
C A RUSSELL

One Hundred Years Ago

(with extracts from the Alpine Journal)

(Plates 67-70)

We have arrived at the middle of January, and the journey over the Julier Pass is still accomplished on wheels and has been so throughout the winter. At Zermatt the sky is cloudless and the weather is so mild that were it not for the snow we should imagine it was spring time. The road to and from the Riffel Alp is continually used, so that visitors can spend the day there. The only drawback is (and some people may consider it an advantage) that the railway from Visp is closed and so the journey must be made in the old way, either on foot or on mules to St Nicholas and from there by sleigh or carriage.

One of the visitors staying at Zermatt early in 1893 was Hermann Woolley who on 17 January, accompanied by Gabriel and Joseph Taugwalder, made the first winter ascent of the Rimpfischhorn. After climbing the WSW ridge, or Rimpfischwänge, the party was delayed for an hour below the final rocks by a strong wind but succeeded in reaching the summit where the view was perfect in every direction.

The splendid conditions in many parts of the Alps, enhanced by occasional snowfalls, continued throughout the winter months and well into April when a notable success was achieved by another member of the Alpine Club.

The exceptional weather this spring has rendered just possible an unusually early ascent of the Dent Blanche. On Tuesday, April 25, Mr. Owen G. Jones, with the guides Antoine Bovier and Pierre Gaspoz, and with porter Bovier fils, effected a safe ascent of the mountain by the south ridge.

The expedition lasted for nearly 36 hours, a quarter of this time being spent on the ridge itself, and included a bivouac at the Bricola Alp where the party enjoyed hot chocolate before returning to Evolène.

By the end of June, when an ascent of the Matterhorn had already been recorded and many Alpine regions were affected by a severe drought it was clear that excellent climbing conditions were in prospect.

The summer of 1893 will long be remembered as an extraordinarily favourable one for climbing. Week after week a clear sun was shining out of a cloudless sky, and the result was that more peaks were scaled than in any previous season since the gloriously fine year of the Queen's Jubilee.

As in the previous year a number of outstanding expeditions was completed in the Mont Blanc range and the Montenvers Hotel was crowded with visitors, amongst whom were some of the best amateur climbers of the day. One of the visitors was A F Mummery who with J N Collie, Geoffrey Hastings and W C Slingsby set out on 24 July to attempt 'the peak round the corner', the prominent aiguille which at one time had been described as the Aiguille de Blaitière derrière¹ and which despite many previous attempts was still unclimbed.

As all of the party were fresh from England their pace was miserably slow. One had a railway headache, another could not go uphill, whilst a third could not go down, and the fourth showed the greatest desire to add to his local geographical knowledge by making, about every half-hour, minute observations. These, it may be added, were at all times of greater value if made in a sitting posture.

On the following day although out of condition the party, led by Mummery, succeeded in forcing a route across the SW and E faces to reach the NE ridge and the summit of the peak now known as the Dent du Requin, the name proposed by Collie and adopted after the climb.

On 7 August Mummery and his companions completed another notable expedition by making the first traverse of the Aiguille du Plan. Starting from the Pèlerins glacier the party overcame numerous difficulties to reach the summit by way of the unclimbed W face, the col now known as the Col des Deux Aigles and the upper section of the N face, above the point at which Mummery, Slingsby and Ellis Carr had been forced to abandon their attempt to climb that face in the previous year.

After making the first ascent of the Requin the party had returned to the Montenvers where Mummery, as he later recalled,² was taught 'that in mountaineering, as in all the other varied affairs of life, "*l'homme propose mais femme dispose.*"' The *femme* in question was Miss Lily Bristow who on 5 August, accompanied by Mummery and Slingsby, became the first lady to climb and to traverse the Aiguille du Grépon. The climb, during which Miss Bristow photographed Mummery leading the ascent of his eponymous crack, was immortalised by the famous comment²

It has frequently been noticed that all mountains appear doomed to pass through the three stages: An inaccessible peak – The most difficult ascent in the Alps – An easy day for a lady.



67. Queen Margherita of Italy on the Lysjoch, 18 August 1893.
(*Vittorio Sella*) (p223)



68. Queen Margherita of Italy at the Margherita hut, 18 August 1893.
(*Vittorio Sella*) (p223)

Later in the month Miss Bristow took part in other fine climbs including, on 24 August, an ascent of the SW, Italian ridge of the Matterhorn with Mummery, Collie and Hastings.

On 8 August G H Morse, J H Wicks and Claude Wilson completed the first traverse of the Grépon in the reverse direction, ascending the peak by way of the SSW ridge. Five days earlier this party had made another new ascent, reaching the summit of the Aiguille d'Argentière by climbing the SW face and the ESE ridge. Two smaller unclimbed peaks below the neighbouring Aiguille du Chardonnet were also ascended during the month: Aiguille Forbes on 2 August by J J Brigg, Eric Greenwood and Alfred Holmes with Jules and Omer Balleys; and Aiguille Adams Reilly on 23 August by Gustav Euringer with Alphonse Payot and Edouard Folliguet.

Other notable achievements were the fifth ascent of the Brenva ridge route on Mont Blanc by J P Farrar with Christian Klucker and Daniel Maquignaz on 26 July – a climb which, Farrar later recalled, 'involved the most continuously heavy step-cutting in hard steep ice I have ever seen' – and a remarkable feat, at the age of 52, by Paul Güssfeldt. Having been granted special permission 'in the interests of science' to cut short a journey with the Emperor William II Güssfeldt accompanied by Klucker and Emile Rey, two of the greatest guides of the period, and by César Ollier as porter reached the summit of Mont Blanc on 16 August by way of the Brenva glacier, the Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey and Mont Blanc de Courmayeur. The expedition, which lasted for 88 hours, necessitated two remote bivouacs and a dreadful night 'in the cabane of the Rochers Rouges, packed together with 12 workmen'.

Elsewhere in the Alps many other parties were able to take advantage of the favourable conditions. In the Dauphiné the E, summit ridge of the Meije was traversed on several occasions and on 12 August Louise and Marie Lacharrière, accompanied by Pierre Gaspard *père*, became the first ladies to complete this route. In the Pennine Alps on 10 September Carlo Restelli, with Mattias Zurbriggen and Ludwig Burgener, followed a difficult route on the E face of Monte Rosa to reach the summit of the Nordend. Starting from the Marinelli hut the party succeeded in climbing very steep rocks and exposed slopes between the famous couloir and the Brioschi route before joining that route on the ridge below the summit.

Further east two peaks in the Bregaglia group were climbed for the first time: the distinctive Ago di Sciora in the Sciora chain on 4 June by Anton von Rydzewsky with Klucker and Rey; and Punta Sant'Anna or Piz Badilet on 26 July by Count Francesco Lurani with a party which included Carlo Magnaghi and Giovanni Fiorelli. In the Dolomites on 11 August Gilberto Melzi, with Giuseppe Zecchini, reached the summit of Cimone della Pala by way of the unclimbed NW ridge, a route followed by the Dutch climber Jeanne Immink who on 12 September, accompanied by Walter Schulze and the guides Michele Bettega and Sepp Innerkofler, became the first lady to climb and to traverse this peak. On 26 August Ludwig Norman-Neruda, with Antonio Tavernaro, completed the first traverse of Sass Maor, having ascended the peak by a new route from the north.

The magnificent weather was particularly welcomed by Dr Jules Janssen,

the astronomer, who was able to proceed with his ambitious scheme of building an observatory on the summit of Mont Blanc. The hut which then stood on the top of the Rochers Rouges had been erected to provide shelter for the workmen engaged in the project and by August some 15 tonnes of materials had been transported at considerable expense to the Petits Rochers Rouges, the rock outcrop 230m below the summit, under the supervision of Frédéric Payot.

The structure is two storeys high, with a terrace. The rectangular base is about 33 ft. long by 15 ft. wide. A spiral staircase runs the height of the building, and unites the two storeys and the terrace, which is raised several feet and supports a platform intended for meteorological observations. The walls, windows, and doors are double. When everything was on the spot, the carpenters were sent to the top to put the building together. By a happy chance they had 15 days of absolutely calm weather, and by September 8 the observatory was in place – walls standing, floors laid, staircase up, windows in; all done, in short, but a part of the terrace. Impatient to see the new work, M. Janssen hastened to the summit and on September 11 reached the new building which, upon inspection, he found entirely satisfactory, with one exception. It was not as deeply buried in the snow as he had ordered.

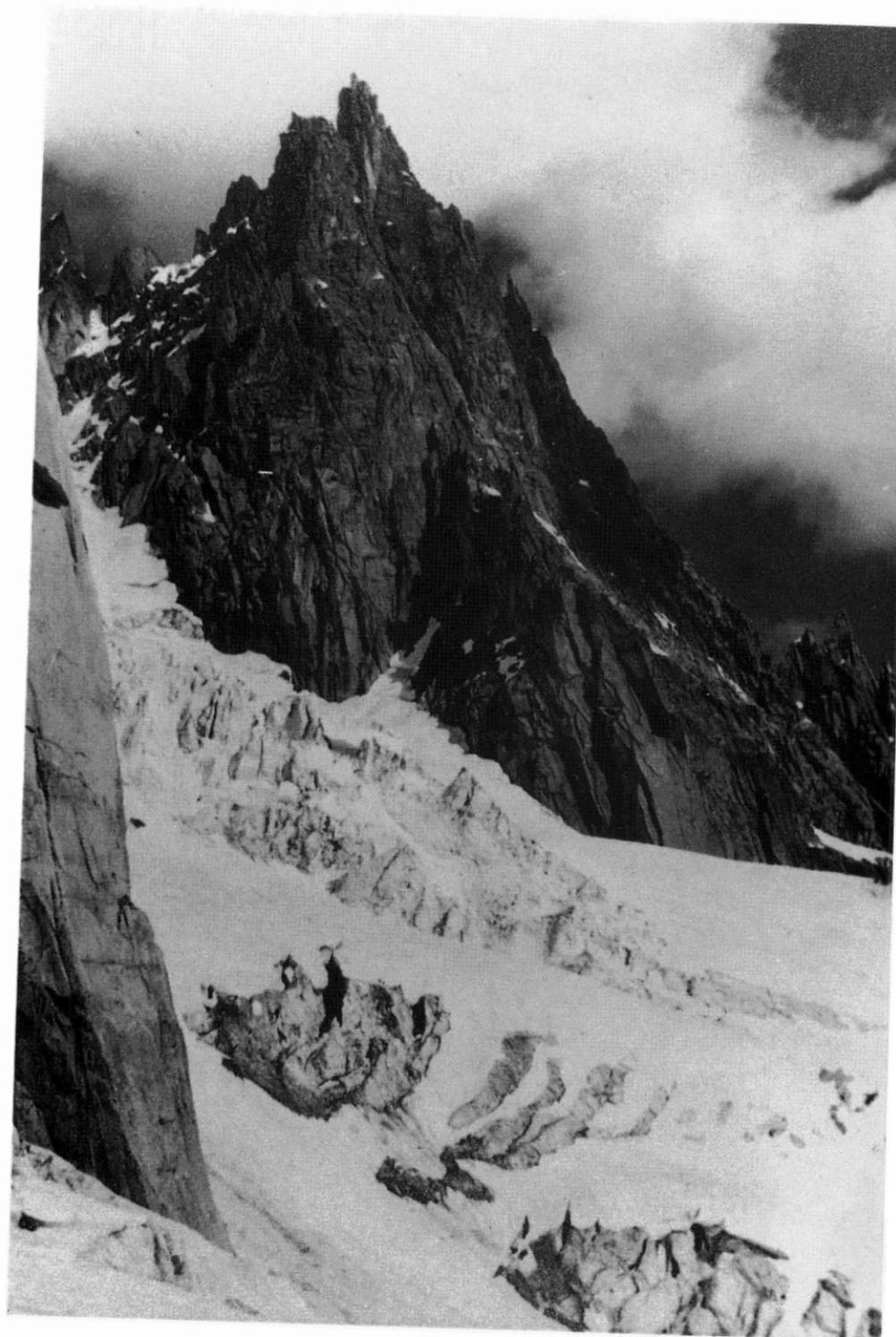
After spending four nights in the observatory and carrying out his first tasks with the aid of a spectroscope Janssen was convinced that the resistance of the snow was sufficient to support the building but Edward Whymper, who during the night of 8–9 August had camped at the summit in perfect conditions, expressed his doubts.³ 'It is not the liability of sinking *into* the snow, but the strong probability that any building erected on the top will sink *with* the snow, which gives rise to apprehensions about the stability and maintenance of M. Janssen's observatory.'

No such doubts were expressed over the location of another famous refuge which was inspected by a distinguished visitor.

On the evening of August 15 her Majesty the Queen of Italy left Gressoney for the Punta Gnifetti, on the summit of which has been recently built the new observatory hut, 'Regina Margherita', constructed by the Italian Alpine Club.

After a two days' stay at the Chalet de Stafel the royal party moved to the Capanna Linty⁴ (3,100m.) in the neighbourhood of which a camp had been established. Thence the Queen started on the morning of the 18th, at 4.30 A.M., attended by her Excellency the Marchesa di Villamarina and by Prince Strozzi, and accompanied by Miss Villamarina and by Baron Peccoz.

After climbing the rocks at the foot of the Gastrelet Glacier, and leaving Capanna Gnifetti to the left, her Majesty arrived at the Lys-Joch at 9.30 A.M., where she was met by Signor Gaudenzio



69. Dent du Requin (*C Douglas Milner*) (p223)

Sella and by Signor Vittorio Sella, who photographed the party. From this point the Queen walked very quickly to the foot of the Punta Gnifetti, which she reached exactly at 12 o'clock.

Her Majesty was received at the top of Punta Gnifetti by Signor Costantino Perazzi, Signor Gaudenzio Sella, and Signor F. Gonella, members of a special committee appointed by the Italian Alpine Club for the construction of the cabane. Signor Perazzi made a short speech, expressing admiration of the courage her Majesty displayed, and gratification at the great interest she always took in mountaineering and science. At 2 o'clock the committee took leave of the Queen, who, with her party, remained in the cabane for the night.

The inauguration of the new building on 3 and 4 September was celebrated in style by Luigi Vaccarone and Guido Rey who, with Zurbriggen, Burgener and Casimir Thérissod arrived at the end of the proceedings, having completed a new route to the Colle Gnifetti from the Marinelli hut. Other refuges which were completed by the end of the season having been constructed on or near the sites of earlier buildings included the Luigi Amedeo di Savoia hut on the Italian ridge of the Matterhorn and the Orny hut^s below the Trient plateau.

In the Pyrenees the completion of a remarkable shelter required the use of dynamite. During the summer Count Henri Russell supervised the construction of *la Grotte du Paradis*, his seventh and last grotto a few metres below the Pique-Longue, the highest point of the Grand Vignemale. The grotto was dry and Russell celebrated by spending the night of 26-27 July at his new abode, alone with the mountain.

In the Caucasus exploration was continued by Woolley, J G Cockin, F W Newmarch and G A Solly who arrived in the central region without guides in July. Although bad weather and dangerous snow conditions frustrated their attempts to ascend the S, higher peak of Ushba (4710m) they reached a number of high passes and climbed to a considerable height on Tikhtengen (4610m) above the Tsanner glacier before being defeated on the W ridge.

In East Africa an important contribution to the exploration of Mount Kenya was made by the naturalist Dr J W Gregory. After arriving in the region as a member of an abortive expedition Gregory organised his own party and during the course of a remarkable journey succeeded in reaching the base of the peak with Fundi Mabruk, a Zanzibari porter, and in climbing to a height of about 4750m on a glacier below Point Lenana (4985m) which he named the Lewis glacier. Gregory also named other prominent features in the area including the Teleki valley, after the Hungarian explorer who had reached the head of that valley six years earlier.

Many successful expeditions were undertaken in other ranges. In the Hindu Kush region on 21 April the Hon C G Bruce joined forces with Francis Younghusband to climb a peak above the Chitral valley; in the Japanese Alps the Rev Walter Weston, who had already climbed Fujisan or Fujiyama and Yarigatake, ascended Okuhodakadake (3190m) on 25 August; and on 4 October W H Cozens-Hardy reached the summit of Durmitor (2522m), the

highest peak in the Montenegro region. In Canada S E S Allen and W D Wilcox, after making unsuccessful attempts to scale Mount Victoria and Mount Temple from a camp beside Lake Louise, moved to the Selkirk range where they completed the first ascent of Eagle Peak (2854m), to the north of Uto Peak and Mount Sir Donald.

At home a number of new climbs was completed in the Lake District where, as in the Alps, exceptionally dry conditions were experienced. On 2 April Charles Hopkinson and W N Tribe made the first ascent of Scafell Pinnacle from Deep Ghyll, a fine achievement for the period. Other notable first ascents included Collier's Climb on Scafell by Joseph Collier and S B Winser, also on 2 April; Pier's Ghyll on Lingmell by Collier, Winser, H S W Jones and G Fairbairn on 29 April; and the Crowley Route on the Napes Needle by Aleister Crowley on 28 August. Sergeant Crag Gully in Langstrath was climbed on 6 September by O G Jones and J W Robinson and on 26 December Jones, who had been lying on the billiard table in the Wastwater Hotel 'thinking of the different kinds of nothing'⁶ made the first ascent of Kern Knotts Chimney on Great Gable, accompanied by Robinson and W H Fowler.

An event which aroused considerable interest was the publication of the *Mountaineering* volume in the All-England Series, written by Claude Wilson and illustrated by Ellis Carr. Describing the book⁷ as 'a practical guide for would-be climbers' Wilson explained in his introduction that

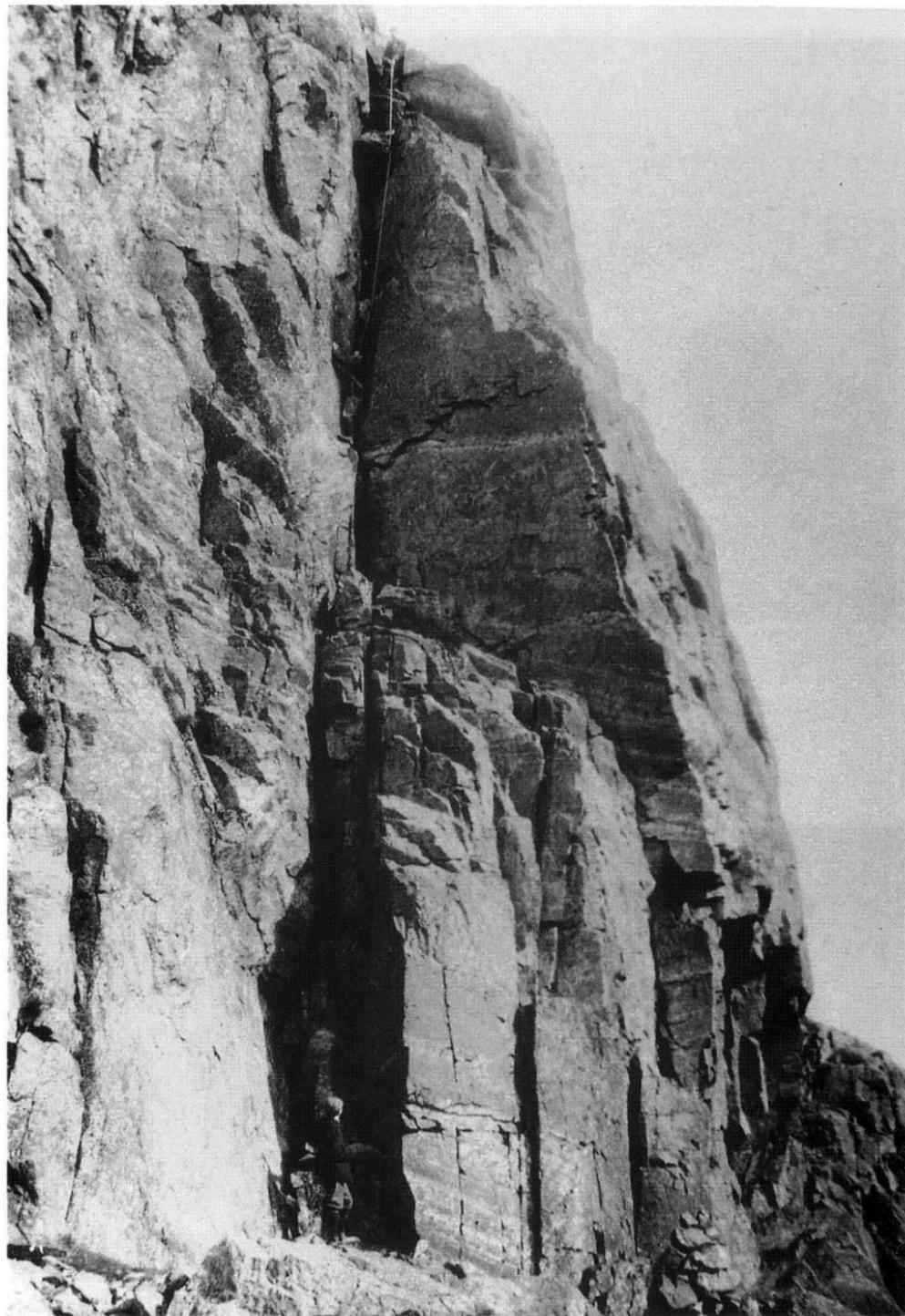
mountaineering is one of the finest and healthiest exercises in the world, and, as such, it must command a continuous supply of recruits: the important point is that those who do enter, and will continue to enter, its lists, should understand the principles which alone make it a justifiable recreation.

As the end of the year approached, after a memorable climbing season, it was time to take stock.

And now the giants of the Alps have all been climbed, and the mountaineer who wishes to break fresh ground must go further afield, or else must content himself with seeking out new and difficult ways to the summit in place of old and possibly easy ones. Still the possible permutations and combinations are practically inexhaustible, or at any rate present an infinite variety which may suffice for many generations.

It was also a time to look back. On 4 December the death occurred of John Tyndall, the great scientist and mountaineer whose name will always be associated with the Weisshorn and the early climbing history of the Matterhorn. There surely could be no finer tribute to any mountaineer than the recollection of Tyndall by C E Mathews.

He loved the mountains with all his heart, and he made his mark in his day.



70. Kern Knotts Chimney, Great Gable.
(G P Abraham & Sons Photos, Keswick) (p223)

REFERENCES

- 1 J D Forbes, *Travels through the Alps of Savoy*. Edinburgh, Adam and Charles Black, 1843.
- 2 A F Mummery, *My Climbs in the Alps and Caucasus*. London, T Fisher Unwin, 1895.
- 3 Edward Whymper, 'The Alps Revisited', Part IV. *The Graphic* Vol L, No 1299, 467-470, 1894.
- 4 Located on a ridge near the Alta Luce plateau and now in ruins.
- 5 Replaced by a new building constructed in 1977 and now relocated on the slopes of the Dent de Vaulion (1483m), Jura region, Canton Vaud.
- 6 O G Jones, *Rock-Climbing in the English Lake District*. Keswick, G P Abraham and Sons, 1897.
- 7 Claude Wilson, MD, *Mountaineering*. London, George Bell & Sons, 1893.