved by the following:

p79, line 7

. . . Climb the snow-crest to the foot of a bulge barring access to an icy couloir. Climb this (awkward) and the couloir above in two pitches (80m). Climb diagonally R on snow or ice for 30m to where a couloir leads back L to the crest. Continue up the crest over several short steps to the foot of a buttress of smooth slabs.

Traverse on to the N face along icy ledges to the foot of an obvious icy

couloir. Climb this and reach the crest via either a recessed overhang on the L or steep ice to the R (*c* 3575m).

Slightly on the R of the crest climb a chimney with large overhanging blocks to a snowy platform. Climb some large broken blocks for 20m, then traverse horizontally R along ledges and flakes for 40m to the edge of a steep ice-slope. Traverse horizontally across the slope for 40m to an area of rocky outcrops and climb up to the foot of a deep icy chimney. The chimney is very steep and can be climbed direct or with variations on the L or R (this can constitute the crux of the climb). After two pitches an open area of easy snow and ice is reached, and a steeply rising traverse R leads to a gap in the NE spur below the final ridge (*c* 3775m).

Aiguille du Chardonnet, North Couloir, Route 124 Because of the formation of a hanging sérac it was not possible in 1985 to climb directly up to the couloir from the bergschrund. The latter was crossed as for Route 125 and a rising traverse made to the R on snow. It was felt that in good conditions the length of the difficulties on this route would not merit the overall grading of full TD.

GREECE

Astraka — Greek Ice (G Sfikas, *The Mountains of Greece*, pp58–69.) Astraka (2436m) is part of the Gamila Massif in the Northern Pindos and lies close to the Albanian border. These are large 'escarpment' peaks having long gentle southern flanks and dolomitic limestone N faces, which receive varied attention from rock-climbers during the summer months. In winter there is a small but growing fraternity of ski-tourers enjoying the three to four metres of snow that fall on the high peaks.

As the weather is generally good, a large freeze/thaw action develops excellent snow and ice conditions, with first-class névé lying up to angles of 70°. Pure ice-climbing pitches consist of thinly covered slabs, so ice-screws are unnecessary and rock protection is generally good. A reasonable selection of rock pegs, wires plus a deadman will suffice. Good conditions may not arise before mid-February, and it is doubtful whether night-time temperatures will be below freezing after mid-April.

Jan Solov and Lindsay Griffin climbed two new winter routes from a base in the Greek Alpine Club refuge on the Astraka Col.

31 March 1986 NW Face-Couloir, approx. 400m, TD, 15 roped pitches, Scottish 4.

2 April 1986 NNW Face-Couloir/Ridge, approx. 400m, D/D+ 13 roped pitches, Scottish 3.

The first section of the latter was first climbed by a Greek party on 14 March 1986; the E face has considerable scope for shorter routes. The cornices are huge, and for these a snow-shovel proved invaluable.

THE HIGH ATLAS—MOROCCO

Although probably well known to Moroccan habitués, the following information, based on a visit in April 1986, does not appear in print and, used in conjunction with the West Col Guide, may be of assistance to visitors of the eastern peaks of the Toubkal Massif (see comments in *AJ88*, 206, 1983).

Oukaimeden To clarify the situation with regard to the CAF hut: this operates as a ski chalet from December to April inclusive, and rates are much higher than at other CAF huts in the region (21 dh as opposed to 8 dh for AC card-holders). During the season it can often be extremely crowded—Morocco whilst producing few climbers holds a very large skiing fraternity—whilst out of season it is possible to cook one's own food, no restaurant service or heating is provided and the cost is reduced to 12 dh/night.

Thoroughly recommended under the 'Trekking Category' is the walk from here over the Tizrag Col (2668m) and down to the Lower Imenane Valley and Asni. This passes through several picturesque and steeply terraced villages where the inhabitants, for once less accustomed here to foreign groups, do not constantly hassle for cigarettes, dirhams or *bon-bons* and are helpful in giving directions. Lightly loaded, the journey could possibly be achieved in five to six hours.

There is no CAF hut now at Timichi in the Ourika Valley.

Angour (3616m), The North Pillar, c 250m Although at first sight quite impressive, this pillar is in fact relatively broken and, in the upper section, distinctly friable. The first third is usually avoided by an open gully on the R flank bearing L near the top to reach the notch below the steeper upper section. (The *Vire* leads L from here along the NE face to the plateau.) This is a pity as it contains the best rock on the climb; delicate slabs slightly L of the crest (III/IV−) lead to an amphitheatre. Move L to the arête and follow this (II) to the notch. Above, it is difficult to follow the French description, which (it would appear) is rather over-graded at III and IV−. The crest is well-defined for the first 50m or so, after which slant R and after a short slabby corner move back L to a depression. Do not take the obvious easy couloir out R but slant L to the steep crest and follow this to easier ground and the summit.

South Face A route was climbed on the S face following the pillar to the R of the 'White Ridge', which may have been climbed before (if not, quite understandably so!), but had not been repeated for quite some time. The first 300m comprise easy scrambling with wide ledges separated by short rock-walls. An obvious diagonal ramp ascends R to the crest of the pillar. This rises in a series of steps towards the plateau, the only real difficulty occurring on the penultimate 'tower' where an awkward gangway leads R to a bulging chimney with a slabby L wall (IV and V−).

Grouden Col (3090m) The best track (all are steep and tedious) on the Oukaimeden side begins approximately halfway up the main narrows leading directly to the Tizi n'Ouadi and slants L all the way, crossing three rocky spurs, to the col.

Aksoual (3903m) The N face of this mountain is 1300m. A route was climbed to the L of the NNE ridge. Follow the central couloir to *c* 3000m, then work L up a series of shallow gullies, short ice-pitches (Scottish 2) and some mixed ground to reach the bottom of the rocky spur falling directly from the summit (*c* 3600m). The first steep section can be climbed directly on slightly friable, slabby rock (III+/IV−), thereafter scrambling leads to the final tower which, though steep, gives easy broken climbing (II).

Anrhemer (3892m) Possibly the best rock in the region outcrops on several

facets of this peak. Despite reports to the contrary, the E and (especially) S faces are very broken, and the rock looks no better than elsewhere. Granite of a rough, red consistency appears on some parts of the main ridge and in fine towers on the central N spur. The classic traverse is most logically and conveniently done from the Tacheddirt Col by an ascent of the NE ridge and descent of the W ridge to the Tizi n'Tigourzatine (3680m). Climbing directly on the crest throughout, there were still no pitches that would warrant grade III.

In April approaches/couloirs were of good névé, well frozen at night while ridges/buttresses remained generally snow-free—similar to the Alps in summer with no glacial problems. The weather is generally fine, though a very cold wind often blows from the Sahara and a cloud inversion can cover the northern slopes. The little good rock that exists takes the form of compact slabby walls that are often totally protectionless. There is no reason, for instance, for dismissing the WSW ridge of Bou Iguenouane (3882m) as 'not particularly interesting', when it is no different from most of the other crests. On all the above peaks it is felt that the numerous gully lines would offer snow and ice ascents in all categories of difficulty in the depth of winter when temperatures often reach −20°C.

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