
Area Notes



'Everest from Chogorong', Edward Norton, watercolour and gouache, 18cm × 13cm, 15 June 1924. (*Courtesy of Norton Family Archives*)

LINDSAY GRIFFIN
The Alps 2021



The east face of Mont Blanc. (GP) Grand Pilier d'Angle. (S) The rock buttress of the Red Sentinel. The Red Sentinel route climbs the mixed spur immediately above.

(1) *Cascata Major*. (2) *Route Major*. (Lindsay Griffin).

Late winter snow that took longer than normal to clear, on-going Covid-19 restrictions in the first half of the year and a surprisingly cool summer when the mountains mostly escaped the intense heat-waves that plagued the rest of Europe characterised the Alps in 2021. This report showcases a representative selection of the year's major adventures on rock and ice in both the western and eastern Alps.

Ice and Mixed

A notable ascent took place on **Mont Blanc** on 20 November 2021 when Francesco Civra Dano and Giuseppe Vidoni pioneered a partial new line on the historic Brenva face, the first new ground to be climbed there for many years. *Route Major* (TD, Graham Brown-Smythe, 1928) is one of the great classics of the range but is climbed far less frequently these days. Although the approach is extremely exposed to serac fall, once on the spur the route is relatively safe. In 1971 Pierre Mazeaud and Roberto Sorgato traversed left from a point low on the *Major* and climbed the right spur of a buttress between the *Major* and *Pear* (V and V+), eventually finishing up the left edge of the final buttress (V+) below capping seracs, well left of the line followed by the normal *Major* finish or the *Gobbi-Ottoz* and *Seigneur* direct variants. This route is highly dangerous, ED, and is thought never to have been repeated.

Immediately left of the *Mazeaud-Sorgato* on the lower buttress is an open depression at over 4,000m and Vidoni, who lives in Courmayeur, saw in November that it was now a steep, 170m icefall. Starting early from the col de la Fourche bivouac, in excellent weather and snow conditions, the Italian pair followed the approach to the *Pear* until they could climb directly to the start of the smear, which they reached at dawn. They found the ice to be good quality, but thin, with even short stubby screws not penetrating fully at times. They completed this section in five pitches, then slanted across the snow slope above to finish up the *Gobbi-Ottoz* direct variant to the *Major*. From here they continued to the summit and down to the Gouter that night, naming their route *Cascata Major* (1300m, VI, 5).

The north face of **Pointe Migot** (3311m) was first climbed in 1964 by the crack British team of Bonington, Brown, Ford, and Patey. These four slanted up right, parallel and left of the start of the *Rébuffat-Terray* to reach a ramp cutting back left and leading to the crest of the north spur. Just before the start of the winter season of December 2001 François Marsigny and Thierry Renault climbed a difficult parallel ramp to gain the north spur, from where they rappelled into the couloir on the left and followed it to the col supérieur des Pélerins, completing a route they named *One Step Beyond*. Little has happened here since, though in 2006 Malcolm Bass, Dave Johnson and Simon Yearsley made the first winter ascent of the 1964 route, finishing via the couloir on the left.

High up on the face to the right of these routes lies a conspicuous rock scar overlooking the upper half of the *Rébuffat-Terray*. In late April, John McCune and Will Sim climbed around 250m of the winter version (*Carrington-Rouse*) of the *Rébuffat-Terray*, then broke out left towards the rock scar. Four pitches of difficult mixed led to a great arcing roof – the crux section – where McCune changed into rock shoes and climbed around it in two pitches. Easier climbing led out to the north spur, from where the pair traversed to the top of the *Rébuffat-Terray* and descended it via the fixed anchors. The new line has been named *Above and Beyond* (6b+, M6).

On the showpiece of the Valais Alps – the **Matterhorn** – there were two impressive ascents of the legendary 1965 *Bonatti* route (1000m, ED3) on the

north face. On 31 March three of Italy's most active alpinists, Matteo Della Bordella, François Cazzanelli, and Francesco Ratti left the Hörnli hut at 5am and reached the summit at 9pm. They continued in the night to the Carrel hut on the Italian ridge, arriving at 11.30pm.

More impressive was the ascent by Simon Messner and regular climbing partner Martin Sieberer, who on 17 October took the 4am train from Täsch to Zermatt, and then walked all the way to the Hörnli hut. Arriving at the base of the route at 9.15am, they found conditions good and decided to continue despite the late hour. Climbing the upper face in the dark (they could find no bivouac site), they reached the summit just before midnight, and by 2am were sitting outside a crowded Solvay hut on the Hörnli ridge. Their exhaustion, due to 3,000m of ascent, had been accentuated by all water bottles freezing solid early in the day, making it impossible to take a drink throughout the entire climb.

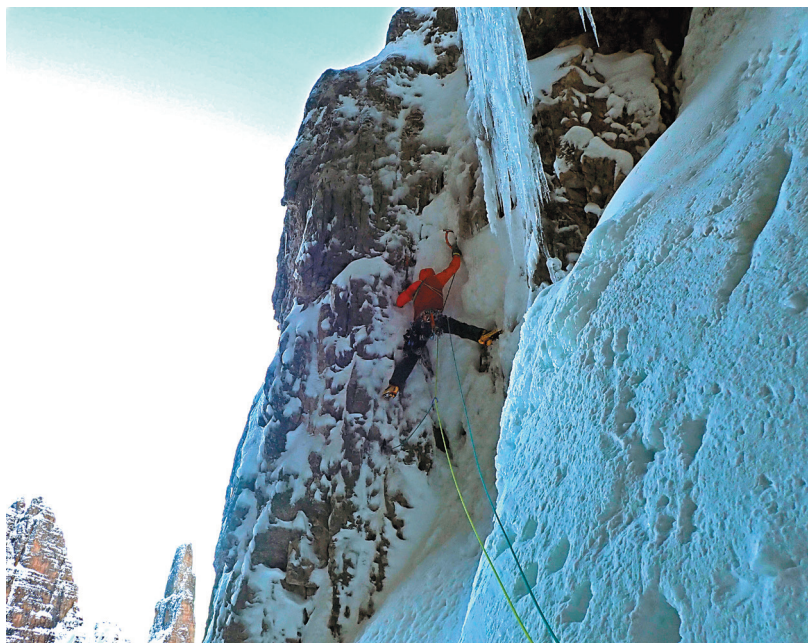
Walter Bonatti's ascent, solo, over five days in deep winter and with temperatures down to -30°C, marked the end of extreme alpinism for this great Italian climber. Although his route was repeated over the next few years in both summer and winter, it subsequently had little or no attention until the mid 1990s. The crux of the route is considered the seven-pitch Traverse of the Angels. Bonatti needed this section to be relatively dry in order to negotiate the technical rock terrain, but nowadays, with a good plastering of snow and ice, it can be climbed quite fast using mixed climbing techniques.

One-day ascents are becoming less of a rarity, though remember that in September 2010 the Swiss Patrick Audenblatten and Michael Lerjen-Demjen completed the route on sight in an astounding seven hours and 14 minutes, making the round trip from the Hörnli hut in less than 10 hours.

The Dolomites continue to be explored for ephemeral ice and mixed climbs, for which there still appears to be great potential for those with good knowledge and able to snatch conditions when they arrive. One of the foremost protagonists is the Italian Emanuele Andreozzi, who with various friends climbed three big new lines in the spring.

On the first day of April, with Matteo Faletti, Andreozzi tackled the north face of the **Cimon della Pala** (3184m), an elegant spire in the Pale di San Martino group that is often referred to as the Matterhorn of the Dolomites. The pair followed a logical line up an obvious series of chimneys, gullies, and ramps to create *Elements of Life* (900m of climbing, AI5 M6). Ice was in excellent condition: the face still receives no sun at this time of year, keeping the localised temperature well below freezing even when warm elsewhere.

The new route, to the right of *Via degli Allievi* (AI5 M4, Colomba-Vidoni, 2019), begins with a 100m icefall first climbed by an Italian team in January 2020. Above, it links lines of weakness and, at one point, traverses a spectacular shark's-fin snow crest in the middle of the wall. The pair reached a notch on the summit ridge only 20m below the top but, disappointingly, conditions prevented further upward progress: it was, after all, April Fool's Day. They rappelled and down-climbed from this point along the left side of the north face.



Matteo Faletti on the tricky fifth pitch (WI5 M5) of *Pazzione Primavera*le, north-north-east face of Cima Tosa. The spire behind is the Campanilo Basso. (Santi Padros)

The end of May and winter was long gone, yet the Dolomites were still covered in deep snow. On 20 May, taking advantage of these unusual conditions, Andreozzi, Faletti and Santi Padros (Spain) climbed a huge ice-mixed line on the north-north-east face of **Cima Tosa**, at 3,173m the highest peak in the Brenta Dolomites. This is the rock wall left of the famous *Canalone Neri* (AD, Neri, 1929, skied from time to time). After camping below the face, the three left at 2.15am and took 16 and a half hours to complete *Pazzione Primavera*le (1000m, 19 pitches, AI6, M7, 90°+) to the great summit plateau. They slid and down-climbed the *Canalone Neri*, regained the tent and skis, and were back at the road by 11pm.

The first half of the route follows the 1933 *Castiglione-Detassis* (IV and V) then traverses left to cross the *Piaz* route (IV+/V, Michelson-Piaz, 1911) before leaving it to climb the right-hand of two huge and previously untouched chimneys. No gear was left on the route.

This was the first time all three had climbed together but it was certainly not the last. Ten days later Andreozzi and Padros were below the north-west face of the **Cima de Gasperi** (2994m) in the Civetta group. They had walked up to the Vazzoler hut in relatively warm temperatures above green valleys but when they stepped out of the winter room at 2.15am they encountered a hard frost. The goal was a huge gully-depression left of the north-west arête (750m, Andrich-Bianchet-Zancristoforo, 1935) and they were surprised



Santi Padros dry-tooling pitch 18 (M7) of Pazzione Primavera. (Emanuele Andreozzi)



Emanuele Andreozzi looks for protection in the upper chimneys of Pazzione Primavera on Cima Tosa. (Santi Padros)

to be able to climb the first 300m unroped. Things then became more intense with a few hard and sometimes unprotected pitches. The climb finished up a large chimney, which proved to be easier than it had appeared from below. At the exit, they traversed left across the 1934 *Benedetti-Zanutti* route for three pitches to a col on the north-east ridge, which they reached after nine and a half hours climbing. From there it was a straightforward descent on snow to the hut. The route was named *Alchimia* (800m, 11 pitches, AI5+, M6+).

The Fanes group is a large and complex region northwest of Cortina that is known for its ski touring and for difficult adventurous rock routes on peaks such as Cima Scotoni and Sas dla Crusc. In recent years it has become more or less the backyard of talented South Tyrolean Simon Gietl. A cabinetmaker turned professional alpinist and mountain guide Gietl was honoured with an award in 2016 for being Italy's foremost mountaineer.

Monte Sella di Sennes (2787m) is a popular ski ascent from the east but in early January Simon and his brother Manuel decided they should 'take a look' at the south-west face. After one false start, they began a line that almost immediately proved challenging. By the time they had completed pitch three, a serious bit of WI5+, the face was in full sun and the pair thought it best to bail. They returned somewhat earlier the following day and by 10am had already reached their highpoint. More superb pitches of mixed led to the summit plateau. *Sorijina* (700m, M6, WI5+, 50°) was completed in just



Pazzione Primavera on the north-north-east face of Cima Tosa. The large gully to the right is the *Canalone Neri*. (Santi Padros)



Santi Padros following the second pitch of *Alchimia* on the north-west face of the Cima de Gasperi. (Emanuele Andreozzi)

seven and a half hours, and when the two regained their car at 5.30pm, the thermometer recorded the same temperature as when they had left it 12 hours previously: -23.5°C .

West of the Brenta Dolomites, the Adamello-Preonella range still has considerable scope for hard ice and mixed climbing but lines are very dependent



The excellent goulotte on pitch four of *Alchimia*, Cima de Gasperi. (*Santi Padros*)



Spectacular scenery on the north-west face of the Cima de Gasperi. (*Emanuele Andreozzi*)

on conditions and favour inside knowledge. In the final days of the year, on the north face of 3,325m **Cima Busazza**, west of the 3,556m Presanella, Andreozzi and Faletti, this time accompanied by Francesco Nardelli, created the demanding *Strapazzati dalla Luna Piena*. Although relatively short by their standards (470m, 10 pitches), the climbing was sustained and

time-consuming, following thin smears through steep granite. Protection was poor and the difficulties substantial (M6, AI5, 90°). Climbing well into the night, the three reached the west summit, traversed east and then embarked on a previously equipped rappel descent, in many places having to add new anchors. This allowed the collection of their skis at the base of the route. Twenty-three hours after leaving, the three regained their car, parked near the Passo del Tonale.

Ski

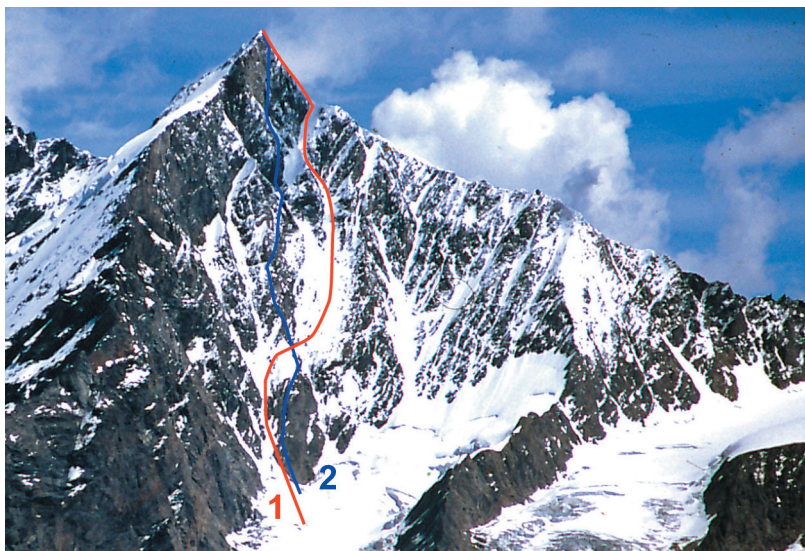
Steep skiing gains an ever-increasing number of exponents while improved equipment has greatly augmented the potential for big, bold, and new ski descents. Arguably, no one is as prolific, or extreme, as the Dutch mountain guide and French resident Paul Bonhomme. His goal during the 2020-1 season was Project X, to complete 10 first descents, each more than 500m and 50°. All were completed, including the east face of the 4,135m **Combin de la Tsessette** via a 1,200m line called *Les Piliers de Bagnes*, the 900m *Merci Mamans* on the south-west face of the **Bietschhorn** (3934m), and his last, on 28 May: the 950m south-west face of the **Täschhorn** (4491m), which he named *X*.

With his regular skiing partner Vivian Bruchez, he first climbed the proposed ski line on the Täschhorn and then the pair skied from the summit, replacing skis with crampons near the base to down-climb a narrow five-metre section. After descending the top part of the east face and *Mischabelgrat* (south-south-east ridge), the pair dropped into the south-west face from the brèche at 4,350m and followed the line climbed in 1956 by Erich Vanis and Hans Chval-Kremslehner, moving west near the bottom to finish down the 1935 *Biner-Taugwalder* start. Apart from near the bottom of the face, the ski line lies to the east of the historic 1906 original route, often cited as one of the greatest mountaineering feats of all time. Climbed by guides Franz and Josef Lochmatter and Josef Knubel with Valentine 'VJ' Ryan and Geoffrey Winthrop Young, and rarely since, it is seriously exposed to rock fall in summer, and still graded TD+ today.

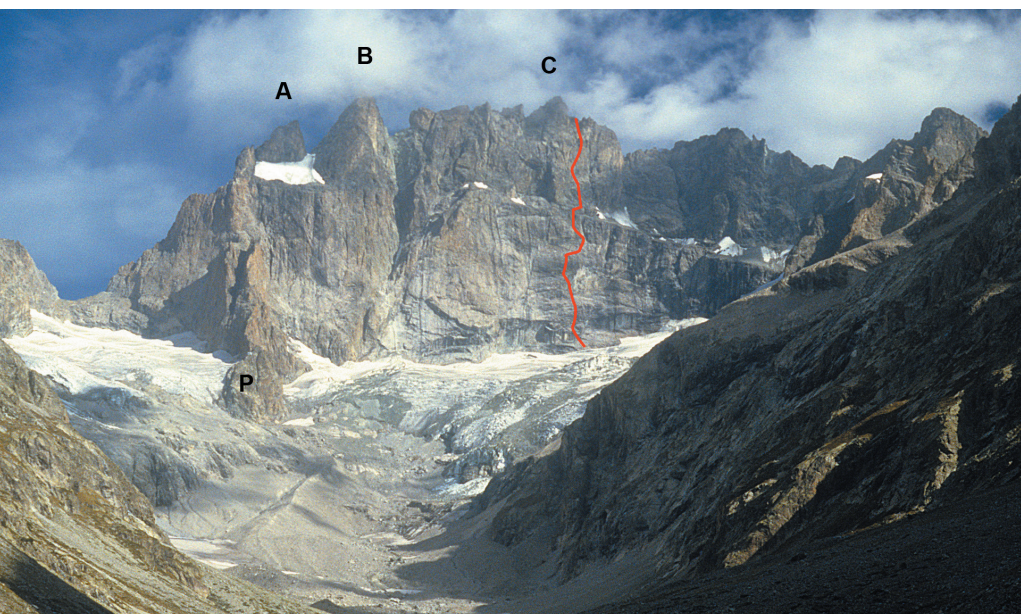
Rock in Summer and Winter

Cyril Dupeyré, Benjamin Ribeyre (France) and the American Erin Smart are three active guides based in La Grave on the north side of the Écrins. Over three consecutive days in August 2020 and a fourth, 26 August, in 2021, they opened the first new route in six years on the south side of the **Meije** (3984m). *Athée Pieds* (970m, 20 pitches, 7c, 6c obl) lies entirely to the right of the historic but infrequently climbed south face of the 3,973m **Doigt de Dieu** (700m, TD+, 5+), though the latter's original finish contains, remarkably for the era, a short section of 6b, climbed in 1951 by Victor Chaud and Jean Walden. This last-named route, of mixed quality rock, was soloed in 2016 by Ribeyre.

A large terrace that slants up from the right cuts the south face at around half-height and is referred to as the Snow Band. It can provide an escape



The south-west face of the Täschhorn with (1) the historic 1906 route, an ascent well ahead of its time and still rarely climbed today and (2) the ski descent by Bonhomme and Bruchez. (*Lindsay Griffin*)



The south face of the Meije above the Etancons glacier. (A) Pic du Glacier Carré. (B) Grand Pic. (C) Doigt de Dieu and the line of *Athée Pieds*. (P) Promontoire Ridge, the normal route up the Meije, reaching the left side of the hanging snowfield – the Glacier Carré – then climbing the left skyline ridge of the Grand Pic. (*Lindsay Griffin*)



Il Regalo di Berna on the south face of the Grandes Jorasses. The top of the pillar is connected to the snow plateau of the normal route by a short ridge of IV. (Lindsay Griffin)

from the lower section or access to the upper but it also marks a delimitation of two rock types: granite below and gneiss above. The new route weaves up the steep compact wall below the shoulder immediately right (east) of the Doigt de Dieu. Most of the belays are bolted and around 40 protection bolts remain in place, of which 14 were placed in the compact rock of the crux sixth pitch. And so ‘Athée Pieds’, or atheist feet, now reach the finger of God.

On the south face of the **Grandes Jorasses**, left of the *Hypercouloir*, stands a fine triangle of rock, its right edge a perfect pillar of seemingly compact granite. It is known variously as the South Pillar, the Pilier du Glacier Suspendu and the Ghiglione Pillar. Piero Ghiglione and Arthur Ottoz made the first ascent in 1948, climbing more broken ground left of the true pillar but working right toward the top to finish near the crest (TD, VI). There have been few repeats, possibly none of the original line, and the long access to the base has become objectively dangerous in recent decades of warm, drier summers. In May 2019 Jon Bracey and Enrico Bonino climbed an ice-mixed line that is probably quite similar to the middle-upper section of the 1948 route (5b, WI5+, M6+).

The true crest of the pillar, such an obvious and logical line, had been considered by many over the years, including more recently Matteo Bernasconi, who throughout the last decade has been a regular climbing partner of Matteo Della Bordella. In 2020 Bernasconi perished in an avalanche and Della Bordella was motivated to complete one of Bernasconi’s dreams.

On 23 February, Della Bordella, Giacomo Mauri and Luca Schiera skinned up to the Boccalatte hut and set off at 4am the following morning and in four hours had reached the foot of the pillar. Two 60m pitches (6a and 5+) on the left side of the initial buttress took them to the start of the



more compact pillar crest. Contrary to expectations – they were carrying bivouac gear expecting a two-day ascent – the granite was extremely weathered and well featured and the three were able to climb fast over moderate difficulties (4+ to 6b). The pitch below the summit of the pillar was completely vertical but with great holds and with temperatures throughout warm enough for bare-handed rock climbing it proved no obstacle. From the top, an easy ridge led to the glacier plateau and the Grandes Jorasses *Normal Route*, which they descended to the Boccalatte hut, arriving at 7pm. The 450m route (excluding the approach) was named *Il Regalo di Berna*.

The west face of the **Petit Dru** now has a hard new free route. Four members of the Groupe Militaire de Haute Montagne, Thomas Auvaro, Léo Billon, Jordi Noguere, and Sébastien Ratel took four days to complete the climb (18-21 February) and a fifth to descend to the valley. The ascent was live streamed on social media by a cameraman filming from Montenvers.

With the Grands Montets lift closed, the team had to make the more arduous approach via Montenvers, choosing to ferry loads to the

bottom of the face a week earlier. When the four set off up their chosen route, which approximated the former Harlin-Robbins *American Direttissima*, they were unaware that in winter 2015 two Spanish, Josep Maria Esquirol and David Palmada, had spent 14 days on this line before bailing a little over 300m from the top, though they still gave their attempt a name: *Abdruits* (6a, M5, A5, 70°). The French followed the Spanish attempt for the first third of the face and then made a variant before rejoining for its last seven pitches. Almost immediately above the Spanish high point, they found the crux to be a dangerously loose pitch of 7a. A further five pitches of sustained 6b and 6c led to easier ground and eventually the summit. The rock was generally sound and the climbers felt the hard dry-tooling pitches would have been very much harder climbed conventionally with hands and rock



On the first complete ascent of a new traverse at the north-eastern end of the Aiguilles Rouges. (Florent Pedrini)

shoes, perhaps 7c. The route was largely protected with nuts and cams and named Base (1000m, 7a, M8+).

There is still potential to discover fine new rock routes of an adventurous yet technically less demanding nature in the wild corners of the Mont Blanc range, notably on the Italian side. Returning to one of their old haunts in September, Simon Richardson and Michel Rinn, operating from the Comino hut above the roadhead in the Italian Val Ferret, climbed the east pillar and ridge of **Mont Vert du Gruevettaz** (2810m). The 6b+ crux was an overhanging chimney-crack, and the name – *Bella Vista* – reflects the outstanding views into the Triolet glacier basin from the upper half of the climb.

Rather novel is a new traverse in the **Aiguilles Rouges** created by Alexandre Henot, Florent Pedrini and Emmanuel Ratouis. After three years of exploration and preparation, the three eventually made a complete crossing over two days in September 2021, with a pre-placed bivouac by the Aiguille Morris.

The route, which features around 40 previously unclimbed pitches, starts towards the north-east end of the range in the vicinity of the Aiguille de Praz Torrent, where it climbs a 400m pillar (6b, 5c/6a obl) to the top of a formation the ascensionists have dubbed the Aiguille de la Tempérance (2722m). The traverse continues south-west along the chain, past the bivouac, to the col de L'Encrenaz, from where a second pillar, named the Pilier de la Deuxième Naissance (around 400m, 4b-6a) leads to the Aiguille de l'Encrenaz (2887m). The traverse finishes with the north ridge of the Aiguille de la Persévérance. Passages have been equipped (and sometimes re-equipped) to make them possible for an ascent with 50m ropes but a good rack of cams is essential to protect the climbing adequately. Count on taking 10-12 hours



During the new two-day traverse of the north-eastern section of the Aiguilles Rouges with Mont Blanc visible distant left. (*Florent Pedrini*)

each day for the walking, climbing, and traversing. With the continued ravages in the Mont Blanc range due to climate change, this new traverse adds to the armoury of long mountain routes available from the Chamonix valley, giving a wild experience but always with stupendous views towards Mont Blanc.

Climbers are still squeezing lines into the facets of the **Matterhorn**. In 2018 local activists François Cazzanelli, Marco Farina and Francesco Ratti, with Emrik Favre and Roberto Ferraris, climbed *Diretta allo Scudo* on the rock wall – the Scudo or Shield – on the south face below Pic Tyndall. Sadly, one year later, Ferraris, a guide, mountain rescuer and prolific new router, died in an avalanche while skiing in the Valtournenche. Cazzanelli, Farina and Ratti wanted to dedicate a new route to Ferraris and so over two days in September 2021 they climbed a pillar, now with the proposed name the *Pilastro Roberto Ferraris*, on the left side of the triangle of rock climbed by the 2002 Gabarrou route *Padre Pio* and further right, the 1970 Calcagno-Cerrutti-di Pietro-Machetto route. The pillar ends on a spur of the south face, well below Picco Muzio, from where a rappel descent was made. The 650m, 16-pitch route, with difficulties up to 6c, was named *L'Amitié* to celebrate the close friendship between the three ascensionists and Ferraris.

Two notable free ascents of Alpine rock routes took place in the summer and autumn, both in Switzerland. The steep, monolithic north face of the **Petit Clocher du Portalet** (2823m) stands opposite the Orny hut at the east end of the Mont Blanc massif. It has always been a forcing ground for free climbing. In 1989 Philippe Steulet climbed the old *Darbellay* aid route at 8a, the first time a climb of the eighth grade had been established in the western Alps. In 2001 Didier Berthod and François Mathey climbed a fantastic splitter crack on the orange wall left of the fourth pitch of *État de Choc*, the Remy brothers' 1983 strenuous crack feat (280m, 7a). Graded 7c+, this pitch was traditionally protected but ended in the middle of nowhere. Twenty years later Fabian Borter and Bertrand Martenet bolted a continuation on or close to the left arête of the north face, and with the help of Berthod, recently returned to climbing after a long absence living in a monastery, climbed the line but were not able to free it. This fell to the Belgian Sébastien Berthe, who redpointed the route in one day on 6 August. After the first three pitches (6b+) of *État de Choc*, the seven new pitches of *Histoire sans Fin* are graded 7c+, 7c, 8b+, 7c, 8b, 8a+, 6b+. His partner on this ascent was Siebe Vanhee, also Belgian, who returned on 9 August for his successful redpoint. The two feel it is probably the finest multi-pitch granite route of that level in Europe.

The **Düdenhorn** lies above (and north-east of) Kandersteg in the Bernese Oberland. Exploring little frequented corners in the early days of Covid-19 was understandably desirable, leading Peter von Känel and Silvan Schüpbach to investigate the mountain's previously unclimbed west face. The Swiss pair established an eight-pitch route on excellent limestone protected entirely by traditional means. Schüpbach came back in the fall of 2020 to look at a better and more direct finish, checking out the final pitches from the top.



The north face of the Petit Clocher du Portalet and the superb left arête taken by *Histoire sans Fin*. Immediately to the right, the prominent right-facing crack and corner system is *État de Choc*. (Claude Remy)



Tradündigung on the west face of the Düdenhorn, Bernese Oberland. (Vladek Zumr)

He returned several more times and in September 2021 equipped the route with fixed ropes so he could work on a redpoint ascent. This took place on 15 October when, with the support of von Känel, Schupbach completed the sustained route *Tradündigung* (8a, 7b+ obl), climbing the final pitch (6b) for the first time: the first free ascent was therefore also the first ascent of the route. Apart from cams and nuts, a few pitons and peckers were used, and the climbers feel their new line is probably the most difficult purely trad multi-pitch route in Switzerland. They would like to see the Düdenhorn remaining a bolt-free zone.

In the first week of March stable high pressure sitting over the Dolomites prompted a flurry of activity on the vast north-west face of Civetta. Lorenzo d'Addario and Nicola Tondini made the first winter ascent of *Dulcis in Fundo* (c400m, IX-, de Blasi-dal Pozzo, 1988) on the **Torre di Alleghe**. Neither had previously climbed the route but they completed it in a day. On **Punta Civetta**, Titus Prinoth and Alex Walpoth made the first winter ascent of *Chimera Verticale* (600m, IX, Bau-Beber-Geremia-Matteraglia, 2008). The pair required two bivouacs. Walpoth had previously repeated the line, situated between the classic *Aste* and *Andrich* routes, in summer 2014. In 2001 Venturino de Bona, climbing alone, put up *W Mexico Cabrones* (1150m, 33 pitches, VIII-) on **Punta Tissi**. Alexander Bau, Thomas Gianola and Giovanni Zaccaria had all climbed this route at various times in summer but combined forces to make the first winter ascent with two bivouacs.

Bau and Tondini, together with Alessandro Beber, are some of the most prolific Dolomite pioneers. Between 2009 and 2012 the three established the 1,200m *Colonne d'Ercole* on **Punta Tissi**. They spent days on the route during the course of three years before making a two-day (25 hours climbing)



Silvan Schüpbach on pitch one (7c+) of *Tradündition* on the west face of the Dündenhorn. After a bouldery start on mediocre rock, the climbing quickly becomes excellent. (Vladek Zumr)

free ascent. In keeping with many of their other major ascents, this team climbed emphatically without bolts, overcoming difficulties up to 7c. In mid August 2021, Léo Billon and Enzo Oddo climbed the route on sight and in a single day from the Tissi hut, completing the 29-pitch route itself in just under 12 hours – an impressive achievement.

In February, after his ascent on the Sella di Sennes, Simon Gietl returned to the Fanes to make a roped solo ascent of the famous *Central Pillar* on the **Sas dla Crusc**, a legendary route first climbed in 1968 by Reinhold and Günther Messner. Reinhold made a committing lead of a four-metre, off-vertical wall of friable rock above an ankle-snapping ledge to create the first ‘alpine’ VII+ in Europe. Hans Mariacher, thinking he was on the original line, climbed around this section in 1978 to make the second ascent of the route.



Silvan Schüpbach on the crux pitch six (8a) of *Tradündition* on the Dündenhorn. This pitch is mainly protected by short knifeblades and a couple of peckers, all left in place to facilitate repeat ascents. (Vladek Zumr)

The *Mariacher Variant* (VII) is the one mostly followed today. Until the mid 1990s Messner's original route had only ever been repeated on a top rope. Even today, opinions still vary on the grade, though the majority lean toward VIII- or 7a. Gietl took only eight hours to make the ascent, which was likely the first winter solo.

Gietl returned to the **Sas dla Crusc** a week later for another Messner route, *Grosse Mauer* (VI+/VII-). This time he dispensed with bivouac gear and simply took a lightweight paraglider. He dispatched the route in just four hours (first pitch in crampons, the rest in rock shoes) and after a quick flight was back at the car by 2pm.

Another notable Gietl ascent took place in May, this time on the attractive formation of **Torre del Lago** (2654m). Gietl was astonished to find that the crest of the conspicuous south-west pillar was still unclimbed. He rectified this with Andrea Oberbacher, the pair creating the 12-pitch *Zero* at mostly V and VI with a crux of VII/VII+. As Gietl reported, 'it's nice to climb a difficult new route, to have a hard time and then be rewarded with the redpoint, but it's also just as satisfying to establish something that's a bit more relaxed.' Given the well-protected, good-quality climbing, it ought to become popular.

Apart from free climbing *Histoire sans Fin*, the Belgian Vanhee also made a notable ascent in the Tre Cime, where he repeated Dave MacLeod's *Project Fear* (8c) on the north face of the **Cima Ovest**. Macleod (with Alan Cassidy) climbed the 1968 *Bauer-Rudolph* aid route until he could continue direct via few new pitches to reach and climb the 8c crux of Alexander Huber's *Pan Aroma*.

Vanhee only briefly practised the route before making the redpoint but decided to link Macleod's 7b+ and 8a+ pitches, and the *Pan Aroma* crux, into one long 50m roof-pitch. Belayed by Italian Nico Cad and hampered by the cold conditions of late summer, Vanhee took two falls, returning to the belay each time, before finally making the continuous redpoint. The pair then continued up the upper section of the *Cassin* to summit.

In retrospect, Vanhee felt a couple of the pitches, including the *Pan Aroma* crux, might originally have been slightly overgraded (maximum difficulties of 8b) and therefore kept with an overall grade of 8c for the more difficult link-up.

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