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A MONTH'S CLIMBING IN THE BERNESE OBERLAND, 1902.

By E. H. F. BRADBY.

(Read before the Alpine Club, April 7, 1903.)

MY object to-night is to show that it is still possible for anyone to have a really good climbing holiday, even in such a frequented district as the Bernese Oberland.

The words 'Bernese Oberland' must, of course, conjure up very different associations now from those which were experienced by the earlier members of this Club. Then, no doubt, they thought of quiet valleys, good guides, primitive but hospitable accommodation, and all the glamour and enchantment of the practically unexplored country. Now, alas! we think of the desolate hideousness of the Eggishorn Hotel; our minds wander to the dusty station at Grindelwald, the screaming engines, the High Street, with its faint smell of drains, more perceptible at night than in the daytime; we hear the roll-call of the Polytechnic travellers in front of the Bear Hotel when they answer to their names, and the numbers of their respective bedrooms are assigned to them, and we see the evening fireworks when some adventurous climber has successfully stormed the steep slopes leading to the Gleckstein Hut.

I must ask you, however, to-night to put these unpleasant thoughts aside, and to come with me for a few moments into what is undoubtedly one of the finest mountain groups in the world, while I shortly describe some climbs which were made, by a party of which I was a member, in July of last year. The Schreckhorn is, as everyone knows, one of the first of the big mountains that strikes the eye from the Lake of Thun, and is one of the finest rock peaks of the Bernese Oberland.

There are two routes up the Schreckhorn—the ordinary way by the S.E. arête, and the more interesting way by the N.W. arête, a climb that for some reason or other is not now very often made.

Kesteven, Wicks, Wilson, and I had attempted the N.W. arête in the summer of 1900, but had been driven back at the top of the great couloir in the early morning by a heavy thunderstorm.

It is always particularly pleasant to start again for an expedition upon which one has previously been unsuccessful; and it was with anxious eyes that on an evening in July last Wicks, Wilson, and I, from the windows of the Schwarzegg Hut, saw ominous clouds rising in the S.W. There is nothing more miserable than to grind up to a hut one afternoon, in perfect weather and raging heat, and come down the next morning wet to the skin, with one's tail between one's legs, and with the sure and certain knowledge that you have gone to considerable expense in the matter of porters and provisions all to no purpose. The storm on this occasion broke at mid-night in howling wind and rain.

I have often wondered why the scientific members of this Club are so interested in, and spend so much time in investigating, the phenomena of mountain-sickness. In a comparatively recent period of time I have twice heard the various symptoms so vividly and graphically described that I have felt the deadly sickness creeping over me as I sat in my chair, and have put my fingers in my ears in order that I might hear no more; but I have wondered still more why it is no one has ever seriously turned his attention to what is of far more importance and a far more interesting study, namely, that of the weather.

The one drawback to climbing is that one is absolutely dependent on the weather, and it should be the aim of every climber to read its signs aright. The rules that govern the weather are, of course, as immutable as the laws of gravitation; and anyone who would really study the subject from a scientific point of view, and would write a trustworthy treatise or handbook on the weather of the Alps, would confer upon all members of this Club a lasting boon. But to return to my subject. At 5 o'clock on that particular morning the weather, for no apparent reason, cleared. Wicks, who had, I think, been reading the sensational account of the first ascent of this N.W. ridge in the 'Alpine Journal,' said it was ridiculous starting at such an hour for such a climb. Now, there is one golden rule for climbers, and that is, they should

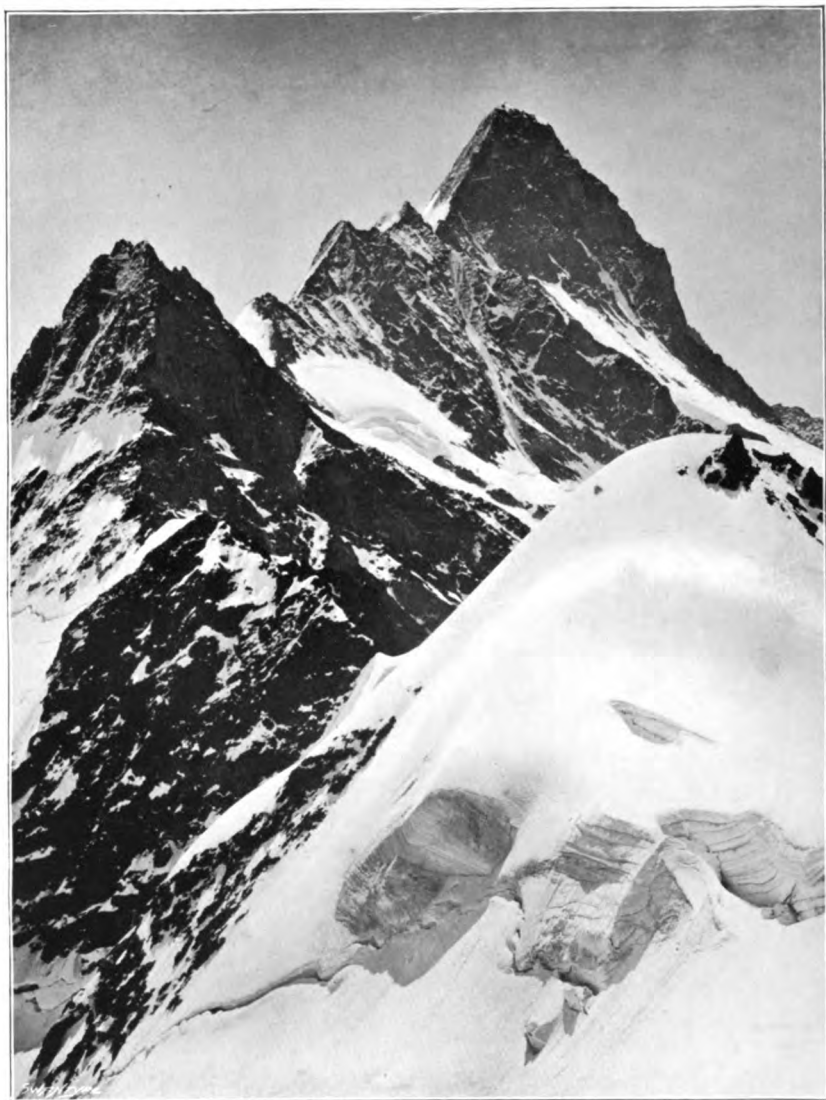


Photo by V. Sella.

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SCHRECKHORN, SHOWING N.W. AND S.W. ARÊTES.

never believe a word of anything they read, and only half of what they see, for, in the words of the Admirable Crichton, 'circumstances alter cases.' Wilson and I, acting on this maxim, thought it worth while making a start; and taking Rey, a son of Emil Rey, who acts as a spare man, and whom we sometimes take with us and sometimes leave behind, we set off at about 5 o'clock. The snow in the main couloir proved to be in good condition after the rain, and we got to the rocks at the top of the couloir at about 8 o'clock, and the ridge, after some step-cutting on the way, some $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours later.

If you expect difficult climbing on this ridge you will be bitterly disappointed. It is in many places very steep, but the rock is good, and there was not, if I remember rightly, a single place where we were not all climbing at the same time. The climb from the col to the top took us some $2\frac{1}{2}$ hrs. When we arrived at the top there was a good deal of mist and cloud, and we were surprised to see that there were three distinct arêtes: the N.W. arête, up which we had come; the S.E. arête, the ordinary and somewhat uninteresting route of ascent; and a well and clearly defined arête running S.W. We had suspected that a route could be made up the face of the mountain on the S. side, but I think it was seeing this arête that led us to investigate, and finally to try, the S.W. arête, which I will next describe. On the way down in the fog we turned from the col rather sooner than we should have done, and paid the penalty in having to negotiate some very awkward places below. It is a curious thing that the S.W. arête of the mountain, which is the right-hand skyline as seen from the Lake of Thun, has, as far as we know, never been tried before, because it is such an obvious way to the summit, and entirely saves the tedious passages to the Schreckhorn col. I would call your attention to the prominent way in which this S.W. arête is defined on the map. From the Schwarzegg Hut, or even from the further side of the Upper Grindelwald glacier, the S.W. arête is very much foreshortened, and looks much more difficult than it really is. At the end of our holiday last year, Wicks, Wilson, and I determined to try this S.W. arête of the Schreckhorn. We toiled up to the hut, as usual, in splendid weather, reconnoitring our route as far as we could by crossing the glacier at the Baregg and going up by the slopes on its left bank. After spending an uncomfortable night in a crowded hut (this is one of the curses of the Bernese Oberland), we woke up early in the morning to find a downpour of rain. After some discussion

(I thought the weather was going to clear) we determined to return to Grindelwald; but as the following day, Saturday, happened to be the last day I had for climbing, I consented to return, on the distinct understanding that if the weather should clear we should start again from Grindelwald that night. By the time that we arrived at the Baregg the weather was getting better, and about lunch-time, at Grindelwald, there was not a cloud in the sky. At 10.40 p.m. we had got together our provisions and had started from Grindelwald, and had a lovely dreamy walk up to the hut without using lanterns, in a stream of the most beautiful moonlight, in which the rocks over which water had been dripping shone like silver. We rested an hour at the hut, and left our porters behind. Quitting the hut at 1.30, we followed the usual Schreckhorn route until we came to the Schreck glacier. Mounting the Schreck glacier, we soon took to the rocks after a little step-cutting, and climbed a steep rock buttress running due W. until the S.W. arête was joined, about 500 ft. below the level of the col, between the Schreckhorn and the Lauteraarhorn. I do not propose to weary you with the details of this climb. Once upon the main ridge there can be no mistake as to the way, because you have to keep to the ridge until you reach the top. There is only one place on the ridge which gives anything more than a moment's hesitation. This place is about 1 hr. from the top, where the arête becomes very narrow, and one is cut off from the higher part of the ridge by 7 ft. or 8 ft. of sheer rock, which it is impossible to climb. The only way out of the difficulty is up a gully on the left-hand side, which at this particular point begins to overhang. It makes an awkward corner; but although the rocks appear to be rotten they are not so, and it is not nearly as difficult as it looks.

We arrived at the top at 3 o'clock, descended by the ordinary route, reached the hut again at 7, and got down to Grindelwald, after taking some food at the Baregg, after midnight, having had a very long but interesting climb.

The next day we spent alternately eating and sleeping. There can be no question that this route up the Schreckhorn is far and away the best climb, and is strongly to be recommended. It is a very fine rock climb, and the rocks, especially on the buttress from the Schreck glacier, are of a beautiful red colour and very striking. The S. side of the mountain soon gets clear from ice and snow, and this climb could be made sooner after bad weather than one would naturally expect. It would be a fine expedition to climb the



Photo by V. Sella.

SCHRECKHORN, SHOWING S.W. ARÊTE AND ORDINARY ROUTE.

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N.W. arête and come down the S.W. arête—or better, to climb the N.W. arête and to descend to the Gleckstein Hut. If the N.W. arête were descended, one would have to come down by the rocks at the top of the great couloir on its left bank, as the top of the couloir is very steep, and the snow would almost certainly be bad in the afternoon. The rocks are not very easy, but were both ascended and descended by us when we were driven back from the N.W. arête in 1900.

Let us now turn to the Jungfrau, which is not, as might be supposed, given over entirely to the tunnel (the mouth of which, by the way, smelt exactly like the Twopenny Tube as we passed last year on our way to the Eiger). They are still working at the tunnel, and there is already a station on the face of the Eiger looking over Grindelwald, called 'The Grindelwald Blick.' Why anyone should want to go there Heaven only knows; but the railway was to be opened to this station during the latter part of last year, and to reassure the timid they were advertising that each train would contain not only a doctor, but a chemist to make up the doctor's prescriptions. They had apparently omitted the parson.

As yet the Jungfrau has, with two slight variations, only been climbed by the S.E. arête, but there are, as everyone knows, four starting-places for the ascent of the peak: the Concordia, Bergli, Guggi, and Roththal Club Huts.

The routes from the former pair unite at the E. foot of the mountain, and those of the latter pair at the W. foot of the highest crags of the peak. By far and away the most interesting climb is from the Wengern Alp side.

We (Wicks, Wilson, and myself) did this climb last year in the reverse direction. We started from the Roththal Hut in the morning, and, ascending by the usual route, which is not difficult to find, arrived at the top at 10.50. There are fixed ropes in the only two difficult places, but in both cases the ropes were glazed with ice, and, if my recollection serves me right, at the first spot the rope was so encased in ice that we had to cut our way up for a considerable distance. I cannot help thinking that these ropes might be more advantageously fixed in other places. They are, judging from the records, almost always ice-covered, and there has already been one fatal accident where the topmost rope is fixed.

We debated some time at the top as to the line of descent. We were all anxious to try the descent to the Wengern Alp, but the route was more or less an unknown quantity, and the question was whether it would be safe in the afternoon, and

whether we had time, as the mere distance which one has to travel is considerable.

As the day was cool, very light cirrus clouds shading the sun, and as it promised to hold fair until evening, and as we were very keen to fully test the crampons which we were wearing for the first time, we finally decided, after some deliberation, to descend to the Wengern Alp.

The rocky arête leading down to the Silberlücke is not difficult, although interesting and entertaining, but we found the bergschrund down to the Giessen glacier difficult, as there was a nasty wall of ice above it. This took us about $1\frac{1}{4}$ hr. to negotiate. The next difficulty is the maze of huge crevasses and séracs which leads down to the lower hollow of the Giessen glacier, called the 'Silbermulde.' No doubt the icefall here varies from year to year. If you are stuck and cut off by crevasses, you can, I believe, get down by the steep snow slope running down from the lower Silberhorn on the true left; but this year this was, as far as we could see, a steep and nasty ice slope. It took us some hours of interesting ice and snow work through magnificent scenery to get down to the lower plateau. When down at the plateau you bear to the left to the highest point of the Schneehorn, and thence by crumbling rocks which present no real difficulty you reach the upper plateau of the Guggi glacier. The icefall which separated us from the lower plateau of the Guggi glacier was not easy; but we finally got down to the lower plateau by cutting down a steep ridge of ice. Whilst we were doing this the weather was changing, and it had begun to snow and blow, which was not pleasant. The lower part of the Guggi glacier is very much broken up, and it is not easy to find your way off the glacier to the hut. The great thing is when coming down to keep well to the left, and to cross over the glacier when nearly on a level with the hut. We reached the Club Hut at 7.45, and Grindelwald at a late hour, after having had a very fine expedition. We certainly found crampons of very great service during the long stretch on the ice and snow, and the only thing to be said against them is that they are very heavy and difficult to carry, as the spikes spoil an ordinary rucksack (a serious consideration for a guideless party), and also they are apt to make the foot sore, as the pressure is not well distributed. This climb should be made from the Wengern Alp, as it is easier, on the whole, to find your way up an icefall than down, and a very early start should be made if possible, by the light of the moon. Don't by any chance, if you happen to get provisions at the

Scheideck Hotel, disclose your names, unless you want to see them written on great placards hanging from telescopes on your return. Telescopes are another of the curses of the Bernese Oberland, and if you intend to go up a mountain *A* you should tell everyone you are going up mountain *B*.

Now let us turn to the great N.E. ridge of the Jungfrau. This wonderful ridge, which rises from the Jungfrau Joch, has never been climbed. The final crest of the mountain was climbed in 1878 by a party from the gap between the Wengern Jungfrau and the proper summit, which means that the last few feet of the N.E. arête were traversed; but this can only be considered a variation of the ordinary route from the Wengern Alp. I notice that Mr. Hasler, in his 'Climbers' Guide,' states that this ridge has already defied several strong parties of climbers; but there is apparently no record of the work that has been done upon it, and nothing at present to guide future parties as to the best line of attack. The ridge is obviously best approached from the Concordia side, and I am nearly satisfied, from the work we did upon it this year, that the lower part of it is unclimbable. Wicks had previously tried it from the Jungfrau Joch, but, owing to hours of step-cutting and high wind, had not got very far. Jossi, father and son, had, so we heard, tried it, and pronounced it impracticable. Our party had a careful look at it from the Concordia Hut this year, and came to the conclusion that the best chance of getting to the top was to strike the ridge as high up as possible.

Wicks, Wilson, Rey, and myself started from the Concordia one morning in July last, and we managed to strike the ridge at the highest point which has yet been attained. The climb to the ridge up steep snow slopes and rocks was pleasant and interesting.

We went some little way along the ridge, which was corniced first on one side and then on another and difficult; and then, as it was evident that we should probably have to sleep the night out if we went on, we hastily retraced our steps before the sun should make the steep snow slopes up which we had come dangerous, for dangerous they certainly would be if the snow were in bad condition. From where we were the arête did not look at all promising, and the steep pitch below the final summit certainly looked impassable. It is almost impossible, however, to judge fairly of a ridge when one is upon it, as everything is very much foreshortened, and looking back when we had retraced our steps we saw that the very steep pitch is really broken up into many gendarmes,

which might very possibly be turned or climbed. One would like very much to follow the ridge down from the top and have a look at it. If it looked fairly promising, the next party who attack the climb should, I think, aim at striking the ridge where we struck it, or even at a still higher level, and make a push for the top, taking the risk of having to spend the night out if they failed to reach the top or found their retreat cut off by the bad condition of the snow. The ridge itself would probably be in the best condition late in the year ; but then, on the other hand, the slopes leading up to it would probably be ice, and any lengthy period of step-cutting before the ridge was reached would be fatal to the expedition, unless a night was spent upon it. Another alternative would be to cut steps up to the ridge, come back, and then use the steps on the following morning, when the ridge could be reached at an early hour and the whole day could be spent upon it. The climb in any case would be an exceedingly interesting one, and I trust that it will finally be made by some member of this Club. Two days afterwards, when we were returning by the Mönch Joch in bad weather, not far from the top of the Jungfrau Joch, we saw what we thought was the neck of a bottle sticking out of the snow. On closer inspection it turned out to be the head of a swallow which was nearly covered in drifting snow, and appeared to be in a weak and almost dying condition. From underneath its wing, Rey, who was with us, picked out a horrible beast which looked very much like a larger edition of a parasite which feeds on man, and which is not a flea. We tried to give the poor little bird some moist bread, which it would not take, and Wilson then wrapped it up in his handkerchief and put it in his breast-pocket. By the time we arrived at vegetation it was getting lively, and then a brilliant thought struck us that a swallow feeds on flies and not bread. We therefore chased small moths and insects with our ice-axes, and gave the swallow a much-needed but light repast. It slept soundly that night—at least so Wilson told me, although when I asked him how he knew, the only evidence he could produce was that he had woken up once or twice in the night and had heard the bird snoring. In the morning it flew away, apparently well and strong.

I will now ask you, lastly, to turn to the Wetterhorn, a mountain which has in the season which has just passed earned for itself an unenviable reputation by reason of the fatal accidents which occurred upon it in August. We happened at Grindelwald to meet our old friend Ulrich Almer,



Photo by V. Sella.

JUNGFRAU FROM ALETSCHHORN, SHOWING N.E. ARÊTE.

[Swan Electric Engraving Co

and as he had a day to spare we persuaded him to try the S.W. arête with us. This arête had never been climbed. We had the usual fatiguing walk up to the Gleckstein Hut in a blazing and scorching sun. Just as we were going to sleep, and were thanking our stars that we had the hut to ourselves, a party of seven Italian workmen, who had been blasting the path below, came to take up their quarters for the night. The noise those men made snoring has never been surpassed, and made sleep quite impossible. I heard Ulrich twice in the middle of the night yell at the top of his voice to wake the



WETTERHORN FROM GRINDELWALD.

men up ; but there was even then only peace for a few minutes, and we were therefore glad to be off as early as possible. We started in good time, and at once bore to the left across the ridge separating us from the Hühnergutz glacier. We had no difficulty in reaching the col up some steepish rocks, as Ulrich was leading ; but it struck me that the way up these rocks would not be very easy for a guideless party to find. We soon attacked the main ridge, but found that the rocks were too rotten and too steep to be safe, and there was nothing to do but to skirt them on the W. face of the mountain above the Hühnergutz glacier, and this involved

some two hours of wearisome step-cutting. When we had reached a point almost directly below the main summit, and were on the other side of the rib of rock which runs down the W. face of the mountain, we made direct for the S.W. ridge, and after two hours' more step-cutting joined it at a small col some 300 or 400 ft. below the summit, which was reached some forty minutes later. Ulrich cut up these last slopes at a terrific pace, feeling no doubt that it was wise to get off them before the sun loosened some 4 inches of hard snow which was adhering to the ice. This was our third expedition, and we were not in the best of training; and I was amused, when arriving at the ridge, to hear Ulrich say that coming up these last slopes he had not felt very well. I was heartily glad that he had not felt better. It is always a pleasure and instruction to walk behind a really good man, such as Ulrich is. His climbing powers, even at his age, are still something wonderful; and I should like to mention an incident which illustrates his marvellous sticking powers to rock. Four years ago, Dr. Wills and I were climbing with Ulrich in the Dauphiné, and, crossing from Ailefroide to Briançon, we tried a small peak on the ridge which bounds the Ailefroide valley on the E. side. The rocks near the top proved to be very rotten, and, traversing under the final arête, we arrived at a shelving slab of rock. The higher part of this slab was bounded by the arête, which rose perpendicularly for about 6 ft., and once up this 6 ft. the climbing was over.

Wills stood in the corner and gave Ulrich a shoulder to enable him to grasp what appeared to be a very substantial handhold for his left hand, and a fair handhold for his right. He had left Wills's shoulder and was well on to the rocks when his left handhold, to which he was clinging, came clean away. For some twenty seconds—it seemed to me a good deal longer, as I stood there looking on an interested spectator and expecting, as Uncle Remus would say, 'every moment to be my next'—he clung with his right hand and body to the rock, holding a great piece of rock in his left hand. With wonderful skill and strength he managed to clear Wills, who was standing below him. Then making a supreme effort, and ascending in an entirely opposite direction to that which he had intended, he reached the top, and lay down panting and puffing just as a man does who has run himself clean out on the post in a quarter-mile race. I stood wondering what he would say when he got up. At length up he jumped, and all he did say was 'Those devil stones!' Subsequently he gravely

explained to us that, although he would not say it before the ladies, he himself did not believe in the Devil. Whether he thought the ladies would think it unorthodox and be shocked, or whether he thought that Beelzebub, the God of flies, was still a name to conjure with, so far as the female sex was concerned, I do not know.

But to return to our climb up the W. face and S.W. arête of the Wetterhorn. We cannot altogether recommend *this* climb, as it can only be done in the early part of the season when there is plenty of snow and it is in good condition. The rocks of the W. arête still remain to be climbed, but for myself I believe they are impossible, and they are certainly not of a very inviting nature.

I will not weary you any more with the description of other climbs which we made last year, and in conclusion will only mention, for those who intend to visit the Oberland, that the traverse of the Finsteraarhorn, the S.E. arête of the Aletschhorn, the Jungfrau Joch, and many others are climbs which any mountaineer, to whom for pecuniary or other reasons the Caucasus or the Rockies or the Himalayas are a sealed book, must some day hope to make; and I would strongly assert that, although in some of the more frequented districts the Alps may have lost some of their charm, yet they are not, and never will be, played out, and that even in the more frequented districts, such as the Bernese Oberland, the jarring note brought in by the influx of visitors is still a mere nothing compared with the various and many mental and physical pleasures which one can there still enjoy to the full.

FROM THE AIGUILLE SANS NOM TO THE AIGUILLE VERTE.

By A. E. FIELD.

(Read before the Alpine Club, June 9, 1908.)

THE Aiguille Sans Nom is doubtless well known to many as a summit on the ridge that runs towards the Dru from the top of the Aiguille Verte. Its face is, perhaps, seen to most advantage from the Dent du Requin, while some part of its summit is seen from the Monteners, just to the left of the Dru. It was first climbed by H.R.H. the Duke of the Abruzzi in 1898,* by the great couloir between it and the Aiguille Verte; the party descended by the same route, were

* See *Alpine Journal*, vol. xix. p. 248.