AREA NOTES

The Alps 1987

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These notes are intended to complement the Alpine Club Guidebooks. Lindsay Griffin would welcome further information and new route descriptions for publication in these pages and the forthcoming guidebook to the Mont Blanc Range at: 2 Top Sling, Tregarth, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 4RL.

The 1987 summer season, typified by the tragic flooding at Annecy and elsewhere, was considered by most activists to be very disappointing. The perennial Patrick Gabarrou continues to explore the western range, discovering quality climbing of some technical difficulty on both rock and ice, in overlooked corners.

However, as in recent years, most ambitions centred on the technical and non-serious rock route (for which there is still considerable scope in the Mont Blanc massif), together with the easy to middle grade mixed climb. Most of the popular rock routes, and indeed some that are not so popular, now sport a fixed abseil descent (often two bolts for each anchor), considerably reducing the seriousness of the enterprise and the need for greater mountaineering ability.

Work is in progress on a new guidebook to the Mont Blanc range and it is thought that, in the interim, an update on the current hut situation in some areas will prove useful.

Robert Blanc Hut (275cm)

A privately owned building with room for 40, which is situated on the S side of the Aiguille des Lanchettes, at the foot of the Central Spur. Conveniently placed for routes on the S side of Mont Tondu and the Aiguille des Glaciers. It is guarded in summer and offers a meal service.

From La Ville des Glaciers (reached via Bourg-Saint-Maurice and Les Chapieux), follow the unmade road to the Lanchettes chalets (1970m; ¾–1h). Continue on a good track towards the Lanchettes Glacier and climb up right to the hut (2h).

Conscrits Hut (273cm)

An old and rather inadequate building belonging to the CAF. It is situated on

the right bank of the Trélatête Glacier and, although officially only housing 40 people, normally has to contend with twice this number. It is guarded in summer and offers a meal service, remaining unlocked for the rest of the year.

From the Trélatête Hotel (1970m) follow the footpath east, taking the left branch to reach the terminal moraines of the Trélatête Glacier (45min). Continue up the central moraine until below the Tré la Grande ice-fall, where the glacier makes a prominent bend to the left. Reach the rocks on the left where conspicuous red paint-marks indicate the start of a good path. Follow this, later traversing scree and grassy slopes (cairns), to the hut (2½h).

Eccles Bivouac Huts (3850m)

In addition to the original wooden shelter with room for six (protected by an overhanging block), there is, about 30m below, a new metal hut with room for nine.

Col de la Fouche Bivouac Hut (3680m)

The old hut was replaced in 1985 by a new building, which houses 10 people.

Trident Hut (3690m)

This is always open and occasionally has a resident warden in July and August. It officially holds 25, but generally has to contend with far more. Cooking facilities are available, but one should not rely on gas being in stock.

Freboudze Bivouac Hut (2363m)

This was dismantled in 1986 and now resides in the Abruzzi Museum of Courmayeur.

Gianni Comino Bivouac Hut (2430m)

This recently-constructed building with room for nine is well placed for routes on the SE side of Mont Gruetta and the rock walls flanking the Gruetta Cirque. The property belongs to the Mondovi section of the CAI and is always open. There is no cooking equipment.

From the car park near the Arnuva restaurant (1769m) in the Val Ferret, continue along the track towards the Col Ferret for a few minutes where a left fork, signposted to the Gianni Comino Bivouac, leads to a bridge across the river. The path, though often indistinct, is well marked by cairns and red paint-flashes. Continue through a small wood (larch, rhododendrons and alpine rosemary!), then climb steeply up the crest of the moraine to reach a little valley which can often be snow-covered until late summer. Go easily left, up ledges and short walls, to reach the crest of the SE shoulder of Mont Gruetta. Bear up left over bands of rock and small grassy ledges to reach the hut (2–2½h).

Point 2802m

A short rock route has been recorded on the SE face of this small peak which lies to the south of Pic Gamba at the foot of the S ridge of the Aiguille Noire de Peuterey:

Grand Design 156m of climbing. VII/VII+.
First Ascent: P Cresswell, D Hope and A Penning, 1–2 August 1987.

Start at the right-hand side of the wall and, after an easy climb to the highest grassy ledge below a curving crackline, there are six fairly short pitches of excellent climbing on perfect granite. After following the crackline, cross the overhang and continue up vague grooves to a second overhang where an obvious ramp leads up to the right. Above the ramp climb corners on the left to the top. (The climb, with four pitches of British 5c, relates to E3 and sports bolt belays at the end of each pitch.)

Józef Nyka adds:

Grandes Jorasses – Pointe Croz

One of the most notable climbs of the last season in the Alps was the second ascent of the 'No siesta' route by the Yugoslav, Tomo Česen. He waited for suitable weather until late September. The climb was made solo on 29 and 30 September 1987, taking 14 hours. Tomo reports that it was more serious and difficult than any other ascent he has made up to now. The 1200m route (some 40 pitches) follows the left side of the Croz Spur, on ice, rock and mixed ground with continuous difficulties of UIAA VI and VI+, with some sections of A1–A2 and an overhang of VII–. Because of the predominance at this time of year of ice formations (up to 90°), crampons were used on four-fifths of the route. The crux section was in the middle of the face – vertical slabs which took him four hours to overcome. The 'No siesta' was first climbed on 21–23 July 1986 by two Slovaks, Stanislav Glejdura and Ján Porvaznik (UIAA VII–, A1–A2, 90°).