
Area Notes 1993

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The Alps and Pyrenees 1993

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The year saw AC members involved in several important winter ascents, a continuous crossing of all the 4000m peaks in the Alps, plus a fine series of first woman solo ascents. It also saw the demise of two outstanding continental activists: Romain Vogler, one of the greatest Swiss Alpine rock-climbers and full-time guide, died at the age of 34 in a rappelling accident on a crag at Maladière. It appears that he was making a long rappel and had not set the ropes equally, his weight coming on to a single strand as he neared the bottom. In May Fred Vimal, France's most promising young Alpinist, was killed whilst trying to solo a hard mixed free/aid route on the Grand Capucin. He was held by his ropes after a 20m fall, but appears to have hit his head and probably died of hypothermia.

THE WINTER SEASON

The official season spans the period from 21 December–20 March inclusive and hence events taking place in December 1992 have been noted.

Pyrenees

Winter conditions in the Pyrenees were exceptionally good this year, with stable weather keeping enough snow and ice on the routes, whilst leaving the approaches well consolidated and relatively safe from objective danger.

In the Cirque de Gavarnie, one of the best known venues for water-ice climbing in Europe, ideal conditions allowed the opening up of the upper, shorter tier. Many worthwhile new routes in the 4/5 catagory were created during January.

Pic du Midi d'Ossau This dramatic mountain offers numerous rock climbs, with several well-established classics that compare in quality with anything else in the range. The heavy buildup of ice during the winter allowed two new routes to be created in the area of the *Classic 1896 route* on the N face. On 19 January Benoit Dandonneau and Juna Carles Griso started up the *Classic route*, then moved left to reach a series of narrow runnels. These gave pitches of 70°–80° and led straight up to a hard mixed exit (5+) onto the left end of a prominent easy ramp leading to the NE ridge.

NE ridge On 21 January Didier Berger and Remi Thivel, followed by Dominique Perrin and Rainer Munch, climbed a direct start (80°/5+) and continued to the summit, giving the route the name *Ya du Grisou dans l'Tempo* and a grade of TD+. On 18 March Thivel returned alone and climbed a parallel line about 100m to the right. Crossing the *Classic* after about 250m of climbing, the route swings left near the top to finish up the last 75° ice pitch of *Ya du Grisou*. Christened *Canaleta Santa Coloma* and graded TD+/ED1, the route was sustained at 55°–70° with plenty of icy rock from 3 to 5+.

The *Ravier route* on the SW face was soloed for the first time in winter on 20 January by Remi Thivel. The first 400m is a snowy 45° couloir and the final, 250–300m buttress is a TD rock climb.

The first solo winter ascent of the complete N spur of the **Grand Pic (Pt de France, 2878m)** was made from 17–19 March by Joan Jover. Despite sections of poor rock, it is now considered one of the best and certainly the longest route on the Ossau. In recent times the route has been climbed completely free at 5+/6a.

Pena Talera This major peak lies entirely in Spain and has a N face that gives excellent winter possibilities. On 23 January, Javier Alonso and Roman Bascunana climbed the 250m high gully immediately right of the prominent *Y Couloir*. The crux was a 70m icefall which steepened to the vertical and an overall grade of D+ was proposed. Just to the north the

modern ski complex of Formigal offers numerous first-class icefalls close to the resort.

Cirque de Gourette At the beginning of January an impressive narrow couloir on the E Face of the **Pene Medan** received its first ascent, and was repeated several days later. It is 500m and graded TD, with ice pitches of 80° and some mixed climbing (moves of V on rock).

Vignemale: the N face – the biggest rock wall in the Pyrenees – is an obvious goal for Alpinists during the winter season. The rarely climbed *Y Couloir*, that branches left from the *Couloir de Gaube* at one third height, received at least six ascents during the winter. All the parties were able to climb the bed of the couloir directly, following a line inaugurated some years ago by Serge Casteran which features sections of vertical ice and rock steps of V+ (600m TD+/ED1).

One of the most impressive achievements throughout the Pyrenees occurred on 28-29 January, when French Alpinist Remy Thivel made the highly sought-after first solo winter ascent of the N spur on **Pique Longue**.

Another notable first winter and first solo ascent on this wall was made from 7-9 March when Jerome Thinière climbed the 1964 N dièdre (500m and nowadays largely free at 6b+, with one section of A2/3 in friable cracks). Earlier, Thinière soloed the classic N face of the **Piton Carré** (the *Ravier brothers' route*) in a day.

Tour de Marboré After fixing the first (and most difficult) couple of pitches on 28 January Javier Olivar made the first solo winter ascent of the classic N Face on 29th-30th. The face was icy and the crux pitches were climbed on aid.

Troumouse On the N face of the highest peak, commonly known as the **Pic de la Munia (3085m)**, Patrick Gabarrou and Pascal Girault put up a new direct route (TD).

Ernest Blade and Nestor Bohigas made a winter ascent of the classic *Ravier route* on the **Pic Blanc de Troumouse**: although a rock climb in summer, the pair front-pointed the whole route except for a mere 20m of mixed ground, and offer the new winter grade of V/5.

Monte Perdido (Ordesa National Park). A new *Direct route* on the N face was climbed by Patrick Gabarrou and Pascal Girault on 19 March and was only possible owing to the considerable glacial recession over the years and the subsequent diminished height of the two principal sérac barriers. Currently there is talk of a proposal to limit the number of climbers visiting this region at any one time.

Pic de l'Esquella The unusually good snow conditions on the Andorran border peaks saw enough buildup of ice for the lower section of the unclimbed narrow right-hand couloir on the 200m N face to be attempted. An initial pitch of 70° was followed by a 25m pillar of ice steepening to the vertical. Above, the angle eased giving 55°-65° snow/ice to the summit. Christened the *Henar Couloir*, the first ascent was made by Albert Querol climbing solo.

Ecrins

In common with the Mont Blanc range, activity here during the season was intense, with such routes as the famous and rarely climbed *Raie des Fesses* on the N face of the **Pic Sans Nom**, one of the hardest ice-climbs in the range, receiving at least a dozen ascents.

L'Olan In this very wild corner of the range, Lionel Daudet made the first solo winter ascent of the *Bouilloux/Villemare Directissima* on the NW face from 18-19 March. Daudet finished via the variation taken by Jean Marc Cambon and Bernard Francou in 1981. Despite the season and orientation of the wall, the harder pitches were climbed free at 6c.

Christophe Moulin reached the summit of **La Meije** on Christmas Eve having made the second winter ascent of the 1962 *Girel-Renaud Direct route* (ED2 VI/mixed), and then travelled (on foot and ski) to the base of the 1100m NW face of **L'Ailefroide**, where he was able to spend a prearranged night inside a tent with a group of friends. After a further three full days and two cold bivouacs he completed the first solo winter ascent of the classic 1936 *Devies-Gervasutti route* (ED1 VI).

Dome de Neige des Ecrins At least three winter ascents were reported of the narrow *Boivin/Diaferia/Vionet-Fuasset couloir* on the W face, first climbed in 1979 and thought to be at least ED2 in standard.

Pic Sans Nom On the right side of the N face the *Pilier de Souvenir*, a hard and rarely repeated rock route put up in 1980 by Pierre Farges and the late Vincent Fine (and later soloed by Farges), was climbed for the first time in winter from 6-13 January (including time spent on the approach) by E Fine and O Laborie.

Les Bans On the popular summer rock-climbing arena of the SE face, Gerard Lepreux and Pierre Teyssier made a winter ascent of the *GUM route* (Bellino/Clouet).

Pelvoux In February M Monnier and N Thibault made the first winter ascent in eight hours of the *Boivin/Poencet route* on the Momie Triangle. This rarely climbed 800m ice gully lies to the left of the *Couloir Chaud*.

Le Rateau In January Mollinati, Rizzardo and Robach made the second ascent in 14 hours of the *Cambon/Francou route* on the (generally) despicable rock of the N face – a route first climbed in winter.

Le Sérac In January D Crabières and A Guillaume made the first winter ascent of the *Biju Duval route* (TD-) on the NW face – slabby granite with considerable verglasing in parts.

Vanoise

The **Croix des Têtes** are formed by two magnificent limestone pillars which overlook the Arc valley. On 17-18 January Marc Almonte and Gilles Enrich made the first winter ascent of *Happy Birthday* on the huge W face (ED3 630m 6c obl). They had problems with any friction moves as the rubber on their rock boots had become far too hard in the low temperatures.

Mont Blanc Massif

The season was blessed by superb anticyclonic weather which produced some of the best climbing conditions on record. Both open couloirs and the narrower *goulottes* were stacked full of first-class ice, with the easily accessible couloirs of Mont Blanc du Tacul coming in for a real hammering. On occasions teams were found retreating across the Vallée Blanche having been unable to start any of the more popular routes owing to the sheer volume of traffic.

Mont Blanc The first winter ascent of the 1984 Gabarrou/Profit/Tavernier route *Abominette* was made on 14 March by Jean-Marc Genevois, Philippe Moine and Patrick Pessi. Although seldom in condition and very rarely repeated, this is probably the easiest of the modern ice climbs on the S Face.

Grand Pilier d'Angle *Divine Providence* received its second winter ascent (but first to the summit of Mont Blanc) from 24-28 December by the Irish-New Zealand team of Brendan Murphy and Dave Wills.

There are now in-situ pegs, especially on the crux corner, but many were found to be loose. The party climbed sections of A3 where sky-hooks, RPs and a selection of pegs were essential. Fortunately, the route gets the early morning sun, but with only one good ledge system (at half-height) on the tower, bivvies were a touch uncomfortable. On one, Murphy spent the whole night hanging in his harness in the middle of a 7a pitch.

From 10-14 February Alain Gherzen made the first solo winter ascent, but placed a bolt on the first hard (7a) pitch. This pitch was aided by Murphy and Wills, using sky-hooks on quartz rugosities after both had taken falls when nut placements ripped. Like the rest of the route, it has been climbed free in summer. It is particularly regrettable that such a talented climber should lower himself to this level simply in order to make a winter solo.

During the New Year period Tony Parks and Dave Wilkinson climbed a hybrid line which started up the *Dufour-Fréhel*. After a chilly bivouac half-way up the mixed ground below the sérac, they made a rising traverse right, roughly following the rambling line taken by Baumont and Becker in 1976 (which finishes up the *Japanese route*). Parks and Wilkinson turned the right edge of the sérac barrier to finish up the *Bonatti-Zappelli* and an icy, windswept Peuterey Ridge.

Aiguille Croux The first winter ascent of Romain Vogler's brilliant line *Que cherches-tu Jean-Marie?* (6c) was made by Francesco Arneodo and Daniele Caneparo on 23 January.

Grand Capucin Giovanni Bassanini and Pietro dal Pra made the first winter ascent of *L'Elixir d'Astaroth* and felt that this ED3 route represents the most demanding outing on the 'Cap' to date.

This March the German Alpinists Robert Jaspar and Malte Roeper made the fourth overall ascent and the first winter ascent of the Boivin/Piola 1983 route *Flagrant Délire* (400m ED3) – a hard aid route which finds a way up the smooth walls immediately right of *Gulliver's Travels*.

Aiguille du Tacul Patrick Gabarrou, in the company of Jean-Michel Asselin and Fred Vimal, climbed an ephemeral gully on the NE face, reaching the top on New Years Eve. The 550m couloir (350m of difficult climbing) was graded TD+ and christened *Goulotte à Eric* after Eric Mariaud, an aspirant guide killed in January after falling into a crevasse.

Grandes Jorasses Relatively amenable conditions on the Jorasses allowed a four-man Polish team (Jacek Fluder, Janurz Golab, Stanislas Piecuch and Bodgan Samborski) to make the first winter and second overall ascent of *Manitua* on the left flank of the Croz Spur (VII+ A3).

From 1-5 February Frank Connell and Dick Turnbull climbed the **Walker Spurin** almost perfect winter conditions. The rock was generally clear and dry except for a little powder adhering to the corners and the last 200m or so which was covered in rime. Odd marks of passage pointed to ascents earlier in the winter. They were followed on 8-10 by Catherine Destivelle who made the first solo ascent by a woman in any season.

Shortly afterwards, Hughes Beauzile soloed the route in four days. A crag-climber with four years experience, he had never previously tried a proper Alpine climb on a high mountain in any season, but completed the route with little damage other than minor frostbite. Later, Stevie Haston made a rapid solo ascent with only one bivouac.

Petites Jorasses Undoubtedly one of the finest achievements of the winter was the first ascent of the amazing ephemeral couloir, situated immediately to the right of the W face, by François Bernard and Antoine Cayrol on 5-6 January (600m ED2).

Germans Stephane Debryne and Tobias Heymann made the first winter ascent of the very steep couloir on the NW face of **Pt 3607m** first climbed in June 1978 by Richard Baumont and Gordon Smith.

Heymann, this time with Philip Jaerschky, made the first winter ascent of what is now considered the finest climb on the W face, *Anouk* (21 pitches, 108 bolts and 6b/c). They took just nine hours for the climb on 11 March, rappelling the route in the last flickers of daylight.

Patrick Gabarrou and Fred Vimal climbed a 450m gully to the left of the *Baumont/Smith route*, but just right of a rather less sustained line (TD) taken in 1981 by Lambert, Perroux and Sanchez which finishes close to **Pt 3576m**. The climbing was decidedly delicate and the route, dedicated to the late Alexis Long, was named *In Memoriam*.

Switching to the Italian side, normally a difficult area to reach in winter, Bruno Ferrari, Bill Ramella and Bruno Satin made the first winter ascent of Piola's quality modern rock route on the E face, *Gargantua*.

Aiguille du Midi On this popular winter arena Martha Mercier and Bruno Robert have discovered a new line on the N face. *Wanda* (named after the late Polish climber Wanda Rukiewicz) lies to the right of the *Carli/Chassange route*. Breaking with tradition, the pair have quoted a modern icefall grade of III/4 for their climb, despite a length of 1000m.

Col des Deux Aigles The SW side of the Col is a 550m couloir, first climbed by Collie, Hastings, Mummery and Slingsby in August 1893 and rarely ascended since (D). Directly above the start (a rightwards traverse

into the main couloir) a thin gully rises for 150m before meeting the original line. This was climbed on 14 February by M Cereuil, H Defline, G Pareau and J Tafforeau, and for the most part was only a couple of metres wide. A rather competitive grade D was offered.

Petit Dru Although not mandatory for admission into the realms of high-standard Alpinism, spending a considerable amount of time alone on the W face of the Dru appears to be quite fashionable these days. This winter it was the turn of Chamonix guide François Marsigny, who made the first solo winter ascent of the *French Directissima* (ED2 6b/A2). Added fun was provided by dropping his sack high on the route and a subsequent bivouac with the rope wrapped around his body for protection. He persisted alone as far as the shoulder and was subsequently lifted off by helicopter after eight days on the face.

André Rhem and Fred Vimal narrowly failed to make the first winter ascent of *Absolu* (6c+ and A2) on the left flank of the Bonatti Pillar. Having climbed 19 of the 22 pitches, the pair were preparing their third bivouac when a small volley of stones caught Rhem directly in the face and they were forced to make an involved self-rescue.

Les Droites André Rhem and Fred Vimal reported climbing a fine new route on the N face in early December '92. However, their line appears to be similar to that followed by the Czechs, Semon and Slavick, in 1979 and has comparable technical difficulties (6a/6b and A2, plus hard mixed climbing).

Aiguille du Triolet Steve Coneys and John Sumner made a worrying ascent of the N face on 1-2 February. They bivvied alongside the lower sérac barrier which avalanched during the night, and the day after their ascent two French climbers, following them on the route, were hit by an avalanche from the upper ice wall and swept down the face.

Aiguille Dorées The first winter and almost certainly the second overall ascent of *Le Chevauchée Fantastique* (300m 6b+) on the SW face of the **Aiguille de la Varappe** fell to Amstutz and Vogler in mid-March.

Valais

Dent Blanche The classic ENE or Viereselgrat (1100m D-/D) received its first solo winter ascent on 21 January by the Swiss Alpinist Christian Portmann.

Breithorn Portmann again, this time with Patrick Torrent, made the first winter ascent of the *N Face Direct* of the central summit (Gabarrou/Steiner September 1979 850m TD-) on 5 January.

Liskamm Although it has received few repetitions, the 1982 *Directissima* to the W summit is considered a superb outing and only really threatened by ice fall at the start (1050m TD+/ED1). Stéphane Albasini and Christian Portmann made the first winter ascent this season, confirming the excellent quality but finding the conditions at the time decidedly difficult.

Gobba di Rollin Alessandro Jacod, Paolo Marselli and Rolando Nicco climbed another worthwhile *goulotte* on the steep mixed E face, which they rated TD.

Monte Rosa The two experienced Slovenian climbers, Vanja Furlan and Zvonito Pozgaj (who subsequently suffered serious amputations from frost-bite injuries sustained on K2), made the first winter and probably the second overall ascent of the 1991 *Francesca Schranz route* on the 'Himalayan' E face (ED1 1600m ice pitches of 70° and rock of IV). Italians, Walter Berardi and Claudio Georgia, have made the first winter ascent of the *Restelli route* (1600m TD-) in a continuous push of 27hrs, finishing on 20 January. The *Shroud Directissima* (2300m TD+/ED1), first climbed in July 1984 by Patrick Gabarrou and Christophe Viard, was probably unrepeated until this winter when it was climbed by Albasini and Portmann. They completed the ascent with a marvellous traverse over the summits of Monte Rosa, Liskamm, Castor and Pollux to finish at the Klein Matterhorn in a total of two days.

Bernese Alps

Eiger The N face was in excellent condition: there were a number of ascents of the classic 1938 route and at least one by a solo Alpinist. The naturalised Swiss Michal Pitelka (Czech born) climbed the face in only nine hours from the Stollenloch window at the end of January.

Mönch The *Damokles Couloir*, which falls 500m to the Guggi glacier from the lowest point between the Sphinx and the start of the SW ridge of the Mönch, was climbed for the first time by Peter Gobert and Beno Horner in February (TD+ ice pitches of 75° and mixed/rock at IV+).

Klein Wellhorn The two neo-classics on the Klein Wellhorn are *Adlerauge* (VII) and *Gletchersinfonie* (VII+) and both the work of the prolific Swiss pair Ruth Baldinger and Kaspar Ochsner. In a rapid time of 5hrs 30min on 6 February, German climber Frank Jourdan made the first solo winter ascent of *Adlerauge*, a route of 670m (20 pitches). Jourdan had originally hoped to combine *Adlerauge* and *Gletchersinfonie*, but was only able to complete a third of the latter before it got dark. British parties climbing *Adlerauge* in the summer had mixed feelings about the quality of the route, some commenting on the very repetitive nature of the climbing.

Wenden/Graustock From 12-14 March German Alpinists Robert Jasper and Molte Roeper climbed a very demanding new route on the N face above the Engelberg valley. The route (*Schwarzwaldklinik* ED3) involved rock pitches of VI and A2/3 (sky-hooks), 90° ice and mixed climbing of Scottish 4/5.

Bregaglia/Bernina

Winters here are not what they used to be and, with the long periods of stable weather and little snowfall that typified this season, local activists were able to bag a number of plums. Notable was Gianluca 'Rampikino'

Maspes, who over the last five years or so has been putting up many new high-quality routes throughout the range.

Piz Badile Maspes, together with fellow Italians D Fiorelli, D Grossi, S Mogovero and B More, was successful in making the first ascent of the 350m *Central Pillar* on the SW face. The climbing involved 60° ice in the couloir, followed by grade VI climbing on the crest of the pillar above.

Punta Allievi Although perhaps an unlikely target for a winter ascent, *Filo Logico*, the wildly exposed crest of the E pillar to the left of the classic *Erba route*, was in good condition in February and was climbed by D Fiorelli and C Perlini on the same day as the ascent of *Electroshock* reported below.

Punta Baroni On the right side of this face Maspes and M Fiorelli made the second ascent (first winter) of the recently created *Isippazzo*, which gave rock difficulties up to VI/VI+ and ice-climbing at 65°.

Picco Luigi Amedeo On this dramatic spire of golden granite, often referred to as the Grand Capucin of the Bregaglia, the ferocious *Electroshock* (VIII+ and A0, with 12 bolt-protected pitches) received its first winter ascent during February from D Bernasconi and M Ricotti. To the right D Galbiati and friends made the first winter ascent of the rarely climbed *Czechoslovakian route*.

Punta Chiara The first winter ascent of the classic S ridge of this rock pyramid, which lies close to the Manzi bivouac hut, was made by Maspes and C Gianetti at the end of December. On pitch seven the pair climbed the crest direct (VI), a harder variation that is usually avoided on the right.

Torre Darwin Ivo Ferrari, climbing alone, made the first winter ascent of the hard mixed free and aid route, *Memorie del Futuro*, on the quasi-vertical SE face (330m VI and A2).

Ago di Sciora A slightly different ball-game was being played on the sombre and sunless side of the range, where on 7-9 January Arturo Giovanoli and Franco Dellatorre made the first winter ascent of the infrequently climbed *NW Ridge Direct* (TD V+/VI).

Sentiero Roma Taking advantage of the very stable conditions in February the well-known local guide and guru Giuseppe Miotti, together with Sergio Salini, made the first winter crossing of the *Sentiero Roma*. Their odyssey, partially aided by cross-country skis, took five days and included ascents of the Badile and Disgrazia.

Monte Lobbia Maspes and Perlini were able to make the first ascent of the Grand Couloir on the E face – a 1100m gully – with plenty of mixed climbing and water-ice pitches up to 85°/90°.

Monte Disgrazia On the icy 700m NE face of **Punta 3483m** Benigno Balatti, with Giovanni Cavalli, made the first winter ascent of his own TD direct route, *Antonello Cardinale*, on 7 February.

Piz Argent The most noteworthy event of the season was the first winter ascent of the rarely climbed S ridge by A Marini and Maspes. Conditions were perfect, with the difficult pitches (V+) free of snow but hard névé covering all the sections of loose rock. This fine 700m route (but twice that amount of actual climbing), first ascended in 1944, was completed in a 19-hour round trip from the Bignami hut.

Dolomites

Civetta Leaving work in Munich on a Friday evening, Georg Kronthaler and Nico Mailander spent the weekend of 13-14 February making the first winter ascent of the *Haupt-Lompel route* on the N face of the Piccolo Civetta (3207m), one of the longest and most serious routes on the wall.

Marmolada The Italians Pietro Dal Pra and Alessandro Lamberti completed the first winter ascent of Igor Koller's route *Fram* (IX- or French 7c) over two days (8-9 February). They climbed the the exposed sunlit limestone walls free, dressed only in lightweight 'Lifa wear' and wearing rock boots with no socks. However, as with Dal Pra's winter ascent a month or so earlier on the Grand Capucin, fixed ropes were used.

Pala Routes on the Cimon della Pala can present quite feasible winter objectives. Franco Corn, Renzo Corona and Mauro Fronza made the first winter ascent of the 1968 *Reali/Vinco route* on the SW face, which is VII+ if climbed completely free. Close by, Corona, this time with his brother Giacomo and Tullio Simoni, climbed a new route on the Pala dei Cantoni. Despite the chilly conditions, this 350m route involved pitches of VII and A4.

Sassolungo Corn, Renzo Corona and Fronza, together with Ivo Rabanser and partner, were quick off the mark to snatch the first winter ascent of the 1992 route *L'Ultimo dei Balkani* (650m VI).

Tofana Massimo da Pozzo, together with Pietro dal Pal, made the first winter ascent of his own route, *Agenti di Scorta dei Giudici Falcone e Borsellino*, on the Tofana di Mezzo (IX-).

Austria

Massive publicity was given to Thomas Bubendofer's solo winter ascent of the *Indirekten route* (VI) on the great S face of the Dachstein in a little over two hours. However, prior to his ascent there had been an uninterrupted eight weeks of sunshine, almost entirely clearing the face of any snow or ice.

THE SPRING/SUMMER SEASON

Older climbers, used to the summers of the 1970s, would have felt completely at home in 1993. For most of July the weather was unsettled with heavy falls of snow, and although the first three weeks in August appear to have been generally fine throughout the Alps, high temperatures led to a very rapid melt and considerable rockfall.

At the beginning and end of the season, breaks in the weather allowed several parties to tackle some of the big ice/mixed routes in excellent condition – a situation that has not occurred for many a summer. Most others kept to fast ascents of hard and generally short free rock routes.

As more people find enjoyment in climbing pure rock in a mountain setting, new crags are being 'discovered' in the Valais close to Alpine huts and are subsequently well equipped to cater for all climbing standards. This procedure also allows a couple of short rock routes of good quality to be slotted into an afternoon, prior to embarking on the main Alpine peak the following day.

The 4000m peaks

On 13 August Simon Jenkins and Martin Moran completed the first ever non-stop traverse of the Alpine 4000m peaks. Their journey took a mere 52 days. (See *'Alps 4000: A Non-Stop Traverse'*, pages 7-15.)

There have been various serious but unsuccessful attempts on this project in the past, generally made by competent amateur mountaineers. This time the considerable Alpine and Himalayan experience of the team allowed the programme to continue almost uninterrupted, despite unusually unsettled weather. The pair were well supported by friends, who established food dumps on some of the more lengthy stretches. However, no mechanised transport was used – only bicycles.

North Face Solos

Very considerable but well-deserved publicity was given to a remarkable series of solo ascents by Alison Hargreaves during the summer. After a lengthy period of mental and physical preparation Hargreaves set out to solo the six classic 'great north faces'. (See *'The Big Six'*, pages 16-23.)

The fact that only five of the six 'north faces' were completed (bad conditions forced her to climb a variation of the *Lauper route*, not the N face, on the **Eiger**) was subsequently of far less importance than the times, which showed a high degree of competence, and that each ascent was the first solo by a woman. The crowning achievement was an impressive solo ascent of the *Slovenian route/Croz Spur* on 10 November in full winter conditions. Unable to cross the snow-covered and heavily-crevassed Leschaux glacier on her own, she was helicoptered over the rimaye and lifted from the summit, but only spent eight hours on the face.

Ecrins

A number of instances of excessive route development in the National Park have resulted in the authorities taking certain measures to limit widespread bolting. From now on, all development and equipping of routes in the Park are subject to prior approval. However, one of the positive effects of re-equipping can be seen on **La Meije** where, during a major clean-up, all the old tat and rappel gear that used to cover the mountain

has now been removed and sound anchor points established exactly where necessary.

The weather, as normal in this region, was good for most of the summer (in contrast to the major massifs further north and east) with few storms in July and August. Unusually adequate snow cover from early summer kept most of the loose material, for which much of the range is well known, in place until towards the end of the season.

Aiguille de Sialouze On the steep and popular walls of the Sialouze, which hold some of the best granite in the range, Jerome Rochelle made the first solo ascent of *Jour de Colère* (ED2) and *Watatanka* (6c obl).

Crête de Palavar On one day in July Rochelle enjoyed 1600m of climbing by linking three routes on this popular granite area above Ailefroide – up and down the 400m classic *Palavar des Flots* (4+); then a combination of *La Vie devant Soi* (5+) and *Les Predateurs* (6a), finally descending *Palavar des Flots* again.

Upper Veneon Valley Highly developed and very popular are the superb granite slabs that lie close to La-Bérarde. The two main areas are the **Tête de la Maye**, where there are routes of all grades (12-14 pitches), and **L'Encoula** which is quite a large area above the west bank of the river south of La Bérarde and below the Glacier de L'Encoula. Topos are available locally.

Briançon New routes and important developments continue on the dolomitic walls of the **Tête d'Aval de Montbrison**, the **Tenailles de Montbrison** and the walls close to the popular **Aiguillette du Lauzet** (where more work in the form of retro-bolting has been carried out on existing, but so far unpopular routes). Probably the hardest route in the whole Briançonnais was completed during the summer on the superb 300m pillar right of the classic *Voie du Grand Dièdre* (5+) on the **Crêtes du Raisin**. This extremely sustained offering gives obligatory 7b climbing with moves of 7c+ if climbed completely free.

Mont Blanc Massif

Unusually heavy snow cover on many of the north faces during June allowed a number of impressive ski descents. The **Aiguille du Midi** became almost over-populated with extreme skiers. Pierre Tardivel's descent of the *W Couloir* (Chassagne/Schmutz D+ in an upwards direction) on 1 June was perhaps the most technical, but there were also other notable achievements. Tardivel also made the first ski descent (his 43rd first descent on skis) of the central spur on the remote Miage face of **Mont Blanc**. Skied 'on-sight', the descent of this 1100m face was completed without incident in less than an hour. Sadly, the guide Alain Moroni was killed attempting to surf the N face of the **Aiguille du Plan**. It was thought that he fell victim to a windslab avalanche.

Mont Blanc This June 45 people had to be rescued from the Vallot hut. Having climbed the peak, they were overtaken by a storm and ended up

marooned in the hut when not one of them felt capable of finding the descent in poor visibility (no one possessed either map or compass).

Grand Capucin There were several important repeats of routes on the E face as well as some very fine attempts, and in some cases successes, at aid elimination. The main protagonist was the very talented Italian guide, Giovanni Bassanini. With an ascent of *Flagrant Délire* in the summer Bassanini has now climbed the 'Cap' 30 times since his first introduction to the face in 1982, and by 10 different routes (including *Gulliver's Travels* eight times).

Le Trident After placing protection on rappel (micro-Friends and Friends up to one-and-a-half) Bassanini flashed a 30m pitch (*Chase the Morning*: solid 8a) to the left of the already supremely difficult crux crack of *Les Untouchables*.

Le Clocher An 'on-form' Bassanini, on his sixth ascent of the route, managed to free the third pitch of *L'Empire State Building* (Piola/Strappazon, 1989 7c 6b obl), a boulder-problem move that had never previously been led.

Clochers de la Noire A prominent narrow ice gully on the N face has always looked a fine objective; one which would simply require the correct conditions and someone with the enthusiasm to go and ascertain its feasibility. François Damilano and Patrick Gabarrou were the team and the date of their successful ascent was 5 June.

Les Périades Climbing on these pinnacles was very fashionable in the early part of the century and although nowadays they hold great appeal for lovers of solitude (it's a long way to walk for 50m of climbing), the last decade has witnessed a fair number of new climbs created in the numerous steep and ephemeral ice gullies of the W face.

Early in the year Patrick Gabarrou climbed a trilogy of routes with various partners. Conditions were not generally favourable and several sections of these routes were climbed on aid. However, the finest route came in June when with Pascal Aruta he climbed the thin ice spear right of the *Puiseux Couloir* to reach the col right of **Pt 3517m**. This fine spear had never been climbed, so one week later Gabarrou returned with Jean Michel Assalin, despatched the remaining 80m of granite and so completed *Connexion 3517*.

Tour des Jorasses Daniel Anker, Michel Piola and Benoit Robert have added another technically demanding line to the superb SE face. *Abyisse* (ED3 7b+ 7a obl), climbed on 8-9 July, starts to the right of the *South Dièdre* and crosses *Etoiles Filantes* on pitch five.

Grandes Jorasses Patrick Gabarrou and the young, up-and-coming Alpinist Benoit Robert climbed out right below the third icefield of the *Colton/MacIntyre* to the steep rock on the N face of **Pt Whympier**. They reached the summit of the latter via a difficult snowed-up groove on the left flank of the prominent pillar high on the left of the buttress.

A major tragedy occurred when eight climbers were killed in an avalanche at 4.30 one morning in early August. They were crossing from the *Rocher du Reposoir* to the *Rocher Whympier* on the normal route.

At the end of August Polish climbers J Fluder and J Gotab made the second ascent of Jean-Marc Boivin and Gerard Vionnet-Fuasset's route *Extreme Dream* (first climbed on 29-30 December 1987).

Two ascents of the *Colton/MacIntyre* (1200m ED3) took place almost immediately after. On 1st September it was climbed by a party from Switzerland, who were followed a day later by the British team of Dave Heselden and Simon Richardson. The route was climbed again in late September by two Spaniards. The British party found the climbing bold, very steep and technically worthy of Scottish 6.

Petites Jorasses Bassanini, climbing on both occasions with a client, made the second ascent of the 1982 Piola/Steiner offering, *Le Pilier Inconnu*, and the first free ascent of *La Beauté du Monde* (ED2 and now 7c).

The superb rock of the E face came under further scrutiny this summer, with the result that three more fine routes were added. From 25-27 June Michel Piola and Benoit Robert created *Pantagruel* (450m 7a+ all-free, 6c with one point of aid, 6b obl) to the right of the original *Bonatti/Mazeaud route* and a finish up the previously unclimbed headwall.

Pure et Dure (Manlio Motto and Romain Vogler on 6 August) takes a direct line up the huge blank slabs to the left of the *Manera/Meneghin route* (ED3 300m 7a 6c+ obl).

The next day the pair, together with Gianni Predan, completed their 1992 project to the right of *Gargantua*. *Piano, Sano e Lontano* (420m and 12-pitches) gave sustained climbing and was allocated an overall grade of ED3 (6c+ 6c obl).

Monte Gruetta On the wonderfully remote E face, Motto and Vogler added *La Roue de la Fortune* (ED2 6b obl), which lies on the front of the large rounded pillar already taken by the superb 1982 Ferrero/Manera route *Pilastro del Sorriso* (TD V+ and a little A0). The new route takes a line to the right of the latter and was attempted by the Vogler brothers in 1982 before they turned their attention to the prominent slanting dièdre on the left, which eventually became the line of *Le Karma* (TD+ 6a/b). The latter is wrongly marked in the current edition of the *Alpine Club Guide to Mont Blanc*. The line shown is actually that of the 1982 Manera/Meneghin/Ribetta route, *Via della Conca Grigia* (400m TD+ 5/6a and A2). *Le Karma* takes the shorter corner to the left and ends at the gap behind the first tower on the SE ridge.

Aiguille du Midi Gabarrou sniffed out a slim ice runnel of around 300m in the very centre of the Frendo Spur rock buttress. Climbed during a period of bad weather, the crux was a very hard ice pitch of 85°, submerged under a cascade of freezing cold water.

Aiguille des Pèlerins Jean Christophe Moulin made the first solo ascent of the classic Piola/Sprungli route, *Nostradamus* (ED2), on the N pillar. Bassanini and Armand Clavel mistakenly created a new five-pitch direct variant at the top of the pillar. This is probably a good deal more logical, though significantly harder (6a/b), than the original.

Aiguille du Fou Philippe Batoux, Lionel Daudet and Benoit Robert have added a sixth route to the S face during 18-20 August. *Le Bon, la Brute*

et le Truand is situated on the right side of the wall and has a crux pitch of A4 and 7a obl.

Aiguille des Oiseaux To the right of the classic *Original route* on the slabby SE spur Philippe Batoux and Benoit Robert have added *Le Festin de Babeth* (6b). It now provides the best line of rappels for parties completing any of the routes on the spur.

Pt des Nantillons On the somewhat austere E face that is clearly visible from the Envers hut, Marc Batard, Vincent Delestre and Damien Girardier have put up a new route called *Désir d'Alan* (TD 5+/A0).

Aiguille de Roc On the E face a new line was added by Jacques and Stephane Dreyer. *Pêche de Genèse* lies to the right of the increasingly popular *Charlotte for Ever* and has maximum difficulties of 6a+.

Grands Charmoz Americans Scott Bakes and 'local' resident Mark Twilight solved a longstanding problem on the W face, when they made the first ascent of a steep, ephemeral ice runnel (*Birthright* TD+). This 10-pitch route had some very bold run-outs on thin ice at half height.

Aiguille de la République Christophe Bodin and Olivier Ratheaux have created the excellent *Marianne et les Grimpeurs*, a 600m TD (6b) on the E face above Trélaporte glacier, and on the NE face of the Aiguille du Trélaporte, *Va Doucement, c'est Toubon* (240m 6a).

Aiguille du Moine The old partnership of Michel Piola and Pascal Strappazzon completed one of the rare 'modern' rock arêtes in the massif when they climbed along the fine crest of the Pinnacles at the base of the S ridge (Tyrolean traverses, short rappels and free climbing up to 6b).

Aiguille Sans Nom From the 27-28 October, a week after their ascent of the Charmoz, Bakes and Twilight climbed a hard new route on the icy N face, finishing right of the 1978 *Gabarrou/Silvy Directissima*. Here goes the *Neighbourhood* is 900m in height and ED3. There were sections of vertical ice plus some aid (A3).

Flammes de Pierre Ridge On **Pt Michelle-Micheline**, *Michelle Angelo* takes the left flank of the prominent pillar to the left of *Guerre de Feu* starting with an obvious crack. The route is 550m and ED2 (6c 6b obl), and was climbed by Italian, Manlio Motto, and Romain Vogler on 27 June.

Aiguille d'Argentière Bodin and Ratheaux knocked off the previously unclimbed line of the W spur of **Pt 3352m** (slightly over one-third of the distance up the Charlet-Straton ridge). The 250m spur gave interesting TD climbing despite sections of broken rock.

Monts Rouges du Triolet Vogler climbed three routes here which all face the sun, lie at a relatively low altitude and can be tackled well after the end of a normal season. On **Pt 3289m**, which lies immediately north of the E peak, he created with Motto two routes on the steep diamond-shaped SE face. On the right *Mal Partiti* is 7a (6b obl), and *Tout Fou*, climbed as a threesome with Gerard Long, is 6c+ (6c obl). The face is around 270m high and can be reached in 1hr 30min up broken ground above the Triolet hut.

On the SW face of the N peak, *Le Fond de l'Air*, climbed on 5 September by Motto, Vogler and Christian Schwartz, starts to the left of the classic 1979 SW spur and is 6c (6b obl).

Aiguille de l'Encrenaz Devotees of the Aiguilles Rouges will be annoyed to have missed this one. Oliver Ratheaux has put up a pleasant new route on the W face, solo. With pitches of 4, an overall grade of AD was considered about right.

Valais

The Swiss Alpine Club are preparing to spend over SF2 million in 1994 on refurbishing seven of their huts. Included are the Orny, the Moiry, the Mischabeljoch bivouac hut, the Schönbiel, and the tiny Piansecco bivouac hut which is situated south of Pizzo Rotondo – an easy 3000m peak in the more gentle mountains of the Ticino Alps. The total hut revenue to the Club in 1992 was more than SF1.3 million.

Dent Blanche A new 900m mixed line on the right side of the NW face was created by Patrick Gabarrou and Tobias Heymann. The pair followed a succession of ice-glazed slabs, then finished up wonderfully sound rock to the crest of the Arête de Ferpècle in the region of the Grand Gendarme.

Monte Rosa On 27-28 June 1993, two Slovenians, Matjaz Jamnik and Bojan Pockar, climbed what may well be the most demanding route in the range to date, when they added a hard new line to the NE face of the **Signalkuppe**, cutting through the 1971 *Gardin route*. With sustained ice/mixed climbing and rock of VII- and A2, an overall grade of ED3 was considered appropriate.

Bernese and Urner Alps

Eiger Two parties, Christophe Germiquet and Gino Merazzi, plus Nicolas and 14-year-old Julian Zambetti, made the second ascent of the 1992 Anker/Piola route *Le Chant du Cygne* (900m ED3), which takes the true crest of the Geneva Pillar on the N face.

Jungfrauoch Robert Jasper has created a demanding new route on the NE side of the 3475m Jungfrauoch. Climbing alone and on his second attempt at the route, Jasper completed the ascent in 8hrs 30min on 18 May. The climb was graded ED3 and had 90° ice, grade VI- and A2/3 rock, plus Scottish 6 mixed climbing. Phew!

Grimsel/Furka The extreme southern section of the Urner Alps is a sub-Alpine chain with granite climbing to rival any other in Switzerland. The venues range from valley crags to 3000m peaks and are generally accessible from the main road, thus avoiding overnight bivouacs or hut usage. A good valley base is Innertkirchen, which has three campsites and a small grocery store: shopping is best done in Meiringen.

This is an increasingly popular region holding great attraction for the modern Alpine rock-climber, and many British parties were active here during the summer. Recommended are *Schnaggarstiider* and *Steiwasp* on the **Räterischbodensee** which give a good introduction to the 'Etive style'

climbing of this area. However, all pitches are generally a full 50m and there are only two bolt runners per pitch.

In the Urbachtal the Gauli hut is now modernised, fully equipped and occasionally guarded. There are some very big granite walls in this valley, but the latter can also be used by the Swiss Army and possibly subjected to live ammunition from time to time.

Despite first appearances, even the popular roadside classics are not quite as safe as one might imagine. Several days before one British party climbed the well known *Quartzriss* (VI) on the central section of **Oelberg**, the whole slab was swept by an enormous rockfall from the mountainside above.

Further afield, British parties climbed on the **Grauwand** and **Salbitschijen**. On the latter, a route on the Second Tower plus an ascent of the superb W ridge (often considered one of best rock climbs on a ridge in the Alps) should be high on anyone's list; similarly the classic *Neidermann* (VI) and, for competent parties, *Kalypso* (VII+) on the former. Both venues have recently been the scene of extensive retro-bolting, which is unfortunately likely to continue with the current policy towards fixed protection in Switzerland.

Wendenstock On the wall to the right of the SW pillar of the **Tallistock** the Remy brothers put up *Taimud* (7a 6b obl) in 1992. At the same time they started on another route to the right again, which on 7-8 July of this year became *La Trashion* (16 pitches of excellent limestone: 7a 6b obl).

At the west end of the chain the first Swiss *via ferrata* was opened in September. It uses 1300m of cable and lies to the left of the Horloui Pillar on the **Gadmerflue**.

Fribourg Range On the 2236m **Dent de Ruth** the Remys have put up a very fine new line at an accessible standard to the left of Hans Peter Trachsel's classic *S Pillar*. *Dealer* is 5+/6a with around 10 points of aid on its 17 pitches.

Miroir d'Argentine The Remys have also been hard at work creating two more routes which start up the steeper walls right of the Miroir. *Mamba*, at 550m, is one of the longest on the cliff and relatively sustained at 6a (obl) and A1 (all-free at 6c). To the left and sandwiched between the *Super Direct* and *Zygofohis* is *Divine Martine* (450m fine and varied climbing at 5+/6a obl with several points of aid)

Bregaglia/Bernina

Monte Qualido / Precipizo degli Asteroidi Spanish climbers Josechu Jimeno and Juan Luis Monge made the first one-day ascent of *Celeste Nostalgia* (VII and A3) on the E face, home to some very impressive Big-Wall climbs.

They followed this with the third ascent of *Il Paradiso puo Attendere* (950m); originally VII and A4 with the A4 pitch on an expanding flake. Jimeno

climbed this pitch free and the route is now regraded at VIII and A1. The pair then climbed *Mellodrama* in three days and finally, down in the valley on **Stella Marina**, completed *Bratamato Ye Ye* (400m VIII), one of the neckiest routes climbed to date.

Just to the right of *Il Paradiso puo Attendare*, two parallel routes were completed in the spring by the perennial Paolo Vitali and companions. The lines, which have been christened *I Melat* and *Artemisia*, each involve 20 pitches of hard free climbing, with maximum difficulties of VIII.

On the famous **Precipizo degli Asteroidi**, *Non sei piu della mia Banda* is the work of Gaffuri, Pizzagalli, Romano and Soldarini. It offers 15 pitches with obligatory moves of VIII+ and is probably the hardest route to date on the wall.

Piz Badile Gianluca Maspes made the first solo ascent of the 1973 *Bottani/Ciapponi/Dell'Oca* route, commonly referred to as the Third Pillar, on the sunny SE face (mainly IV-V with a pitch of VI).

Pizzo Cengalo Maspes (again) and Paolo Cucchi have climbed a new route on the E face. *Dalle Via* takes the crest of the pillar that lies immediately right of the large couloir separating the Punta Angela from the main body of the mountain. This eight-pitch route has crux sections of VII.

Albigna Valley The second edition of the Albigna valley guide – Albigna II – covers climbs close to the dam such as those on the Punta da l'Albigna, the Bio-Pillar, Piz dal Pal and the Spazzacaldeira. There are now nearly two dozen routes on the Spazza up to grade VIII. Of the more recent, *Lasciami Li* (VI+), which is situated towards the left side of the wall, has been particularly recommended.

Torrone Occidentale The ever productive Maspes has added another route facing the Allievi hut on the popular playground of **Punta 2987m**. With Cristiano Perlini he climbed *Ciota Cicoz*, which is six pitches long and has a crux of VII+.

Monte Disgrazia Two speedy climbers, Paolo Maffazzini and Luca Salini followed the crest of the ridge above the Preda Rossa, over the Corni Bruciati and the Cima di Corna Rosso to the summit of the Disgrazia in eight hours. This is a notable performance on a ridge that is 8km long, has a total ascent of more than 1700m, traverses 10 summits and climbs rock, which is frequently poor, up to a standard of grade IV.

Piz Bernina Gabarrou and Heymann climbed a new route on the edge of the W spur, probably right of the ground taken by the 1899 *Burton-Alexander/Schocher/Platz* route. The team reported sustained climbing on very fine rock with pitches of V+/VI-.

Adamello

There is still plenty of scope for first ascents in this enchanting coarse-granite massif. On the S face of the **Pra Vecchio (2812m)**, a jagged aiguille standing to the NE of the Caro Alto, Carlo Care and Luigi Sauda put up *Zito parla 'l Granito* (TD VI), a 10-pitch route that climbs over a series of towers and compact slabs, similar to those found in the Bregaglia.