

DOUBLE ANNIVERSARY ON THE DOM

BY TERENCE HARTLEY

IT was in 1917 that Arnold Lunn made the first ski ascent of the Dom, 4545 m., the highest mountain wholly in Switzerland. To celebrate Sir Arnold's eightieth birthday and the sixtieth anniversary of the Alpine Ski Club which he founded in 1908, Neil Hogg suggested that a small party be got up to make an attempt on the Dom on ski. So it was that Janey Reid, Belinda Coryton, Neil and I, with Ruedi Kaufmann from Grindelwald as guide, decided to meet at Randa on June 7, 1968.

Unfortunately Neil had to return to his hotel at Lucerne the next morning, leaving the four of us to set out for the Dom hut at about 7.15 a.m. Once we had left the village, the path soon became steep and we slowly made our way up through the pine trees. The weather was cloudy with just a few patches of blue sky, which made it reasonably cool for climbing. In about one and a half hours we were clear of the trees and onto the rocks. The Uto Section of the S.A.C. have kept the track in extremely good condition—in the difficult places there are fixed ropes and well-placed hand- and foot-holds. Even so, carrying skis and with three days' food in our sacks, it was hard going.

At last after five hours we arrived at the Dom hut. It is almost new, perched on the rocks above the old hut, just below the end of the Festi glacier. We had an aerial view of the valley as far as Zermatt, but the peaks of the Valais were covered in cloud. We did, however, get a glimpse of the Dom, towering up behind the hut.

Next morning we woke hopefully at 2 a.m., but it was snowing and blowing, so there was no alternative but to return to bed. We breakfasted late, and by this time the weather had begun to improve. The clouds slowly rolled away and the great peaks appeared one by one—first the Breithorn and the Klein Matterhorn, then that lovely mountain the Weisshorn with its famous North ridge, and last of all the Matterhorn, always reluctant to shed its wisp of cloud. But our eyes kept anxiously returning to the Dom, now quite clear and looking deceptively close. It was a nail-biting day, just waiting.

However, our patience was rewarded after one of Ruedi's excellent hut suppers and a few hours' sleep. We were up again at midnight, the stars were shining and the moon almost full. A quick breakfast and we were away by 1 a.m. We only had to carry our skis for a little while on the moraine above the hut before we reached the Festi glacier and the climb on skins began. Far below we could see the twinkling lights of

Zermatt, where no doubt the late revellers were still enjoying themselves! We made fast progress on the hard snow, *Harscheisen* coming in very useful to get extra grip. At 3.45 a.m. we reached the Festijoch and, looking back, saw a beautiful moonset over the Matterhorn, soon followed by the red glow on the peaks as the sun began to rise. It took us about an hour to negotiate the snow and rock of the joch, with skis strapped to our rucksacks. Before putting on our skis again, we scuttled like scalded cats across under the huge blocks of the ice-fall coming down from the Dom itself. After this we climbed on up the Hohberg glacier, weaving carefully around the large crevasses, first towards the Lenzjoch and then right-handed on to the summit slopes of the Dom.

At about 4200 m. we left our skis and proceeded on foot, kicking and cutting steps for just over an hour up the steep slopes to the summit which we reached at 7.45 a.m. The elaborate iron cross fixed there left no doubt that we really were at the top! The wind was very cold, so after taking in the splendid view of the Alps spread out before us, we rejoined our skis. Soon we were skiing down on hard frozen snow with a sprinkling of powder which made for good fast running. After a short rest and snack, we recrossed the Festijoch and skied on down the open slopes of the Festi glacier, finding patches of spring snow here and there. At 10.45 a.m. we were back in the hut for our second breakfast.

We were incredibly lucky to have had such a wonderful day, to be stored away in the memory and never to be forgotten. We imagined that fifty-one years ago Sir Arnold must have had the same sort of feelings, and we wished that we also had had the strength to take our skis right to the summit as he had done.

The walk back down the steep path to Randa was rather an anticlimax, and agonising to the feet. However, at 3 p.m. we were back in the village, footsore and tired, but happy that we had accomplished what we had set out to do.

Our thanks go to Sir Arnold for the inspiration he has given to us and to countless skiers and mountaineers all over the world, to Ruedi for his excellent guiding, and to the Alpine Ski Club for its financial help.