One Hundred Years Ago

(with extracts from the Alpine Journal)

C A RUSSELL

(Plates 78–81)

> Heavy snowfalls in December had made the conditions rather different from the previous year, and a week's 'Föhn' wind made mountaineering at first impossible. So soft was the snow that it took us 8 hrs to get up the Faulhorn, which we had done the previous year in a little over three. Everything comes, however, to the man who waits – even mountains – and on January 6 our patience was rewarded by a change of weather, the precursor of as brilliant a week, I should think, in point of weather, as was ever seen at Grindelwald in winter.

The splendid weather, described by Theodore Cornish, which was experienced in the Bernese Oberland during the second week of January 1890 was immediately utilized by the climbing parties staying at Grindelwald, and within a few days several climbs of note had been completed. On 7 January C W Mead and G F Woodroffe, with Ulrich Kaufmann and Christian Jossi, made the first winter ascent of the Eiger, reaching the summit by way of the SW flank and W ridge. 'Much step-cutting was required, but otherwise there were no serious difficulties. The weather was so perfect that through the telescope of the "Bear" a guide could be seen on the summit in the act of striking a match in the approved Swiss fashion and handing it to his "Herr", who, after lighting his pipe, let it burn out.' On the same day Cornish, who on arrival at the Bergli hut had been disappointed to find that he could not attempt the Eiger from that direction, succeeded with Hans and Ulrich Almer in reaching the summit of the Jungfrau. On 8 January Cornish and his guides climbed the Gross Fiescherhorn, a feat repeated by the other party two days later.

In February W A B Coolidge and Frederick Gardiner arrived in Grindelwald where they enjoyed three weeks of fine weather. 'Bright sunshine gladdened our eyes every morning and lasted far longer than in January, so that we were not merely able to have our lunch in the open whenever we liked, but to lounge on benches outside the house, in both cases being forced occasionally to seek for shelter in the shade against a sun which was at times overpowering.' Coolidge, who recalled the charm of their arrival by sleigh, 'could not help regretting that this delightful three hours' drive will soon be entirely superseded by an hour's run in the train, as the railway up the valley is to be opened on July 1 next.'

First winter ascents were also completed in other districts. In the Bernina

Alps on 27 February W H Bulpett and J H Wainewright, with the brothers C C and H C Grass, climbed the E peak of Piz Palü in fine but intensely cold weather, with a bitter wind. Two weeks later, on 13 March, the summit of the Presanella in the Adamello group was reached by Orazio de Falkner and Count Armandi Avogli.

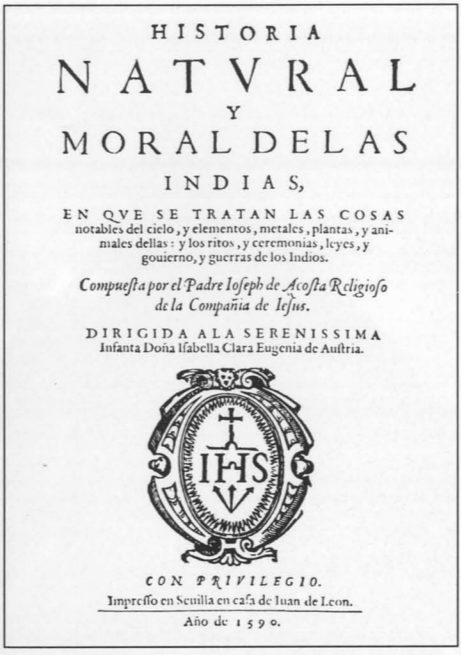
The winter sunshine was followed, in all regions of the Alps, by long periods of unsettled weather which, with the exception of one fine spell in July, continued without interruption to the end of the climbing season. Many routes on the higher peaks were out of condition throughout a summer which was notable for several violent storms, and all in all it was not the best of years for climbing. Nevertheless many determined parties were active in all the principal regions and a surprising number of new ascents were completed.

In the Mont Blanc range an early success was achieved by Ludwig Purtscheller who on 17 June made the first ascent, solo, of the distinctive aiguille above the Tour glacier which bears his name. On 23 July C H Pasteur, his two sisters Isabel and Mary Pasteur and Claude Wilson, with Auguste Cupelin made the first ascent and traverse of La Nonne, the lowest of the three peaks on the ridge between the Aiguille Verte and the Aiguille du Moine. A few days later, on 31 July, V Attinger, A Barbey and H Pascal, with Justin and Joseph Bessard reached the summit of the unclimbed Petit Darrey, above the Saleina glacier.

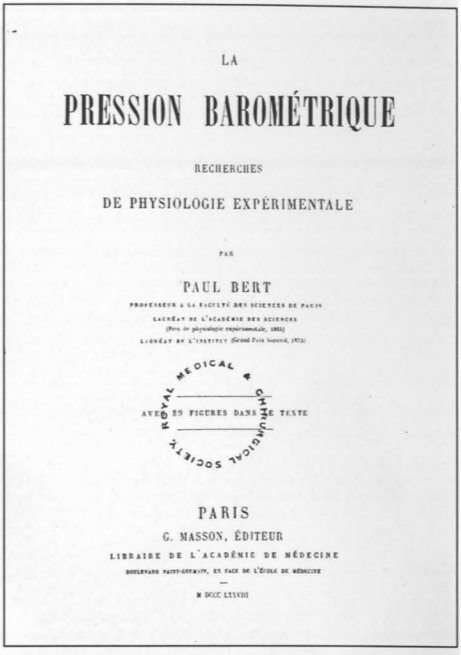
In the Arolla district a notable achievement, on 13 August, was the ascent of the N face of Mont Collon by John Hopkinson, with Jean and Antoine Maître. This climb, which had been planned by Jean Maître and was completed in ideal snow conditions, established the first of the three principal routes on the face. Five days later the same party – with the addition of Hopkinson's son Bertram – traversed to the E peak of the Petit Mont Collon after reaching the slightly lower W peak by way of the unclimbed NW ridge. Above the Arolla valley two routes on the Blanche de Perroc, the N peak of the Dent de Perroc, were climbed for the first time; the NW ridge on 28 July by Walter Leaf, G W Prothero and R L Nettleship, with Clemens Zurbriggen and Aloys Kalbermatten, and the NE ridge on 31 July by A G Topham, with the Maître brothers.

Elsewhere in the Pennine Alps the Leaf party, without Kalbermatten, reached the summit of Mont Pleureur above Mauvoisin by way of the unclimbed SW ridge on 23 July, and the first recorded ascent of the Petit Combin was completed on 25 July by Charles de la Harpe and E W Viollier, with Justin Bessard. To the east two new routes to the highest point of the Portjengrat were established; the E ridge by Moritz von Kuffner, with Alexander Burgener and J P Ruppen on 15 July, and a direct line on the W face by A F de Fonblanque and G F Berney, with Xaver and Moritz Imseng on 11 August.

In the Bernina Alps the outstanding achievements of the season were undoubtedly those of Ludwig Norman-Neruda who with Christian Klucker completed three major new routes in the space of ten days; the first ascent – and descent – of the NW face of Piz Scerscen on 9 July; an ascent of the unclimbed NE face of Piz Roseg on 16 July; and, on 18 July, the first direct ascent of the NE wall of Piz Bernina. The last of these routes was completed in deteriorating


HISTORIA
NATVRAL
Y
MORAL DELAS
INDIAS,
EN QVE SE TRATAN LAS COSAS
notables del cielo, y elementos, metales, plantas, y animales dellas: y los ritos, y ceremonias, leyes, y gouierno, y guerras de los Indios.
Compuesta por el Padre Ioseph de Acosta Religioso de la Compañia de Iesus.
DIRIGIDA A LA SERENISSIMA
Infanta Doña Isabella Clara Eugenia de Austria.
IHS
CON PRIVILEGIO.
Impresso en Sevilla en casa de Iuan de Leon.
Año de 1590.

76. *The title page of Joseph de Acosta's* Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias, *1590.* (From Bodleian Library, Oxford, by permission) (p 191)


LA
PRESSION BAROMÉTRIQUE
RECHERCHES
DE PHYSIOLOGIE EXPÉRIMENTALE
PAR
PAUL BERT
ROYAL MEDICAL & CHIRURGICAL SOCIETY
AVEC 89 FIGURES DANS LE TEXTE
PARIS
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77. *The title page of Paul Bert's* La Pression Barométrique, *1878.* (From Library of the Royal Society of Medicine, London, by permission) (p 191)



78. *Fünffingerspitze.* (C Douglas Milner) (p 204)

weather and after being caught in a severe thunderstorm high on the N ridge of Piz Bernina the party endured six hours of unpleasant descent to the Roseg valley. Addressing the Alpine Club in the following year, Norman-Neruda explained that he had wished to attempt the climb on Piz Scerscen but would not have thought of the other routes

> . . . had not the conditions of snow and ice, which caused 1890 to be called a bad year for climbing, enabled us to do much we should have had to leave undone under more generally favourable circumstances, for in our ascents of the Piz Roseg and the Piz Bernina we had to conquer steep, in many places quite exceptionally steep ice slopes which at other times, in a good mountaineering season, would in all likelihood present insurmountable difficulties. But we found at nearly every point a sufficient coat of snow covering the ice, and steps had scarcely ever to be cut through the snow into the ice, as would infallibly have been the case in a dry summer, and often half a dozen kicks were enough to produce as many steps; consequently the work necessitated by step-cutting was not only of a comparatively little fatiguing nature, but we got through it in time to reach our two goals – the summit and our own comfortable bed – the same day we had started.

All three climbs were remarkable for the period and the ascent of the NE face of Piz Roseg, an impressive ice wall 700m high, was not to be repeated for more than 30 years.

Norman-Neruda and Klucker then moved to the Zermatt district where on 31 July they made a determined attempt to climb the NNE face of the Dent Blanche, reaching 3900m before dangerous snow conditions and icy rocks forced a retreat by way of the ENE ridge. On the following day, after traversing the Wellenkuppe, this formidable party made the first complete ascent of the ENE ridge of the Ober Gabelhorn and on 9 August, with the addition of Joseph Reinstadler, reached the E summit of the Lyskamm by a direct route up the unclimbed NE face.

Four other climbs completed during the season are worthy of note. In the Dauphiné on 24 July Alfred Holmes, with Maximin Gaspard and Basil Andenmatten, made the first ascent of the Pic du Glacier Carré below the Grand Pic of the Meije, and in the Mont Blanc range on 28 July the Pic Sans Nom, on the ridge between the Aiguille Verte and the Aiguille du Dru, was climbed for the first time by the guideless party of Ellis Carr, G H Morse and J H Wicks. In the Dolomites, also on 28 July, Hans Helversen with Sepp Innerkofler succeeded in completing a route up the unclimbed N face of the Kleine Zinne or Cima Piccola di Lavaredo. On 8 August Robert Hans Schmitt and Johann Santner, without guides, made the first ascent of the highest point of the Fünffingerspitze or Punta delle Cinque Dita. In his account of the climb Schmitt, who was regarded by Coolidge as 'a remarkable personality among the most daring climbers of his day', wrote that it was by far the most difficult which he had ever undertaken and issued a challenge to other parties to retrieve his card from the summit.

On Mont Blanc a famous landmark was established when Joseph Vallot, with the assistance of 110 guides, constructed his first observatory on the rocks of the Bosses ridge.

> It consists of two rooms, one for ordinary travellers, the second reserved for the storage of instruments and the use of observers. The traveller's room is warmed by an oil-stove, and well furnished with rugs. The building is a wooden framework with loose stone walls piled round it, and the roof is well furnished with lightening conductors.

In August an early visitor to the new hut was Dr Janssen, the celebrated astronomer and the President of the French Alpine Club

> . . . who, being lame, was dragged to the summit of Mont Blanc on a sledge. M. Janssen's principal scientific object was to determine, by means of spectroscopic observations, the presence or absence of oxygen in the solar atmosphere. Briefly, M. Janssen considers it an established fact, from his observations, that oxygen is absent from the solar atmosphere. Physicists may or may not agree as to the sufficiency of proof, but no doubt the contribution to the settlement of a most important and difficult question – one affecting the very existence of life on our planet – is very valuable.

One of the first climbers to visit the hut was Achille Ratti – the future Pope Pius XI – whose party completed a traverse on Mont Blanc on 1 August.

The storms which occurred during the last two weeks of August were severe, and a violent gale on 19 August forced the Janssen party to remain in the Vallot observatory for three days before the ascent could be continued. A week later a second terrible storm claimed a tragic victim. In an appeal made in the *Daily Graphic* on 20 September, Edward Whymper recalled that

> . . . when telegrams came in, about three weeks ago, stating that Jean-Antoine Carrel had died from fatigue on the south side of the Matterhorn, those who knew the man scarcely credited the report. It was not likely that this tough and hardy mountaineer would die from fatigue anywhere, still less was it probable that he would succumb upon 'his own mountain'. But it is true.

During the night of 25–26 August Carrel, the great guide who with J B Bich had made the first ascent of the Matterhorn from the Italian side, died of exhaustion on the lowest rocks of the mountain after safely bringing his party down through the storm from the hut on the Italian ridge. Generous provision for Carrel's family was made in response to eloquent appeals by Whymper who, in his book *Scrambles Amongst the Alps*, had written that Carrel 'was *the* man, of all those who attempted the ascent of the Matterhorn, who most deserved to be the first upon its summit. He was the first to doubt its inaccessibility, and he was the only man who persisted in believing that its ascent would be accomplished.'

On 14 December the death occurred of Gottlieb Studer who 'in the course of his life made more than 600 ascents over 10,000 feet. These extend over the



79. *Uto Peak and Mount Sir Donald.* (Edward C Porter, Alpine Club Library Collection) (p 204)

period from 1825 to 1883. At the age of 68 he ascended Mont Blanc, and at 78 the Matterhorn.' In a tribute to Studer, one of the original members of the Swiss Alpine Club, Coolidge noted that

> . . . by the death of Gottlieb Studer the Alps have lost their most devoted friend, for no one (save Mr. John Ball) has ever known them as thoroughly as he did, or has done as much to make them known to others. He was elected an honorary member of our own Club in July 1859, the first foreigner to receive this honour, to which certainly no one had a better right.

In the Caucasus exploration of the range was continued by several parties and a number of climbs were completed. In August J G Cockin and H W Holder, accompanied by Ulrich Almer, made their second visit to the central chain. Starting from bases in the southern valleys they scaled three unclimbed peaks in the Adai Khokh group including on 26 August Adai Khokh or Uilpata (4638m), the highest summit, by way of the SE ridge. In his account of the climb read before the Alpine Club in the following year, Holder described the approach to the ridge across the large undulating snowfield at the foot of the peak.

> At this time the sky was almost cloudless and the sun shone brilliantly; the snow glittered and sparkled like diamonds. The magnificence of the snowfield, surpassing anything we had previously seen, profoundly impressed us all. Silently we marched, each possessed by his own thoughts and feelings, and gradually the heat, the glare, and the monotony of the march began to tell, and we almost fell asleep as we finished this part of our journey. There was no crevasse to stumble over; nothing to strain our energies; no demand on skill and previous experience: simply a steady tramp through the snow.

The party then attempted to reach the unclimbed W and higher peak of Jangi Tau (5051m) from the south but were forced to retreat late in the day from a point high on the route.

> We worked up rocks till five in the afternoon. We calculated we had still two hours' work before us, as there were steep and difficult rocks to be surmounted ere we reached the final slope of ice or snow. Most reluctantly we concluded that the only prudent course was to abandon the climb. We were soon benighted, spent the greater part of the night in descending by lantern-light, and at very considerable risk, the rocks we had easily climbed by daylight.

A F Mummery, who had made the first ascent of Dykh Tau (5204m) two years earlier, explored a number of valleys to the south of the central chain with his brother-in-law W J Petherick, but no ascents of note were recorded. Other visitors were George Yeld and G P Baker, who while exploring the eastern end of the range in perfect weather climbed Bazar-Juzi (4480m) in Daghestan on 22 August, and Vittorio Sella who with three Italian porters again travelled

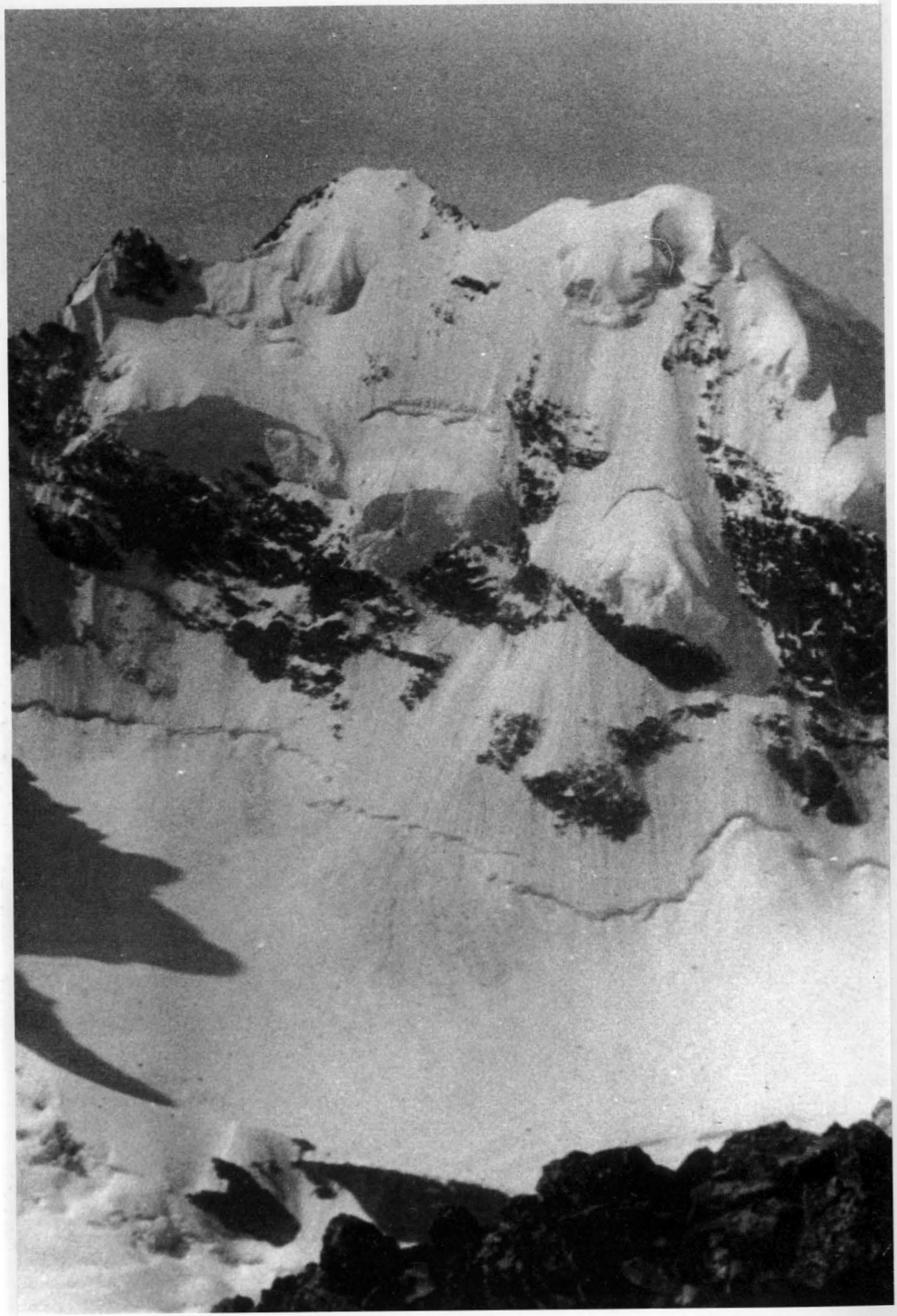
extensively, making a number of ascents in the central region. Although bad weather interfered with Sella's photographic work on several occasions, he was able to obtain some fine panoramas of the central chain from the south, ten different views of Ushba and many photographs of the southern valleys and villages.

Further afield, P W Thomas explored part of the San Juan range in the Colorado Rockies and on 1 September, with N G Douglass, ascended a peak which he identified as Mount Wilson (4342m). Following a detailed study of Thomas's description, it has since been suggested by local authorities that the summit he reached was, in fact, that of the neighbouring peak now named El Diente (4315m).

In Canada the facilities provided by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company were enabling an increasing number of climbers to investigate the peaks of the Selkirk range. The principal achievement of the season in this region was the first ascent of the imposing mountain originally named Syndicate Peak but renamed Mount Sir Donald after Sir Donald Alexander Smith, later Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, who five years earlier had performed the 'last spike' ceremony to complete the transcontinental line. Starting from the Glacier House Hotel the Swiss climbers Emil Huber and Carl Sulzer with Harry Cooper, a young man engaged as porter, spent a miserable night in the open after their tent had been 'placed upon the top of a bush in order to secure it against the teeth of the many ravenous rodents which abound in those mountains. Already before, the mosquitoes, which pestered us in the Selkirks, had forced many an uncouth word from our lips, but in such thick swarms as here they had never tortured us.'

On 24 July Huber and Sulzer continued the climb to make the first ascent of Uto Peak (2930m). 'Directly opposite us the shadowed, dark, really magnificent figure of Mt Sir Donald towered into the sky, mounting with a sudden leap 1,000 metres from glaciers and heaps of debris to a lofty peak.' Two days later the whole party reached the summit of Mount Sir Donald (3297m) by way of the SW face and the SE ridge. After a stiff climb up rough rocks with good holds the ridge was followed 'partly along its uppermost edge, partly along the shelving of the west flank. Many a difficulty was overcome, but the peak always approached nearer and nearer. We were sure of it by this time, and a little after 10 o'clock a loud "Hurrah S.A.C.!" burst forth into the blue sky.'

The tent had been provided by H W Topham, who had returned to Glacier House with his two porters after making the first ascents of Mount Donkin (2955m) and Mount Fox (3224m), the peaks named by the Rev W S Green in memory of W F Donkin and Harry Fox whose expedition to the Caucasus two years earlier had ended in tragedy. Other peaks in the Selkirk range climbed for the first time were Mount Selwyn (3357m) by Topham and H E Forster; Mount Sugar Loaf (3271m) on 14 August and Mount Purity (3187m) on 29 August by Topham, Forster and Huber; and Swiss Peak (3205m), also on 29 August, by Sulzer and a porter. All the peaks were difficult of approach and on one occasion a pack-horse 'which growled like a bear' had to be left behind 'for it was impossible to get him through the tangled forest'.



80. Piz Roseg, NE face. (N A Tombazi, Alpine Club Library Collection) (p 204)

Topham later recalled that 'we had great difficulty in forcing our way through the dense undergrowth, which renders walking below timber-line almost impossible. There is one golden rule to be observed in the Selkirks: "Keep above timber-line."'

Interest in the Canadian mountains following the completion of the railway was increased by the publication during the year of Green's book, *Among the Selkirk Glaciers*, in which he gave vivid descriptions of his own experiences in the range.

A number of expeditions of interest was undertaken in other distant regions. In East Africa on 17 February a party including F J Jackson and Ernest Gedge reached the crater rim of Mount Elgon (4321m) on the Kenya-Uganda border, and in the Southern Alps in December G E Mannering and Marmaduke Dixon reached a point only 40m below the summit of Mount Cook (3764m).

At the end of June Francis Younghusband left Simla on another of his adventurous journeys, having been commissioned to investigate the Pamir region. After crossing the Karakoram and staying at Yarkand Younghusband and his companion George Macartney, afterwards British Consul-General at Kashgar, spent the month of October exploring a large area of the Pamirs, crossing several high passes and camping beside the Great Karakul lake before descending to their winter quarters at Kashgar. 'This is a fine lake more than a dozen miles in length, and the day on which we reached it it presented a magnificent spectacle. A terrific wind was blowing, lashing the water into waves till the whole was a mass of foam. Heavy snow-clouds were scudding across the scene, and through them, beyond the tossing lake, could be seen dark rocky masses; and high above all this turmoil below, appeared the majestic Peak Kaufmann[1], twenty-three thousand feet in height.'

At home two first ascents by ladies are worthy of note. In the Lake District on 31 March Miss D J Koecher, her brother O J Koecher, H B Dixon and A M Marshall made the fifth ascent of the Napes Needle. On the Isle of Skye at Whitsuntide Charles Pilkington and his wife Mabel traversed the Inaccessible Pinnacle, the highest point of Sgurr Dearg, as members of a party led by C T Dent. Interest in rock-climbing, which had been growing for some years, was increased considerably by the publication in the *Pall Mall Budget* on 5 June of an illustrated article on the Needle, giving details of how it might be climbed.

During the year W M Conway published the *Climbers' Guide to the Central Pennine Alps*, the first of a series of Alpine guide-books developed from his *Zermatt Pocket-Book* which had appeared nine years earlier. The guide, produced in collaboration with Coolidge, was soon in demand and was reviewed in the *Alpine Journal*:

> The present instalment covers the ground from the Great St. Bernard to the Theodul, Mr. Conway having (as he with perhaps somewhat brutal frankness admits) divided the book at the latter point in order to make it necessary for climbers settled at Zermatt to buy both volumes. The method is much the same as that of the original 'Pocket Book', except that more attention is paid to bibliography, wherein we may doubtless see the hand of Mr.

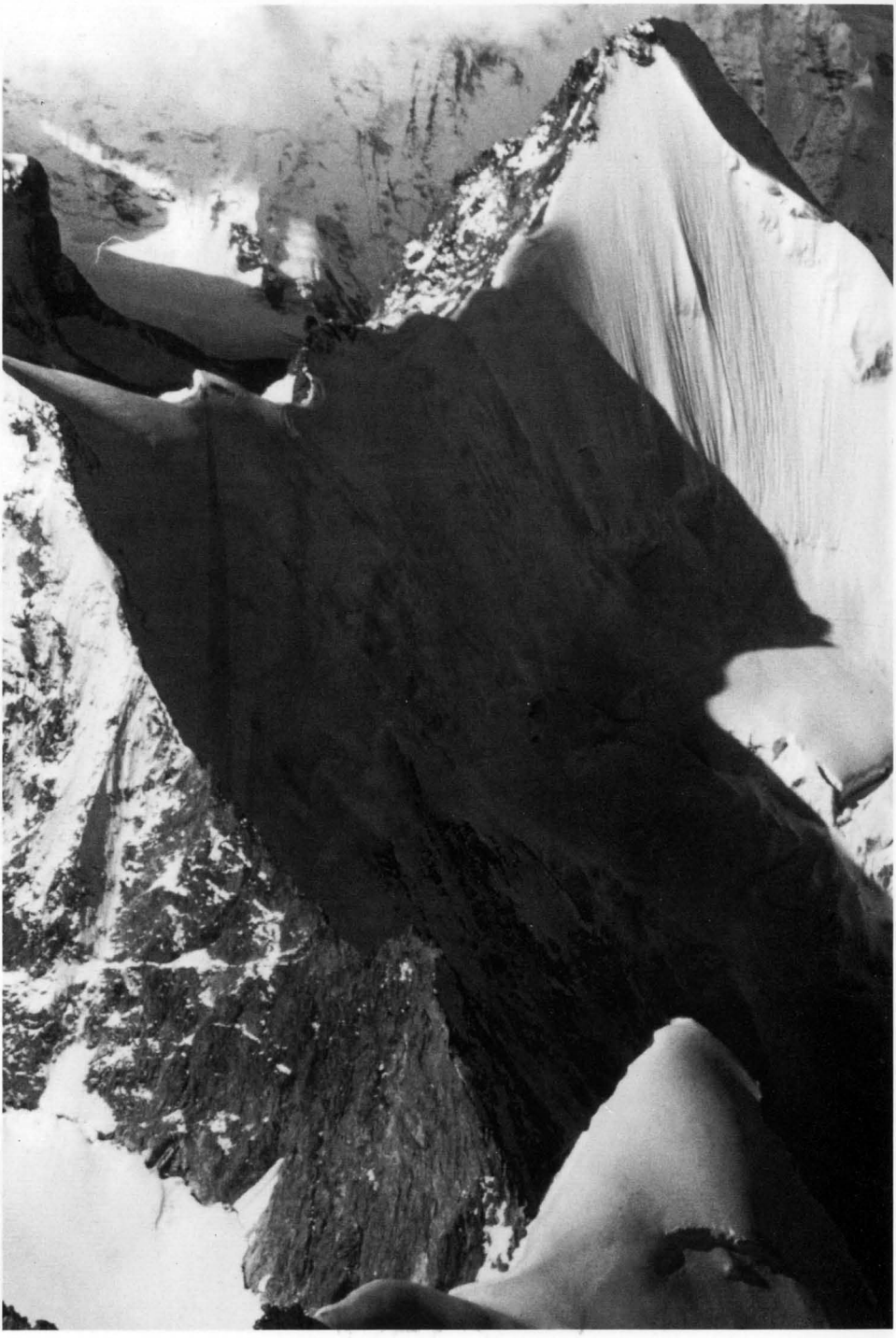
> Conway's collaborator; the arrangement is somewhat altered. Formerly it was by districts; now it is rather by ridges. In its present form, in short, the book treats rather of the ways in which to reach given points, than of the point to be reached from a given place; and so far may be regarded as illustrating the author's sentiments in regard to 'centres'.

On 4 March, in a paper entitled 'The Dom from the Domjoch' read before the Alpine Club, Conway had initiated one of the great debates of the time in climbing circles by attacking 'centrism' – the practice of climbing habitually in the immediate neighbourhood of a chosen centre. After continuing to attack the practice throughout the year, Conway set out his views in a further paper 'The Exploration of the Alps' read before the Club on 15 December, part of which appeared later in the *Alpine Journal* under the title 'Centrists and Excentrists':

> Broadly speaking, I assert that the man who wanders amongst the Alps (or any other large range or set of ranges) is more easily able to keep his eye alert and his mind fresh for the appreciation of the various forms and kinds of beauty which mountain regions offer, than can a man who makes excursions around a centre. Few parts of the world are richer in beauty than a great mountain area, crowned with snow, draped in ice, buttressed by splintered rock, founded on the broad bosom of the earth, and framed in the emerald glories of verdant meadows and mysterious forests. Great is the educational value of mountains to the aesthetic sense; but he that would experience it must open his mind to all the pleasures of the hills. The man who knows only one kind of mountain, only the surroundings of a few centres, does not know even the Alps.
>
> I conclude, therefore, that, except for the gymnast and the man who climbs merely for the sake of enjoying dangerous adventure (and who therefore cares only for the most difficult rocks, which nature kindly arranges in the immediate neighbourhood of a few centres), the excentrist's method of visiting mountain ranges is the best. The Alpine wanderer is more likely to profit by his expedition than the centrist, and I maintain that, in the present condition of affairs, wandering deserves to be practised and encouraged by members of the Alpine Club.

It is fitting that the conclusion to this account should be provided by Conway, the true excentrist and one of the great explorers of his day:

> Members of the Alpine Club are now to be found in almost every great mountain region in the world. They have recently not only flocked to the Caucasus, but they have penetrated into its remoter districts. Daghestan has now been photographed. The Selkirks, in North America, have been further explored. Renewed attention has been paid to the great mountains of Mexico. Moreover, this extension of the mountaineering range is not the result of a



81. Obergabelhorn, with (L) ENE ridge. (Frank Solari) (p 204)

spasmodic and exceptional effort; it is a normal and continuous growth, and may be regarded as merely the promise of greater developments to come.

REFERENCE

1 Now Pik Lenin (7134m).