

Area Notes 2003

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Alps & Pyrenees 2003

The following selective report, covering the winter 2002-03 and the subsequent, unusually hot summer, relied on the generous assistance of the following activists, correspondents and information sources: Jules Cartwright, Antonella Cicogna, Rob Collister, Sébastien Constant, *Desnivel*, Go Mountain, Grzegorz Glazek and the Polish Centre of High Mountain Documentation, Andrej Grmovsek, Claude Gardien, Robert Jasper, Mireille Lazarevitch, Francois Marsigny, Luca Maspes, *Montagnes*, PlanetMountain, Tony Penning, Marko Prezelj, Hilary Sharp, Haroen Schiff, Grzegorz Skorek, Rémi Thivel and *Vertical*.

The report is arranged from west to east, beginning with the Pyrenees and ending with the Dolomites. All winter activities are covered first and, more and more, these include the major new routes of the year. Also included are corrections/additions to AC guides. The *Alpine Journal* particularly welcomes details of new routes and information on members' activities in the Alps, as well as changes to established routes. These should be sent to the Club or direct to the author.

PYRENEES

Ice and mixed climbing in the Pyrenees is still rather underrated and definitely underdeveloped. However, the vagaries of the maritime climate certainly favour local activists, who are able to snatch the opportunities when they arise. March marked the start of exceptional conditions on both Spanish and French sides of the Pyrenees and many of the great classic winter routes

were climbed more often than in any previous season. Nearly all the new routing took place during that month and the following is just a selection of the most important ascents.

WESTERN PYRENEES

Pic du Midi d'Ossau On 17 March Cyrille Dupouy, Christian Ravier, Vincent Séger and Rémi Thivel made the first winter ascent of the *Grande Cheminée*, a TD+ never repeated in its entirety because of its remote situation and a reputation for bad rock. To approach the chimney, situated high on the N face of the Pointe de France, Dupouy, Ravier (son of Jean and a guide since 1990), Séger and Thivel chose the *Canaleta Santa Coloma*, a hard ice and mixed route (650m to the summit: V/5 and M5) opened solo by Thivel in March 1993. The link-up between the lower third of this route and the Grande Cheminée was considered to be particularly elegant and the combination, which was thought to warrant ED2, was completed in a continuous 24-hour push, with difficulties in the chimney rated M6, 6a and A3. The four regained their car 30 hours after leaving.

Peña Telera On the N face of the main summit, Txus Lizarraga and Mikel Zabalza completed two new lines between the Collado Couloir (Companario/Cortes/Porta, January 1971: AD: 60°), and the classic *Gran Diagonal* (Gutierrez/Morandeira, March 1966: AD/AD+). *Tia Rogella* (300m: TD: V/Mixed and 85°) begins 100m to the right of the Collado Couloir and exits on to the upper slopes of the *Normal Route*, while *Yolande* (350m: TD+: 80° and V+/Mixed) lies right of *Raquel* (Fernandez and party, 1979: D+) and joins the upper section of the *Gran Diagonal*. Both were climbed in late March.

On the 2702m **Puerto Rico** at the western end of the massif, Guillaume Delaye, Pierre Labbre, Benoît Monfort, Josselin Perrugault, Magali and Frédéric Salles put up a new route left of the Eduardo Emmanuel Couloir, which they named *Voie des Toys* (600m: ED1: M5 and 95°).

TENDENERA GROUP

Peña Forato East of the Telera and south of Panticosa the Tendeñera Massif is home to several classic ice couloirs. On 16 March Joxerra Eskibel, Eneka Guenetxea and Iñaki Ruiz made the first winter ascent of the NE Spur of Peña Forato os Diables via a predominantly snow route christened *Vicky*. Access is via the Panticosa ski lifts and the difficulties of this 650m route were rated at 70° and IV.

VIGNEMALE GROUP

Pointe Chausenque On the NNE face, Damien Boitard and Davy Nicolau have climbed a new line, which they are calling *Loin du Golf*. The route starts up the *Voie des Seracs* (Arlaud/Laffont/Otta, 1925: AD+) and in the snow basin branches up right to climb through a rock barrier in three pitches of ice and mixed (M4 and a short vertical pillar). Above, 200m of 50-55°

snow leads to the crest. The overall height of this fine addition to the area is 450m and the grade TD-.

On 20 March and three days prior to his solo of *Délinquents* reported below, Jérôme Thinières joined Xavier Garcia to link the lower section of the *Arlaud-Souriac Couloir* (first climbed in the summer of 1960 by Patrice de Bellefon and M Haegelin but as a winter route by Toni Bedel, Daniel Gillereau and Bruno Prat on 10 March 1978: 600m: TD+: V/5-: 80°) with the upper section (the big icy dièdre) of *Mixed Emotions* (Ferran Latorre/Père Vilarasau, March 1995: 700m: ED2: A3+, 5, 80° with a very short section of 90°). This combination avoids all the difficult lower rock climbing of *Mixed Emotions* and gave a 600m predominately ice route at IV/4.

Pique Longue On 12 March Frenchmen Jérôme Thinières and Romain Wagner climbed a partial new route on the N face of the main summit of the Vignemale (Grand Vignemale or Pique Longue). Due to the very warm and rainy start to the winter, a thin line of ice had formed down the lower right flank of the Gaube Couloir leading to more ample ice on the *Original North Face Route*. The two Frenchmen climbed the first 100m of the Gaube, then broke out right, overcoming several sections of thin ice and mixed (85°) for another c300m before joining the *Original Route*. They reached the summit after only eight hours, grading their ephemeral new line ED1.

Excellent conditions resulted in many climbers attempting the second ascent of *Les Délinquents de L'Inutile*, the direct route on the N face put up on 23 March 1994 by Benoît Dandonneau, Christian Ravier and Rémi Thivel. These three climbers completed the route in a 23-hour push and fickle ice conditions have stopped any subsequent ascent. One of the crux sections occurs low down on the route, where an overhang must be crossed via some delicate aid (25m: A3). Unfortunately the commitment required to climb this pitch decreased markedly last winter, when on one of the unsuccessful attempts a party placed three extra bolts. During the ascent of his new route, Jérôme Thinières had ample time to look at *Les Délinquents* and decided to try an ascent, solo, on 25 March. He took a mere 12 hours and 30 minutes for the climb and only used a backrope on the aid pitch. The overall grade is ED2 (800m to the summit: WI5+, A3 and M5). The following day Pierre Bogino and Romain Wagner repeated the ascent in 12 hours and confirmed the climb was obviously in much better condition than on the first ascent.

The Cirque de Gavarnie Excellent conditions allowed three parties to make complete and continuous direct ascents of the Cirque by linking routes on all three tiers. The first time an ascent in this style took place was over 3-5 March 1994 when Patrick Gabarrou and Ferran Latorre climbed *SuperBanzayous*, a thin 55m variation to the 300m *Banzayous*, followed by *Saphir* (135m: V/5 and again a new route) on the second tier, and completed their ascent with the new route *Aloïs* on the left side of the upper wall (180m: A2/3 and 5+, then VI/5). The total vertical interval to the rim of the Cirque was 1300m.

The first party in 2003 comprised Dani Ascaso and Jordi Corominas,

who linked *Fluide Glacial* (IV/5-), *Mitoligico* (IV/4) and *Aloïs* (which they rated V/5, and 5+/A3). This was only the second ascent of *Aloïs* and the link-up took place in January.

Next on the scene were two more Spanish climbers, Oscar Cacho and Chiro Sanchez. This pair, climbing in February, also made two bivouacs and linked *Frezante* (IV/4), *Zephyre* (IV/4+) and *Aloïs*.

The third party, which opted for a different style, made their ascent on 10 March. Lightly equipped and climbing very fast, French climbers Richard Dupont, Rémy Laborde and Jérôme Thinières first climbed the difficult *Thanatos* (V/6) in just six hours, followed this with a two-hour ascent of *Mitoligico* on the second tier and finished up *Aloïs* in eight hours. From the base of *Thanatos* to the top of *Aloïs* they took a total of 18 hours, and after making a rappel descent of the cirque, were back at their starting point in a 23-hour round trip.

Sadly, a year later Thinières was to suffer a fatal accident at this venue, when an ice pillar collapsed.

POSETS GROUP

Pico de Bateillance On the western end of the Crête de Bateillance, which runs west from the summit of the Pico de Bateillance, a very popular winter destination for ski mountaineers, Emilio and Toño Guerra have climbed *En Peores Plazas Hemos Toreao*. The two climbed the 200m face in four pitches of 50-70° with a step of III+, then after crossing the top of the *North Couloir* (an existing route), descended the easy NE ridge.

Agullas de Sen In the southern section of the Posets group, Nancho Criado and Toño Guerra have made the first ascent of the straightforward *Diagonal Gran* on the Agullas de Sen. This is a 350m snow couloir at 40-55° with a mixed exit of III and reaches the crest at an altitude of c2810m. It faces south-west and was climbed in two hours on 24 April.

LUCHON GROUP

Pic des Spijoels On 26 March Damien Boitard, Nicolas Leuilliez and Davy Nicolau added another route to the steep NE face, when they climbed the *Jean-Pierre Laurent Memorial Route*. The great classic here, and probably the best ice climb in the Luchonnais, is the *Grand Dièdre* (350m: TD) first climbed over two days in January 1964 by Philippe Sol and Claude Valleau. Boitard, Leuilliez and Nicolau wanted to repeat this line but in the dark they mistook the start and ended up on an unclimbed line beginning approximately 100m to the left. The new route first climbs two delicate mixed pitches to gain a system of 50-55° goulottes. Above, the crux is overcoming a bulge in a vertical dièdre (M6 and A1). An overall grade of TD+ (IV/4, M6, A1) was thought appropriate for this excellent route. J-P Laurent was a Pyrenean guide recently killed by an avalanche in Kazakhstan.

MALADETA GROUP

Tuca Blanca Just a few kilometres south of the Hospital de Benasque, Manolo Castillo, Paulo Roxo and Yolanda Traver have opened a new mixed route on the NE face of Tuca Blanca de Paderna. The 460m climb, named *El Regalo del Viento*, was on generally very good granite and had difficulties up to M3+ and 70°.

EASTERN PYRENEES – CERDAGNE

Puig de Pastuira On the north flank of a subsidiary ridge of the 2688m Puig, which is situated south of Vallter ski station and the more well-known winter climbing ground of the Gra de Fajol, Valentin Martin and Victor Tardió have climbed the *Canal Bernat Laura*. This 260m couloir, which they believe to be new, was graded D with a section of IV/60°.

ECRINS

Le Ratoux On the N face of this 3809m mountain overlooking La Grave, Sébastien Constant and Jérôme Mercader added another new mixed route to the left side of the face. The 550m *La Valse aux Adieux* (M6 and 70°) was climbed on 1 April and is situated just 80m to the right of the big sérac barrier that marks the end of the left side of the face.

Pointe Nérot In a tribute to the Ecrins activist Raphaël Borgis (see Pre de Bar entry below), Sébastien Constant and Stéphane Malavasi added a committing mixed route to the N face. *Les Bougissitudes de la Vie* (1200m: ED1: WI4+, M5 and F5c) climbs the pillar falling from the centre of the large serac barrier high in the middle of the face and finishes on the W summit via the last section of the N ridge. It passes a prominent gendarme (2753m IGN), which the climbers would like to name Pointe Rafougne. This was Constant's fourth winter route on the face, which rises above the easily accessible Vallon de l'Homme.

VANOISE

Roc de la Valette Outstanding winter conditions on the c450m N face of the Roc de la Valette allowed new lines to be climbed, as well as the first repeat of the only existing ice route on the face. In January 1991 François Damilano, the late Jean-Noël Roche and Philippe Roger climbed a fine line up the right side of the face at WI5+/6. Despite much interest, more than 10 years elapsed before conditions were ripe for a second ascent and this was achieved in early December 2002 by Philippe Batoux, Benoît Robert and Pierre Plaze. A little later Titi Gentet and Bruno Sourzac made the third ascent in the remarkably fast time of three hours.

A somewhat harder line had been envisaged to the left and it was finally achieved in one long day on 13 December. Philippe Billet, Benoît Jacquemot, Manu Pellissier and Fred Valet climbed the serious *Die Another Day* at V/5+, M5, A1. A little over a week later Batoux, Robert and Sébastien Franc

repeated the line to the headwall (reporting the aid to be A2 rather than A1) but then moved out right onto the big ice smear and climbed it in one 60m+ pitch at WI6+. Unfortunately, when they reached the top, they were too worried about the potential avalanche danger to descend by the standard route and opted to rappel the line of ascent, placing bolt belays at almost every stance. The first ascensionists were particularly angry to find the commitment needed for their fine new route had been destroyed.

MONT BLANC MASSIF

After a poor start to the season excellent climatic and snow/ice conditions in February and March allowed a number of major new routes, important repeat ascents and one or two great adventures to be achieved. Modern classic routes on the north faces enjoyed great popularity and were often climbed in very fast times.

Mont Blanc

Brouillard and Frêne faces – multiple ascents.

One of the most remarkable events in the rich and varied history of Alpine winter climbing took place during February and March when, over a period of just 22 days, Patrick Bérhault and Philippe Magnin achieved what most would consider to be more than a lifetime of climbing, completing all the major ice couloirs and rock pillars on both the Brouillard and Frêne faces. The French prepared for the extravaganza by carrying large quantities of food and equipment during the previous summer up to the Eccles bivouac hut. They then sat through the winter, waiting for an appropriate period of stable weather, which began in early February.

The pair began on the 11th with *Brouillard Givrant*, (Bellin/Boivin, 1985: ED2 V/6), the relatively short but hard and very rarely climbed gully between the Left Hand and Red Pillars. They equipped belays on the ascent and, as with virtually all routes climbed during their odyssey, rappelled from the top of the difficulties. Next day it was the *Cascade du Notre Dame* (Gabarrou/Marsigny, 1984: ED2 V/6). This line lies immediately left of the Central Pillar of Brouillard and was in very good condition last winter, holding much more ice than *Brouillard Givrant*. The magnificent final ice fall was a full 60m in height. As with most days during their extended visit, on the way back to the Eccles the two walked across to the base of the next climb on the list, so that they would have tracks in place on the glacier for the following day.

On the 13th they climbed the *Hypercouloir* (Gabarrou/Steiner, ED1/2 V/6). This was the first of the couloirs opened on the face and is widely regarded as the easiest, being most likely in condition and having received most ascents. The following day saw them at the start of *Hypergoulotte* (Grison/Mailly, 1984: ED3: V/6+, F5, A1). This very ephemeral line is undoubtedly the hardest of the ice lines on the face, but also, according to Bérhault, the finest. Bérhault and Magnin appear to have dry-tooled the aid section at a

high M grade. On the morning of the 15th they had a bit of a rest, leaving the hut late to start their 'attack' on the Frêne face with *Abominette* (Gabarrou/Profit/Tavernier, 1984: TD-: IV/3). This is by far the easiest of the couloirs and runs up the left flank of the South Pillar of Frêne.

On the following day the weather turned mediocre and the pair decided to have a well-earned rest before tackling the next objective, the difficult *Fantomastic* (Gabarrou/Marsigny, 1985: ED3: V/6 M), another rarely repeated line squeezed between the Hidden and South Frêne pillars. Next it was *Frêneysie Pascale* (Gabarrou/Marsigny, 1984: ED2/3 V or VI/6 M), the discontinuous couloir between the central and right-hand pillars, which both Bérhault and Magnin thought to be one of the best ice routes on this side of Mont Blanc. There only remained the *Cascade de Frêne* (Bernardi/Grassi/Luzi, 1980: TD+: IV/5+), which is the direct finish to the *Great Frêne Couloir* and provides the only vertical ice pitches above 4500m in Europe. The Frenchmen found two 50m pitches of vertical ice and continued above to reach the summit of Mt Blanc at around 4pm. There, they picked up skis, previously deposited by Italian friends, and via the Grands Mulets, were down in the Chamonix valley by 9pm. Even this descent was difficult as the pair were travelling so light they had not even taken head torches.

After a good rest Bérhault and Magnin walked back up to the hut on 22 February, ready to begin next day on the second half of their odyssey, the rock pillars. This time they found more clement conditions and for Bérhault more familiar ground (he had climbed many of them previously). They began on the 23rd with the *Hidden Pillar of Frêne* (Frost/Harlin, 1963: ED1/2: 6b), finding the route to be more serious than they imagined. On the 24th they climbed the *Central Pillar* (Bonington/Clough/Djuglosz/Whillans, 1961: TD+/ED1: 7a+ all free) in an 11-hour round trip from the hut, for the second day in succession rappelling the corner left of the pillar. This was one of the few routes climbed that had noticeable amounts of fixed gear.

On the 25th came the *South Pillar* (Dubost/Seigneur, 1972: TD-/TD: F/5+ and some mixed climbing), which they found superb and felt it deserved a much wider popularity. Next morning they opted for the very rarely climbed *Central Pillar of Brouillard* by the *British Route* (Jones, solo, 1971: TD: V+ and A1). Bérhault had climbed this route 21 years previously when he was just 18 years old, possibly making the second ascent. This time he found many of his old slings still in place. On 27 February, the same day as three other French alpinists left the Eccles Hut for an ascent of Frêneysie Pascale, they chose the *Right Hand Pillar* (now often referred to in France as the Bonington Pillar: Baillie/Bonington/Harlin/Robertson, 1965: TD+/ED1: 6a/6a+). Unfortunately, the weather was poor and they eventually gave up around four pitches below the top. Next day the weather was better and they were able to reach their high point much earlier and continue to the top, although not without considerable difficulty.

On 1 March the pair tackled the *Red Pillar* via the classic *Bonatti Route* (Bonatti/Oggioni, 1959: TD+/ED1: 6b). Bérhault knew this route well,

having climbed it twice before in winter, including the second winter ascent in 1982. The route now features a fair amount of fixed gear, including, according to the French pair, some bolted belay stances. The next day, one of their most enjoyable, they rested while it snowed. Fortunately, the weather cleared on the 3rd and the *Left Hand (South) Pillar* (Kowalewski/Maczka/Wroz, 1971: TD+: graded UIAA VI by the Poles). There appears to be no record of this pillar having received a second ascent and certainly no winter ascent, with would-be ascensionists put off by the Polish description of poor rock. However, the French found the granite to be quite sound but due to the lengthy approach and difficulties on the pillar, Bérhault felt it was their toughest day.

This left just one route, the *Right Hand (North) Pillar of Frêne*y (Bolloni/Gervasutti, 1940: TD+/ED1: 5+ and A1, Mixed). Weary but also finding nasty avalanche conditions below Col Eccles, the pair took another rest day on the 4th but completed the climb on the 5th, reaching the top of Mont Blanc by 3pm and descending to the Vallot. The following day, using more skis left at the hut by friends, they descended to Chamonix.

The sheer technical competence and endurance needed to climb fast over very difficult ground day after day was outstanding but critics have argued that the pair climbed no new ground, operated from a well-stocked and relatively comfortable base, left the hut on most days with no rucksacks, avoided commitment by rappelling the routes, some of which were rather short (350-400m), replenished their rack at the hut and changed axe picks on a daily basis, and had a good rest in Chamonix in the middle. However, it is unlikely this project could have been completed in any other style, and in just three weeks the two climbed a collection of routes the envy of nearly every Alpine climber.

Tragically, in the spring of 2004 Bérhault's next great link-up, all 82 of the UIAA designated 4000m peaks in the Alps in a continuous journey, came to an abrupt end on the ridge linking the Täschorn to the Dom, when he fell unroped through a cornice and was killed.

Peuterey Super-Integral In late February Stéphane Benoist, Patrice Glairon-Rappaz and Patrick Pessi completed the *Peuterey Super-Integral*, a harder version of the famous *Peuterey Integral*, which reaches the summit of Mont Blanc after more than 4500m of ascent over all types of terrain. Carrying 26kg sacks and with no pre-placed food or equipment, they took one day to reach the Monzino Hut and a second to gain the foot of the *Ratti-Vitali* on the Aiguille Noire. They took two days to complete this climb and descend the N ridge to the glacier, after which they climbed the classic *Gervasutti Route* on the SW face of the Gugliermina.

After a bivouac at the start of the leftwards traverse near the top of the route, the three French continued over the Aiguille Blanche to reach Col Peuterey in the middle of the night. By now the weather had turned for the worse, so rather than making an unpleasant bivouac on the col, they crossed the upper Frêney Plateau to the Eccles bivouac huts, benefiting on the final

ascent from a fixed rope left by the Bérhault-Magnin team. They rested the following day and on the 27th climbed *Fréneysie Pascale*, on the recommendation of Bérhault and Magnin. After a bivouac below the crux ice column, they reached the summit and descended to the Midi téléphérique station, arriving at 4am on 1 March.

Brouillard Hypercouloir Also profiting from the excellent conditions was Philippe Batoux, who on 18 March made a solo ascent of the *Hypercouloir*. He took only 2½ hours for the couloir, a further 2½ hours for the upper section of the Brouillard Ridge and then another 2½ hours to ski to the Plan de l'Aiguille via the Grands Mulets.

Brouillard Face Christophe Dumarest and Patrick Gabarrou climbed a new 800m route right of the *Hypercouloir*, which Gabarrou reported to be the last logical line on this flank of the mountain. *Patagonic* starts up the couloir but soon branches right, following a succession of steep ice smears up the side wall. In the upper section it climbs a less well-defined rib of mixed terrain right of the upper *South East Spur* (Gabarrou/Long, 1983: ED2: 6b).

Aiguille de la Brenva Massimo Farina and Ezio Marlier made a direct ascent of the c200m east-facing couloir falling from the 3051m brèche between the Aiguille de la Brenva and Tour de la Brenva. The lower pitch of the couloir was not formed and Farina climbed rock at 6c with three bolts for protection. The thinly iced pitch above was led by Marlier, who found spaced protection and several impending sections (WI5+). The two named their line *Stop the War* (IV/5+ and F6c).

Aiguille du Tacul On the NE face Philippe Batoux, Christophe Dumarest and Patrick Gabarrou climbed a new line close to the crest of the lower section of the NE ridge, a little to the right of Goulotte à Eric (Asselin/Gabarrou/Vimal, 550m: IV/6, 6a and A2). *Stupenda* (III/6, M6 and A2) is 300m to the crest of the ridge, where it meets both Goulotte à Eric and the 1974 Afanassieff-Cordier route. The route received a second ascent, solo, five days later on 19 March by Bruno Sourzac.

Grandes Jorasses There were three notable winter ascents on the 4208m Grandes Jorasses, beginning with a new route to a previously unnamed point alongside the summit ridge.

A Lei From 26-28 February Philippe Batoux, Patrick Gabarrou and Benoit Robert climbed close to the seldom repeated *Slovenian Route*, put up in July 1997 by Knez, Matijevec, Vidmar and Zupan (650m: ED1/2: V/5 or 5+, F4+/5 and A2) to finish on a small but distinctive point right of the Croz. Thin ice runnels (WI5+) led to the right edge of the Second Icefield on the classic line up the Croz Spur, after which two hard mixed pitches on friable rock gained the bottom right corner of the Third Icefield and an uncomfortable bivouac site. One stove failed to work, so they were forced to suck ice. During the night it began to snow.

Next morning they were away early, climbing the icefield and dodging spindrift avalanches until they reached the top and the relative shelter of a

steep dièdre. Here, Robert changed into rock shoes for what turned out to be a 3½-hour lead up a difficult pitch. It was night when he finished and when hauling up his boots, tied by their laces to the rope, one was missing. The three made another uncomfortable bivouac and continued next day to reach the top of a small unnamed tower that stands slightly proud of the summit crest. They christened this Pointe Magali and their route *A Lei* (V/5+, M5+, 6b and A2+).

The team then radioed the PGHM and asked whether a spare boot could be lowered by helicopter. The rescue service was having none of this and said they would prefer to lift them off. In the end Gabarrou magnanimously donated his boot to Robert and being 20 years older than his partners (he was 52 at the time), took his place in the helicopter while Batoux and Robert set off down towards the Val Ferret.

No Siesta Robert Jasper (Germany), and Marcus Stofer (Switzerland) made the sixth or seventh overall and first free ascent of the celebrated *No Siesta*. Beginning on the 17th, the difficulties on the first day reached M7+ and the following day was spent overcoming the crux central section, with Jasper climbing the crux 6a+ and A2 pitch on sight at M8. The pair spent the second night at the same, relatively comfortable, ledge used by the Slovak first ascensionists on their second bivouac. The third day involved sections of M5-M6 at 4000m before the summit ridge was reached. In common with other ascensionists, Jasper considers *No Siesta* to be one of the most demanding major mixed climbs in the Alps and a remarkable effort at the time by the two Slovak first ascensionists.

Gousseault Route Chamonix guides, Olivier Larios and François Marsigny, made the fifth ascent of the *Serge Gousseault Route* on the NE Flank of the Walker Spur, using a more direct start to reach the First Ramp. This direct start, more or less the same as that used by the 1979 route, *Rolling Stones*, was more than likely climbed by Gordon Smith and Tobin Sorenson during the second ascent of the route in August 1977. The three French climbed the route in 31 pitches with only 15m of aid. Marsigny feels that the climb is one of the great mixed masterpieces of the Mont Blanc Massif and in years to come will probably be regarded as one of the great classics of its type. He also reports that while there is no single pitch as hard as the cruxes of *No Siesta*, the Desmaison route feels much longer

Petit Dru Over the fine weather period spanning 18-23 February, Polish climbers Janusz Golab, Grzegorz Skorek and Stanislaw Piecuch created a new 1050m route, *Home Speed Home*, on the W face. The new route starts right of the *American Direct* and in its lower section lies close to the 1992 Marc Batard route, *Lionel André*. After overcoming several roofs and reaching the large terraces, the three followed a crack system right of the *American Direct*, joining it after a total of 17 pitches. They then climbed seven pitches of the *American* to reach the top of the 90m dièdre, after which they broke out right via a short aid pitch to reach the crest of the NW ridge, forming the right side of the N face. Eight pitches up the N face led to the summit,

which they reached at 4pm on the 23rd. Difficulties were mainly UIAA IV-IV+ and A1/A2 but there was an A3 bat-hooking section on the fourth pitch and much higher on the route a short chimney of VII.

Aiguille Sans Nom From 9-11 March Nick Bullock and Jules Cartwright climbed the *Nant Blanc Face* of the *Brèche Sans Nom*, utilising an alternative and considerably harder start to the Brown-Patey Route on the Aiguille Sans Nom. The Bullock-Cartwright line climbs a series of steep granite corners and cracks, and logically would lend itself to a summer attempt. However, above the big ice slope almost all the exits have been climbed as ice/mixed lines and in recent summers have clearly not been feasible or at best very dangerous.

Cartwright had completed the lower section the previous summer at British HVS and E1 but was prevented by illness from continuing above the top of the ice slope. Hoping to link this start with one of the harder finishes through the headwall, he returned last March with Bullock and climbed the rock using axes and crampons at M6+/M7 (Scottish mixed grade of VII, 8). On the third day they climbed the ice slope but tiredness and lack of time forced them to reconsider any attempt on one of the more difficult exits above, so instead they escaped to the Brèche Sans Nom via the 1990 *Marsigny-Mohr Route* (WI4: 80°). From here, they rappelled the far side to the Charpoua Glacier. The variation start was named *Borderline* and, combined with one of the more difficult mixed finishes on the headwall, could give one of the longest and most sustained routes of its type in the range.

At the same time, Kenton Cool and Guy Willett linked the start of *Russian Roulette* with the upper section of the *Gabarrou-Silvy Directissima*. This gave much climbing of Scottish VI with two pitches of VII and the combination, completed in two days, gave sustained mixed climbing throughout, with no need to tackle any pure rock. If the sérac that threatens the mixed ground taken by the start of *Russian Roulette* is deemed stable, then this blend of lines possibly offers the most logical winter ascent on this part of the face.

Pointes Supérieur de Pré de Bar Over five days in mid-February Stéphane Benoist and Patrick Pessi climbed a new and technically demanding route to the summit of one of the Pointes Supérieur de Pré de Bar at the head of the Argentière Glacier. *Les Barbares* (ED2: F5+ and A2+, M4+/5, 80°) is 20 pitches and about 500m in height. The two climbers would like to propose the name of *Pointe Raphaël Borgis* for this summit. Borgis, a very active and popular guide from Briançon, was killed in an avalanche on 7 January 2003 on the slopes of Montgenèvre.

VALAIS

Breithorn On 28 February Italian guides, Ivano Bianchi and Roberto Rossi, climbed a new route on the N face between the Roccia Nera and Pt 4106m, the two most easterly of the Breithorn summits. *Il Rosso ed il Bianco* (500m: TD+: IV+/5) lies some distance to the right of the 1980 Bernardi/Grassi route, *Via del Gran Diedro Ghiacciato*, and climbs left round a prominent red-

coloured outcrop and up mixed ground to a sustained thin ice crux forming the top 160m of the route.

BERNINA

Sasso Nero On 22 February Luca Maspes soloed the first ascent of *Senza Pieta* towards the left edge of the SE face (to SW Spur). This c800m climb was graded VI/5- (ice) and VI+ on rock and mixed terrain.

He self-belayed three pitches, the first of which proved to be the crux at WI4+/5-. Whilst climbing this, the exit from the gully, 100m above, collapsed and fell on him. Fortunately, no damage was done and he was able to continue through a rock and mixed section (VI) to the exit, which took three attempts spread over an hour. By 2pm he was on the final mixed terrain and three hours later reached the top of the SW Spur, having negotiated snow slopes interrupted by thin ice runnels and rocky barriers up to VI/VI+, all climbed in crampons.

Maspes, known for his bold solo ascents over the years, said the climb involved a combination of commitment, high technical difficulties and objective danger, and was the most difficult solo climb he has made.

SUMMER 2003

VANOISE

Epéna Two major new rock routes were completed on the N face of Pointe Centrale, the most direct being *Les Sommets de l'Espoir* (800m: 21 pitches: 6c, 6b obl.), which takes the front face of the big rounded pillar right of the depression dropping from the Brèche Perdreux. It was first begun in 1997, continued in 2001 and finally finished in July 2003 by Mathias Ailhaut, Stéphane Berrat, Christophe Ducroz, Patrick Gabarrou and Nicolae Morar. To the right is *A toi l'Ami*, a slightly longer route (840m: 22 pitches) which is 6c+, 6b obl. and was equipped to pitch 16 over two stages in the summer of 1997 by Laurent Bouvet and Gabarrou. On 3 and 4 August last year Gabarrou returned with Morar and Roger Reymond to finish the job.

The N face of the Epéna is noted for being, together with the N face of the Vignemale, one of the highest limestone walls in France and rises to a multi-summitted crest with many established classics.

MONT BLANC MASSIF

The effect of a dry winter and late spring heat wave produced a summer of real destruction. The Petit Dru again featured prominently, with several large rock falls emanating from the huge roofs above the 1997 scar. Major incidents occurred on 8 August, when dust from the blast settled on the roofs of cars in the Chamonix valley. The rock scar, previously capped by a rather square-cut overhang, is now topped by a ragged and undercut affair, giving the impression that all is certainly far from over.

The famous hanging icefield of the Niche on the N face all but disappeared and to the south of the peak, the Charpoua glacier became chaotic and impossible to cross. As parts of the glacier were also threatened by rock-fall, it put the normal approach to the Flamme de Pierre or any traverse of the Dru more or less out of the question. For that reason the Balcon de la Mer de Glace was also closed due to the real risk of rock-fall onto the path.

The unusually dry conditions extended to all altitudes and posed serious problems on Mont Blanc itself. By August the Mayor of Saint-Gervais had strongly advised climbers not to attempt the *Gouter Route* and a gendarme from the PGHM was positioned before the big couloir below the hut to counsel people on the grave dangers above. Although the route was never actually closed, after almost-daily deaths in the couloir the Gouter Hut was eventually shut and the cable across the couloir removed. No guides operated on this route for a period of three to four weeks. This contrasted the actions by Zermatt authorities after the enormous rock fall in the Matterhorn (see article 'Flight from the Hörnli', p92). In this case the mountain was actually closed and led to a serious legal case when it was 're-opened' some days later and a climber died while ascending the mountain.

Earlier the route from the Cosmiques Hut via the slopes of Mont Blanc du Tacul and Mont Maudit had also become quite technical, with a very difficult c15m ice wall to surmount on the Tacul (a knotted rope was fixed in place), a tricky rimaye below Mt Maudit and the section around the Maudit to the Col de la Brenva very icy. This deterred most guides from attempting the route with clients. Later the sérac on the Tacul cracked and sometime in September fell down, making the route easier.

The *Grands Mulets Route*, normally considered acceptable in descent when the sections threatened by sérac fall can be passed relatively quickly, was also in a very dangerous state. In one particularly tragic accident on 14 July, three members of the FFME's elite team of young alpinists were descending after having climbed several fine routes on the south side of Mt Blanc (where one party reported the entire Brouillard face to be completely rock), when they were hit by sérac fall and killed instantly. On the Italian side of the mountain two Swiss guides were rescued by helicopter from near the top of *Divine Providence* on the Grand Pilier d'Angle because it was just too dangerous to continue.

Elsewhere, rock fall could be heard almost daily from the N face of the Grandes Jorasses and on or around 7 August there was a major fall from the slabs of the Tour Grise on the Walker Spur, just above the Cassin bivouac. The extent of the damage was not enormous and the route was repeated later in the season.

At the end of winter the Mont Blanc glaciers were already open and becoming difficult to cross. In summer several enormous crevasses appeared in areas that are normally deemed benign and more or less crevasse-free, such as the Trient Plateau. Normally straightforward rimayes were huge and often impossible to cross. However, by early August none of last winter's

snow remained and travel was on hard compacted snow from the previous year, making even apparently fragile bridges reasonably safe. In the Ecrins, where glacier movement was measured on an almost daily basis, the melt was impressive. One of the most major rock-falls here occurred on the N face of the Olan, where a large section of the wall taken by the *Couzy-Desmaison* collapsed.

The story was the same in the Valais. Although rock-falls on the Matterhorn dominated the press it was the same story all over. For example, by mid-July climbing the Grand Combin was becoming objectively dangerous due to rock-fall and the *Normal Route* on the Weissmies featured a long ladder to surmount a large and dangerous, overhanging sérac.

However, all this overshadowed the fact that the weather was generally excellent if very hot and it was possible to climb rock routes more or less every day.

Mont Blanc

Grand Pilier d'Angle As part of a most impressive summer season in the Eastern Alps, Dolomites and Mont Blanc Range, Slovenians, Andrej Grmovsek and Marko Lukic made the second free ascent of *Divine Providence*. First climbed over four days in 1994 by two of the foremost activists in the region, Patrick Gabarrou and Francois Marsigny at 6b and A3, the long awaited first free ascent came on 27-28 July 2002 when the Swiss, Denis Burdet and Nicolas Zambetti, climbed the whole route on sight.

The two Slovenians also climbed the whole route on sight, despite finding the 7c corner wet (led by Lukic). They were slowed on the upper Peuterey Ridge because they only carried a total of two ice tools on the climb, and one of them had broken during the approach. At around the same time Lukic with his wife Alenka climbed the celebrated *Les Intouchables (7c+)* on **Le Trident** (du Tacul) on-sight.

Aiguille Noire and Mont Rouge de Peuterey The 2002 Hope/Mullin/Penning line, *Lost to Obsession* (c530m of climbing: 12 pitches; ED1: E4 6a/F6c+) on the SE face of the Noire appears to have been repeated, as complimentary remarks have been written by at least two people in the hut book. Tony Penning returned to this area again in late summer 2003 and attempted a line towards the left side of the NE face of Mont Rouge, directly opposite the hut. The climb takes the front face of a prominent rounded pillar and most (six pitches) but not all of the face was completed. Difficulties were E4 6a/F6c+. Penning believes that if he can straighten the start the climb could become popular due to its ease of access.

Aiguille du Tacul - Pointe 3132m In late spring Patrick Gabarrou returned to this venue on the E flank of the Tacul's NE ridge and with Mauro Costamanga and Franca Torre added a third line, *Chouettes Couettes*, to the right of his April 2002 route *Ice for God* (400m: IV/4 and A1)

Evêque - Pointe 3019m Tony Penning added his fourth new route to the NE face of this remotely situated peak in the Frébouze glacier basin. Climbed

on 6 September with Nic Mullin and Robin Wilmshurst-Smith, *My Lady Tanya* follows a crack/chimney system right of the previously existing routes to gave a 500m climb of F6b (E2 5b). The glacier below this face had changed dramatically in the intervening year since Penning's last visit, with the rimaye having dropped more than 10m. This meant the climb could only be accessed via the common start used for the *Cresswell Route* and Rainbow Island.

Aiguille de Blaitière On the Red Pillar, taking the crest just to the left of the classic 1983 Piola-Steiner route, *L'eau Rance d'Arabie*, Patrick Gabarrou and Ezio Marlier, helped on the last day by Nicolae Morar, have put up *Nicol'ami* a seven-pitch route with sustained difficulties (6a, 6a+, 6a, 6c+, 7a/7a+, 7a, 6c) and obligatory climbing of 6c. The authors describe this climb, bolt-protected but still rather run out in parts, as superb.

Aiguilles Rouges Due to the unstable conditions in the mountains, the sunny, easily accessible and rather friendlier Aiguilles Rouges proved extremely popular last summer. Although a number of new routes were certainly established, only details of the one below are known.

Brévent On the sound and very compact rock of the S face, François and Karen Pallandre, assisted by Guillaume Appolinaire, completed *Poème à Lou* (230m: 6b, 6a obl.) on 10 June. This new route starts right of centre, then works up left to the middle of the face. According to the first ascensionists the compact gneiss, typical of the region, allows no chance of natural protection and the route has been equipped with 80, 12mm bolts.

VALAIS WEST

Bouquetins It is good to see worthwhile new routes of modest difficulty still being climbed in the Alps. In June, Dutch climbers, Haroen Schijf and Eric van Ruijven, climbed a probable new route on **Pointe 3150m** above the Bouquetins Hut. The fine little climb follows the W ridge and the rock was quite sound, comparable with that on the classic Mont Collon or Evêque rock routes: *Tycholot* (250m: AD+: sustained at III-IV+ with an avoidable pitch of V near the top).

VALAIS GUIDES

The following suggestions to routes in both Valais Alps West and East have been offered by Rob Collister, based on observations during the summers of 2002 and 2003.

VALAIS ALPS WEST

H8 *Regondi Bivouac*: re-built around six years ago and now has beds and blankets for 12. No stove, cooking utensils nor any other facilities.

22a *Combin de Corbassière South Ridge*: a better description of the approach from the Panossière Hut is suggested. From the hut follow the moraine S for 500m, past the signpost to the Col d'Otone, and then descend to the glacier. Cross it more or less horizontally, then hug the true L bank, rising to an altitude of c2800m. About 300m past a large waterfall an ice-tongue

descends from the glacier above (not visible from the hut). Climb the ice, or rock and scree on the left, to where the angle eases. Now traverse horizontally right (N) across the glacier, heading for an obvious col in the ridge descending NE from Pt. 3442m. Climb the ridge easily until it is possible to traverse onto the glacier and climb it (crevasses) to the col (3405m) at the foot of the S ridge. *Descent:* from the summit descend W over boulder slopes and snow patches to a broad saddle. From the E end of this, go down S over scree and shale. Then see Route 22b.

45b *Pointe d'Otemma South Ridge:* a better description of the approach from the Chanrion Hut is suggested. From the hut walk E to pick up the 4WD track and follow it downhill until 50m short of the first hairpin bend. Now strike uphill, at first along the line of a small stream, then on grassy runnels between stones, to reach open grassy slopes. Near the top of these pick up an old path, now very faint, and follow it rightward along the line of a grassy terrace (visible from the 4WD track), which cuts across the lower band of cliffs and leads to the base of the S ridge. The ridge itself is easy.

40a *La Ruinette South West Ridge:* undergraded at PD-; worth at least PD. To return directly to Mauvoisin from the Col de Lire Rose descend the west-facing cwm towards Pt 2672m, then head SW down generally stable scree, moraine and eventually rolling meadows to join the wonderfully scenic path from Lac Tsofeiret to Mauvoisin.

102a *Bouquetins East Flank from Aosta Hut:* the route from the hut to the Col de la Division is probably PD in its own right. The path up the moraine is tricky in places and it is easy to lose the correct line. It could be very delicate in wet weather, especially in descent. Above, the névé, steep and exposed, leads to a rock barrier, up which traces of a path zig-zag to avoid the lower couloir. Near the top the track becomes more obvious.

129a *Col de Mourti East Side:* this is easily the most difficult section of a traverse of the Pointes de Mourti and during the 2002 season showed no sign of ever having been used (on either E or W sides). However, the descent is certainly easier than it looks from above, even if belays are few and far between.

135a *Grand Cornier North West Ridge:* the guidebook time of 3½ hours is very fast. It is more like 3 hours to the start of the rock and a further 1½-2 hours to the top. Total time around 5 hours.

VALAIS ALPS EAST

5a *Trifhorn South Ridge:* this was not being climbed much in the summer of 2003 because the access gully leading to the Triftjoch contained no snow and was truly abysmal. The ridge gave sustained climbing at II and III and in the current conditions is better in descent.

6a *Zinal Rothorn South East Ridge via the Gabel:* the lower section of this climb is thought to be better described as follows. From the hut follow a path and then cairns eastward across and up a boulder field. This leads to

the right edge of the glacier, which is ascended until the angle eases. Soon after climb an unpleasant sandy chimney, which splits the steep rock wall overlooking the glacier. Traverse horizontally left for c100m to another shorter chimney. Now make a rising traverse left and via a loose rock wall reach the crest of the long spur dropping from Pt 3786m. Continue up a boulder field above to reach névé, which is climbed by a rising traverse left to reach another rock spur. Ascend this spur on scree and boulders to reach the E end of the Schneegrat, or ascend diagonally left up another snowfield to reach the Schneegrat at a point further W.

63a *Leiterspitzen Traverse*: the Täschalp Hotel has now been renamed Europeweg Hutte after the eponymous long-distance footpath.

BREGAGLIA

Piz Badile In July, Hervé Barmasse, Massimo Dadrino, Massimo Farina and Ezio Marlier climbed a new route on the SE face between the *Via Vera* (Corti/Gilardi, 1972: 350m: all free at VI+) and *Third (East) Pillar* (Bottani/Bottani/Ciapponi/Dell'Oca, 1973: 350m: VI). Christened *Ringhio*, this fine new rock route starts up slabs to the right of the classic *Molteni Route*, crosses through the traverse of the Third Pillar and finishes up a magnificent pillar (6b+/6c; 6b obl). Commendably, only natural gear was used.

Picco Luigi Amedeo Local activist, Simone Pedefferri, made three significant free ascents on the Grand Capucin of the Masino. Around mid-August 2003 he climbed the original line of *Elettroshock* free apart from one rest on pitch four. He estimated the grade as 8a. Prior to this Pedefferri teamed with Alberto Marazzi to make the first free ascent of the recently created route, *Foglia al Vento*. This 12-pitch line by Lorenzo Lanfranchi and Carlo Micheli gave two pitches of 7a, three of 7b, two of 7b+ and one of 7c.

Finally Pedefferri completed a probable second free ascent of the 1980 Slovak route, *Feri Ultra* (Ciernik/Piacek, 11 pitches: VI+ and A2/3: climbed free in 1994 by Igor Koller and Dino Kuran at VIII- or 7a). Pedefferri climbed the route on sight and made an important variant to the seventh pitch (previously 6c). He thought the overall grade of the route to be more like 7b.

Monte Qualido On 5 July Alberto Marazzi and Simone Pedefferri repeated the 2000 Vojtech Dvorak and Radek Lienerth route, *Time to Leave* (22 pitches: 7b+). This combines the first 12 pitches of *Il Paradiso può Attendere* with three pitches of *Mediterraneo* (via two new and difficult link pitches), and then the final five rope lengths of *Melat*. Marazzi and Pedefferri climbed the whole route in one day and confirmed the grade.

Pizzo Cengalo Ivo Ferrari made a free solo ascent of *Dalai Lama* (Maspes/Perlini, July 1992: c500m: 12 pitches: VII max) on the SE face (to the South Summit or Punta Angela: 3215m). Instead of taking the c100m of easy ground to the top after completing all the difficulties, he moved left and finished up the last two pitches (VI-, VI+) of the neighbouring *Gran Diedro* (Merizzi/Pasqualotto, September 1992, 500m: VI+/VII-).

DISGRAZIA AND BERNINA

During the perfect weather that characterised the summer, local activist Luca Maspes put up 14 new routes on lower-altitude rock faces. These provide a mixture of traditional protected and alpine sport routes and prove that the creation of short modern rock routes in the Bernina, away from the bigger peaks, is still very much in its infancy.

Disgrazia Group

Sentinella della Vergine Over 3-4 August Alessandra Gianatti, Paolo Marchiaro and Luca Maspes opened a new route on the pillars of the c2880m Sentinella della Vergine, overlooking the lower Ventina glacier. The 300m *Cassandra Crossing* is completely bolted, is on sound rock, and can be climbed at 5c/6a throughout. The second pitch sports a section of 7a but this can be avoided by an easier variant to the right. A week or so later Gianatti and Maspes with Giovanni Pagnoncelli, Emanuele Pellizzari and Silvano De Zaiacono moved further left and climbed *Placanica*, another well-bolted Alpine sport route of five pitches with maximum difficulties of 6b.

The third line, which climbs a parallel pillar to the right of the previous route was completed on 4 September and is again fully bolted. *El Porro* is 310m in length (5c/6a) and was climbed by Giulio della Torre, Gianetti, Marchiaro, Maspes and Pellizzari.

Punta del Lago Gianatti, Marchiaro and Maspes put up the new route *Antirachele* on 20 June. The Punta lies on the east side of Pizzo Rachele and this new seven-pitch naturally-protected route (five on the wall plus two on the ridge above) climbs magnificent red serpentine at a grade of VI/VI+.

Trapezio di Sassera On 19 June Gianetti, Marchiaro and Maspes put up *Omega 3* (240m in length; four pitches; VII/VII+: natural protection throughout). This is another fine low-altitude rock route in the Sassera Cwm and again on spectacular red serpentine.

Bernina Sasso Nero Opening their explorations of the hidden corners of the Bernina on the 12 July, Gianetti and Maspes investigated the previously unvisited north-western flanks of the long SW ridge of Sasso Nero. Here, they climbed a new five-pitch route on the SW tower, where traditional protection and belays were used throughout and the maximum difficulties rated as VI+.

On 23 August the pair returned and climbed the E face of the S tower to give the 300m *Ali il Chimico*, again naturally protected and VI/VI+.

On 16 September Maspes returned with long-time local activist and guidebook author, Giuseppe Miotti. This time the pair went to the previously untouched S face and put up *Ripidolite*, which after some easy terrain at the bottom gave 300m of traditionally protected climbing at VI+/VII-.

Punta Longoni – Sperone dell'Onda On the SE face of the Sperone, the lowest and most easterly part of the gully descending from Punta Longoni above the piste to the Entova-Scersen Hut, Gianetti, Maspes and Miotti climbed the three-pitch *Amianto* (VII+) on-sight and with protection from

very small Friends and one peg. The three climbed the 150m route on 9 July. The two other routes on this wall come from the early 1990s and are graded VIII and VII, all climbed on natural gear.

Cima di Casoggio Maspes added two new routes to the S face of this peak in the Musella Group. On 8 August with with Slovenian, Peter Podgornik, he put up *Pentagate* (350m: VI+) direct to the main summit, then returned two days later with Roberto Agnelli and Gianetti to climb *Il Quattro Agnelli* (250m; VI- and A2) on the S face of the subsidiary western summit named La Sfinge.

DOLOMITES

There were many new routes and significant ascents during the fine summer weather. Those below are just a few of the more notable highlights and illustrate that top-standard climbing on the big faces is still far from dormant.

Marmolada d'Ombretta Rémy Duhoux and Philippe Mussato climbed the obvious compact wall between *Excalibur* (Cipriani/Giordani, 1993: c400m: VIII+) and *Specchio di Sara* (Giordani/Manfrini, 1988: c400m: free at IX or 7c by Mittersteiner). The French respected the local ethic of minimal bolting, placing on average one per pitch and one on the belay (Giordani favoured minimal bolting, well exemplified by the first ascent of *Specchio di Sara* where the climbing is often very run out: Giordani took a 30m fall). Their 10-pitch new route, christened *Sur le Fil des Apparences* and completed over 24-25 July, gives very sustained climbing from 7a to 7c and could potentially become a future classic for traditional adventure climbers.

As their opening gambit to a highly successfully summer season, Slovenians Andrej Grmovsek and Marko Lukic climbed *Specchio di Sara*. Both climbed the whole route free and Lukic climbed everything on sight. The pair thought the climb both excellent and serious; very typical of the hard climbing to be found on the Marmolada.

Marmolada di Rocca On 2 August Duhoux and Mussato put up a new route on the right edge of the walls that contain the classic 1936 *Castiglioni-Vinazer Route*. *Piacevole* is protected entirely by pegs (30 were left in place), wires, Friends and natural threads. The 750m route has around 20 pitches, mainly at 6b in standard but with three sections of 6c/7a. On the final attempt the French pair climbed the route in 10½ hours to top out on the summit of the Pyramid to the right of the finish of the 1936 route.

Pala di San Martino In September the very dry conditions over the summer permitted Lorenzo Massarotto and Alberto Peruffo to climb a fine new route on the S face of the Pala. The 750m route, which is mainly V with crux sections of VI, climbs one of the big black water stripes on the broad wall to the right of the ultra classic SW Pillar or *Gran Pilastro* (Langes/Merlet, 1920: 600m: mainly III/III+ with one section of IV: direct start by Langes and partner in 1926, 200m, IV), where prior to last summer there was only one established route.

Cima Ovest On 11 July, five days after their ascent of *Specchio di Sara*, Grmovsek and Lukic made the probable third ascent of *Akut* (Astner/Ties, 2000: 500m; 15 pitches: first climbed with some aid and then redpointed on the second ascent by Astner and Ties in 2001 at 8a, 7b obl.) on the N face. The pair climbed the route in 11 hours, making the first continuous free ascent. The route lies to the right of the *Baur-Rudolph* and features a wildly exposed three-metre roof above the Cassin Traverse.

After the Slovenian ascent the route was repeated by Rolando Larcher, who felt the obligatory difficulties were more like 7a than the quoted 7b. Larcher went on to make the first winter and first solo ascent of this route in February 2004.

Finally, the Austrian Michael Mayr made the second free ascent of the *Couzy-Desmason Route*, reporting the crux to be more like 8a+ rather than the 8b rating given by Mauro 'Bubu' Bole, who made the first in 1999. In fact the two Slovenians remark that several of the big routes they completed at altitude, eg. *Akut*, *Divine Providence*, *Camillotto Pellisier* etc, all of which are awarded big numbers, would not get such high grades were they actually situated on a sport crag. This fuels the on-going debate surrounding the difficulty in giving meaningful technical grades to any really long, hard route at altitude in the big mountains.

Cima Grande Two days after their ascent of *Akut*, Grmovsek and Lukic climbed *Das Phantom der Zinne* (Astner/Hainz, 1996: 550m: 7c+). The pair found this route rather more serious than *Akut*, with some very run out climbing, sparsely protected by pegs and some bolts. The Slovenian ascent, achieved in 12 hours, was the third overall of this route and the first continuous redpoint ascent.

The well-known Italian, Mauro 'Bubu' Bole, spent part of the summer making the first free ascent of the *Camillotto-Pellesier Route* (Mauro/Minuzzo, 1967: 550m: V and A2e: 340 bolts) on the left side of the N face. Bole added no new drilled protection but re-bolted the belays, before eventually redpointing the route in August at 8b. A second free ascent was made shortly after by Marko Lukic. The Slovenian felt the hardest pitch to be no more than 8a+. However, he found the 400m route sustained with pitch ratings of 7a+, 7c, 8b (8a+?), 8a, 6c, 6c+, 8a+, 7a, 6a, 5c, 4a.

Towards the end of the season Bole was back in the Lavaredo and almost free climbed the *Spanish Route* (Carillo/Galego/Gomex/Loranzo, 1977: 450m: VI and A3e). Of the 13 pitches, two were rated 7c and the crux roof on the third pitch climbed at 8a with three pegs for aid (A0).