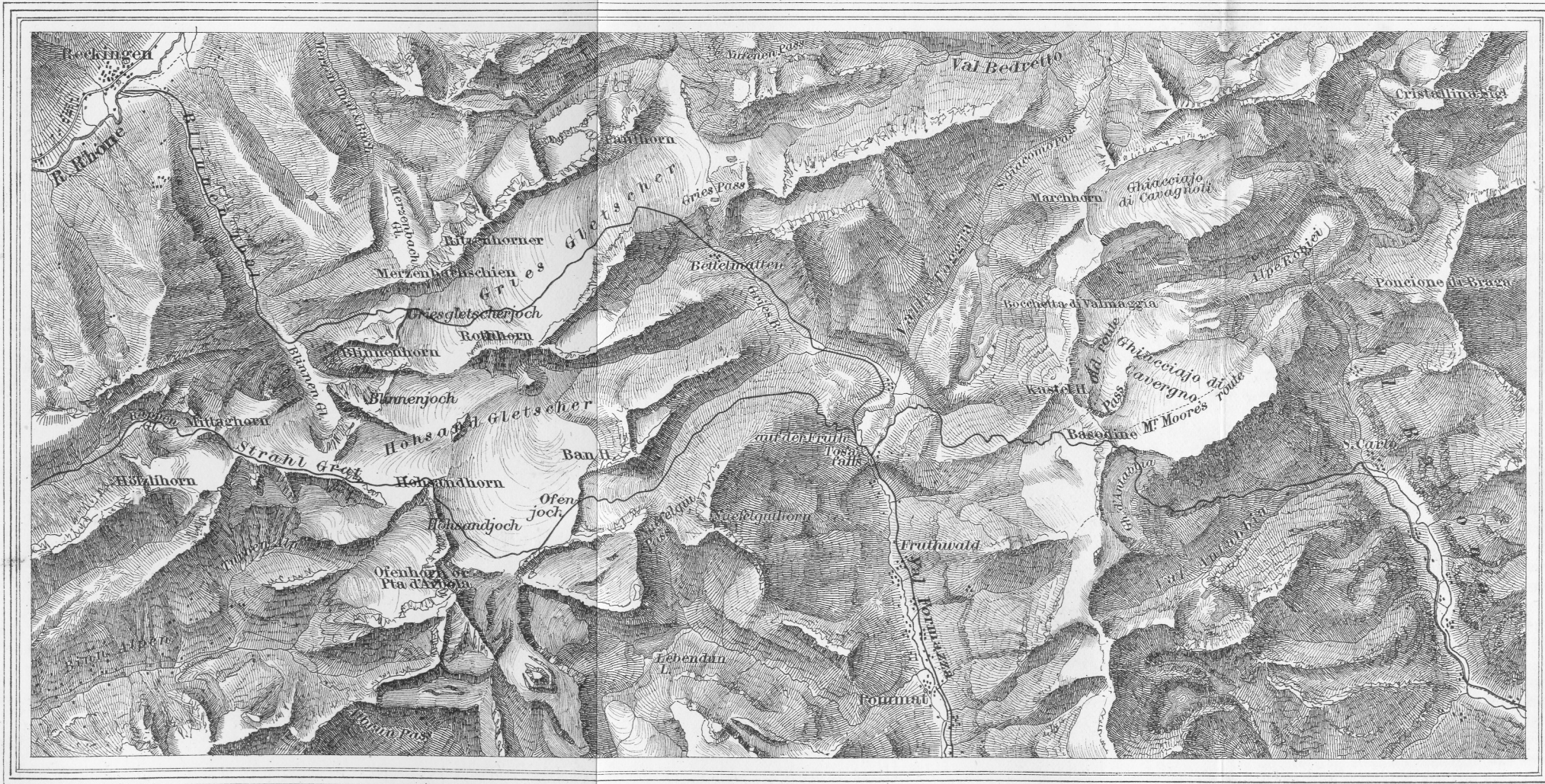


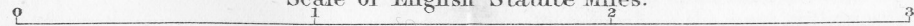
# THE MOUNTAINS OF VAL FORMAZZA



Stanford's Geogr. Establ. London.

Note. Mr Gardiner's route is in red. The 'Blinnen Joch' is Mr S. Taylor's Holsand Pass. Its name has been altered to distinguish it from the Holsandjoch leading to the Binnental. The 'Blinnen Thal' is converted into the Blindenthal in some modern Swiss books and maps.

Scale of English Statute Miles.



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EXCURSIONS IN THE LEPONTINE ALPS.  
By F. GARDINER.

**T**H**ERE** are but few parts of the great European play-ground which the English mountaineer has not visited, and he who would now tread upon new ground must seek far and near, and sift through no inconsiderable quantity of Alpine literature before he attains his desired object. It was not, therefore, without some difficulty that we eventually ascertained that, with the exception of Mr. Sedley Taylor's ascent of the Blinnenhorn from the Blinnen Glacier, and the ascent of the Basodine by Mr. Freshfield, the snowy peaks round the Gries Glacier and Tosa Falls had scarcely been touched by English mountaineers. The result of our discovery was, that in the programme drawn out by my friend Mr. C. Pilkington and myself for our Alpine campaign a week was devoted to the partial examination of this group.

Our guides were Peter Kaufmann of Grindelwald, and Peter Knubel of St. Niklaus, and the first expedition which we had in hand was to endeavour to make a new pass from the Blinnenthal to the Tosa Falls, between the Blinnenhorn and the Merzenbachschein by the Gries Glacier. Reckingen, in the Rhone Valley, is the nearest village to the Blinnenthal, but it contains no inn; so we obtained provisions, blankets, &c., at the Hôtel des Alpes at Viesch, a comfortable little hostelry recently opened by my old friend Herr Fuller, formerly M. Seiler's chief aide-de-camp at the Hôtel Mont Rose, Zermatt. Arrived at Reckingen, we applied to the priest (who seemed to be the only able-bodied male in the village who was not employed in haymaking) for a porter to carry our wood and blankets to the upper chalets in the Blinnenthal. His recommendation caused us to engage one Franz Guntern, a chasseur, who, in 1866, acted as Mr. Sedley Taylor's local

guide when he ascended the Blinnenhorn, an expedition which has been but once repeated, and that by the curé himself, a feat of which he was not a little proud. The path leading to the upper chalets lies on the right bank of the stream, and rises pleasantly through a picturesque valley well wooded up to a considerable height, and closed at its head by the Blinnen Glacier, which descends in a graceful ice-fall from the Strahlgrat between the Hohsandhorn and the Mittaghorn. The group of human burrows—for they are not worthy of the name of chalets—at the head of the Blinnenthal, we found dirty, damp, and altogether wretched, and when we started next morning (June 29) at 2.50, Pilkington was handicapped with a severe cold, while I was quivering like an aspen leaf with a sharp attack of ague. Still in spite of these discomforts the weather was so perfect that we could not resist its influence, and we went on our way rejoicing. Crossing the valley and the stream issuing from the Blinnen Glacier on a snow bridge formed by the remnants of a gigantic avalanche, we mounted by a narrow and steep valley between the Merzenbachschein and Blinnenhorn, keeping to the left bank of the stream flowing from a small glacier between those peaks. The way was steep and the stones loose and shaley, but we encountered no difficulty, and reached the glacier at 5.15 A.M. and the col at 6 A.M. It commands a noble view of the Oberland group, somewhat limited to the north by the Merzenbachschein.

When, an hour later, we stood upon the summit of the Blinnenhorn, the view in every direction was simply perfect. It would be from a point of view like the Blinnenhorn that I should wish to answer those sceptics who ask, 'What went ye out to see?' Never had I seen the giants of the Oberland look so imposing; the Finsteraarhorn asserted its preeminence over its neighbours, while the Viescherhörner, Oberaarhorn, Aletschhorn, Nesthorn, and Bietschhorn formed the advanced guard of a host of other peaks. In fact, nearly every summit of the group was visible. Below us lay the Rhone Valley with its numerous villages, churches, and cornfields, succeeded by the varied green of forest and alp, which led the eye back again to the majestic glaciers and summits; a panorama sublime and beautiful, never to be forgotten. The temperature, luckily, was so mild that we were able to remain on the summit for over an hour. We returned to the pass (for which we suggest the name of Griesgletscherjoch) at 8.30 A.M., breakfasted there, packed up our traps, and started for the Tosa Falls at 9 A.M. We descended by the right-hand side of the Gries Glacier, which is quite easy, though possibly some of the crevasses

under the Blinnenhorn might give trouble later in the season. Passing under the Rothhorn and rounding the Bettelmattenhorn, we descended by a small glacier to the chalets of Bettelmatten in the Griesthal, where we joined the path of the Gries pass. The upper part of the Griesthal is composed of two plateaux, with a steep drop between the chalets of Bettelmatten and Mora, and it descends gently from the latter village to within a short distance of Auf der Fruth, where the valley again becomes almost level and receives the stream flowing from the Valle Toggia, which, with the water from the Hohsand and Gries Glaciers, breaks over a precipice towards the chalets of Unter Fruth, forming the grandest waterfall in the Alps. As a rule I have found visits to waterfalls merely productive of disappointment; there are so many causes which militate against them, such as the height of surrounding mountains, scarcity of water. But the Tosa Falls are really splendid, and we viewed them under specially favourable circumstances, the volume of the fall being considerably augmented by the rapid melting of the spring snows in the upper Alps. Viewed from a clump of trees half-way down the path to Unter Fruth, the fall presents its most favourable aspect.

The inn we found partly occupied by a large party of Italians, who were dancing together wildly to the obnoxious squalling of a flageolet and a huge trombone, the latter being about as inconvenient a mountaineering companion as can well be imagined. Luckily these noisy visitors left shortly after our arrival; later in the day, two Italian mountaineers, completely arrayed in mountaineering gear and apparently prepared for every emergency, reached the inn on muleback. Bran new alpenstocks of most unseasoned-looking wood, white umbrellas, and veils formed prominent features in their outfits. Pilkington and I were certainly an awful warning to all those who disregarded precautions against the burning effects of the sun on the snow.

But few English visitors, judging by the entries in the book, visit this inn, and, with the exception of the 'ubiquitous Tuckett' and Freshfield, none of those names 'familiar in the ear as household words' are to be found registered therein. The royal word 'muggy' best expresses the nature of the weather when we left the Tosa Falls Inn at 3.10 A.M. on Sunday, July 1. Following a faintly-marked track, we reached the chalets of Gigelen under the Monte Castello, and whence we witnessed a brilliantly red sunrise, which did not raise our hope of good weather and a clear view to any unreasonably expectant pitch. From Gigelen to the summit of the Baso-

dine we trudged uncomfortably through soft snow, and shortly after leaving the chalets the clouds descended upon us, and we made our way by chart and compass. The guides' want of faith in the latter was something quite disheartening, and they remained unconvinced, although it led us well, and we hit the ridge between the Kastelhorn and Basodine at the right place. Here the clouds parted for a short time, and we could see the Hohsand and Gries Glaciers; but towards the Oberland everything was shrouded in black clouds. A storm was evidently raging, for we could hear the distant roll of thunder and see an occasional flash of lightning. We reached the summit at 7.40 A.M., and beneath us to the north-east lay the Caveragno Glacier, by which this peak is usually ascended.\* Somewhat more to the east lay the glacier of Val Antabbia, by which we hoped to effect our descent to the Val Bavona. We had only just taken our bearings when the storm which we had seen raging in the Oberland approached with rapid strides, and broke over our devoted heads. An old proverb says, 'He who would catch fish must not mind getting wet;' so, having caught our fish, we took the wetting with equanimity. The rocks leading to the Antabbia Glacier are steep, but we did not find them difficult, and the remains of a large avalanche assisted us on to the glacier, over which, to use an Americanism, 'we made tracks' rapidly, for it was snowing, and the wind was howling horribly. We were somewhat frozen, and looked like figures on a Twelfth Night cake. Lower down the snow was changed for heavy drenching rain, and we could see but a short distance ahead. Just before the first inhabited chalets we came suddenly upon a group of little goatherds picturesquely clad in long blue cloaks. They received us with anything but placidity, not having seen climbers in that part before, and they made off with yells, evidently of opinion that our advent was more likely to be of an infernal than celestial nature. Appearances, I must admit, were against us. A donation of small coin and the remains of our provisions, however, mitigated the effect of our first apparition, and the boys preceded us to the chalets, from which a steep path, in some places literally a stone staircase, leads to the village of San Carlo, at the junction of the Val d'Antabbia with the Val Bavona.

Although in Italian territory, the inhabitants of Val Formazza, from which we had started in the morning, are a German-speaking population of an unmistakably northern type, while the inhabitants of the Val Bavona, although po-

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\* See Mr. A. W. Moore's note, p. 112.

litically Swiss, are thoroughly Italian in all essentials. The solid and comparatively well-built appearance of the chalets in the upper Italian Alps has often struck me, as compared with the miserable shanties that the ordinary Swiss cowherd is content to use. The chalets of Val d'Antabbia fully bear out this comparison. The descent seemed never ending, and when I mention that the Basodine is 10,748 feet high, and the village of San Carlo but 3,150 feet above the sea level, that may be understood. San Carlo was reached at 10.45 A.M. To say that we were wet through, but faintly describes the condition we were in when we stood upon the bridge leading to that village; the water was pouring from our hats and sodden garments. Shortly afterwards the storm passed away, and, although the clouds hung heavily round the mountains all day, the sun shone out at intervals, lighting up one of the most lovely valleys in the Alps, combining almost every variety of Alpine vegetation with noble precipitous rocks and cliffs interspersed with picturesque chapels, shrines, and villages. The upper part of the valley is crowded with huge boulders, some of which are so large that the earth on their top has been planted with barley or oats. Until we reached Caveragno we scarcely met a human being except some ancient beldames, 'picturesquely hideous,' who were left in charge of the valley habitations, most of the able-bodied population being in the upper Alps. Passing through the vine-trellised street of Caveragno, we arrived at Bignasco at 1.10 P.M., exactly ten hours from the time we had left the inn at Tosa Falls. The praises of Bignasco have been already sung by the author of 'Italian Alps,' but it would be almost impossible to exaggerate the loveliness of the place; everything combines in its favour, from its luxuriant foliage, its situation at the junction of the valleys, with a distant view of the snow-capped Basodine to the high-arched bridges, and the grotesque and gaudy frescoes which decorate shrine and chapel.

We were hospitably received by the proprietor of the great rambling inn, by whom our tale was received with incredulity, on the ground that we had done our work too quickly, the route by the Caveragno Glacier probably occupying more time than our descent by the Glacier and Val d'Antabbia. Our host, somewhat to our astonishment, produced some remarkably good Bordeaux, which we scarcely expected to get in so remote a spot. Good fishing is to be had in the neighbourhood; an Englishman we met there produced some very fine trout and grayling he had caught that day. Two graceful bridges cross the streams flowing from the Val Bavona

and Val Lavizzara, adding in no small degree to the picturesque-ness of the place, and were the rudiments of cleanliness better understood by the proprietor of the 'Posta,' a lover of the mountains, whether his department be botanic, athletic, or artistic, would scarcely regret a visit to Bignasco; but I was given to understand that the landlord is a man of substance and a local magnate of considerable importance, so probably his great mind disdains such details.

On the following morning we crossed the bridge over the Bavona, and, following the high road to Cevio, mounted at the back of that village by a steep mule-path, which leads to the village of Linescio, picturesquely placed high above the river Rovana, amidst vines, chestnut trees, and corn-fields. At Collognasca the valley bifurcates into the Val di Bosco and Val di Campo; our destination being Andermatten, in the Val Formazza, our way lay through the former valley. Mounting a steep path, we reached the considerable village of Cerentino, and on the other side of the valley, separated by a deep ravine, surrounded by trees, stood the picturesque villages of Corino and Camanoglio. Above Cerentino the valley assumes a much more orthodox Alpine character, the chestnut tree and the vine giving place to the pine and the Alpenrose. At Cerentino Italian only is spoken; but at some chalets about half way between that place and Bosco, the *sennerinn* came out and addressed us in a queer mixture of German and Italian. She offered us milk, for which she refused absolutely to take any remuneration whatever, an experience to me almost unique, certainly in the Italian Alps. The village of Bosco is situated at the head of the valley, the inhabitants are not nearly so Italian in type as those of the lower part of the valley, and they speak a patois of German, which even our guides could only understand with difficulty. Bosco is built upon a small hillock crowned by a substantial church. We had been given to understand at Bignasco that entertainment was to be had at the priest's house; but found on our arrival that there was no resident clerical, and we should have fared but meagrely had not Knubel unearthed a grubby-looking native, who entertained us with milk and rather mouldy bread for a moderate consideration; travellers are not an everyday occurrence in this valley, and prices are still primitive. Clouds, which threatened heavy rain, and mist seething restlessly round the cauldron-shaped cirque at the head of the valley, commended the advisability of engaging local talent to point the way to the top of the pass. It was well we did so, for before reaching the Grosse Alp we were swallowed up in mist, the rain poured down in torrents, and we were not sorry when

we reached the wooden cross marking the summit. In order to reach Andermatten we had taken the Criner Pass which rounds the Sternhorn, and near the Ober See joins the route leading to the Hintere Furke Pass. The Criner Furke Pass, though more circuitous, is used by the natives in preference to the Hintere Furke, owing to the greater height of the latter. From the Criner Pass there is a fine view up the Val Formazza closed by the Falls of the Tosa. While descending towards the chalets of Staffel we met a large party of Bosco peasants of both sexes returning home; the ladies of the party, with laudable economy but scant modesty, had divested themselves of shoes and stockings and had tucked their clothes well above their knees. They were equally struck with our appearance, especially observing, with anything but respectful astonishment, a red woollen cap I wore. We parted none the worse friends for a little criticism on either side, and they went on their way, and we could see their bare legs and red umbrellas bobbing up and down for the next half-hour, while we answered their farewell *jodels* with the best efforts of our townbred lungs, until a turn in the path took them out of our sight. Between the Ober See and Staffel Alp the mountain side was crimson with Alpenrosen. Descending swiftly to the Staffelwald we reached Andermatten at 4 P.M., just before the clouds came down again, and it set in for an uncompromisingly wet night. The inn at Andermatten no longer exists, that is to say as an inn. The former proprietor is dead, and we had some difficulty in persuading the ancient dame whom we found in possession 'to take us in and do for us.' We were not sorry to return to our old quarters at Tosa Falls the following day after the makeshift reception we had had to put up with at Andermatten. Towards evening the clouds cleared away, and the wind springing up from the north was a sign in our favour for our next and last expedition in this district.

Brilliantly fine was the weather when we started from Tosa Falls at 2.35 A.M. on July 4. Crossing the small plains opposite the inn we climbed over the lower north-east buttress of the Nuefelgiuhorn, and in about one hour and a half reached the desolate Nuefelgiu Pass between the peak of that name and the Bannhorn. Leaving the pass and turning to the right, by the aid of a convenient couloir we reached the glacier between the Ofenhorn and Bannhorn, where a sharp ridge of rocks between these peaks completely divides it from the Hohsaud Glacier. This ridge is completely ignored by the Federal Map, and caused us no small bewilderment; but having once crossed it by a gap close to the Bannhorn we saw the Hohsaud Glacier spread out before us, and the Hohsandhorn

at no very great distance in front. In order to reach the latter we kept as high above the crevasses and seracs of the Hohsand Glacier as possible. We propose the name of Ofenjoch for our new pass. From the pass itself we had a fine view of the Basodine, but it was not until we reached the Hohsanhorn that the great peaks of the Oberland came in sight. The view is so precisely similar to that from the Blinnenhorn that I shall not again attempt a description, and will merely say that that peak has the double advantage over the Hohsanhorn of being higher and somewhat nearer to that Alpine paradise.

In order to reach the Mittaghorn we went along the narrow arête of the Strahlgrat, which we found the most difficult part of the day's work. It occupied more than two hours. The Mittaghorn was reached shortly before eleven, and, after building a cairn, we descended the small but extremely steep Rappen Glacier, and at midday found ourselves at the head of the Rappenthal, than which a more uninteresting and monotonous valley I have rarely seen. We found it tenanted by a single chamois, who scarcely took the trouble to get out of our way until chivied by fiendish yells, and even then turned round to view the phenomenon of bipeds upon the Rappen Glacier. For three-fourths of its length the bottom of the valley was filled with avalanche snow; but under the Eggerhorn it turns sharply to the north, and the beautiful slopes of the Walliser Viescherhörner and the villages of the Rhone valley come in view. A pleasantly shaded path through a forest took us to Aernen, the village opposite Viesch. A further descent in order to reach a small bridge over the Rhone, a scramble up to the dusty high road, and we were once more at Herr Fuller's comfortable Hôtel des Alpes, well satisfied with our work round Tosa Falls.

This district, with the exception of the Gries Pass, has been, so far as I can ascertain, almost unknown to English travellers, and the two passes we succeeded in effecting are quite new, and make pleasant routes for reaching these southern valleys from the valley of the Rhone, and afford throughout a series of magnificent views. The existence of a comfortable little inn at the Tosa Falls in the centre of this group, the varied flora, picturesque villages, churches, and inhabitants of these valleys should certainly be sufficient to attract a portion of the host of sub-Alpine travellers who so freely flow in the accustomed groove of travel, and little suspect, as they move drearily along the Rhone Valley and Furka Pass smothered in dust or bespattered with mud, what scenes of unexplored beauty they leave on either side.