

Wehrli, A. G., Zurich, photo.

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THE SOUTH FACE OF MONTE ROSA,
FROM THE PIZZO BIANCO.

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THE NORD END FROM MACUGNAGA.

By EDWARD A. BROOME.

(Read before the Alpine Club, May 7, 1912.)

‘ No foole like to the old foole.’

THIS though written centuries ago still remains true, and I find it difficult to decide which is the more foolish—for a sexagenarian to have undertaken one of the longest and most sensational expeditions in the Alps, or to have taken upon himself to read a descriptive paper afterwards. At any rate both expeditions were, or are, made in the very best of good company ; and if the climb was thought out and sought out beforehand, its sequel was unsought, and indeed at first declined for excellent reasons. So the blame, if any, must be put on our good Honorary Secretary, a courteous autocrat who, like his historical namesake, ‘ conceals the iron hand in the velvet glove.’ However, when once the Government has taken its stand, and the strike notice is withdrawn, I for one always enjoy the return to work, especially when that work is reading a paper here. The audience, if critical, is charitable, and I have the additional consolation of knowing that, although other peaks in the Monte Rosa group have often filled up a pleasant evening, the Nord End from the Macugnaga side, though by no means a new climb, has never done so

I have always had the greatest affection for this fine range. The Dufour Spitze was my very first big Swiss peak (1885),

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and since then I have been up every summit in the group over 14,000 feet, some of them several times, perhaps the best expedition (1904)* being a long traverse of the Nord End and the Dufour Spitze ; beginning with the former by its steep rock ridge, due S. of and immediately opposite the Stockhorn ; up the N.W. arête to the top ; down to and along the Silber-sattel ; thence a new and somewhat sensational scramble straight up the steep N. face of the Allerhöchste Spitze to the actual summit ; and finishing down the delightful S. rib of rocks to the foot of the Grenz-sattel.

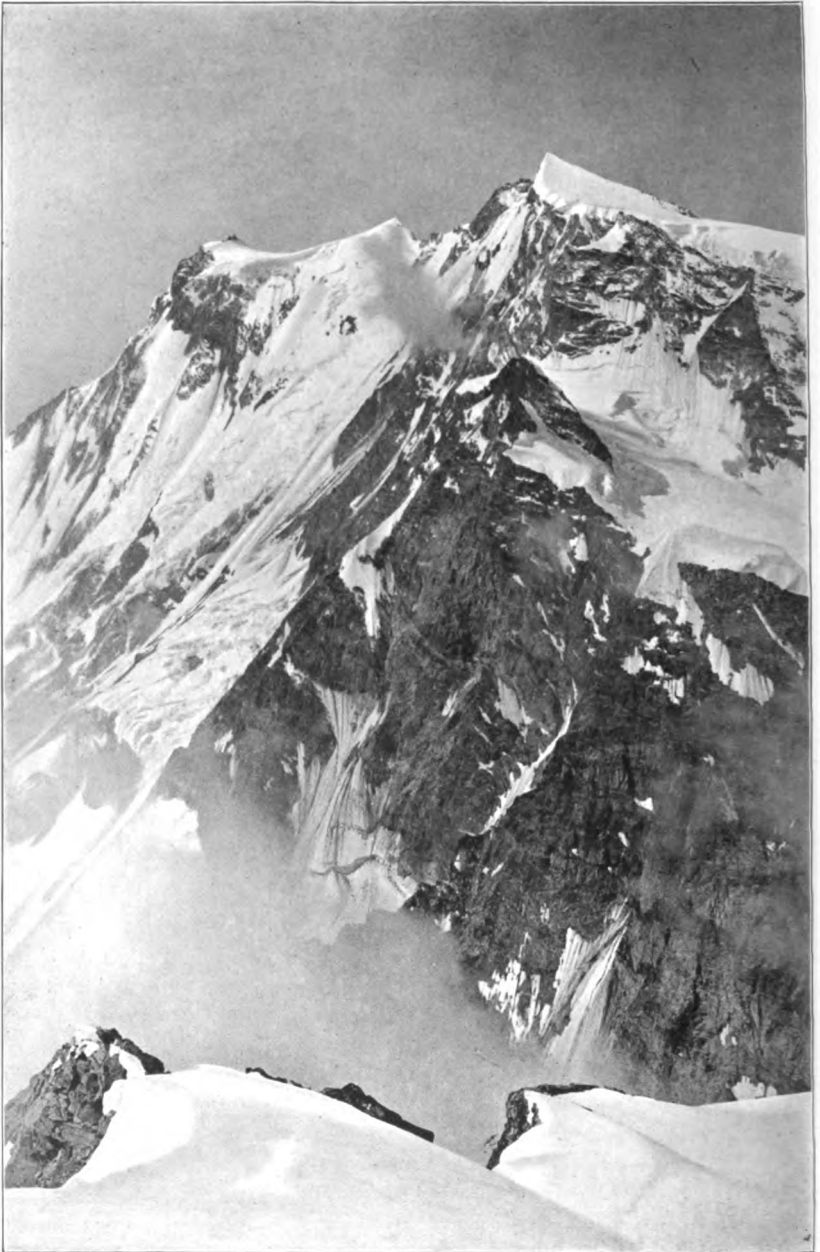
Macugnaga is almost perfectly situated, most convenient to reach, very comfortable for a stay either long or short, and is not nearly as much known or visited by climbers as it deserves to be. It is indeed an extraordinary fact—the big climbs from here are so little known and have been so seldom made that there exist Valais guides of quite the first rank who have never been in this valley, and never even seen it except from the sentinel summits overlooking it. Notwithstanding the numerous passes leading from Zermatt, it is quite a case of 'thou art so near and yet so far !' Yet, near or far, the churches are numerous, the people pious, the views unique, and the climbing magnificent and unsurpassable.

Macugnaga is however, more visited from the Saas valley, and usually *via* the deservedly popular Monte Moro pass ; from the summit of which, as well as from the village itself, the stupendous E. wall of Monte Rosa, with its highest peaks as centre and the Punta Gnifetti and Nord End as flanking bastions, forms the grandest amphitheatre in the Alps. When first I saw it all shining out resplendent above an ebbing sea of mist, I could only recall and indeed recite, 'And I saw heaven opened, and behold a Great White Throne.' I have never beheld anything quite like it, before or since !

The hotels are now a great and a delightful contrast to the uncomfortable and insanitary inns of twenty-five years ago. The Monte Moro is one of the best in the High Alps, and the Monte Rosa and Belvedere are fairly good also, most of the regular visitors to all three being Italians, for whose benefit a good motor road has recently been finished.

My former visits to Macugnaga, some half-dozen in number, had been by as many different passes, all, however, over Conway's so-called Weissgrat—that is, N. or N.E. of the main mass ; and more or less with an eye to possibly getting back over the

* *A. J.* vol. xxii. p. 572.



Alfred Holmes, photo.

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NORD-END,
FROM CIMA DI JAZZI.

big mountain itself. There had always been some obstacle in the way—weather conditions, mountain conditions, guide's exorbitant conditions, my own lack of condition, or something. The more, too, I looked at the Dufour Spitze climb, and for that matter the more I heard and read of the history of former expeditions up that side, the more I disliked the idea of crossing the Marinelli Couloir and then toiling for a long day up the avalanchy snowfields and braving the overhanging séracs and icefalls above and beyond it. The superstructure of this route, and its accident records (fatal and otherwise), seemed to make the odds against climbers somewhat too long!

On the other hand, the Nord End climb altogether avoided the wicked avalanche funnel; seemed to be fairly free from things coming down over which one had no control; consisted entirely of steep rocks, which I for one much prefer to snowfields, gentle or steep; and in fact seemed to have everything in its favour except its interminable length. Moreover, I never heard of any accident on this last route, with the one exception of the Castelnovo catastrophe in 1909*; and that appears to have been caused by a violent storm, and not by any kind of fall. To put it epigrammatically, Mont 'Rose was not without its thorn'; so the Nord 'End must justify the means'!

At any rate, the latter could never go better than in this last wonderful summer. Several friends had done it and returned to Zermatt with cheerful countenances; and indeed the only 'Face' that got to look blacker and blacker was that of the Matterhorn!

So after a capital three weeks' or month's work round Zermatt, my son-in-law and climbing companion, Professor Corning, and I packed up our rucksacks, and on August 29 crossed the New Weissthorn to Macugnaga with the two excellent young guides Niklaus Brantschen and Heinrich Fux. The former had been with us all the season and was keen on trying the Nord End, while Fux had done it once before with our friend Dr. O. K. Williamson (as second guide to Jean Maitre), and wanted to repeat it. The heat coming down the pass and in the valley was intolerable and felt like a coming storm, but the village (4950 ft.) always cools down in the evening.

Next day the barometer and our hopes alike fell, and in the afternoon down came the deluge also, making a start quite impossible. Dr. Rolleston, whom we intended to meet at the

* *A. J.* vol. xxiv. p. 674.

Marinelli, had crossed the Jägerjoch, traversed across and down to the hut and slept there, but now had to walk down the following morning to breakfast with us, and reported new snow aloft. We all, however, had good hopes of the weather taking up again; but the iced rocks must have time, so we spent a couple of reposeful days, finding our *convives* companionable, the hotel comfortable (at any rate they didn't burn us out), and the cuisine, Capri, and Chianti capital. My climbing companions filled up their spare time exploring the interesting churches; but I pursued my ecclesiastical studies on somewhat different lines, and cultivated a pious acquaintance with an Irish Dean at the 'Belvedere,' who daily received 'The Times,' quite a spiritual solace during that exciting international and railway crisis!

Friday morning, September 1, saw us all *en route* for the Capanna Marinelli—Rolleston with Josef Lochmatter and Schanton; Corning and I with our two men and a porter. The Macugnaga guides were rather doubtful about our success; but the weather seemed more settled again, and our time was getting short. My archæologists insisted on taking me some little distance round to see the ancient church, which I fear was not fully appreciated; also the patriarchal gnarled linden tree twenty-seven feet in girth, with its shady stone seat, which was delightful! It is a lovely walk thence through woods and over the beautiful Belvedere oasis clothed with pine and larch; and we lunched at the little inn, thereby economising our provisions. Then on along the level moraine and across the glacier to the foot of and up the three broad buttresses of steep rocks to the hut, four and a half to five hours' easy going from the Monte Moro Hotel. The shanty is small but weather-tight, is grandly situate, and should always be the sleeping-place for the climb, as there is certainly no safe gîte higher up.

You will perhaps expect me to touch briefly on the previous climbing history of the Nord End from Macugnaga; if so, this is the best place. The first ascent was as far back as 1876, by Signor Luigi Brioschi, with the brothers Ferdinand and Abram Imseng, *via* what I shall call the right-hand route. Ferdinand is the hero indissolubly connected with the conquest of all this E. wall. He led Pendlebury and Taylor four years earlier (1872) on the first ascent of the Dufour Spitze from this side,* made the first ascent of our Nord End (1876), and was killed with Marinelli and an Italian guide while attempting the

* *A.J.* vol. vi. p. 232.



Sydney Spencer, photo.

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MONTE ROSA, FROM THE MONTE MORO PASS.
(WINTER.)

Dufour a second time in 1881. His death (he is buried in Macugnaga churchyard)

'but binds him to his native mountains more.'

The second Nord End ascent (1893) was made by Signor Restelli with Mathias Zurbriggen and Luigi Burgener. They preferred to pioneer another, a left-hand route, in my opinion much more dangerous and exposed. They found it all this, also very long and difficult, and were obliged to bivouac close to the summit, after sixteen hours' hard work.

Captain Farrar made the third (1898), led by that good judge Daniel Maquingaz, who, when their porter to the hut pointed out the left-hand route, positively and absolutely declined to have anything whatever to do with it. So they went right, left the cabane 4.15 A.M. and arrived at the Nord End summit 3.5 P.M. After such a restful day they naturally needed some exercise, so went on over the Silber-sattel to the Dufour Spitze (6.5) and Betemps Hut (8.30).

Number four climb (1900) was made by two Italian gentlemen, Signori Facetti and Ongania, in two parties, each with a guide and porter. It is believed they also followed the right-hand route, whence they reached the N.W. arête a little to the right of the summit, and went on down without quite touching it.

The fifth ascent (1901) was a very weird and dangerous one, made by Herren Reichert, Dorn, and Bridlinger. After two hours on the rocks above the hut, they took to the Marinelli Couloir itself (*query*, did their accident insurance policies cover this?), mounted in it for two hours, proceeding by iceridges and extremely steep rocks, and finished up the nearly perpendicular glacier coming down from the Silber-sattel. They reached the summit about 9.30 P.M., and of course had to sleep out; the only wonder being that they were not 'sleeping their last sleep' out!

Number six (1906). Dr. Julius Kugy, being with M. Zurbriggen and Josef Croux, naturally went by the former's left-hand route. A long description of the expedition was published, the most interesting portion being 'the tour much exceeded my expectations in grandeur and beauty, but is dangerous to a high degree from stones.'

The seventh climb (also in 1906, and not completed) was made without guides by Signori Antonio Castelnuovo and two others; but I do not know if they were the same two who were lost with him in 1909, and whose bodies have never yet

been found. They were forced (1906) to turn round some short distance under the summit by a violent wind, and had to descend the same way. This was truly a grievous misfortune; for had they completed their expedition then, there would have been no tragedy later. The names of the 1909 party were A. Castelnuovo, G. Bompadre, and P. Sommaruga.

The eighth and last I could hear of up to this last year was in 1909 by Signor Lampugnani with one or two companions, guideless; by which route I know not. There seem therefore to have been some eight ascents up to 1911, when there was quite what Farrar terms an 'English invasion.' At any rate (*sub rosa*) the numerous Super Rosa climbing notes in the 'A. J.' seemed to me almost as superfluous as my paper!

This little historical *résumé* shows that there are practically two distinct routes from the Capanna to the summit—the Imseng-Brioschi or right-hand, and the Zurbriggen-Restelli or left-hand route. Of these there can be little doubt that the right-hand is more direct, affords better climbing, crosses fewer of the steep couloirs, and is consequently less exposed to stone-falls. After an hour or two up a broken rock face—so broken up that if a few stones did fall there would be ample cover—you proceed by a moderately well-defined and somewhat bent rock rib, which you strike at its bottom, and which lands you many hours later on the top. The left-hand route, on the other hand, is mostly up very complicated and intricate rock terraces, the face being broken up into a series of minor, often disjointed, arêtes with avalanche troughs between them; the art consisting in making the least exposed connections.

To come back to the Marinelli hut and our own expedition. While we were preparing for dinner our porter startled us by pointing out three little black specks getting down off the steep rocks at the foot of the Grenzgipfel and disappearing into the big bergschlund just below them. This naturally caused some excitement, as no complete traverse over the Dufour Spitze from that side had ever been even attempted, and seemed almost like courting disaster! However, we could do nothing (except write a lengthy note in the hut book), and, though we repeatedly looked again, saw no more that evening; so we ate our dinner and made ourselves comfortable for the night. In early morning again we watched three twinkling lanterns slowly descending, and from their altered position it seemed that the men must have been on foot all night, and indeed worked through the icefall and névé above the upper part of Marinelli Couloir to a high patch of rocks on our (N.) side.



Sir A. B. W. Kennedy, photo.

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THE "GREAT WHITE THRONE."

This and other causes made our start a late one, and we did not get off till 4.10 A.M.

I never can recall all the details of a climb, but my companions have kindly helped me out with their recollections; and I have, so to speak, struck an average of all three. We were of course bound for what I have called the right-hand route, and the first part of the climb (rope unnecessary) consisted for a couple of hours or more of easy, ill-defined, broken rocks and moraine as already named, but always bearing up right to the rock arête to which I have also referred. This prominent rib is unmistakable, not only from its practical continuity, but also because it is always just above the S. side of another deep-cut avalanche trough, which starts just N. of our summit and terminates in the Nord End glacier. This trough, though smaller, is almost as well defined as the Marinelli itself, and (like the Marinelli) is not crossed on this climb. We got on to the ridge by its south or left-hand foot, roped, and worked for some time on it a little to the left of and just below its crest, on the side farthest away from the couloir.

After another hour or so we got up on to the actual crest itself and hardly again left it, climbing at first in two parties of three and four. Rolleston, however, whose herculean frame seems on such occasions to have incorporated the engines of a 100 h.p. F.I.A.T., soon left us behind, and we subdivided our party of four into two twos, Dolomite fashion. This alteration saved some little time, and we progressed steadily. The climbing on the arête, and particularly along its crest, was good, and the rocks almost invariably solid—nowhere outrageously difficult and certainly nowhere easy; but then we made a point of keeping to the ridge, avoiding any traversing underneath it, and only crossing such minor couloirs as were absolutely necessary.

At one point, however, about halfway up our friendly backbone, and just below where it has a sort of spinal curvature, this became impossible; for it was here intersected by a tributary couloir, across which we hurried, and beneath which our guides thought must somewhere be the icy tomb of the intrepid Italians. Either just before or just after this there was a tremendous fall of stones down the bigger trough on our right. A few of them cannoned up and on to the ridge somewhere between Rolleston and us, causing some little anxiety; but a few *jodels* quickly reassured both parties. On our other side huge avalanches hurtled down the Marinelli (one of them breaking right over the Imseng rocks) and never ceased all

day, confirming my view that the Dufour Spitze climb is almost without the pale.

Still, even at home one is not always free from this danger. Abroad I have had to cross some notorious avalanche tracks on some famous mountains—*e.g.* the Dom, Verte, Jorasses, Péteret, Ecrins, Scerscen, and Diamantidi. These and others were passed without incident; but, *per contra*, only this year, during the great snowstorm of January 18, and in my own obscure offices in England, I had to bolt, barely escaping burial under many tons of snow, ice, bricks, glass, and debris that slid off a lofty building, smashed a wall, and crashed through a skylight right over my head. No jury could have called this 'foolhardiness'; but a coroner, familiar with Alpine adventure, might have summed up 'death by anti-climax.'

Well, the higher we got the steeper grew the rocks, the hardest passage of all being very near the top. Our old friend the arête, behaving handsomely to the last, landed us, to our great delight, right on the actual summit. We were lucky in finding no *verglas* till within about an hour of this point, being much better fortune than we expected, and the weather overhead, as usual last year, was perfect.

This, too, was fortunate for our noctambulists, who had crossed us more or less within shouting distance, and proved to be the enterprising Heinrich Burgener and his brother Siegfried, with a climber who we afterwards learnt was Dr. Otto Stein of Dusseldorf.* Their indiscreet expedition was the invention of Heinrich, but he will never repeat it; to give him his due, he is not the sort to vacillate between

'The lust of lucre and the dread of death.'

The party had toiled all night and caught nothing (fortunately), crossed the Marinelli Couloir very high up during the darkness to the topmost rocks of Reichert's weird route, and then descended near the couloir to the Capanna Marinelli, taking a long rest there.

Our own climb was quite long enough, and I should describe its outstanding features as continuous hard work on good sound rocks, continuous roars of avoidable avalanches, and continuous sporting enjoyment. We reached our summit at 2.10 p.m., just ten hours from the start, and one and a

* *A. J.* vol. xxvi. p. 349.

half hour may be deducted for meals. The 'god outside the machine' had attained the Olympian heights one and three-quarter hour earlier, and was now only visible far away down near the Felsen.

We left again at three o'clock, and our descent was without special adventure. The easier and quicker way down by the southern rocks above the Silber-sattel, and thence by steep snowslopes which lower down join the ordinary Mont Rose route, was now barred to us by the wide bergschrunds of this long hot summer. There was nothing for it but to wade through the soft snow of the N.W. buttress for a quarter of an hour or so, and then take to the conspicuous steep rock-rib facing due W. Following Rolleston's and Lochmatter's tracks, we must have descended somewhat too low, and certainly did not hit off the right route; for it was found necessary to ascend the rocks again a little before going down them, mostly by the ridge, but partly also by a very smooth and slippery chimney which had not, I think, been my way on a former climb. We considered at the time this bit required more care than anything on the ascent; but perhaps it was only one of those mental delusions which at this stage sometimes come over tired people. Anyhow a hitched double rope came in very useful and saved time. Once on the easy névé we got on rapidly, and were soon at the Betemps Hut (six o'clock), finding that our friend Rolleston had arrived there about 3.15. We were glad of a comfortable tea and a short rest, and not sorry to get across the glacier before dark.

The moon rose brilliantly as we toiled up the long grind under the Gorner Grat, but later proved to be a source of exasperation, as she kept dodging us behind the various summits of first the Breithorn and then the Riffelhorn, her frequent total eclipses causing much stumbling and many unnecessary ejaculations. Indeed, Corning was afterwards heard to relate that I called her lunar majesty a 'verdammter Schweinhund,' whatever that may mean! Airy fantasies may once again have been begotten by tired brains; and my relative, whose linguistic and patois-istic knowledge is quite exceptional, possibly put his own poetic thoughts into my mouth!

We reached the Riffelhaus at 8.30, comfortably but not unduly fatigued after a glorious climb, slept soundly, and descended to Zermatt next morning by Gorner Grat electric express.

FINIS CORONAT OPUS.