
Area Notes



181. Simon Pierse, *Ciarforon from Rifugio Vittorio Emanuele II*, 2006, watercolour, 42 x 59cm

Area Notes

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Alps 2008	<i>Lindsay Griffin</i>
Greenland 2008	<i>Derek Fordham</i>
Scottish Winter 2008-2009	<i>Simon Richardson</i>
Morocco 2005-9	<i>Mike Mortimer</i>
India 2008	<i>Harish Kapadia</i>
Nepal 2008	<i>Dick Isherwood</i>
Pakistan 2007	<i>Lindsay Griffin and Dick Isherwood</i>
China and Tibet	<i>John Town</i>
New Zealand 2008-9	<i>Kester Brown</i>
Cordillera Blanca	<i>Antonio Gómez Bohórquez</i>
Argentine Andes 2008	<i>Marcelo Scanu</i>

LINDSAY GRIFFIN

The Alps 2008

This selection of ascents in 2008 could not have been written without the help of Jonathan Griffith, Andrej Grmovsek, Tomaz Jakofcic, Rolando Larcher, Tony Penning, Claude Rémy, Hilary Sharp, Luca Signorelli and Ueli Steck.

Starting in late June, Diego Giovannini and Franco ‘Franz’ Nicolini took 60 days to complete the first non-mechanised link-up of all 82 Alpine 4000m summits that appear on the UIAA’s official list. The pair opted to track from west to east, ending with Piz Bernina. Until the early 1990s there was no definitive list; some opting for as low as 52 (the number of completely separate mountains), others adding more, with alpine specialist Richard Goedecke listing a staggering 150 individual tops and bumps. At the end of 1993, in an attempt to put an end to the debate, a joint UIAA and Italian Alpine Club committee came up with an ‘official’ list of 82, which they hoped would be used as the benchmark for future attempts. This list came too late for Simon Jenkins and Martin Moran, who in the same year made the first non-mechanised traverse of 74 summits from the Piz Bernina to the Barre des Ecrins. Perhaps the most notable attempt to complete the 82-peak traverse began in the winter of 2004, and ended after 65 summits when Patrick Berhault fell to his death.

Ecrins Enchaînement

An impressive event in the **Ecrins Massif** took place over 11 days, ending in October, when Aymeric Clouet and Christophe Dumerest made a more-or-less continuous north to south traverse of the range, linking eight respectable north faces. Two or three of these alone would keep most people happy for a season. The pair started with the *Z Couloir* on the **Meije** and finished with the *North Ridge* of **Le Sirac**. In between they climbed the *North Couloir* of the **Col du Diable**, *North Couloir* of the **Brèche de la Somme**, *Grand Central Couloir* on the north-west face of the **Dôme de Neige des Ecrins**, *North-West Face* of **Ailefroide Occidentale**, *North-East Couloir* of **Les Bans** and *North Couloir* of the **Brèche des Bruyères**. They saw no other climber in the massif during the entire trip.

Mont Blanc Massif

At the end of September Enrico Bonino and Paolo Stroppiana squeezed a new line into the now well-explored east face of **Mont Maudit**, when they climbed an icy ramp through the rock buttress immediately above the diagonal traverse of **Blaireaux** (just left of the 1978 *Gabarrou-Maquennehan Central Couloir*, later renamed the *Direttissima Roger Baxter-Jones*). The 500m



183. Marko Lukic making a free ascent of the Dru Couloir Direct (First complete ascent Accomazzo/Sorenson, 1977 with two short sections of A3) (Andrej Grmovsek)

route, named *Rêve Caché*, was climbed in 17 pitches up to WI 5+ and F4c. Not long after starting the difficult section, Stroppiana was hit on the leg by a large rock and finished the route with some difficulty.

On the **Grand Capuçin**, Alex Huber evoked old ethics of the legendary Paul Preuss by free soloing up and down the *Swiss Route* (300m: 6b). Huber climbed the route from the top of the approach couloir in one hour on 5 August. Preuss, who soloed many climbs in the first years of the 20th century and was noted for his purity of style, felt that one should ascend only those routes that can be down-climbed safely.

On the east flank of the **Dent de Jetoula** above the Rochefort Glacier,

Elio Bonfanti, Enrico Bonino, Luca Maspes, Rinaldo Roetti and Paolo Stroppiana climbed *Diretta allo Scudo, le Demon du Midi* (250m: 6c/A0, 6b+ obl) on the east-southeast face of **Punta 3095m**. The right edge of this formation was climbed in 1990 by Giancarlo Grassi, the last of many routes in the Mont Blanc Massif that he opened before his untimely death in the spring of 1991. A second route was added in 2005 by Dave Hope, Nick Mullin and Tony Penning, who climbed a corner system left of a prominent shield of slabs: *Voie Pellin* (500m of climbing, British E4 6a). The new Italian route climbs directly up the shield, but in complete contrast to *Voie Pellin*, uses a large quantity of bolts, a situation that saddens Penning, who had one day hoped to return and attempt the line in good style. Bonfanti has approached the Courmayeur municipality, proposing that Punta 3095m (actually 3093m) be renamed Punta Grassi.

From 19-24 February, Benoît Drouillat and Pascal Ducroz, both French guides, and the Belgian Vanessa Francois made most likely the second winter and, indeed, a very rare ascent of *Manitua* on the north face of the **Grandes Jorasses**. The team was unable to climb the final and crux pitch onto the crest of the Croz Spur, and instead made a series of very tenuous skyhook moves left to reach the top section of Bubu Bole's route, *Le Nez*. Here, they aided up Bole's protection bolts to complete the ascent. Sadly, within the next 12 months both Drouillat and Ducroz would lose their lives in separate climbing accidents.

On 17 February Tina di Batista and Tomaz Jakofcic made a rare ascent of Yvan Ghirardini's *Rêve Ephémère d'Alpiniste* on the north face of Pointe Young. They climbed the route free in 11 hours at a surprisingly reasonable M5+.

On the left extremity of the Jorasses north face, 57-year old Patrick Gabarrou plugged the obvious gap between Couloir Douce and the Petit MacIntyre. This snow/ice face with a mixed exit was climbed with Michel Caranotte, and is Gabarrou's ninth new route on the wall. Graded TD, the line was named *Hugues d'en Haut* after Hugues d'Aubarede, a 61-year old French grandfather who was one of the victims of the 2008 K2 tragedy.

In January, on the north face of the **Grand Dru**, two Slovenian teams made completely free ascents of the *Dru Couloir Direct*. First up was the tried and tested partnership of Andrej Grmovsek and Marko Lukic, who completed the route in 13 hours at VI/6+ and M8, with each pitch climbed on-sight. Grmovsek said it was the best mixed climb he'd ever done. It was repeated later at the same grade by Tina di Batista and Tomaz Jakofcic.

On the Grandes Montets Ridge of the **Aiguille Verte**, Jonathan Griffith and Will Sim climbed some new ground with their 450m *Choco and Vanilla Go Climbing*. However, most of this route appears to coincide with *Hot and Cold*, put up by Thierry Renault with Abigail Crofts in April 2007. The route loosely lies on the north-east (Argentière) face of **Pointe Farrar** but well to the right of the summit fall-line. In the upper section, Crofts and Renault avoided a rocky nose via mixed ground on the left, while Griffith and Sim passed it on the right. The meat of both routes appears to be the

same; three sustained mixed pitches in a corner system that were II 4+ and M5 for Renault, and III M6 (easy Scottish 7) and A1 for the British pair.

On the right side of the north face of the **Petit Clocher du Portalet**, Claude and Yves Remy have added *Plaisir Immédiat*. This eight-pitch route (6c) is now the best equipped (65 bolts) and least demanding on the steep monolithic wall. The Remys also replaced many of the original bolts on their 1983 jamming classic *Etat de Choc* (7a). On the east pillar of **Le Satellite**, a modest summit just north of the Petit Clocher, the Remys put up *La Raison du Temps*, a five-pitch bolt-protected line up cracks and corners at 6b.



184. *Left:* Duncan Tunstall climbing the steep chimney beyond the shattered tower, pitch 33, day 3, on the first ascent of the south-west spur of Punta Baretta. *Right:* approximate line of Richardson/Tunstall route. (Simon Richardson)

South-west Spur, Punta Baretta (1200m ED1)

Punta Baretta (4013m) is considered to be the most remote of all the 4000m peaks and lies on the south side of Mont Blanc on the lower Brouillard Ridge. Its forgotten south-west side plunges 1600m to the Miage glacier and is defined by two spurs separated by a couloir. The lower-angled right-hand spur was climbed by Baretta himself in 1880, and has only been repeated once. The upper section was followed by Blodig in 1908 who traversed onto Baretta's route from the upper Mont Blanc glacier during his quest to complete the 4000ers.

The south-west aspect of Baretta was ignored for nearly a century until May 2006 when Pierre Tardivel climbed, and then skied, the couloir left of Baretta's spur. The couloir was repeated by an Italian team in July 2009,



185. Yves Remy repeating his recently re-equipped 1983 classic, *Etat de Choc* (Remy/ Remy: 300m: 7a), on the North Face of the Petit Clocher du Portalet. Here he is on pitch six (6c). (*Claude Remy*)

which prompted Simon Richardson and Duncan Tunstall to attempt the steeper unclimbed spur leading directly to the summit.

The pair left the Miage glacier at 4am on 7 September and ascended 400m of brittle ice up the steep snout of the Mont Blanc glacier to gain the spur which they climbed in more than 40 pitches over a series of knife-edge towers to the final snow slopes. They reached the summit at 2pm on the third day and descended to the Eccles Hut.

The ascent of a new 1200m route leading to the summit of a 4000m peak is an unusual event; according to the Italian mountain historian Luca Signorelli, the south-west spur of Punta Baretta was 'one of the last remaining virgin features on Mont Blanc'.

[A full account of this ascent is planned for the next AJ.]

Bernese Oberland

Records were set and then broken on the **Eiger** during the winter. On 28 January, Simon Anthamatten and Roger Sch鋗li climbed the *Classic 1938 Route* in just six hours and 50 minutes, a time that until quite recently would have been a good three hours faster than the record for a roped party. In 1969 Peter Habeler and Reinhold Messner turned the world of alpinism upside down by racing up the climb in an astonishing 10 hours. This was an achievement light years ahead of its time and remained more or less unbeaten by a roped pair until very recently, Sch鋗li himself, with Hanspeter Hug, knocking two hours off the record in October 2007. Prior to his 2008 ascent, Sch鋗li had climbed the route nine times. Incidentally, film buffs will recognize Anthamatten and Sch鋗li as the actors playing Andreas Hinterstoisser and Toni Kurz in Joe Simpson's film, *The Beckoning Silence*.

For Sch鋗li it was part of a remarkable achievement of climbing all six 'Great North Faces' of the Alps, one after the other, between 8 January and 22 February. Apart from the Eiger and Badile (see next page), his routes were as follows: Cima Grande, *Via Camillotto Pellissier*, Matterhorn, *Classic Schmidt Route*; Dru, *Dru Couloir*, Grandes Jorasses, *Shroud*.

The Anthamatten-Sch鋗li record did not last for long: less than a month later Daniel Arnold and Stephen Ruoss climbed the *1938 Route* in six hours and 10 minutes.

Of course this sort of time is quite leisurely for Ueli Steck. The noted Swiss alpinist, who already held the speed record for the ascent, returned to the face on 13 February and, without a rope, stormed up the 1938 Route in two hours and 47 minutes (and 33 seconds!). As the weaving nature of the line makes the distance climbed more than twice the 1800m vertical interval of the face, Steck was moving at over 20m a minute.

An innovative feat took place on the very steep rock wall that forms the right edge of the north face, when on 6 August American Dean Potter soloed *Deep Blue Sea* (300m. 7b+), wearing a parachute to protect a possible fall. Fortunately, it was never put to the test. Potter traversed into the route above the lower, less steep and looser terrain, where a fall would not have allowed him enough time to deploy the parachute. He concentrated



186. Monte Disgrazia from the north-northeast. (E) East Summit (3648m). (C) Central Summit (3650m). (M) Main Summit (3678m). (N) North face. (1) North East Spur (Anderegg/Prat/Barlow/Still/Taugwald, 1874: AD+). (2) The approximate line of *Moonlight* (Baletti/Cavalli, 2008: 450m of climbing: VI and 75°). (3) Hypergoulotte (Baletti/Ranaglia, 1989: 330m: ED1: 95° and V). (4) Couloir dell'Insubordinato (Casarotto/Federico/Gogna/Mario/Mauri/Molin, 1979: 300m: D/D+: 65° max). (4) The classic Corda Molla Ridge (First integral ascent Bonola/Corti/Corti, 1928: 500m: AD+). (*Lindsay Griffin*)

his efforts on the slightly impending headwall, five pitches of which he'd climbed the year before, roped to Beat Kammerlander.

Late in August, Steck returned to the north face, and with Stefan Siegrist free climbed *Paciencia*, creating what the Swiss pair feel to be the most difficult alpine sport route on the Eiger. The route, which climbs through the Rote Fluh and continues up the front face of the Czechoslovak Pillar, was equipped, climbed but not redpointed in 2003. *Paciencia* has 27 pitches, one of which is 8a, two are 7c+ and nearly all the remainder vary between 7a and 7b+.

Bregaglia-Disgrazia

Arriving at the summit of the **Piz Badile** on the 20 February, after a bivouac at the foot of the east-northeast face, and three more on the wall, Fabio Valseschini completed the first solo winter ascent of the *British Route* (Isherwood/Kosterlitz, 1968: 600m: ED1: climbed free by Rossano Libera at 7a). This was only the second time the route had been climbed in winter: the first, in 1982 by two young alpinists from Czechoslovakia, Zusanna Hofmannova and Alena Stehlikova, remains one of the most impressive performances ever by an all female team on a major route in the Alps. AC member Martin Moran made the first solo ascent in 1979, and as access to this route has become increasingly difficult over the years, it is not clear if



187. The west face of the Sass dia Crusc (2825m) rises above the Badia Valley. (A) The left-hand or Livanos Pillar. (B) The Central Pillar. (1) Livanos Pillar (VII- [5.10b], 500m, Gabriel-Livanos, 1953). (2) Meyerl Diedre (VII [5.10d], 550m, Mayerl-Rahracher, 1962). (3) La Perla Preziosa (IX+ [5.13a/b], 375m/eight pitches of new climbing, Sartori-Tondini-Zandegiacomo, 2008). (Claudio Cima)

there have been any more before Valseschini.

One day later, Rossano Libera started up the *Cassin Route* alone, and after two bivouacs made the first confirmed winter solo. Unusually, there appears to have been a lot of compact névé and he climbed much of the route using ice tools, finding difficult mixed ground and dry tooling in the upper chimneys. However, just a few days earlier the *Cassin* had received a remarkably fast ascent by Simon Gietl and Roger Schäli, who completed it in a day and rappelled the *North Ridge* the following night. This may have been only the third winter ascent of the historic route, one of the traditional 'Six Great North Faces of the Alps'.

Benigno Baletti added his 19th (!) new route to **Monte Disgrazia**, when with his wife Giovanna Cavalli (completing her ninth new route on the peak) he climbed *Moonlight* (450m: 75° and UIAA VI). The pair began on the ice slope left of the Hypergoulotte on the north-northeast flank of the south-east ridge, but at half height crossed the couloir and finished up a pronounced rock rib of excellent serpentine.

Dolomites

Continuing his philosophy of trying to create hard traditionally-protected routes on the great Dolomite walls, Nicola Tondini, has made a free ascent of *La Perla Preziosa* (Precious Pearl) on the magnificent west face of the **Sass dia Crusc** (aka Sasso della Croce or Heiligkreuzkofel) in the Fanis. Tondini began working on the route, which lies to the right of the now classic Meyerl Diedre, in 2005. Stumped by a section of very rotten rock, he was forced to climb out right on a superb compact wall and agonized for more than a year about the problem of protection, before finally placing two bolts and climbing the crux at UIAA IX+.

Florian and Martin Riegler made the first free ascent of *Vint ani do*, a 350m line on the south face of the **Meisules de la Biesces** in the Sella Group first climbed in 2004 by Stefan Comploi and Ivo Rabanser at VII and A2. The brothers climbed the 12-pitch route at 8a+ to produce what is now considered the most difficult line in the Sella-Sassolungo region. Surprisingly, they made this free ascent during the winter season – on 2 March.

Rolando Larcher climbed a superb and exposed line left of the classic *Solda Route* on the south-west face of the **Marmolada di Penia**. Larcher employed his usual style, climbing from the ground up, using natural protection where possible and only resorting to bolts - as always, drilled by hand – when faced with totally compact rock. In the end he placed only 11 protection bolts. Although he managed to free each individual move of the 17-pitch *AlexAnna*, Larcher was unable to make a redpoint ascent due to unseasonably inclement weather but estimates the eventual grade at 8a+/8b.

On 15 August Thomas Huber completed a previously attempted project of linking hard routes on each of the summits of the **Tre Cime di Lavarado** in less than 24 hours, descending from the summits by parachute. With Peter Anzenbeger he started up *Alpenliebe* (UIAA IX) on the north face of the **Cima Ovest** at 10.30pm on the 14th, reached the summit at 4am but had to wait until dawn to make the BASE jump from near the top of the Squirrels' Ridge. At 7am he was beginning *Das Phantom der Zinne* (IX+) on the north face of the **Cima Grande** with his brother Alex. They reached the top at 2pm and then descended to the Ring Band, from where Thomas made his second BASE jump. At 3.30 he was tackling *Ötzi Trifft Yeti* (VIII+) on the south face of **Cima Piccalo** with Martin Kopfsgruter, who apparently had to wake Huber numerous times on the belays. However, the pair reached the summit at 7.30pm after Thomas had climbed a total of 48 pitches. From there, he chose to descend the *Normal Route* at a more leisurely pace.