

Area Notes 1999

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Alps and Pyrenees

Russia and Central Asia

Greenland

Scottish Winter

India

Pakistan

Nepal

North America

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Alps and Pyrenees 1998 -1999

This report looks at selected activity, both in terms of exploration and technical performance, during the winter of 1998-99 and the following spring to autumn season. In preparing these notes Lindsay Griffin would like to acknowledge the assistance of Valeri Babanov, Julian Cartwright, Andy Cave, Lucian Comoy, Liana Darenskaya, Igor Koller, Mireille Lazarevitch, Ian Parnell, Emanuele Pellizzari, Michel Piola, Al Powell, Joan Quintana, Simon Richardson, Hilary Sharp, Thomas Tivadar, Mark Twight and Paolo Vitali. Technical grades are either French or UIAA unless otherwise stated.

New route descriptions, corrections and any information on AC members' activities are most welcome and should be sent either to the Club or directly to: 2 Top Sling, Tregarth, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 4RL.

WINTER 1998-1999

The winter/spring season was noted for the big storm towards the end of January that killed the talented British climber, Jamie Fisher, on the summit ridge of **Les Droites**; the almost unprecedented snowfalls that at one stage marooned a reported 100,000 skiers at over 100 resorts and caused catastrophic avalanches, notably the one that wiped out much of the village of Montroc (12 people killed) above Argentière and a second, which caused the deaths of 38 inhabitants in the Austrian village, Galtür; and for the mid-March accident and subsequent fire that closed the Mont Blanc Tunnel (with still no sign of it reopening at the

time of writing) and subsequently a similar accident closing the Tauern Tunnel in Austria. It was also noted for a highly publicised (in France) rescue of three ski tourers trapped in a snow hole high in the Vanoise for 10 days. Given all the above, it is hardly surprising that very little climbing of note was achieved during the winter. However, several significant ascents were made very early in the season before the onslaught of bad weather, and in the spring when conditions had at last improved.

Pyrenees

Although many new ice lines were put up throughout the region, the high mountains were often out of reach and few significant alpine ascents were recorded. The major events of the season took place in that Mecca of Pyrenean ice climbing, Gavarnie.

Cirque de Gavarnie Excellent conditions during early February saw the almost mythical line of *Overdose* (Boulang/Casteran/Julian/Munsch, 1978: 450m: V+/5) receive its third and fourth ascents. The first of these, on the 5th of the month, was an outstanding solo ascent by the accomplished French activist, Rémi Thivel, who took a mere three and a half hours. This was followed on the 16th by a 10-hour ascent from José Gordito and Joan Quintana, who rappelled the route via Abalakov threads. Both parties felt the line to be very serious with potential for considerable objective danger. The right branch of *Overdose*, above the easy snow terrace at one-third height, was climbed by Guy Lacrampe and partner at V/5. Although they spent two days on the route, which they christened *Cocaine*, the line was repeated shortly afterwards in just six hours.

Modern mixed climbing reached new levels of difficulty in this area when Pierre Bogino, Rémi Laborde and Jérôme Thinières climbed the 400m *Substance Ordinaire d'un Fin de Siècle* in the Vallée d'Héas. The top pitch involved hard dry tooling followed by a tricky rising traverse to reach a stalactite and was graded 7.

Mont Blanc Massif

Grand Capucin The winter season provided the new breed of aspiring aid men with the opportunity to spend several consecutive days of character-building weather hooking and nailing their way up three new lines.

On the sombre N Face, Dominique Brau-Mouret and Marc Challamel spent three days in early January completing *Marche à l'Ombre* at A2+. The final four pitches up a Yosemite-like headwall were particularly splendid.

It was then the turn of the Russians, who were some of the few climbers from the ENSA International Winter Meet to venture forth on to a big route in the generally atrocious weather prevailing at the time. On the R side of the E Face and close to the Spanish route, *Alta Tension*, Michail Devi and Alexander Klenov put up *Russkaya Zima* at A3 and 6c, while Alexander Ruchkin and Rinat Zaitov completed *Zimniy Voyag* at A4 and 6c. The latter pair were caught in a bad storm and after descending their route were forced to spend a full two days crossing the Vallée Blanche to reach the Midi téléphérique station.

Pointe Lachenal Mixed climbing is now, if you'll excuse the pun, in full swing amongst French alpinists and three new routes, very much in the modern idiom, were climbed on the E Face during November and December 1998.

M6 Solar (Batoux/Cruaud/Robert: 200m: M5+) and *Ophélie Winter* (Batoux/Franc/Robert: 160m: III/5, F5+ and A1) lie right of the classic *Contamine Route*, while *Hit Machine* (Batoux/Robert: 250m: III/M6) follows an obvious goulotte immediately right of the California Wall.

Grandes Jorasses On the 2nd April and therefore outside the official winter season, Jean Christophe Lafaille created a new route on the huge monolithic wall that forms the left flank of the Croz Spur. *Décolage* pursues a direct line up the compact rock left of *Manitua* (climbed in 1991 by the late Slavko Svetic and the first route established on this wall) and Lafaille spent around a week overcoming taxing aid pitches up to A4 in difficulty, before making an exit on to the Second Icefield. At this point he rappelled the route and returned to the valley, subsequently to face considerable criticism. This was less for the fact that he stopped well short of the top of this historic wall, than for his later blatant marketing of the story and its sale to Paris Match, which published a four-page spread on the exploit.

Aiguille du Roc After a previous attempt in 1997 Phillipe Batoux and Patrick Gabarrou climbed *Ice in the Sky* on the lower walls of the Aiguille. Starting up the first three pitches of the 1983 Piola/Pedrini summer rock route, *Eye in the Sky*, the pair traversed left to finish up the classic *Children of the Moon*. The 350m line was graded an ephemeral III/5 and although the belays were always sound, the climbing was extremely bold, as the ice was too thin for screws and the surrounding granite too compact for natural gear.

Grands Charmoz On the 20th January French guide, Emmanuel Pellissier and his Hungarian girlfriend, Ildi Kiss, made a partial second ascent of the Scott Backes/Mark Twight route *Birtright* (the name a comment on how most Americans believe they can go anywhere, do anything and say what they please). Climbed in 1993, *Birtright* is more or less a winter ascent of the old 1959 *Desmaison/Mazeaud Route* and was a line coveted by a number of British alpinists in the late '70s. Pellissier free-climbed the original aid sections, finding them hard but the route overall of excellent quality. Instead of traversing right like the first ascensionists, the French/Hungarian pair continued up the line of the goulotte to the point where it terminates under a small roof. From there a descent was equipped for 60m rappels and the route christened *Birtheft*. But wait a minute. *Birtright* is a 10-pitch route to the midway terraces on the W Face. *Birtheft* is at most a 50m dead-end variation. When Backes and Twight traversed out of the corner and bivouacked 15m above the top of their sixth pitch, they were more or less level with the small roof. As they had bivouac gear, they decided the midway terraces were a more logical conclusion to the route and continued a further four mixed pitches the following day. Not all the way to the summit of course, for as Twight says, 'why spoil a nearly perfect record'.

Petit Dru At the beginning of April a four-man Munich-based team, Gabor Berecz, Oskar Nadasdi, Peter Schäffler and Thomas Tivadar, climbed the left side of the recent rockfall scar, roughly following the line of the old *French Directissima*, to reach the latter at the base of the Red Shield. This gave 11 new pitches with difficulties up to 5.11, A3 and M5. Christened *Just for Fun*, the line proved, not surprisingly, somewhat dangerous and the four often played Russian Roulette with stonefall while on the belay stances. During the ascent Tivadar

was also able to observe the 1998 Russian route, *Lena*. He reports that the line looked relatively safe and that probably only four pitches were new, the rest appearing to climb ground on the *Thomas Gross Route* that was unaffected by the great rockfall. Tivadar made a winter ascent of the *Gross Route* in March 1990 and can therefore speak with some authority.

Grand Dru In mid January Julian Cartwright and Matt Dickinson made the second recorded winter ascent of the *Lesueur Route* on the N Face. The British pair made three bivouacs on the face in relatively mild winter temperatures and climbed the route at Scottish 7 and A1. This was one of the major achievements of the winter but the route was repeated again in late March by Rich Cross and Al Powell, who also made three bivouacs and found similar technical difficulties. This pair took a direct start similar to the 1998 *Ruchkin/Zailov line* and, higher up, made a five-pitch variation up the 100m wall between the original route and the 1998 *Devi/Klenov variation*. Both British parties assessed the overall grade as ED3.

Les Droites Another notable British (and New Zealand) achievement during the winter season was a quasi-ascent of the difficult *Koenig-Suhubiette Couloir* on the N Face by Dave Wills and Al Powell. This is rarely in condition and as the upper goulotte contained no ice, the pair were forced to make a rising traverse right to the crest of the NE Spur, up which they finished in a blizzard. However, below this, the original line up the grooves left of the third icefall (V+/VI with 10 aid points on the first ascent) gave difficulties of E1, A1 and Scottish VII, 8. Two bivouacs were made on the face.

Bregaglia-Masino

Pizzo Cengalo On 18 March Paolo Paggi and Mario Sertori made the first ascent of the 7-pitch *Maloviento* on the SE Face of the initial tower of the S Ridge. The new route follows a prominent series of cracks and corners left of *Le Fessure del Desiderio*, an equipped 250m 6c first climbed in 1997 by Sertori, who with Paggi made the second overall and first winter ascent of the route on 17 March 1999. The rock was excellent except for a few sections on the first and crux pitch (6b) and natural protection was used throughout. This is now the fourth route on this easily accessible face, the other two being *Il Volo del Picchio* towards the R side and *Don Carlos* (a bolted 6c) close to the L edge. All have seven pitches on generally excellent slabby rock.

Pizzo Torrone Occidentale On 14 March Marco Geronimi and Mario Sertori made probably the first winter ascent of the 1994 Maspes/Righetti route, *El Diablo* (400m: 10 pitches: 7a+/7b with three points of aid: 6b+obl) in a remarkable 11 hours' round trip from the Casera di Zocca.

Ortler

Mattias Robl completed a fine series of linked ascents when he soloed the Ertl/Schmid Route on the N Face of the **Ortles** (1300m: TD: Serious), the *Pinggera/Richter Route* on the N Face of the adjacent **Monte Zebbru** (c. 500m: D) and the *Brehm/Ertl Route* on the N Face of the **Gran Zebbru** (Königspitze) (c. 600m: TD-). His total time was a little over 12 hours.

Sadly, in October '99 the well-known extreme skier, Mauro Rumez, lost his

life in an avalanche below the Coni di Ghiaccio. Rumez had made nearly 40 first descents throughout the world, including the W Rib of Denali and summits up to 6800m in the Xixabangma Group.

SUMMER

Mont Blanc Massif

The weather during the summer of 1999, although never particularly bad, was unpredictable with low cloud and localised storms. For this reason the brunt of new development appears to have taken place on the lower peaks and subsidiary ranges such as the Aiguilles Rouges.

Grandes Jorasses The most notable achievement of the summer was the first ascent of *Eldorado* on the Whymper Spur by the Russian climber, Valeri Babanov. This new route lies between the *Japanese Couloir* and the *Directe de l'Amitié* and could only be attempted when the face was primarily icy and free from stonefall. Leaving his wife with a walkie-talkie in a tent next to the Leschaux hut, Babanov set off up the initial ice slope on 16 July. He spent two days climbing only in the morning and sheltering below rock walls the rest of the time, before branching out right from the *Japanese Couloir* at the point where the ice gives way to rock. Bad weather now hampered progress and the next 120m of impending granite proved the crux, with one section graded A3/A4. Above, slabby ground and a logical series of cracks and corners led up to the summit ridge. Babanov reached the top of Pointe Whymper late in the day on the 27th and spent his 12th consecutive night in a portaledge during the descent to the Boccalatte Hut. Apart from the hard aid, the new route had free climbing difficulties up to 6b and 90° ice.

Grand Capucin French parties were quickly on the scene in early summer to grab the second ascents of the two Russian routes reported above. Pierre Bogino and Christophe Moulin repeated *Zimniy Voyag* (ED3: A4 and 6c), and Sébastien Laurent and Sébastien Scheel climbed *Russkaya Zima* (ED2: A3 and 6c).

Red Pillar of Brouillard British climbers will be interested in the ascent of the *Gabarrou-Long Directissima* early in the season (12 hours to the top of the pillar then a rappel descent) by 19-year-old Ben Bransby on his first visit to the Alps (and also his first climb in the Mont Blanc Range). Bransby led the crux pitch free at 7a+ or good British E5 6b.

Pointe Lachenal Alain Ghersen managed to make a completely free ascent of the Gérard Long/Romain Vogler route, *La Ruée vers l'Haut*, climbing the overhanging dièdre on pitch five at a meaty 7c+.

Aiguille du Midi Emmanuel Pellissier and Ildi Kiss climbed a new route on the NW Face of the Cosmiques Arête, finishing up the last two pitches of the 1980 *Burnier-Vogler Route*. Technical difficulties of water ice 5+ were reported. Both these interesting routes can be reached in four rappels from the bridge.

Dent du Requin A useful addition to the repertoire of climbs available from the Requin hut was completed on 29 June by François Pallendre, Vincent Ravel, Xavier Savoff and Jérôme Stoessel. *L'Eden de la Mer* (seven pitches: 6b, 6a obl) lies on the SE Face of **Pointe 3041m** – the gendarme near the base of

the SE (Chapeau à Cornes) Ridge, which is normally turned during an ascent of this classic Winthrop Young climb up the crest. The foot of the route can be reached in half an hour from the hut and the climbing was reported to be most enjoyable.

Aiguille du Roc As part of an on-going re-equipping program of his own routes in the Massif, Michel Piola repeated his 1984 classic, *Ambience Eigerwand*, replacing all the bolts. Several variants were added to improve the line (including a new third pitch at 6b) and the original route updated to 6a+. In common with other routes of a similar style put up during the same era, *Ambience Eigerwand* is now thought to have been slightly undergraded when compared to equivalent pitches on limestone.

Pointes des Nantillons One of the big finds of the last two years is the previously virgin S Face of the Third Point. This 450m wall was climbed by Benoît Robert, Michel Piola and Vincent Sprungli in August 1998 to create the magnificent *Vaisseau Fantome* (14 pitches up to 6c). The three kept the existence of this route a closely guarded secret and returned in July 1999 to add *L'Homme du Rio Grande*, another 14-pitch route right up the centre of the face between *Vaisseau Fantome* and *Hibernatus*, the latter also climbed in 1998, following the line of the S Spur defining the right edge of the wall. *L'Homme du Rio Grande* proved to be another first rate climb on generally impeccable granite and comparable in both quality and ambience to classic routes on the Aiguilles Dorées.

On the First Point a new six-pitch line was added to the area of rock between La Nom du Rose and the Little Yosemite Wall. *C'est Vaisance* gives a combination of difficult cracks and delicate slabs with a crux of 7b. It was put up on 29 August by Mathew Andrews, Ferdinando Buatier and Antonio Pozzi.

Tour Verte A large cast of climbers was involved in completing *Le Pont des Soupires*, a 10-pitch line following the striking crest of the SE Ridge. This is the ridge with a conspicuous block almost impossibly balanced between two narrow pinnacles. The entire line, which has taken a remarkable five years to complete, can be climbed at 6a/6a+ with three points of aid (6b+ all free).

Aiguille du Moine On the initial tower of the long rocky spur immediately right of the couloir climbed in 1890 by Carr, Morse, Wicks and the Wilsons (and possibly still unrepeated in its entirety) Piola and Pascal Strappazon completed a 13-pitch line called *La Fable de la Fontaine*. The pair had climbed the upper 10 pitches in '98 by avoiding the lower wall on the R, but returned the following summer to climb the route integrally to the summit of the tower. The 400m line starts above the Balcon de la Mer de Glace, close to the point where it crosses the last little stream before reaching the Pinacles du Moine Couloir and gives superb sustained climbing at 6a/6a+.

Aiguille de la Grande Rocheuse Raph Dutremolet with Ben and Nico Patard climbed the 12-pitch *Le Rat Ben* (450m: ED1: 6b+, 6b obl) on the large triangular rock face, which forms the E flank of **Pointe 3500m** on the rarely climbed NE Spur. In the past there have been several attempts at routes on this wall but this climb lies near the L edge, starting close to the rimaye below the couloir leading up to the Col Armand Charlet. The granite is red and well-featured, and the situation is reported to feel really quite remote.

Aiguilles Dorées Starting up a 30m variant to the L of the original line, Andy Cave and Simon Nadin made the first free ascent of the old 1964 Vaucher Route on the N Face of the Tête Biselx (originally A3) at 6c+ or around British E4. The 6-pitch route gave excellent climbing, which proved easier than it appeared from below, and the pair found it more logical (though obviously harder) to finish up the top section of the Remy brothers' *Dianetic*.

Replacing the bolts, like for like, on popular routes put up in the early or mid 80s is generally accepted to be ethically sound. However, Walter Josi's equipping of the wonderful classic S Ridge of the Aiguille Sans Nom (Formaz/Vouillaz, 1961: 400m: AD+/D-: V) with belay bolts and several protection bolts is definitely not. This route had been climbed perfectly well over the years on natural gear. On a more positive note the Swiss activist and guide created a new two-pitch direct start avoiding the initial scree couloir and states that a rack of wires and Friends etc is still essential to complete the climb.

Petites Jorasses The closure of the Mont Blanc Tunnel greatly affected the number of climbers visiting the Italian side of the range and the Val Veni was reported to be remarkably quiet. Even so, during a weekend in August there were several parties at work on what was once a remote and infrequently visited venue; the E Face of the **Petites Jorasses**. The popularity of this face is more than justified, as in the opinion of some climbers it has the finest rock in the valley. The three popular lines now appear to be the original *Bonatti Route*, *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*. One of the parties climbing that weekend comprised Doré Green and Simon Richardson. This pair completed *Pantagruel*, feeling it was the only route to properly address the challenge of the impending headwall, making it probably the true line of the face.

Paroi des Titans Alesandro Busca, Manlio Motto and Piola completed a two-year project to give an as yet unnamed route of nine independent pitches with maximum difficulties of 7a+. The route lies just to the L of the immensely popular (and often very overcrowded) modern classic, *Vénus ou bien Venise* (Motto/Piola, 1997: 12 pitches: 6a+ maximum).

Aiguille Rouge There was something of an explosion of short and easily accessible rock routes on the walls of compact gneiss above the Chamonix Valley. On the S Face of the Aiguille de la Floria 3 new routes were added on the wall R of *Asia* (Piola, 1995: eight pitches: 5+). *Les Neiges du Kilimanjaro* (5 pitches: 6b) was put up by Piola and Robert, *Passe Temps du Vendredi* (only two or three metres to the R of the last named route: 6b) by Serge Bazin and Cri-Cri Gaussoit-Villeneuve, and an unnamed route up the R edge of the face by Emmanuel Méot and partner. Meanwhile on the E Face Laurent Colignon and Michel Fontas put up *Isai* to give seven excellent and fully equipped pitches at 4+ and 5.

On the **Contrefort de l'Index** (right of the descent couloir from the Index) Piola climbed the crest of the spur to create a superb 6-pitch route christened *Manu Puliti* (5b). The 1998 Méot route, *Nez Rouge* (5/5+), which lies on the R flank of this spur became extremely popular in '99 and looks like becoming a real modern classic, no doubt due in part to the very short approach from the téléphérique station.

Bernese Oberland

Finsteraarhorn Of interest to Club members will be two recent British ascents of the magnificent but infrequently climbed NE Rib. In August 1999 Doré Green and Simon Richardson made a two-day ascent of this 1000m-high route in rather snowy conditions. The pair climbed a more direct line up the Grey Tower via thin slabs on the east flank to reach its summit, then followed a knife-edge crest to reach easy ground. They finished up the *Left Hand Exit*, which appears the logical line to follow in mixed conditions. The previous August the Rib had been climbed in very dry conditions by Nick Kekus and Tony Parks. Both teams experienced no stonefall and confirmed the overall grade as ED1.

Eiger New activity on the Eiger never fails to capture the limelight. Over the last two years Daniel Anker and Stephan Siegrist have been attempting a major rock climb up the steep compact limestone on the front face of the Czechoslovakian Pillar. Their aim is to complete a highly technical, long, all-free route on the N Face but so far bad weather has prevented them forcing the exit on to the W Ridge. However, success did come on a somewhat shorter project up the vertical grey and yellow wall that rises from the great terrace right of the Geneva Pillar. Daniela and Robert Jasper spent around 20 days from June till the end of August working and equipping their line to the right of *Spit Verdoneque e Denté*, before making a two-day redpoint ascent at 8a. *Symphonie de Liberté* climbs the first 12 pitches of Piola's *Chant du Cygne* before slanting R from the big cave to reach the L end of the terrace after another 5 pitches. A further 11 pitches up the steep wall above lead to the W Ridge. Perversely, although this route is some 900m in height, it ends barely halfway up the mountain.

Also of note in '99 was a much publicised, continuous live broadcast of an ascent of the classic 1938 Route. Thanks to a big budget, a large audience was able to sit comfortably in front of TV screens and watch four well-known guides make the climb in early September.

Bregaglia – Masino

All new routes reported below lie on the Italian side of the range, signifying that either it is only the Masino that sees worthwhile pioneering activity or climbers operating on the Swiss side of the range keep their new routes closely guarded secrets.

Monte Qualido Probably the most impressive ascent in the Masino was the creation of *Black Snake* on the great E Face. Inspired by recent free climbing on the big walls of Yosemite, local activists Alberto Marazzi and Simone Pedeferra linked pitches of three major routes in the middle of the face to create an almost totally free climb. Starting up the first two pitches of *Galactica* (7b+), they then climbed the next five pitches of *Ho Kahey*, pitches 8, 9, 10 and 11 of *Galactica*, then finished up the last four pitches (12-15) of *La Spada nella Roccia*. This produced a 500m climb with several pitches of 7b/c (7a/7a+ obl), only one point of aid and an overall grade of 8a. However, one pitch was only climbed on a top rope and it appears that a protection bolt was added to the crux of *La Spada*, which had already been climbed free with nothing more than the old in-situ aid gear for protection.

On the same wall there were a number of other impressive ascents. An Italian climber from Bormio made a completely free ascent of *Artemisia* at 7b/c, eliminating the two remaining aid points left after Pedefferri's almost free repeat. Charlie Micheli and Giovanni Ongaro made a coveted second ascent of the 1996 Berta/Salvaterra route, *Sinfonia* (6c and A3) and the 1992 Pizzagalli/Soldarini route, *Vertical Holidays* (19 pitches: 6c+ and A2) received a second ascent from Andrea Caloni and Alessio Zambello (in 23 hours' climbing time) during July, and a third from the Czech climbers, Vojta Dvorak and Radek Lienerth. The latter pair took 26 hours, much of it in inclement weather, spread over the 6th and 7th, then 13-15 August. In the middle of this they took time out to make an ascent of *Galactica* at 7a and A1 in nine hours on the 11th and the 1997 Brambati/Carnati/Vitali route, *Qualifalaise*, at 7a+ (on sight in three hours) on the 12th.

La Mongolfiera Dante Barlascini, Lorenzo Lanfranchi, Giovanni Ongaro and Fabio Spatola created a new aid route on the E Face. The Mongolfiera is situated above and to the L of the Scoglio della Metamorfofi in the Mello Valley and from the top it is easy to descend in to the Val Qualido. *Melloscrollo* climbs directly up the impending walls for four original pitches to join the existing *Vuoto Senza Ritorno* (Fazzini/Fazzini/Riva, 1989: 10 pitches: VII and A3). It then follows the last three pitches of this route to the top. Some of the new climbing is very delicate and was given a New Wave A3 grade.

Zocca Valley During brief spells of fine weather Gianluca Maspes and Giovanni Ongaro climbed a new 3-pitch route up a pillar leading to the crest of the **Cima di Zocca's** E Ridge. *Excellent* involves sustained climbing on bolt-protected compact slabs with maximum difficulties of 7a. The day before the two Italian climbers had indulged in a bit of soloing. Ongaro climbed the classic 1973 *Erba-Fumagalli Route* (300m: eight pitches: VI) on the **Punta Allievi** in an astonishing round trip of just over two hours from the Allievi-Bonacossa huts, while Maspes soloed the West Pillar of **Punta Vittoria** via a route that was part new and part coincidental with the 1953 *Gallotti-Maffioli* route (V/V+).

Meridiana di Torrone Although at the time of writing their names are not known, two German climbers made the second ascent of the 1997 Covelli/Spatova/Van Duin route, *Antiche Melodie*. This is a major big wall route, reportedly involving hard aid climbing, and negotiates the obvious feature high on the face – the Meridiana Roof. The roof projects around 30m and must offer sensationally exposed climbing. The Germans completed the route in early August, spending four days on the wall.

Ortler

Palon de la Mare Unclimbed faces still exist in the Alps, though since 26 June the NW Face of this 3703m peak is no longer one of them. It was climbed by Italians, Crimella, Mauri, Spada and Valsecchi to give the 700m *Tritico 1999*, a route entirely on snow and ice, climbing through sérac barriers (60-80°) to reach the easier summit snow slopes. The overall grade was D+.

Dolomites

Tre Cime di Lavaredo The highlight of 1999 was the first free ascent of the *Couzy Route* on the N Face of the **Cima Ovest** by the Italian Mauro 'Babu' Bole. When first climbed in 1959 by Desmaison and Mazeaud, this impressive 500m route was graded A4 and V+ and considered one of the hardest in the Dolomites. Bole attempted to climb the route without any re-equipping out of respect for the first ascensionists but found that partners were reluctant to belay him from the ancient pegs and bolts. He therefore bolted the belays. His eventual redpoint ascent involved a crux pitch of 8b, with another of 8a+, two of 8a, one of 7c+ etc, all protected on natural gear and the original in-situ pegs and wooden wedges. The *Couzy Route*, climbed in this fashion, becomes one of the hardest multi-pitch climbs in Europe.

Of interest to British climbers will be Ben Bransby and Ian Parnell's ascent of the *Squirrels' Ridge* (VIII). The pair climbed the route completely free at E5, with Bransby wearing trainers throughout.

On the **Cima Grande** Kurt Astner and Kurt Brugger climbed a new bolted line immediately left of the *Comici*. *Iso 2000* is 7a, 6b+ obl and would appear now to allow parties on the neighbouring *Comici* an equipped rappel escape from various points on this route. The *Comici* was also the second leg of a remarkable *enchaînement* by Manfred Stuffer. During one day in August this climber soloed the *Vinazer Route* on the S Face of the **Marmolada** with the *Messner Finish* (800m: VII-), descended the N Face glacier, pedalled the 75km to the Lavaredo on a mountain bike and soloed the *Comici* (500m: VII) in just one and a half hours, to finish on the summit at 6.40pm. Further left, on the N Face, Catherine Destivelle spent three days soloing the *Brandler-Hasse Direct* at 6c and A2+ (the third solo and the first by a woman).

Finally, on the **Cima Piccolissimo** Icio dall'Omo and Marco Zandegiacomo put up the 200m *Nobile* (7c+) on the impending wall next to the Cassin route.

Brenta

Cima della Farfalla *Die Frau ist die Ruin des Alpinismus* is the title of an article written by the legendary Paul Preuss. It is also the name of a route put up on the wall left of the 1967 *Claus-Maestri Route* by Franco Cavallaro and Roberto Pedrotti. The new 300m line on the NE Face offers six bolt-protected pitches with difficulties up to 7c (6c obl) and was quickly repeated by Rolando Larcher, who confirmed its high quality.

Cima Ghez Rolando Larcher made the first ascent of *Il Giorno che Verra*, climbing alone with a backrope. The route is 400m high and has four pitches of 7c/7c+ (7b obl). Larcher kept to his usual standard of ethics by climbing from the ground up and making every move free until a skyhook rest was employed to place bolt protection. He then made a full redpoint ascent.

Tofana

Pilastro di Rozes On the Third Tower of the Pilastro, local climbers, Tiziano Cipriano and Massimo da Pozzo, have climbed *Dapazzo Vecchio Pazzo*, a 10-pitch route of 7c (7a obl) through the area of rock containing a huge roof situated left of their own 1998 line, *Compagni di Merende*.

Civetta

Punta Tissi On the NW Face between the *Philipp-Flamm* and *Cinque di Valmadrera* Piero Bez and Venturino de Bona have finally completed *Nuvole*. This is a major addition to the wall, being a 1300m line with 35 pitches and obligatory difficulties of 7b. The pair spent a total of 10 days on this route since their first attempts back in 1996.

Boscanero

Gigi dal Pozzo created two routes in the Boscanero Group: *Libidine Gigia* (300m: VII+) with Federico and Renato Panciera close to the L edge of the **Rochetta Alta** and *Per Gianluca* (400m: 7b+) with Maurizio and Pino Fontana on the **Sasso di Toanella**. Both routes were climbed solely on natural protection, a characteristic of most dal Pozzo routes. Dal Pozzo will rarely resort to bolts and although many of his routes are of high quality, they are often very bold and repeat ascents have been few.

Sella

Mur de Pisciadu *Tridentina* is a new 300m route from local activists, Marcello Cominetti and Francesco Piardi. It finds a way up the wall alongside the modern bolt-protected classic, *Ore e Carbone*, and has maximum difficulties of 7a+. The Mur is an unusually sound 450m high wall of limestone close to the Passo Gardena and now offers over 30 routes.

Marmolada Slovaks, Igor Koller and Miro Piala, climbed a new route up the Gorbi Wall, which they christened *Milenium* (sic). Bolts were hand-drilled and the crux third pitch was redpointed by Piala at IX/IX+. The rock, as on all the Gorbi Wall routes, was superb. Koller and Piala also tried to add an independent finish to Koller's own route, *Fram* (7c), which joins the *Fish* at the great cave. However, they were dogged by bad weather and although managing a pitch above the cave, were unable to free climb in the prevailing conditions and decided to retreat.

Also of note was Ben Bransby's attempt to repeat the 1992 Koller/Kuran route on the Gorbi Wall, *Last President* (150m: IX and A0). Bransby climbed the free section of the crux pitch without too much problem but found the A0 desperate and eventually took a 12m fall. This incident prompted a retreat but Bransby felt the section might go free at British 6c to someone with a very long reach.