Area Notes

COMPILED BY A V SAUNDERS

The Western Alps 1988

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(*Plate* 102)

A prolonged spell of fine weather during August allowed British parties to complete a variety of routes in the Mont Blanc range. Most of the activity, however, again took place on the easily accessible, less serious and often heavily overcrowded rock walls which now offer some outstanding modern classic free climbs. At higher altitudes, Rob Durran and Jerry Gore repeated the Gabarrou-Long route on the Red Pillar of Brouillard, finding the free climbing to be less technical than that noted by the first ascensionists but having considerable problems with the hard aid pitch (first free climbed by John Sylvester in 1986!). They were not amused to find their car vandalized and equipment stolen on returning to the Val Veni parking lot – an occurrence which is now distressingly common on this side of the range and is certainly not unheard-of on the other. They also completed the Guides' Route on the Dru and thought it an excellent two-day outing, with only one or two sections on less-than-sound granite. The route was climbed virtually free as far as the 'Niche', after which an overnight storm dictated a more traditional approach.

Far from the madding crowd, on the quiet walls of Petit Mont Gruetta above the Frébouze glacier, Tony Penning and Peter Cresswell discovered a new line up slabs and grooves on the open face to the right of the Emery route. They found good quality climbing, especially in the lower third, with difficulties up to VII; a description will be included in the forthcoming Guide. There are now at least six routes on this slabby face, perhaps the best being the 1983 Grassi-Meneghin (V+). The vertical interval attributed to some climbs in the past is thought to be rather exaggerated.

At the time of writing the foundations of the Trident hut are far from stable: prospective clientèle are recommended to use the Col de la Fourche hut, or risk an early and somewhat unpremeditated descent to the Brenva glacier.

Unusually, the Dauphiné retained a lot of snow, and pure ice routes remained in superb condition until well into August. British parties climbed a number of these, and at least one new route was created. Not for the first time, a party completing the classic Gervasutti route on the NW face of the Ailefroide found it hard, loose and frightening.



102. N face of Brèche du Glacier Noir. (Ailefroide Orientale L, Ailefroide Centrale R. The brèche is the gap to the R of the Ailefroide Orientale). (p 229)

North Face of the Brèche du Glacier Noir (Dauphiné)

A very steep piece of ice climbing taking the obvious shallow couloir that snakes down from the upper snow slopes, immediately below the brèche. The difficult middle section remains in the shade all day and is protected from stone-fall by a rock wall to its left. Belays are not easy to arrange and the climbing is reminiscent of routes on the Minus face of Ben Nevis.

First Ascent: L Hardy and N Parks, 17 July 1988, c500m, ED inf.

Follow the wide couloir of the Marmier-Rabet route on the N face of the Arêtes and where this forks, after 150m, branch left (the Marmier-Rabet route takes the right fork) and reach the 250m rock wall in the centre of the face. Climb a vertical ice smear in two 50m pitches to a shallow couloir. Four more pitches of gradually easing difficulty lead to the upper slopes and the brèche is gained after a further 100m (11h from the bergschrund).

Descent: Reach the summit of the Ailefroide Orientale easily in 20min, then follow the normal descent route to the Sélé hut (2½h).

Józef Nyka adds:

Rocchetta Alta (2412m) (Eastern Dolomites)

A Polish team composed of Władysław Kacorzyk, Jacek Kantyka and Janusz Skorek completed the first winter ascent (and probably second ascent) of the Martini route via the N face. Attempts on 9 and 11–12 February 1988 failed in bad weather at 80 and 120m height. Ropes were left. On 14 February they started the final push. On the 16th a shelf at the base of the overhanging upper part was reached where the team spent three nights, equipping the crux pitches via the great overhangs. Returns to the tent on the shelf demanded acrobatic manoeuvres. On 19 February they reached easier terrain and the summit ridge. The last bivouac was on the E side of the ridge.

The term N face really refers to the North Pillar of the Rocchetta Alta (survey point 2309m). It is some 750m high and has 25 pitches of UIAA V, VI, A3. Only three pitches are easier than V. There is no sun on it at all during the winter. The route was first climbed on 2–6 September 1978 by S Martini, P Leoni and M Tranquilini. There are seven other routes on the face. The Rocchetta Alta di Bosconero is located in the eastern part of the Dolomites – north of Longarone and Belluno. A good 'Base Camp' is the Bosconero hut at the foot of the mountain.

Because of the high technical difficulty of the climb and the hard wintry conditions during the ascent, this was one of the most notable achievements of the 1988 winter in the Dolomites.

Lindsay Griffin would welcome further information and new route descriptions for publication in these pages at: 2 Top Sling, Tregarth, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 4RL.