

A DAY ON THE AIGUILLES ROUGES D'AROLLA.

BY W. CECIL SLINGSBY.

(Read before the Alpine Club, March 6, 1888.)

ONE day about the middle of August last year (1887) Messrs. W. Larden, Harry Fox, Captain Powell, Dr. Ed. Hopkinson, and I, without guides, after a weary trudge of many hours through deep new snow, were rewarded by the capital little climb up the Aiguille de la Za. Now, this was a much greater satisfaction to us than may appear at first sight. The truth is, some of us had grave doubts whether we should ever find, or at any rate reach, a top at all, as we had been most solemnly warned at Arolla, that in a chimney some distance up the Aiguille a large loose rock would be found, which, if merely touched by the first man, would fall down and utterly annihilate both him and his unfortunate comrades below, and that, furthermore, the top of the peak itself, apparently built upon this rock, would roll down, bit by bit, until nothing but a little stump would remain, and thus Arolla would for ever be deprived of its Aiguille. As a matter of fact, when we began climbing the rocks, we became so engrossed with our work that we quite forgot the loose rock, and never found it or thought of it until we had reached the top. Here we enjoyed to our heart's content in golden sunshine one of the most enchanting views imaginable.

As anyone can easily believe who has seen Mr. Larden's most useful 'Guide d'Arolla,' it was a great privilege for those of us who contemplated making a prolonged stay at Arolla to have him with us, as, without doubt, he knows infinitely more about the climbing there than any other person; and I, for one, did not spare him with questions as to routes and new work to be done. Amongst the latter, he recommended the Dents des Bouquetins and one of the Aiguilles Rouges.

After this day I had many other good views of the Aiguilles Rouges from different peaks, and at last began to realise, what I had at first disbelieved, that there must be some truth in the statement of the local guides, that 'the best climbing about Arolla was upon the Aiguilles Rouges.'

On Friday, September 2, my wife and I decided to abandon a scheme that we had formed of going to Zinal on the Saturday, as the weather was bad, but, as the Arolla guides hold the theory that 'if it rain to-day it will be fine

to-morrow, and *vice versa*,' Messrs. Harold W. Topham and Arthur Macnamara had arranged with Jean Maître to attack one of the unclimbed Aiguilles Rouges the next day, and were good enough to ask me to join them, which, fortunately for me, I consented to do, though with little hope of success. We all agreed, however, that if the weather did allow us to set off, Jean Maître was merely to act as the sub-alpine guide and alpine porter.

In the small hours of morning, rain was still falling, and the porter, who had developed from a churl into a right good fellow, did not awaken us until the rain had fled away. At 6.15 we set off in broad daylight. As we were all in good training we agreed to walk quickly. Having passed the Praz Gras chalets, we followed the bank of an irrigation stream, and soon reached the Glacier des Ignes. This is a poor wizened little glacier, which is sadly overladen with débris from a great variety of rocks. In fact, its lower end is nearly snuffed out. The upper portion, however, is clean, and we found it bare ice.

At 8.15 we breakfasted on a large glacier table, and as the clouds had just drifted away from the southern aiguille, the one we wished to climb, we carefully studied our route.

The Aiguilles Rouges consist of three peaks, of which the central or highest had alone at that time been climbed. The northern peak is merely a large spur on its loftier neighbour, but yet, when seen from the north, it looks very fine. The southern peak rises directly out of the Glacier des Ignes with very high and perpendicular precipices, from the tops of which steep and massive buttresses spring, and support a most jagged mountain crest singularly well suited for the light clouds to play at hide-and-seek. The face is unequally bisected by a gully, which, plainly enough, would lead to the arête some distance south of the highest point. This made us decide to vary the usual custom of climbing Arolla mountains—'from the other side'—and to attack it boldly in front.

At 8.45 we set off, and in ten minutes reached the rocks, and were soon in the gully, where we had an interesting climb, but only once met with any great difficulty, which was in recovering an axe which had fallen over a boss of rock. At 10.15 we reached a col on the southern arête, and had a most savage view down the other side. After 35 minutes' halt we roped for the first time, and had a rare good scramble over several points on the arête, and reached a top at 11.15, and *the top* at 11.32. From here we had one of the grandest

views of the Matterhorn conceivable. The top of the mountain alone was visible in a frame of ever-changing clouds, and it seemed to be infinitely higher than any mountain I had ever seen in my life. It just chanced also that the top was seen directly over the point of the Aiguille de la Za. The other Zermatt mountains were mostly cloud-hidden, which increased the grandeur of the Matterhorn. Whilst on the top a large white-tailed eagle sailed most majestically out of some mysterious rocky eyrie a little below us, and, without so much as even deigning to look at the intruders on its solitude, with a few sweeps of its wings vanished amongst the crags. A few croaking ravens then came and flew about us.

So far we had had lots of good climbing, but nothing quite first-rate; but, as we had resolved to descend our new peak by its northern arête, if possible, and then to climb the central aiguille, we felt sure that we had a really good time before us, as both the arête and the central peak looked most grand from where we were.

As I cannot sufficiently thank my companions for allowing me to act as leading guide, I will not attempt to do so. They did so, however, and I took the coveted place of last man on the rope. Starting again at 12, difficulties at once began. Not a yard could be climbed on the terrible west face, and not much could be done on the arête, which is very narrow, and broken up into scores of little minarets. We were soon forced on to the east face, and began scrambling round its buttresses, and across its gullies, and then back on to the arête, and felt, like a foxhunter when a good fox has broken cover, with a wide grass country before him, that we were in for a good thing. After a time we neared the last and biggest pinnacle, which we thought, when we saw it from the top, might prove to be too much for us. We had already passed other points by going up and down, round, over, and under, as the case required, but this pinnacle was much stiffer than anything we had yet met with, and it looked bad enough. We climbed carefully down a buttress, traversed the face under the pinnacle, and then got on some smooth rock slabs, and found ourselves looking down into and across a very steep gully, the trough and sides of which were polished like an ancient spinster's tea-pot. At first we reconnoitred two or three places, but to no use; then, by sheer good luck, we noticed above us, between a large boss of rock and the high wall of the pinnacle itself, a little gap, which might possibly prove to be the top of a chimney

leading into the gully. We were soon up to it, and, to our joy, found a vertical chimney, about eighteen feet high and eighteen inches wide, at the bottom of which there was an irregular three-inch shelf, which formed the actual top of the gully under the pinnacle. I anchored myself firmly, and the others went down and took the axes. The chimney is a charming place to be met with before dinner, and both it and the ledge afforded us a most enjoyable wriggle and scramble. Soon afterwards we reached at 1.35 the col between the two peaks, having had 1 hr. 35 min. stiff climbing down from our new peak. Here, too, we got into old ground, as the central peak had once been ascended by a gully up to this col and then by the S. arête. As this arête appeared to be very easy, after what we had gone through, Topham, who goes like a greyhound at Altcar, proposed that we should 'hurry up.' We did so, and in 25 minutes we reached the top, and left a long arête behind us. On the way up we found a beautiful tuft of *Silene acaulis*, whose long tap roots pierce with little difficulty the soft green schistose rock of this arête. The *Ranunculus glacialis* is almost as much at home here as on the Jotun Mountains in Norway.

Our new peak looked very grand from here, and we felt as proud as Punch for having climbed it. The view into the two valleys of Arolla and Hérémece was a singularly sterile one, and the only little speck of real fertility visible was around the hamlet of La Sage, an oasis surrounded by dull burnt-up brown land. The south faces of all the peaks around us were snow-free, whilst the northern and western seemed to be terribly cold and snowy.

We set off again at 2.20, and descended by the north arête and east face. This route is as pretty and varied a rock climb as can be wished for, and it is a great pity that it is so very little known. We reached the col between the north and central Aiguilles at 3.30, the top of the Glacier des Aiguilles Rouges at 4.30; we unroped beyond the glacier at 4.50, halted until 5.20, and reached Arolla at 6.30 P.M.

As the mountains were in perfect order, and as we went very quickly all day, our times must not be considered quite average. All our difficulties were met with when descending. We had altogether an enormous amount of rock-climbing; in fact, I have very rarely had so much on any one expedition. We did not meet with the slightest trouble or danger from the falling stones which the native guides seem particularly to associate with the Aiguilles Rouges. As leading guide, I must say that my duties were reduced to a minimum by the

ability of my English comrades and of Jean Maître, who is a good rock-climber, and who may be safely trusted as leader on these and other mountains at Arolla.

Few mountains in Switzerland afford so good rock-climbing as the Arolla peaks, the Dents des Bouquetins, Mont Collon, the Aiguilles Rouges, and others, and yet comparatively few climbers have taken the advice of Mr. Cust and others to make Arolla their headquarters for a short time, instead of Zermatt and Grindelwald. Many peaks have only once or twice been ascended, and there is still new work to be done by those who thirst for glory. These should study most closely Mr. Larden's 'Guide d'Arolla' when published. For my part, I think Arolla is a delightful place at which to spend a month's holiday. The big and little expeditions to be made are equally good. Interesting glaciers are near at hand, the nearest of which—the Glacier de Cijorénove—is now advancing most rapidly, and by next summer will most probably have covered an ancient green lateral moraine, and so will destroy what was, last year, very decent pasturage. There are pretty walks through the meadows and the woods of the Arolla pines to neighbouring chalets, and suitable fields for exercise for both the young and old.

EXPLORATION OF THE CAUCASUS IN 1888.

I.

[The following note is extracted from the Journal of the R. G. S. for September last. We may mention here that in the current November number of the same Journal will be found an article by Mr. D. W. Freshfield on 'The Peaks, Passes, and Glaciers of the Caucasus,' summarising the results of exploration up to date.]

MR. A. F. MUMMERY returned from the Caucasus early in August last, after a successful and very pleasant journey. Starting about the end of June with an Alpine guide, Zurfluh of Meiringen, he went straight to the central group, of which Koshtantau, 17,096 feet, the second (measured) peak in the Caucasus, is the highest (measured) summit. The qualification is necessary until the height of Shkara (see Mr. Freshfield's recent map and paper) has been ascertained. The difference in height between the two peaks is not very great, perhaps 250 feet, but it appears likely that Shkara will, as Mr. Freshfield has anticipated, prove to be the higher. On July 24, Koshtantau was ascended; two previous attempts, on one of which Mr. Mummery climbed alone the south-western buttress of the great mountain, itself 13,500 feet high, having