

Some of us climb with guides and some without ; some of us swear by tricounis and others pin their faith to crampons ; some even—and these do not perhaps always receive the recognition they deserve—mountaineer²² on ski ; but we are all united by the common love of the hills which is the *fons et origo* of our Club. The A.C. is the oldest of all Alpine clubs. It was founded by young men and it should be its proudest boast that it is the youngest in spirit.

IN THE MONT BLANC MASSIF AND THE OBERLAND.

By Miss MIRIAM E. O'BRIEN.

II.—IN THE BERNESE OBERLAND.

THE Oberland, although one of my more recent 'discoveries'—I went there for the first time in 1929—has risen rapidly to a very high place in my affection, and of the dozen climbs that I was fortunate enough to accomplish there in 1929 and 1930, the most interesting of all was the traverse of the Dreieckhörner ridge.

Dreieckhorn, S.E. and N.E. Ridges.

The S.E. ridge of the Dreieckhorn, seen from the Aletsch Glacier near the Concordia hut or from farther south, seems to bristle with innumerable spires and needles of such slenderness that one wonders how they manage to stand erect. Adolf Rubi, although he had noticed these needles when he played as a child around the hut where his father was keeper, had never been over to visit them and thought, moreover, that part of the ridge S. of the Klein Dreieckhorn had not been accomplished. In 1930, when we were looking for rocks to climb, this seemed like a splendid field for exploration.

At 03.30 on the morning of August 29, Adolf and I left the Concordia hut and descended the Gross Aletsch Glacier towards the Olmenhorn. Leaving the glacier near the *k* in 'Beim 1^{ten} Dreieck' on the Siegfried map, we continued in a general S.W. direction up grass and scree slopes, passing one band of

²² *Mountaineering* on ski has always received due recognition. See *A.J.* 21, 441–55 ; 24, 553–64 ; 34, 399–401 ; 43, 283–88.—*Editor.*



Photo, Miss O'Brien.]

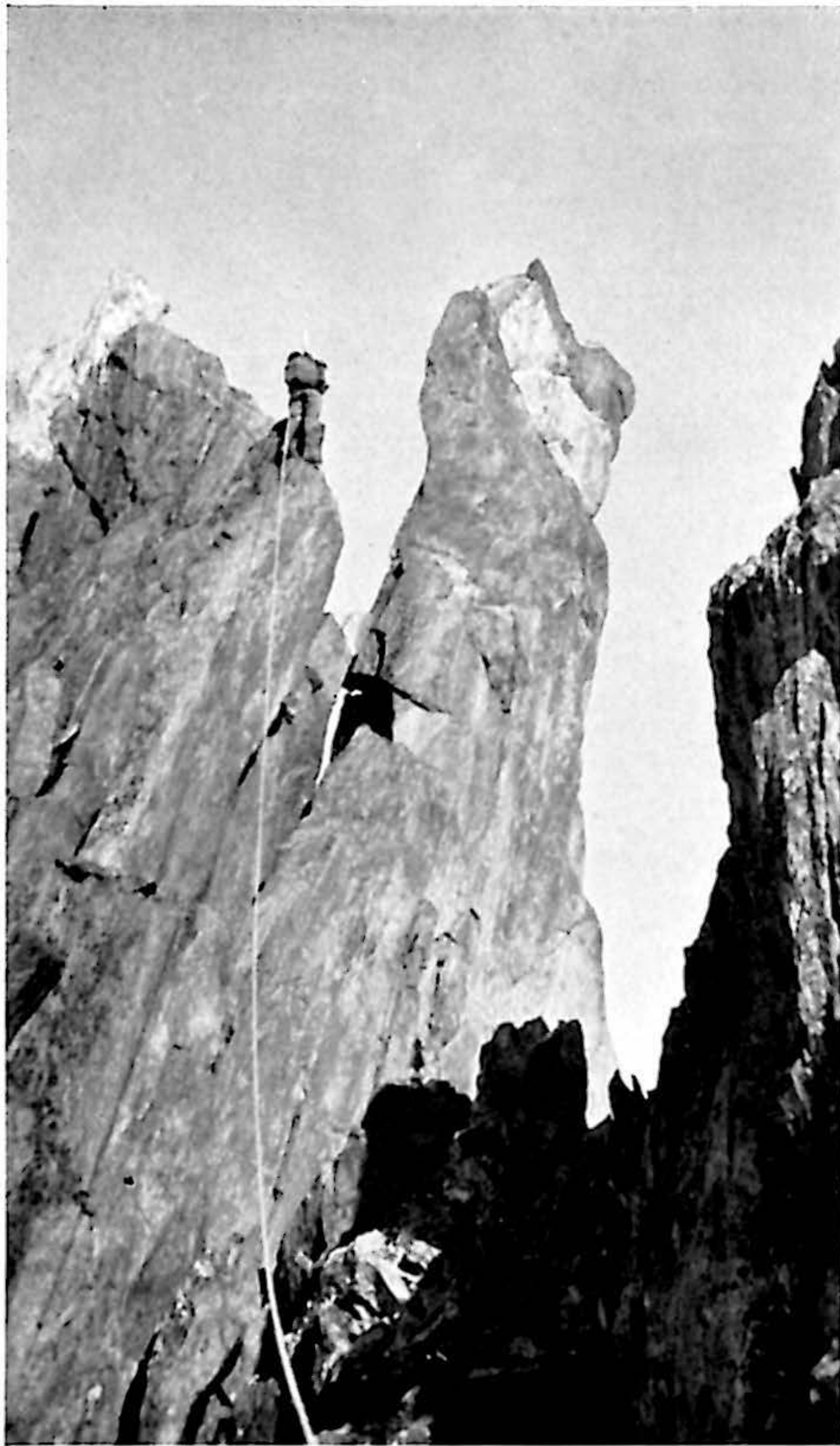
GENDARMES ON DREIECKHORN RIDGE.



Photo, Miss O'Brien.]

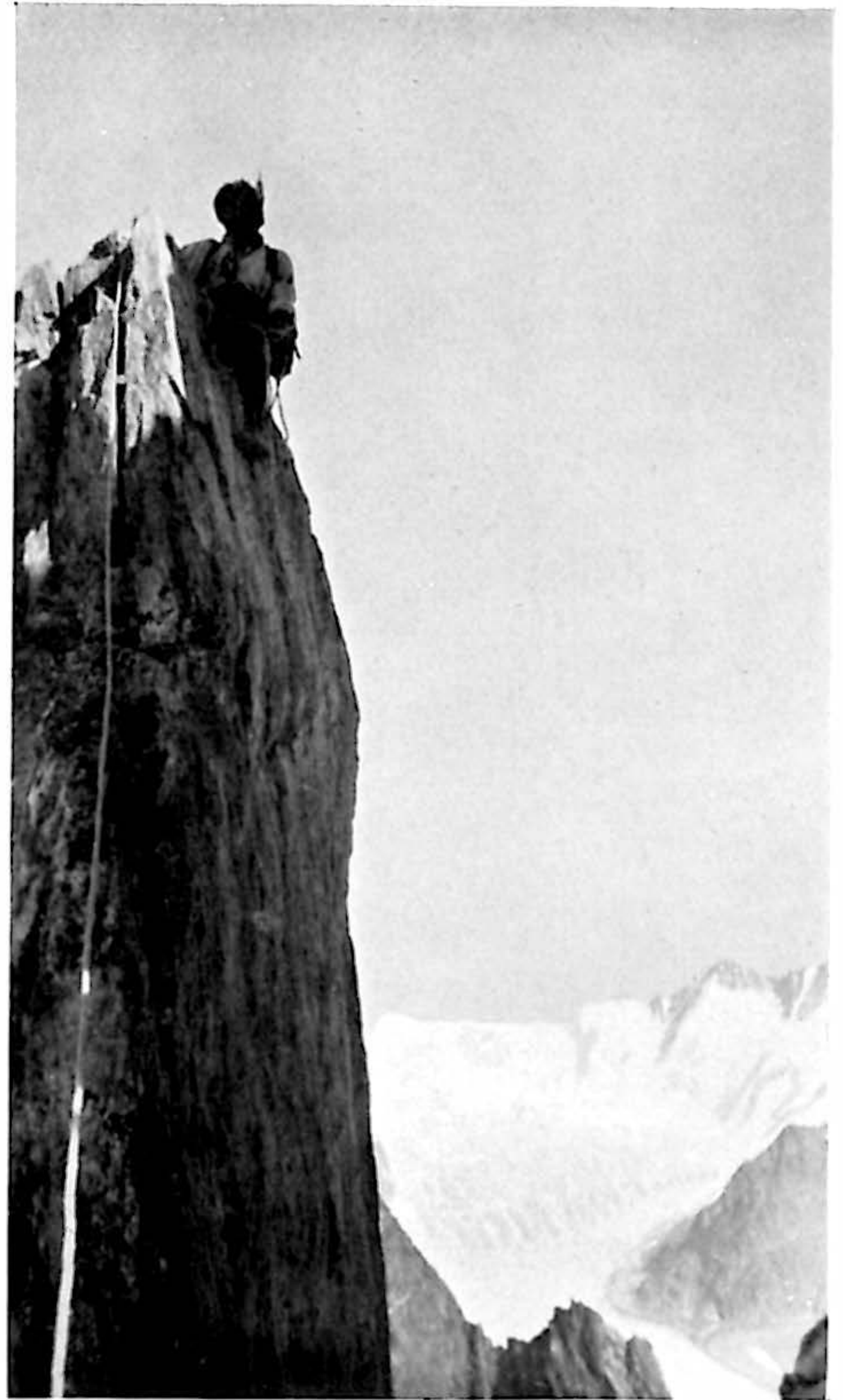
GENDARMES ON DREIECKHORN RIDGE.

[To face p. 52.]



Photo, Miss O'Brien.]

ON THE DREIECKHORN.



Photo, Miss O'Brien.]

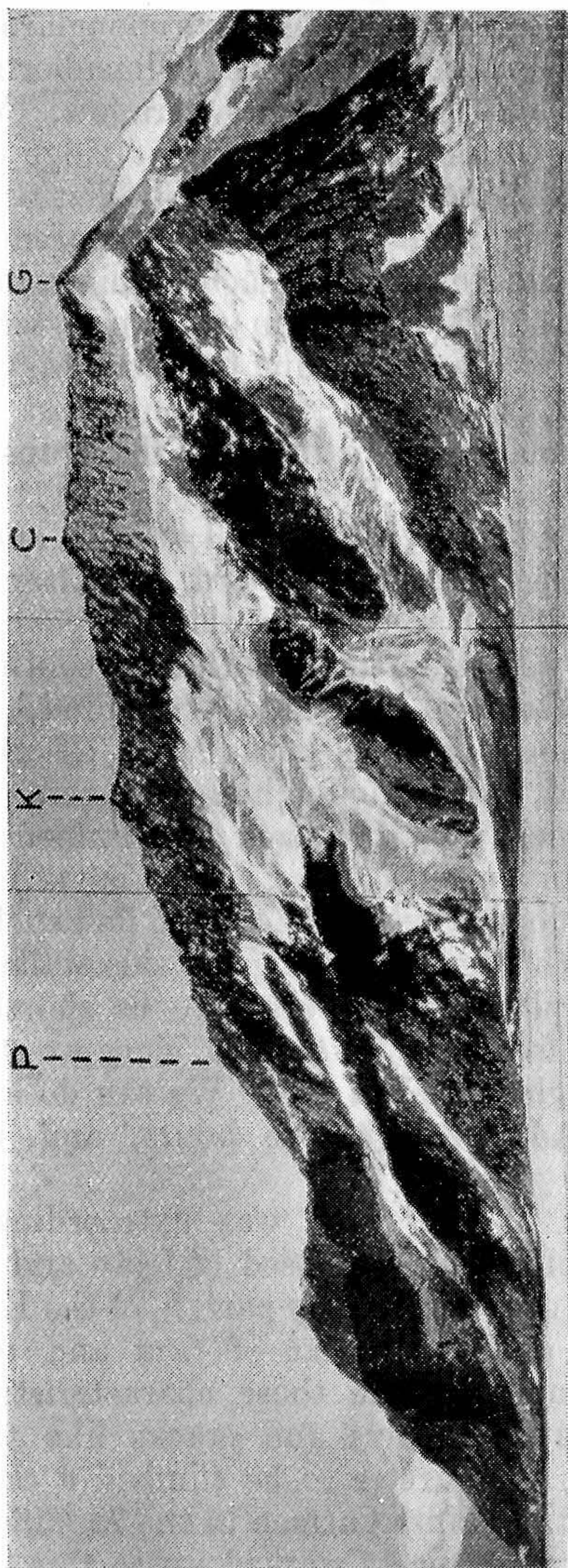
ON THE DREIECKHORN.

easy *roches moutonnées*, to the glacier that lies along the northern base of the Olmenhorn.

The closer view of the ridge obtained from this point suggested to us that perhaps we might have enough rock-climbing, anyway, without first going over the Olmenhorn, where the rocks looked loose and the gendarmes were few. We therefore joined the main Olmenhorn-Dreieckhorn ridge at the first tooth N.W. of the *Sattel* 3215 m., a fairly distinct point that marks the beginning of the higher and apparently more interesting part of the ridge. We reached this point by way of the little ridge that runs down from it, in an easterly direction, to the glacier. Thus far everything had been easy and we had travelled unroped, with Adolf ahead but most of the time in sight. On reaching the main ridge that runs N.W. from the Olmenhorn over the Klein Dreieckhorn to the Gross Dreieckhorn, the difficulties began, all at once and in earnest. We put on the rope and climbed hard, but after only a very few minutes Adolf declared we could not possibly do that ridge in one day, a pessimistic view that he continued to hold until 2 in the afternoon. 'Would you mind,' he inquired anxiously, 'sleeping out on the rocks?' I assured him that I should not mind, and reminded him, with some satisfaction, that my experience with bivouacs was immensely superior to his. (I have bivouacked once; Adolf never.) We agreed that we could go down a bit to the side to find shelter from the wind, and we both began scanning the side walls for a likely-looking bivouac place. It occurred to us shortly, however, that we need not find the spot at once, since we still had some 12 hours of daylight ahead of us. 'We can do a lot of rock-climbing,' said Adolf, 'in twelve hours,' and, may I add, we did.

The formation of the ridge was extraordinarily varied. Although much of it was composed of loose and friable rock, there was a great deal in the early part, S. of the Klein Dreieckhorn, consisting of huge blocks of firm and solid granite. The climbing problems were those characteristic of granite everywhere—many chimneys and cracks like those on the Grands Charmoz, with arêtes to be climbed *à cheval* like the summit ridge on the Pointe Carmen in the Aiguilles du Diable. And when we had got nicely worked up to this 'strong-arm' type of climbing, along would come more delicate problems such as slabs with only slight roughnesses to hold on to, or detached leaves and flakes of rock with room enough underneath for just the tips of the fingers.

While there was no step of extraordinary difficulty—for example, nothing that could not be done in nailed boots and



Photo, Miss O'Brien.]

P = POINT WHERE WE HIT THE RIDGE.
K = KLEIN DREIECKHORN.

C = CENTRAL SUMMIT.
G = GROSS DREIECKHORN.

with a rucksack on—the *ensemble* was hard. And although we were not climbing slowly, we seemed to make scant progress over the innumerable gendarmes. We went up and over

practically all of them. No doubt we could have turned some, usually on the left or Mittel Aletsch Glacier side, but the rock slightly below the summit ridge was loose and rotten, and we thought it might be just as fast, as well as much more interesting, to follow the crest of the ridge.

Occasionally, where it would save time, we took off our climbing rope and roped down. On the crumpled paper that I carried in my pocket, with times and miscellaneous comments jotted down during the trip, I find the following notes: '10.25, *Pic Adolf*. Built cairn. Roped off overhang on Aletsch side. 10.40, Adolf goes back up for rope.' (It is fair to add, however, that that happened only once.)

On one of the earlier gendarmes we found a bottle with a wet pulpy mass inside that had presumably once been a card. With difficulty we distinguished the following words: 'Mr. John —, Oxford [and] Cambridge [Club], Pall Mall.' I should like to have more information about this gentleman and his routes, and so would the Editor, 'A.J.'

We stopped for lunch at 13.05 with the Klein Dreieckhorn almost within grasping distance, separated from us only by a few smallish gendarmes. It was then that Adolf began to wonder if perhaps we could, by hurrying, get through in one day. The ridge from the Klein Dreieckhorn to the Gross Dreieckhorn, he knew, was easy. And his impertinent reason for thinking so was that a friend of ours had come down it!

Before following Adolf down the N.W. ridge of the Klein Dreieckhorn, I lingered a little on the summit and discovered a bottle buried under some rocks. I dug it out and shouted down to Adolf that our ridge had been climbed previously. He was far below me, in fact as far as he could very well get, considering that I was tied to the other end of his rope and that I was sitting motionless on the summit cairn. I read him the note that I had found: 'Julien Gallet, S.A.C., avec Joseph Kalbermatten et Christian Kaufmann, jr., 1^{ère} ascension du Pic 3550 des Dreieckhoerner, le 24 juillet, 1897, de l'Hôtel Eggishorn en 5 h. $\frac{1}{2}$, face Est.' We were then on Pic 3648; Pic 3550 lay a couple of hours to the S.E., and how, after making the first ascent of Pic 3550, could the bottle get to 3648 without coming along the ridge? Adolf could not explain the situation, but his personal conviction was that if any party had done rock-climbing like that in 1897 they would have said something about it. I have since found out (S.A.C. *Jahrbuch*, xxxiii, 183) that 3550 was simply a slip of the pencil, and that this

was really a record of the first ascent of the Klein Dreieckhorn itself, Point 3648 m.¹

As Adolf had predicted, N.W. of the Klein Dreieckhorn up to the Gross Dreieckhorn the going was very much easier and the rock more like the usual Oberland variety—loose, breakable and of no great difficulty. There were a few gendarmes immediately beyond the Klein Dreieckhorn that afforded some good climbing, but nothing compared to what we had encountered before, and it soon became increasingly easy to turn the gendarmes on the loose scree slopes to the west. There could be no relaxing of our forced-march pace, and truth compels me to admit that after the really strenuous efforts we had put in on the section to the S., this part of the ridge seemed unnecessarily long.

From 18.15 to 18.30 we ate our last orange on the summit of the Gross Dreieckhorn, cast one or two hurried glances at the sunset colours and the lights in the Jungfrauoch Berghaus and wondered if we could get down before complete darkness set in. Before us lay the ordinary route down the N.E. ridge of the Gross Dreieckhorn—the first part snow, the last part rock. To go down the ice crest of the ridge would have meant an extra hour's step-cutting, which did not appeal to Adolf at all. To the right was an unpleasant slope, apparently snow, but in reality just an inch or so of snow on an ice foundation, so steep as it curved over that, as far as I could see, it might not have any bottom at all. We walked and slid down as fast as Adolf could make me go and reached the rocks at 19.05. From there we raced down the ridge at a mad pace, throwing caution to the winds. My only thought was that it would be easier and quicker to climb by the light of heaven than by the light of one candle. I never stopped to test a hold, and when one crumbled away under my weight I made a spring to the next, thus covering most of the way in a series of leaps. When almost at the end of the ridge, we turned to the left to go down the N. slope on to the glacier, and at 20.20, on this slope, discovered that we could really see nothing more.

Climbing down rocks, with a candle lantern below throwing up great black shadows where there should have been footholds, is not a rapid process. Although there remained only about one-tenth of the rock-climbing down the ridge, 1 hour

¹ The ascent was made by the E. face and a short traverse of the 'summit-ridge' (*Dans l'Alpe ignorée*, pp. 124–6).

20 minutes—longer than it had taken us to do the first nine-tenths—elapsed before we jumped the bergschrund.

The last memorable incident that night occurred when we were walking over snow bridges on the Concordia Platz, with Adolf so far ahead that his lantern did me very little good. Without warning I found myself dangling in a crevasse, partially buried in the large amount of snow that had accompanied me in my fall. The rope between Adolf and me had been taut—more from habit than from any intentional prudence—and Adolf pulled me out with the greatest of ease. At 22.45, more than nineteen hours after our departure, we walked into the Concordia hut, feeling that, for one day, we had had enough rock-climbing.

From the point where we had struck the ridge, slightly north of the Olmenhorn, the distance to the Gross Dreieckhorn, measured on the map, is 3 kilometres. But the trouble with this calculation is that the map represents distances horizontally, and the horizontal component of this climb, when compared with its vertical ups and downs, is relatively negligible. But it is a very fine climb from end to end, or, as I suppose one should say, from base to apex.

Jungfrau. (Descent to the Trümletental.)

The ALPINE JOURNAL (41, 422-3) suggests that I traversed the Jungfrau, ascending by the N.E. ridge and descending over the Silberhorn ridge to the Trümletental, in one day. No wonder it adds exclamation notes and queries. It would be, indeed, quite a climb, although probably not impossible, for a fast party under good conditions. The more moderate facts of my Jungfrau climbs, however, are these :—

On August 28, Rubi and I went up the N.E. ridge and down by the ordinary route ; on September 9 we went up the ordinary route and down the N.W. side to the Trümletental.

Our route down was not new. In the upper part, we followed the Hornby and Philpott route over the N.W. ridge of the Silberhorn.² The first descent of this route had been made some six weeks earlier by MM. W. Amstutz and Tom de Lépiney.³ We went somewhat farther down the ridge than the Amstutz-de Lépiney caravan before traversing towards the Rotbrettlücke and, on the lower part, abandoned their route altogether, descending over the steep grassy cliffs between the

² *A.J.* 2, 210, 254-61.

³ *A.J.* 41, 416-7.

Lamm and Giessen ravines, climbed by Herren H. Lauper and P. von Schumacher in 1926.

On September 9 we left the Jungfraujoch at 04.05, and at 06.40 were on the summit of the Jungfrau. At 07.10, after a large meal, we started down the N.W. face over the Hochfirn, and then continued down the easy rock ridge, following the regular route to the Silberlücke, which last we reached in 45 minutes from the top of the Jungfrau. From there to the top of the Silberhorn took another 25 minutes. We spent about a half-hour on the Silberhorn, enjoying the really wonderful view and, I blush to admit it, eating again. Down the ice ridge on the farther side of the Silberhorn (the N.W. ridge) we cut no steps at all, Adolf assuring me that the crampons would hold eventually if I just let them slide along far enough, but my personal opinion is that skating down a steep ice ridge on crampons is no sport for a timid woman.

Below the ice, we came on to a ridge of broken black rock, where we stopped to eat again and to survey what was before us. Our route lay down a long ridge, followed by snowfields, rocky slopes, a glacier and finally a grassy knoll. It looked a long distance to go and everything lay over unknown terrain. Starting on, we followed the ridge pretty closely, not liking to get into the falling-stone region to the left of us. The going looked easier there, but it was under a hanging glacier. When our ridge ended abruptly in steep cliffs, we did venture to the left, travelling as fast as possible, however, to a small rock-sprinkled snowfield down which we glissaded at our fastest pace. At 12.15 we arrived on a level with the Rotbrettlücke. The Amstutz-de Lépiney party, we knew, had crossed this gap and gone down the other (S.W.) side, where they had experienced considerable difficulty near the bottom, so they said, in discovering a route down alternating bands of grass and cliff. We determined not to cross the gap, but to continue down the N. side where, at first, the going was easy over patches of snow, scree and a little rock wall, on to a much-crevassed branch of the Giessen Glacier. It seemed to me that we walked miles up and down and back and forth, and across it in all directions, to avoid the crevasses. Finally, at the lower edge, we got off on to the pleasant grassy knoll that we had seen from far above. It was then only 13.25. We felt that we had done extremely well, that our troubles were over, and that all that lay before us was a gentle stroll down through flower-strewn grass to the river in the Trümletental and up the other side to the Wengernalp. Little did we know that the

stiffest work of the day was ahead of us. Continuing down the grassy knoll, we soon began to run into difficulties ; the slope got steeper and there were bands of rock interspersed, rock not always easy to descend although we usually found a way somehow without the use of the rope. Finally we were stuck—absolutely stuck—by a tremendous cliff much too steep to climb down, and very much too long to rope down. We tried to go to the left, where our knoll was bounded by a seething waterfall called the Lammlauine, but this looked anything but practicable as a route of descent. We were told later, however, that the usual route of the chamois-hunters to this fertile hunting-ground is close to this stream. Adolf left his sack and traversed to the right, frantically scanning every inch of the cliff for a route down. After about 500 yards he met another waterfall, the Giessen, without having found a way over the cliffs anywhere between. Herren Lauper and von Schumacher stated the case mildly when they said : ‘ Ein Abstieg über den soeben beschriebenen Weg dürfte bei schlechtem Wetter recht unangenehm und ohne genaue Ortskenntnisse sehr schwer zu finden sein.’⁴ The weather was good, but we certainly did not know the way. To make a long story short—or at least shorter—we finally did get down by choosing what looked like the best section of the cliff and roping off. I went first, cautiously and slowly, with 130 ft. of rope in my hand, searching diligently for a place to land—any bit of grass growing on the cliff into which we could jam the pick of the ice axe, and where we could find something to fasten the rope to for the next stage of the trip. We could not afford to be very particular about what we used ; at one place the situation looked desperate until I discovered a narrow rock embedded in the earth and apparently connected to more rock above and below ; it was a simple matter to dig a tunnel around behind and thread the rope through it. Every now and then we would land on a more or less horizontal grassy patch that I supposed, of course, to be the bottom, and while Adolf brought down the ropes—at the very beginning we had given up the idea of being tied together, needing all our ropes for *rappels*—I would wander off only to discover that we were at the top of a new series of cliffs. Finally, after nearly 3 hours of really strenuous efforts, we reached the base.

A few minutes' walking over old moraines and avalanche

⁴ *Hochgebirgsführer durch die Berner Alpen*, 2nd edition, vol. iv, p. 102.

débris brought us to Biglen Alp. At Wengernalp we caught the last train and dined that evening in Grindelwald. Adolf, always a conservative youth, remarked thoughtfully that he would not care to do that climb 'with a large party of slow people.'

Schreckhorn-Lauteraarhorn Traverse.

Another and even longer climb was our traverse of the Schreckhorn and Lauteraarhorn on September 1, 1929. We left the Strahlegg hut at 02.10 and went up the S.W. ridge of the Schreckhorn (top, 08.45), a pleasant rock climb somewhat resembling La Meije, nowhere really difficult, sufficiently firm and yet not so easy as to be boring. From the Schreckhorn we traversed the *Lauteraargrat* to the Lauteraarhorn, and came down by the S.W. ridge of the Lauteraarhorn direct to the Strahlegg hut, a route which we think had never been taken in the descent.

From the top of the Schreckhorn we got down to the Schrecksattel in 30 minutes and continued straight on. One of the earlier gendarmes, a very small one, was quite good fun. 'It is a very good thing you like it,' said Adolf, 'because there are fifty more.' To check the accuracy of this statement I began to count the gendarmes, but when I had counted twenty-seven and we had not progressed any appreciable distance along the ridge I stopped and gave myself up to plain enjoyment. It was glorious weather. There is a stimulation in climbing at 4000 metres that is missing at low altitudes, and it was really a very interesting, although not too difficult, ridge. We stopped half an hour for luncheon between two of the gendarmes and admired the Schreckhorn—such a friendly mountain to have such an awe-inspiring name—and shortly afterwards, much to our surprise, found ourselves on the summit of the Lauteraarhorn. Without attempting to hurry, we had done the ridge in 3 hours 10 minutes from the Schrecksattel, or 3 hours 40 minutes from the top of the Schreckhorn, including our half-hour's luncheon interval.

At 13.30 we started down. As Adolf had already come up this S.W. ridge of the Lauteraarhorn, he had a very good idea of how the descent should be carried out. He went first and I stayed behind, watching with some curiosity to see if the rocks over which he fixed his *rappels* were liable to pull out; they all looked loose to me. A little after 15.00 we reached the bottom of the steepest part of the ridge and allowed ourselves food and rest. From here, although the climbing along



Photo, Miss O'Brien.]

LAUTERAARGRAT FROM SCHRECKHORN
(OUR RIDGE OF DESCENT ON RIGHT SKYLINE).



Photo, Miss O'Brien.]

SCHRECKHORN
(OUR RIDGE OF ASCENT ON THE LEFT SKYLINE).

[To face p. 60.]



Photo, Miss O'Brien.]

WELLIGRAT, FROM KLEIN WELLHORN.



Photo, Miss O'Brien.]

LOOKING DOWN N.E. FACE OF FINSTERAARHORN.

the ridge was easy, there was still quite a lot of it, and it seemed to me that the said ridge became a little long near the bottom. The hut looked very good when I wandered in at 18.20. Adolf, who had been there quite a while, had a bountiful dinner prepared, which we disposed of with speed and efficiency. Nobody even mentioned going down to Grindelwald that night, and I fell asleep dreaming of the statement in Adolf's guide-book—written by an Englishman who, accompanied by his wife, had climbed in the Oberland—that 'one could always count on Rubi to choose easy and short climbs suitable for a lady.'

Welligrat.

The *Lauteraargrat*—or at least part of it—is one of those climbs first accomplished by Miss Gertrude Bell. She met on the ridge, I believe, another lady, making the traverse in the opposite direction.⁵

In 1930, in the Oberland, I found great interest in repeating some more of Miss Bell's climbs, and in comparing her impressions with mine. So much is just the same now as it was thirty years ago!—the peaks, the chimneys, the glaciers. Whole pages of Miss Bell's letters to her family could have been written this last year, and they would have been as accurate in their descriptions as they were in 1901. On the other hand, so much has changed! Miss Bell enjoyed an 'unexploredness' in these mountain regions that one does not find to-day. What fun she must have had wandering around the Engelhörner chain when 'the whole place up there is marked with chamois paths, no one, I expect, having ever been there to disturb them.'⁶

In the first place, we both, Miss Bell in 1901 and I in 1930, went to the Engelhörner to escape bad weather. Miss Bell writes from Rosenlauri in August 1901: 'I am established for a day or two in this enchanting spot, having been driven out of the higher mountains by a snowfall on Monday, which renders the big things impossible for a day or so. Here, there is a fascinating little rock range, that can be done in almost any weather.'⁷ I wrote the same thing to my family in August 1930. And it may be worth mentioning that we both did those rock scrambles with our minds fixed on the N.E. face

⁵ See *A.J.* 38, 298–9.

⁶ *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*, i, 124.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 123.

of the Finsteraarhorn, intending, as soon as weather conditions would permit, to attempt its ascent. 'All our thoughts are turned to the virgin arête on the Finsteraarhorn.'⁸

Miss Bell's new routes and first ascents in the Engelhörner, although still amusing rock climbs, are nevertheless done every season by crowds of climbers, if not good, bad and indifferent, at least by the good and the indifferent, and I shall not take space here to describe them. But not so often done, probably because of its greater length, is the *Welligrat*. 'Between the two Wellhorns there is an arête of rocks which has never been attempted—it is indeed one of the four impossibles of the Oberland—and we intend to do it and we think we can.'⁹ They succeeded on July 13, 1902.

Miss Bell's descriptions of the ridge seen from the Vorder Wellhorn could not be improved on to-day. 'There was a most discouraging bit of smooth rock and above that an overhang round which we could see no way. My heart sank—I thought we should never do it. However, we set off and when we came nearer we found that these two places were not half as bad as they looked. . . .'¹⁰ That is true. The steep, smooth slabs at the beginning flattened out as we approached, and we could almost walk up without using our hands. The overhang was very easily turned on the left. But Miss Bell's description of the difficulties of the rest of the climb, judged from modern standards, seems a little overrated. Beyond the overhang there was, it is true, a ridge of very loose and friable rock, but the ridge was relatively broad. 'And it [the ridge] ended in a sharp gap on the farther side of which two short but extremely exposed chimneys led up to the final slopes.'¹¹ Getting up the farther side of this gap is, indeed, the only bit of real rock-climbing on the whole ridge. We detected two routes besides Miss Bell's chimneys. Adolf is still convinced that the one he chose, round to the left of the ridge, is undoubtedly the easiest. Unfortunately he never got a chance to try it, since he was roped to me, and I went up Miss Bell's chimneys.

Miss Bell's party went down presumably by the E. ridge of the Gross Wellhorn and, crossing the Rosenlauri Glacier under the séracs, reached Rosenlauri that night. We continued on along the S. ridge of the Gross Wellhorn until the gendarmes got too plentiful, when we went down the E. face to the glacier, across the glacier to the small *Sattel* between the base of the

⁸ *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*, i, 122.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 137.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 135.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

S. ridge of the Wellhorn and the little rocky ridge, known as the *Wellhorngrat*, that continues up to the south. Thence we proceeded along the latter and up to the Wettersattel, making a total ascent for that day of approximately 10,000 ft. We reached the Gleckstein hut in time for supper, and I, much to Adolf's disgust, decided to spend the night there and refused to accompany him down to Grindelwald that evening.

Finsteraarhorn, N.E. Face.

On July 31, 1902, Miss Bell and her guides set out from the Pavillon Dolfuss for one of the other big problems which she had had in mind for two years, the N.E. face of the Finsteraarhorn. 'The mountain . . . comes down in a series of arches radiating from the extremely pointed top to the Finsteraar Glacier. . . . The arête . . . rises from the glacier in a great series of gendarmes and towers, set at such an angle on the steep face of the mountain that you wonder how they can stand at all and indeed they can scarcely be said to stand, for the great points of them are continually overbalancing and tumbling down into the couloirs between the arêtes and they are all capped with loosely poised stones, jutting out and hanging over and ready to fall at any minute.'¹²

It seems to me that Miss Bell's arête is perhaps not sufficiently differentiated from the rest of the wall to bear the name 'ridge,' and might rather be called a rib. In any case, it runs up about two-thirds of this stupendous 1000-metre wall and provides a route exposed to fewer falling stones than the rest of the wall. Miss Bell's party followed this rib nearly to its top, the last part of the way in the face of threatening weather. They tried to turn the last gendarme, which presents a sheer, forbidding face of rock, by means of an iced chimney on the left, but conditions were so bad that they could not advance, the storm broke in earnest and they were forced to turn back. That night, in a raging thunder and snow storm, they bivouacked on the rocks just below their turning-point. The next day they worked their way down the rib again, struggling against snow, cold and wind, and having to rope down almost all the way over snow-covered rocks with iced ropes. They bivouacked a second night on the glacier in pouring rain. Their descent was, throughout, a marvellous feat of endurance and courage.

¹² *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*, i, 139.

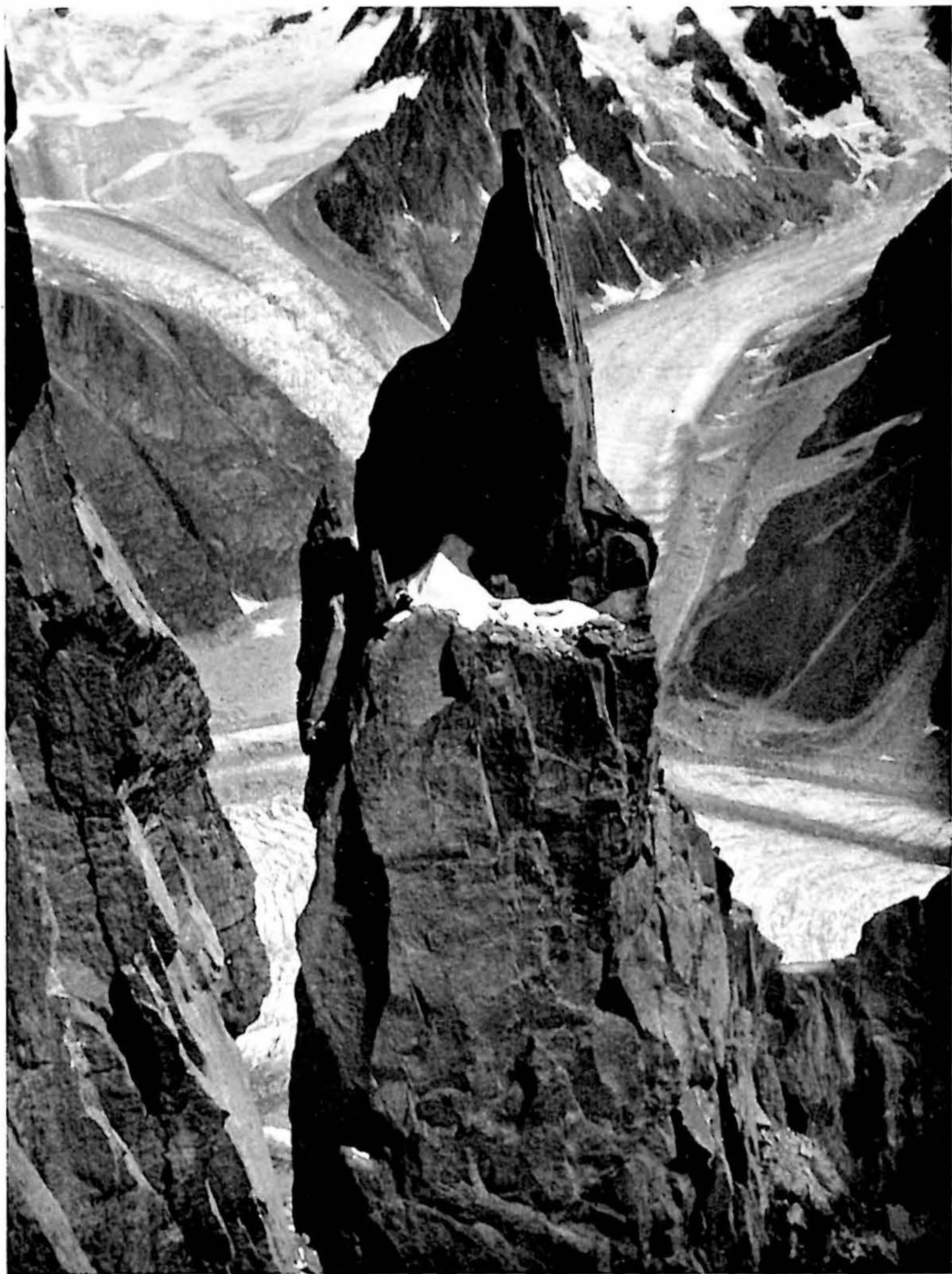
After Miss Bell's attempt, and before ours, the wall was twice climbed, in 1904 by Herr Gustave Hasler with Fritz Amatter,¹³ and in 1906 by Messrs. Val Fynn and Brüderlin.¹⁴ These two parties bivouacked at the beginning of the climb near the bottom of the rock wall, and the Fynn-Brüderlin party bivouacked a second night before reaching the summit. The party of September 29, 1929, Herren Hans Winterberger and Otto Brügger, with Hans Kohler, took the E., or Oberes Studerjoch, 'arête' ('A.J.' 42, 110-12).

Adolf Rubi and I had had some thoughts of trying this climb in the summer of 1929, but the proper occasion never seemed to present itself. In 1930, however, our arrangements worked out better, and towards the end of August even the weather conditions seemed favourable. On September 2, taking Adolf's younger brother, Fritz, with us as porter, we went up to the Strahlegg hut—which had not been built when the earlier climbs were accomplished. We preferred starting early from the hut to bivouacking, especially since in September a night out would be long and probably cold.

We left the Strahlegg hut at exactly midnight, following the regular route to the Finsteraarjoch. Near the Pass we met a bitterly cold wind destined to accompany us all day. Going down the other side, we wound round the base of the Finsteraarhorn wall until almost under the Oberes Studerjoch, where we sat down to wait in a spot somewhat sheltered from the wind. It was then 03.50; we should have about an hour before daylight. But the cold was intense—I shudder to think what a bivouac for the whole night would have been like!—and after a few minutes, concluding that anyhow it would be light before reaching the rocks, we started on again up towards the enormous and wide-open bergschrund. As far as we could make out in the dark, the only possible place to cross was where the stones falling down the main couloir of the wall above—the couloir just to the left (looking up) of Miss Bell's rib—had worn a deep gully or groove in the ice of the upper lip and piled themselves up in a cone underneath. By standing on the top of this rock cone Adolf was able to reach across with the pick of his ice axe and, not without difficulty, cut some holds in the groove above and pull himself up. The danger of this proceeding was somewhat mitigated by the earliness of the hour (04.30) and the coldness of the

¹³ *A.J.* 34, 266-80.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 379-87.



Photo, P. Montandon.]

AIGUILLE DE ROC DU GRÉPON.
(Cf. *A.J.* 43, pp. 240-5.)

[To face p. 64.



Photo, Miss O'Brien.]

THE FINAL ROCKS OF N.E. FACE OF FINSTERAARHORN.

day. Adolf continued cutting up the very steep ice gully, when suddenly down the trough came a fall of stones. Fritz and I rushed for shelter to a place where the upper lip of the bergschrund overhung. What was happening to Adolf? Nothing, apparently, for when the stones stopped falling, the chips of ice began again and the rope ran out in its accustomed little jerks.

When my turn came, I followed Adolf's route with feverish haste, impatient with the darkness that made it difficult to distinguish quickly the holds that he had cut in the hard ice. Finally—and with what relief!—I saw a line of steps leading to the left up and out of the gully. But before I could get to them, the rope below me tightened. I shouted to Fritz to come up, and that quickly. Then down the gully came another stonefall. There was nothing to do but crouch flat against the ice with my arms and rucksack over my head. The stones had apparently come from only a short distance, however, and were all small, as well as rolling gently. After I had been showered with them for what seemed like a very long time, there was a cry of warning from Adolf above: 'Stones are falling!' I supposed, of course, that this time there would be big ones. However, only the same gentle patter continued.

After gaining the rocks, we went up for a few minutes before turning to the right (N.W.) to cross the big couloir, which we did as quickly as possible. This brought us over underneath a large red tower, the lowest gendarme of Miss Bell's broken rocky rib. Her party had gained this rib more directly than we had been able to do, by crossing the bergschrund on the right of the big couloir and reaching a little rocky promontory below the main rock rib. The Hasler-Amatter party had followed much the same route, while Fynn and Brüderlin had attacked the wall farther to the left—*considerably* farther to the left than ourselves—and crossed the big couloir higher up.

We climbed up along the rib, as all the earlier parties had done. I think probably we kept more on the crest of the rib than they did. Hasler mentions snow-filled couloirs, gullies and chimneys,¹⁵ and Miss Bell says, 'Every now and then we had to creep up and out of the common hard chimney, or round the face of a tower, or cut our way across an ice couloir between two gendarmes.'¹⁶ It must be remembered that they all climbed

¹⁵ *A.J.* 34, 268–80.

¹⁶ *Letters of Gertrude Bell*, p. 140.

earlier in the season (July 16, July 31, and August 12) and no doubt they used snow-filled couloirs that we in September found iced and swept by falling stones.

On the crest of the ridge there was no danger from falling stones, except from those unavoidably dislodged in huge masses by the man above. We turned the gendarmes whenever possible on the left (S.); we were cold and wanted every ray of sun that we could get. But the sun went over to the other side of the mountain shortly after midday and left the entire face bleak and frigid. About half-way up we came to one step of considerable difficulty, which Adolf surmounted by climbing, for about 130 ft., an exposed and difficult edge on the N. flank of the rib. This, I think, may be the place which Miss Bell mentions as being so particularly difficult (especially later, on the descent), where her party climbed up by means of an overhanging chimney on the left, on the S. slope of the rib. I noticed such a chimney there, although only Fritz used it.

Farther up the ridge 'the towers multiplied like rabbits above and grew steeper and steeper. . . . The ridge had been growing narrow, its sides steeper as we mounted, so that we had been obliged for some time to stick quite to the backbone of it; then it threw itself up into a great tower leaning over to the right and made of slabs set like slates on the top with a steep drop of some twenty feet below them on to the col.'¹⁷ This is the gendarme that Hasler calls the 'Great Grey Tower' and which he characterizes as 'the key to the mountain.' 'So we tried the left side of the tower: there was a very steep iced couloir running up at the foot of the rock on that side for about 50 ft., after which all would be well. Again we let ourselves down on the extra rope to the foot of the tower, again to find that this way also was impossible. A month later in the year I believe that this couloir would go; after a warm August there would be no ice in it, and though it is very steep the rocks so far as one could see under the ice, looked climbable.'¹⁸ Miss Bell was quite right in thinking that the couloir would go, although even in September it was ice-filled. We must not forget, however, that the couloir seemed more possible to us because we were not climbing it in a snow-storm, and we had, moreover, the knowledge that the couloir *had* gone before, which is of inestimable value in getting up a difficult step. But in saying that 'after [the couloir] all would be well,' Miss Bell was unduly optimistic, and it is perhaps

¹⁷ *Letters of Gertrude Bell*, p. 140.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 141.

just as well that she did not get up above the couloir to try, in a raging snowstorm, the steep final walls of the face.

After we had roped down to the left for about 80 ft. Adolf cut holds up the brittle waterfall-ice in the couloir for a short distance and then out to the left on to a wall of loose and ice-glazed rocks. After about 30 ft. of real difficulty, we reached gently-sloping slabs of rotten rock covered with loose stones. Here the climbing was comparatively easy but dangerous. Stones might fall from the final wall that rose, menacing, straight above us, or pieces of ice and frozen snow from the ice-sheathed rocks and the corniches of the summit ridge. After about 250 ft. we could traverse to the right to approach the ridge again.

Here our route diverged markedly from everything that had been done before on this wall. From this point the other two parties had continued straight up, presumably in the shallow couloir just to the left on the S. slope of the rib, a narrow couloir that apparently drained all the falling ice and stones from the steep walls above. Amatter remembers hard snow here at the time of his ascent, but when we were there the couloir was ice-glazed and so long that cutting up it would have been an interminable as well as a dangerous process, if, indeed, possible at all. Farther out to the left, also, the ground looked uninviting—exposed to too many falling stones.

We turned to the right, therefore, and a short traverse brought us on to the ridge. From there we could not work upwards, either following the crest of the ridge, which here rises in a perpendicular step, or its N. flank. Below, on the N., was a vertical sheet of ice and an unbroken drop of several hundred metres. The only possibility seemed to be a traverse still farther to the N. into a small chimney about 100 ft. distant. This traverse along a vertical wall of ice-glazed rocks with all the hand- and foot-holds loose and icy cold was a passage of extraordinary difficulty. It was by far the worst passage on the whole face.¹⁹ I held my breath while Adolf worked his way slowly and surely across, and felt an intense relief when he arrived safely in the chimney. He then climbed up the chimney for about 60 ft. to a little platform. I started over, and have rarely been so surprised as I was when I got across that traverse without falling off.

From there to the summit I can see every step of our route up those fearful, ice-coated walls, and Adolf with tremendous

¹⁹ See *A.J.* 42, 339, for Rubi's comment.

energy and vigour hewing out huge chunks of ice and hurling down whole armfuls of rock in his efforts to find something to use for a hold. There was one step where Adolf climbed the full 130 ft. of rope between us and still found himself in a very uncertain position on steep ice. Somehow—no one knows how—he managed to get a spare rope out of his rucksack, tie it on, and then go on 40 ft. farther before attaining a firm platform. The last 130 ft. before reaching the summit ridge were bare and very steep ice with a few rocks sticking out here and there. But these rocks were held in position only by the ice itself, and any chopping intended to fashion them into holds served merely to dislodge them.

At last we reached the N.W. ridge and the ordinary route up from the Hugiattel, about 200 ft. below the top (northern summit). The other parties had both reached the southern summit first, and from the left (S.).²⁰ What a joyous gambol along a broad and level path were those last 200 ft. ! At 17.30, 13 hrs. after starting up the wall, we reached the top of it. How pleasant to lie there sheltered from the wind, eating, enjoying the delicate sunset colours, and even, from time to time, peering over the edge at the N.E. face.

After a long time we rolled up some of the ropes—a party of three does not need 300 ft. to descend the ordinary route of the Finsteraarhorn—and strolled casually down, reaching the Finsteraarhorn hut at 8 p.m., 20 hrs. from leaving the Strahlegg.

This is not an amusing climb—far from it. It is difficult, very, but it owes its difficulty entirely to the looseness and rottenness of the rock. Not only are handholds and footholds never reliable, but one is forced to take constant care not to send rocks down on to the man below, a feat becoming increasingly difficult as the slope grows steeper.²¹ Moreover, from the point of view of the objective danger involved from falling stones, I consider the climb unjustifiable.

(*Concluded.*)

[We tender our grateful and appreciative thanks to Miss O'Brien for her admirably described article.—*Editor*, 'A.J.']

²⁰ So also the Winterberger-Brügger-Kohler party of 1929 (*A.J.* 42, p. 110–12).

²¹ Apart from the special technique and great delicacy required on loose and very steep rocks, the climb does not call for much further cragsmanship (I took my mittens off for two 'steps' only).