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## Area Notes

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189. John Fairley, *Climbers on the east ridge of Lyskamm*, oil on canvas, 255x610mm, 2008

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# Area Notes

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The Alps 2011	<i>Lindsay Griffin</i>
Scottish Winter 2010-2011	<i>Simon Richardson</i>
Afghanistan 2011	<i>Lindsay Griffin</i>
Pakistan 2011	<i>Dick Isherwood</i>
India 2010	<i>Harish Kapadia</i>
Nepal 2011	<i>Dick Isherwood</i>
China and Tibet 2011	<i>John Town</i>
Bolivia 2009-2011	<i>Erik Monasterio</i>
Argentine Andes 2010-2011	<i>Marcelo Scanu</i>
New Zealand 2010-2011	<i>Kester Brown</i>

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LINDSAY GRIFFIN

## The Alps 2011



190. Frêne face of Mont Blanc, showing the line of *Chronique de la haine ordinaire*. (Luca Signorelli)

The Alps remain the experimental laboratory for European climbers, a place to develop their skills and try out progressive ideas before using experience gained to tackle increasingly difficult climbs in the Greater Ranges. Autumn and winter are now the preferred time for the great ice and mixed faces, the 2011 autumn especially producing excellent conditions. Although this resumé deals with the innovative climbing that took

place throughout the year, many other mountaineers were ticking notable repeats. The relative number of alpinists may be diminishing, but there still appears to be plenty operating at a very high level.

On **Mont Blanc** itself, two well-known lines, believed to be previously unattempted, were finally climbed. Italian Hervé Barmasse and the Spanish-Basque brothers Eneko and Iker Pou added a second route to the remote and very rarely climbed Left-hand Pillar of Brouillard. The smallest of the four pillars on the Brouillard Face was first climbed in 1971 by Poles, Ryszard Kowalewski, Janusz Maczka and Wojciech Wroz, who followed the left flank of the pillar on rock that is in parts quite friable (VI). They continued with 300m of mixed terrain up the broad rocky spur, common with the upper section of the Red Pillar, to the Brouillard Ridge, and from there to the summit. However, the obvious and most elegant line – straight up the crest – remained unclimbed. Barmasse and the Pou brothers completed 11 pitches up to F6c, more or less directly up the crest. They continued onwards to the vicinity of Mont Blanc de Courmayeur, where they bivouacked. The route was named *La Classica Moderna* (1000m to the summit; 350m of new climbing on the pillar), as their style of ascent resembled that used by Walter Bonatti on his historic climb of the neighbouring Red Pillar in 1959. As Barmasse points out, in those days the pioneers had to reach the summit of Mont Blanc in order to get home. This was the second climb in Barmasse's trilogy entitled 'Exploring the Alps', of which more below.

Aymeric Clouet, Pierre Labbre and Jérôme Para completed a winter *Peuterey Super-integral*, only the third known of its type. The first winter super-integral took place in 1982 and sealed a place in history for Renato Casarotto. Over 15 days the legendary Italian, completely alone, climbed the *Ratti-Vitali* on the west face of the Aiguille Noire, the *Boccalatte-Gervasutti* route on the south-west face of the Gugliermine, and finished up the Central Pillar of Frêne. This idea was repeated in winter 2003 by three French, who for their final route on the Frêne face substituted *Frêneysie Pascale*, the steep and discontinuous couloir between the Right Hand and Central Pillar. Clouet, Labbre and Para also opted for a different route on the Frêne face; the very steep corner system between the Hidden and Central pillars. In the past this corner was equipped with anchors for a rappel descent – albeit objectively-threatened – from above the difficulties on the Central Pillar of Frêne. However, it overhangs in parts and appears to have deterred any serious winter attempts until now. The climbing, in generally wide cracks or chimneys choked with old ice, was sustained, hard and mixed. The route has been named *Chronique de la haine ordinaire*.

Nicolas Potard made an important free ascent on the east face of the **Grand Capuçin**, when he linked the 1968 *Lecco Route* with the 1991 Romain Vogler route *De fil en Aiguille* to produce *Le Tresor de Romain*. The link required two new pitches (F6a and F7a+) and the climb offers one pitch of F8a and another at F8a+. Potard, with Paul Dudas, added *Ciao Vinc* to **La Vierge** – the 'mini Grand Capuçin' above the right bank of the



191. Aiguille Verte from the north, showing the ephemeral line of Les Cascades de Col du Nant Blanc (*Lindsay Griffin*)

Milieu glacier on the Aiguille d'Argentière. The 200m route is 7b+, 6c obl, with a wonderful 7b crack on pitch four. Both Potard's lines rely heavily on trad gear. The previously unclimbed south face of rarely visited **Pointe Sud de Fréboudze** was the goal of Philippe Batoux, Pierre d'Albo and Lionel Daudet. Over four days in winter they put up *N'oublie pas la Saint Valentin* (500m, A2+, 6b and M4).

A strange climb, with serious death potential, was dubbed *Paranormal Activiti* by Spanish alpinist Pau Escalé. With various partners he made attempts to climb the huge sérac to the right of the initial spur on the classic 1929 route up the north face of the **Plan**, leading to the hanging glacier. The four rock pitches below the sérac wall itself were A2+ and A3; the sérac gave sections of WI6. However, on his final attempt, darkness caught him 50-60m below the top of the sérac, and he bailed. Incomplete lines, which reach no logical conclusion, are increasingly being given a name; climbers seemingly unable to admit 'defeat'. This one is no exception. It seems most unlikely there will be queues at the base to finish it off.

On **Les Droites**, Patrick Pessi, Sébastien Ratel and Remy Sfilio made a winter ascent of a line up the middle of the Bergland Pillar (climbed in 1969 up the left flank by Lackner and Messner), naming their 1000m route *Ecaille Epique* (ED M6, 90° and A1). However, for much of the way



192. North-west face (c.1000m) of the Mönch. 1. *Haston-Eistrup Couloir* (1976), 2. *Dare* (solo 2011). (Ben Dare)

it appears to coincide with a little-known ascent in 1991 by Chris Dale and Jim Kerr, who climbed in summer, and naturally in a different style, to produce an ED2 route with difficulties of 6b. There will be differences between the French and British lines, certainly in the lower half, though there appears to be far less room for variation above the conspicuous tower at mid-height. But the concept of climbing the spur direct is two decades old.

Although not in 2011, mention must be made of two routes climbed

from the Nant Blanc glacier by AC member Andy Parkin. Starting at the base of the classic Charlet-Platonov *Nant Blanc Face Direct* on the **Aiguille Verte**, Parkin, climbing solo, followed a series of icefalls and goulottes up the face to the left, exiting on the upper Grand Montets Ridge at the Col du Nant Blanc (just above the Pointe de Ségogne, the last rock on the arête before the summit). The 650m route – *Les Cascades de Col du Nant Blanc* (V/4) – lies wholly to the right of the Gugliermina and involves ice to 85°. Parkin had watched and waited 10 years for this route to come into condition, and his ascent took place during a spell of unusually hard freeze in early June 2009. He descended the same route, as glaciers on the far side of the mountain were quite open at the time, and the Nant Blanc has relatively few crevasses.

Prior to this he had soloed another new route well to the left on the **Petit Aiguille Verte**. The 350m line was discovered 'by accident', lies to the right of *Imassacre Directe*, and slants left to reach the north-west ridge not far below the summit. Graded WI4+, with rock at IV/V to finish, the route offers delicate ice climbing to 90°. Both these routes receive, and need, a reasonable amount of sun: normally it would be too cold in winter for ice to form.

The Grandes Jorasses was the first venue for an exceptional winter trilogy. Between 14 January and 12 March Patrice Glairon-Rappaz and Cedric Périllat Merceroz climbed the three great north faces of the Alps – **Grandes Jorasses, Eiger and Matterhorn** – by three difficult direct routes. This project, linking three of the hardest, and rarely climbed, *direttissima*, had not previously been done in one winter: 14-18 January, Grandes Jorasses via *Rolling Stones* (five bivouacs); 20 January - 5 February, Eiger via *Harlin Direttissima with 1938 Heckmair exit* (six bivouacs); 8-12 March, Matterhorn via *Cerutti-Gogna* (four bivouacs).

In the Ecrins massif there was an impressive series of multiple ascents by Yann Borgnet and Robin Revest, who linked three great north faces above the Glacier Noir, the theme being to celebrate the achievements of one of the massif's most famous partnerships; Jean-Michel Cambon and Bernard Francou. On day one they climbed the 1976 *Cambon-Francou Direct* on **Mont Pelvoux**. This sombre 1000m wall is TD+, F6a and mixed, and had possibly no more than two ascents before 2011. From the summit they descended the *Coolidge Couloir* (PD), climbed back up the Sialouze glacier to the *Col Est du Pelvoux*, and then down-climbed and rappelled the *North Couloir* (700m: D) to regain their bivouac site on the glacier at 10pm. Next day it was the 1975 *Cambon-Francou Directe de Droite* on the **Pic Sans Nom** (1000m: ED1: F6b, A1 and mixed), which climbs the great slabs to the right of the famous Jean-Marc Boivin ice route, *Raie des Fesses*. From the summit they climbed down the *North West Couloir* (AD) to the Coup de Sabre glacier, they again reached their bivouac site late; this time at 10.30pm. On the third and final day they climbed the easiest of their three chosen north faces, the 1981 *Cambon-Francou Direct*, aka *Pilier des Séracs*, on **Ailefroide Centrale** (900m: TD+: 5+, 60° and mixed). On the hanging glacier, they

abandoned the original line, which climbs direct to the subsidiary summit of Pointe Forastier, and instead slanted right to finish up the *Costa Rouge Arête* (D) to the central summit. Descending the *South Face* (PD), they were in the Ailefroide campsite at 10pm.

Still in the Ecrins, over two days in May Hélias Millerioux and Romain Hocquemiller climbed a new line on the upper WNW face of the **Pic Sans Nom**. Millerioux had spotted this during two failed attempts to make a winter ascent of *L'éloge de la Fuite*, further right on the face. The 350m upper wall has a tricky mixed approach, above which the pair climbed four pitches to bivouac on the Chapoutot Ledge. Next day they climbed a further four difficult pitches to the north-west ridge, then followed the crest over more mixed terrain to the summit. *T'y as mis un bon piton* is ED1 F7a, F6c obl.

On the great north-west face of the **Olan**, one of the most serious rock walls in the Ecrins, Mathieu Detrie and Pierre Labbre put up *Chauve qui peut* (1100m, F7b or F6c+ and A1), which on the upper wall climbs direct up the face between the 1981 *Directe de Gauche* and the 1956 *Couzy-Desmaison*, to where the two more or less intersect on the middle terraces. After a short stretch on the latter, it climbs right of the *Directe* before joining it towards the top.

In the Valais Alps the **Matterhorn** came under the spotlight with a number of notable ascents on both north and south faces. Local guide and all-round Matterhorn guru Hervé Barmasse climbed the south pillar of Picco Muzio. There are other established routes on this pillar but they are not direct: Barmasse rectified this by first climbing 400m up the objectively dangerous snow gully, and then a further 700m of characteristically chossy Matterhorn rock (with difficulties up to 6c), solo. He made three bivouacs on the face. This line was the first in a trilogy named 'Exploring the Alps', in which Barmasse climbed new routes on three of the most famous (and thought to be very well-explored) mountains in the Alps.

On the north side, conditions during the autumn proved excellent, allowing several parties to complete the rarely climbed *Bonatti Direct* in one day. Olov Isaksson and Nikolay Primerov took bivouac gear and a large rack, crossed the rimaye at 5am and summited at 7pm, free climbing throughout up to M6. However, locals Patrick Aufdenblatten and Michael Lerjen travelled light, moved together above the Traverse of the Angels, and reached the summit in a remarkable 7hrs14mins. The previous fastest time on this route had been 25 hours, by racehorse Ueli Steck, solo. Given Steck's credentials, many felt an improvement on his time would be almost impossible for roped parties.

In 2008 Martial Dumas, Jean-Yves Fredricksen and Jean Troillet climbed an independent line up the centre of the north face for 400-500m to meet the classic *Schmidt Route*, which they followed to the level of the Shoulder on the Hörnli Ridge, before traversing left to gain this crest. Troillet had previously attempted this line with Sébastien Gay, who shortly after was killed in a ski-flying incident. Troillet dedicated the line to his friend and



193. The top half of the north-west face of the Piz Badile, showing the approximate line of *Sogni d'alta Quota*. Ringo Starr takes a parallel line to the left, finishing up the prominent left-facing dièdre. (Lindsay Griffin coll.)

*Sébastien Gay* was graded ED2/3, F5, A2 and 85° ice. In autumn 2011 Roger Schaeli and Robert Jasper made the second overall and first free ascent at M8, again finishing out left to the Hörnli Ridge (which at that height on the face is probably more difficult than continuing direct to the summit).

Barmasse's third new route in the trilogy took place on **Monte Rosa**, where with his father Marco, also a highly accomplished alpinist and guide, he climbed the wall left of the 1987 Italian route *Africa Nostra* on the remote and rarely visited south-east face of Signalkuppe (aka Punta Gnifetti). The pair took the logical approach of descending onto the glacier plateau below the face from high on the standard Italian route up the SSW flank. The 800m new route hits the south-west ridge just 15m below the summit (and Margherita hut), has pitches of 'UIAA VI', and was graded ED. With the completion of the trilogy Barmasse had achieved what he set out to prove; we should never take for granted that everything in the Alps has been climbed.

Moving east to the Bregaglia-Disgrazia, there were two new routes of note. The **Piz Badile** gained, arguably, its first really major new route in

almost a decade, with the completion of *Sogni d'alta Quota* on the austere 650m north-west face. This new line breaches the obvious and previously unclimbed expanse of rock between the 1985 Italian route, *Ringo Starr*, and the classic but serious 1937 *Bramani Route*. It was completed over two days by Antonio Gomba, Andrea Marzorati and Corrado Trezzi, who climbed 18 pitches of primarily bolt-protected ground at F6b+, F6a obl. **Monte Disgrazia** gave up one of its secrets when, after a lengthy approach, Michele Comi, Stefano Mogavero, and guidebook authors Luca Maspes and Giuseppe Miotti made the first ascent of the south spur of the 3468m East Summit. This route was a prelude to the 2012 celebrations held to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the first ascent of this fine peak. The route was named *Via del 149* and is 600m high with difficulties of UIAA VII- on generally good to excellent rock.

On the huge granite wall of the **Qualido**, Swiss-based James Pearson made the first continuous free ascent of *Joy Division* (800m, 22 pitches, F8b). *Joy Division*, a combination of the three lines *Forse si, forse no* (1996), *Mellodrama* (1989) and *Melat* (1993) was climbed by local star Simone Pedferri over three days in 2004. After several attempts using a portaledge, Pearson, belayed by Nico Nastorg, completed the route with one bivouac on the good ledge above pitch 15. Pitch one (F8b) proved to be the crux, even though reports suggested the fourth pitch (also F8b) would be harder. Pearson also found the seventh pitch (F7b+) very demanding, a sustained, technical affair coming after six hard pitches.

On a different slant, American John Harlin completed the second *circumnavigation of the Swiss border*, a journey of around 2000km with a total height gain of 170,000m. Harlin started the project in 2010 but was stopped early in the trip by an accident. He came back in the autumn of that year to paddle and mountain bike the northern frontier, and in the summer of 2011 returned to the Liechtenstein border to continue east, south and then west, passing through the Rätikon, Bernina, Bregaglia and Valais before finishing over Mont Dolent. While he certainly didn't keep religiously to the frontier, for instance his crossing of the Bregaglia was made via the Roma Path to the south, this was certainly a weather-dependent feat of endurance.

There is little to report from the Bernese Oberland. In the on-going fascination with speed ascents, on 20 April, 27-year-old Dani Arnold surprised the world of alpinism by breaking Ueli Steck's record time for an ascent of the north face of the **Eiger**. Arnold arrived on the summit at around 11:30 in the morning, having taken just 2hrs 28mins, almost 20 minutes faster than Steck's record ascent in February 2008. This is particularly remarkable given that when Steck achieved this time he had climbed the route many times previously, including several solo ascents: Arnold appears to have climbed it only once before, roped. Speed ascents prove great technical competence and represent huge personal achievement, though their general contribution to the wider world of alpinism remains unclear. However, they are inspirational in showing what can be achieved in the

mountains with a highly trained body.

Another notable solo came from Ben Dare, who climbed a partial new line on the c1000m north-west face of the **Mönch**. From low on the *Nollen Route*, he slanted left to reach the 1976 *Haston-Eistrup Couloir* well above its base. Following this through the crux narrows, he branched left into a prominent gully, cutting through the rocky face on the left. This led to the upper section of the south-west ridge, just below the summit. The grade was around TD. The gully was 60-75° with a few short vertical sections, and was followed by moderate mixed ground to the ridge.

A hard new mixed route was climbed in the Orobic Alps, where Tito Arosio, Yuri Parimbelli and Ennio Spiranelli made a one-day, winter first ascent of *Piantobaldo* (600m, WI4, M7, A1) on the north-west face of the **Presolana**. The route starts up the first two rope lengths of *Orobic Ice*, then continues for 11 independent pitches to the summit ridge of Presolana West.

In the Dolomites one of the most notable winter ascents came from Fabio Valsechini, who completed the first winter solo of *Via dei Cinque di Valmadrera* (1,350m: VI+ and A3) on the north-west face of the **Civetta**. First climbed in the winter of 1972 by the Rusconi brothers, this demanding route had seen only four previous ascents, including a summer solo in 2004. Valsechini made seven bivouacs on this huge, complex wall, and an eighth during the descent. An important first winter ascent came from Simon Gietl and Roger Schaeli, who climbed *Pressknodel* (400m, 7c) on the north face of **Cima Ovest di Lavaredo**. The route climbs the right side of the face, is committing, and has rather spaced protection. It was only first redpointed in 2010.

The Dolomites is an area where many fine new routes are still created adhering to good ethics. On the east face of **Piz Ciavazes** Simon Gietl and Simon Niederbacher put up *Das Privileg* (300m, nine pitches, F7b) using entirely natural gear (nuts, cams and pegs). Similarly, on the **Lastia de Gardas** above the San Lucano Valley, Pietro Dal Prà and Alessandro Rudatis climbed *In mezzo poco* (400m, F8a+) and *Gracias a la vida* (270m, F8a+), using largely trad protection. Only eight bolts were placed on *In mezzo* and there are one or two dangerous runouts. On both routes seconds need to have a lot of experience of dynamic belaying. On the south face of **Tofana di Rozes**, Tomaz Jakofcic and Luka Lindic spent four days establishing *Viki krema* (800m: F7a/F7b), and then freed it over two days. Again, the climb relies heavily on trad gear, with only 23 bolts *in situ*.

Belayed by his brother, the talented Austrian Hansjörg Auer returned to the **Marmolada** and on the **Ombretta** put up *Bruderliebe* (800m, 19 pitches, F8b/F8b+). Auer is a regular on the Marmolada and came to global prominence with his free solo of the *Fish*. His new route climbs the wall right of Igor Koller's *40 anni per il Falier* and was established ground up in eight days. The main difficulties are in the compact lower half; pitches above are no more than F6b. While using a mixture of trad gear and bolts, the climbing is generally quite run out.