

PASSAGE OF THE TRIFTJOCH AND ASCENT OF THE  
FINSTERAARHORN IN 1865, WITHOUT GUIDES.

(From letters addressed by the late Mr. Alfred Traill Parker,  
member of the Alpine Club, to his father.)

Chez Seiler, Zermatt, July 30, 1865.

**M**Y DEAR FATHER,—A rapid line from Sierre will have told you that we made out our first pass.

Wednesday was very wet at Lenk, so we only made out the Iffigen Bach.

Thursday looked hopeless at 3 A.M., but the rain stopped and we trapped it to the end of the road.

We had previously explored the way to the Fluh-See, so we took the driver and a lad to carry our sacks. We had to build cairns on the way up to guide them down.

They seemed much amused to see me take a header in the lake, but were evidently anxious to start down again, and made off best pace as soon as they were paid, without betraying any curiosity as to our progress.

We climbed up by the right bank of the Rüzli Glacier, where there seemed to be a constant cannonade of stones, so we hugged the rocks like a certain lady of our acquaintance. You remember how she used to coast along the wall coming from church on Sunday. It was fair travelling on the glacier, and at a point of rock we left our sacks to ascend the Strubel. The mists shut us in, and though we waited nearly an hour on the top we could not see anything. There are two or three peaks of nearly the same height. Ours had its cairn, but we cannot tell whether we were at the real summit. There is some confusion about the topography of the neighbouring glaciers, and after picking up our sacks we made quick travelling and soon had a shrewd suspicion that we were on the Glacier de la Plaine Morte, *alias* Wildstrubel, instead of the Lämmern. We pushed on for a good point of view, and our doubts were soon solved by seeing Sierre and Chippis below. As Sierre was our destination we saw no particular object in going by Schwarenbach and Leukerbad in preference to straight down the hill, so we made direct tracks. I enclose a gentian or two—they were the most perfect blue I have yet seen. Two hours over a stony valley, followed by windings among cliffs with

fine waterfalls, and a gorge like a small *Via Mala* brought us to some chalets and we were soon seated on three mushroom stools, and proceeded to put ourselves outside a bucket of very good cream. A strong-minded youth offered to take our sacks to Sierre, and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours—partly over sward, partly stony-hearted zigzags—brought us to the *Soleil*, Sierre, by the *Raspily Thal*. The views of the mountains south of the Rhone Valley must be splendid on a clear day, and I recommended mine host at Sierre to build an hotel there as well as at Zinal.

Friday we started for Zinal on three of the best nags the place could produce. You may remember the long slant above Chippis. While we were winding up, some pianofortes [rocks] were heard approaching, and presently one about the size of my head arrived best pace with a good deal of the forte and very little of the piano. I saw it would clear me, but I thought my mule would be short of a hind quarter or two; luckily it cleared us both, and Charles' mule must have had a good view of it, as there were not six feet between us. I should think it bounded 40 feet as it crossed the road. There was not much time for reflection, but I consider it the nearest approach to an accident I have had in the Alps.

The night looked so hopeless that we slept at Zinal instead of Arpitetta. I shall be sorry to see the little inn give place to a larger one which is being built. My bed was a climb of 5 feet from the ground.

On reflection we determined to give the Trift another chance in preference to the Moming, because, as we know both sides of it and were anxious to reach this for Sunday and the weather looked dubious, we should be able to make tracks—unless things looked very bad. We took a porter for two of the sacks to within  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours of the ladder and started at 2.30 A.M. We were so early that we had to cut some 100 steps up to the ladder. The rocks are considered a good hour, but we found it very difficult to make sure we were on the path and it took us nearly 3 hours to reach the col (12.15 P.M.).

The Zermatt view was limited by mist, but the near view on the Zinal side was very fine.

The névé was rather crevassed and we were dangling from our trusty rope more than once; a few steps cut in the ice brought us over the difficulties of the pass, and after a tedious descent over moraine we reached the sward at the foot of the Trift Glacier, and brewed lots of lemonade. We find lemons squeezed on lump sugar 'splendid invention and very portable.'

The most exciting work of the day was crossing the Triftbach, very much swollen. We found a place where three jumps served to make it practicable, so I was roped and led off, but No. 3 was unjumpable, so I returned. Charles then left us to descend by a path he knew, and Sandbach and I crossed by three jumps higher up—at the expense of being wet to the middle, and Sandbach's bâton lost in the final jump. We nearly got pipped on the way down, as the path is very difficult to find, but we got in by 6.45 and Charles turned up some two hours later. The place is crowded, and we slept in the 'salon de lecture,' but to-day we have No. 10, the best suite of rooms in the house. Professor Sellar and wife are here, and Reilly, A.C.

This morning we attended the funeral of the porter who was killed by the avalanche on Monte Rosa last Friday. He seems to have run into the way of it, while the others ran more out of the way.

Mr. Wilson's body is placed with the others in the churchyard next to Von Grote's tomb, and a few evergreens placed above.

When I have had a talk with McCormick, the chaplain, I will give you any details I can collect. I need hardly say that the recent events here will make us take every precaution for safety.

Albrecht, the Walkers' old guide, is here, and considers our Sierre Col a very useful one. He is surprised to hear it is so easy. We must name it.

I hope these yarns will not tire you.

We had a first-rate sermon from McCormick<sup>1</sup> and a very nice allusion to the recent accidents. He is a fine fellow, over 6 feet, and was in the Cambridge Eight and Eleven.

Love to you all.

Ever your affectionate son,  
(sd.) ALFRED T. PARKER.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Rev. Joseph McCormick was then chaplain at Zermatt. He was a great athlete, and had made in that year the ascent of Mont Blanc with Mr. Hudson's party. He took part in the recovery of the bodies of the men killed on the first ascent of the Matterhorn (*cf.* 'Scrambles,' 5th edition, p. 389). In his later years he was chaplain in the summer at Grindelwald and a great feature at the Bear. He died about two years ago, as rector of St. James's, Piccadilly.]

Bel Alp, Aug. 5, 1865.

. . . The weather has been sadly against us. I thought we had booked Monte Rosa. We shall try to 'Climb the dark Finster where road there is none.' I believe the work is rather in our line—rock climbing and such like. . . .

Cheval Blanc, Luzern, Aug. 13, 1865.

MY DEAR FATHER,—I sent you a pencil note from Viesch to announce the ascent of the Finster.

It happened on this wise :

On Wednesday afternoon the weather took a turn for the better and we decided to sleep again at the Faulberg, and to combine if possible the Finster and the Oberaarjoch next day.

There were two Englishmen and three guides already *en route* to the hut and after considerable delay, caused by a letter from Gladstone<sup>2</sup> to Charles arriving as we were starting, we got under weigh and reached the hut in less than three hours.

We had a convivial night, but individually I had no sleep, as the door was shut and the atmosphere questionable. I will back one of the guides for variety in snores against the field : one phase was exactly like the blowing a fat man makes when swimming against the tide. At midnight I got up and bribed the guide next the door by giving him my waterproof to let it remain open. I then got the fire ready and made coffee, and a little after 1 we started by moonlight on our respective expeditions—they for Jungfrau, we for Finster. It was hardly fair of their guides (whom we had tipped 5 fr.) to let us start the wrong way, as we had been told to make a wide *détour* to avoid crevasses in entering the Grünhorn Lücke. This was unnecessary and our ways would have lain together for the first half-hour. The night was cloudy and cold, but we soon got into our stride, and were sitting at the top of the 'Greenhorn's Gap,' looking down at the roots of the Finster, when dawn arrived. He looked somewhat stiff, and was guarded by as mazy a labyrinth of crevasses, hidden and otherwise, as we ever saw—though we could not say the same some 18 hours later.

We picked out our ridge (*vide* Hardy's account in 'Peaks and

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<sup>2</sup> [The Rev. Stephen Gladstone.]

Passes'), but soon thought an ice slope on the right of it was easier and worked up it, cutting some 300 steps. Then rock again to the snow-fields, which were rather soft, and about the Titlis angle in the steepest part. We found fifty steps at a time enough, and were sometimes down to thirty. About noon we were at the foot of the final arête of rocks, which are said to take two hours, but as we had another 100 steps to cut it took us 2½. The views down on the glaciers towards Grimsel and Grindelwald were splendid, but the mists rolled up as we neared the top and we saw very little on arrival.

By the time we reached the foot of the ridge it was sleeting and hailing apace, and our footsteps were mostly obliterated; luckily the small round holes made by the points of our axes were not filled up, so they left a faint track—but we were disappointed of the glissades, the prospect of which had consoled us during our upward toil.

When we got down to the glacier it was dense mist; it was some 3 hours back to the Faulberg, and Charles proposed Viesch by the Viesch Glacier—some 6 hours, he supposed. As I expected to sleep out anyhow, and we had little to eat and were wet through even if we did reach Faulberg, I gave in to the Viesch plan, and as the mist rose a little we made rapid travelling down; but we were soon in clouds again, and instead of bearing away to land on the right we went down to the junction of the Viesch and Rothhorn Glaciers, and were soon in the most diabolical mesh of crevasses that we had ever encountered. It looked very like sleeping in one, but by some gymnastics which we should have spared in cold blood we emerged on the right bank of the Viesch Glacier.

Here daylight failed us, and as the next process was to find a waterfall down which people are lowered by ropes we determined to have table d'hôte and a night's lodging. Bread and cheese were the former, and we had a very fine selection of flat stones for the latter. It was not warm, but we were thankful for small mercies; stones were better than crevasses for beds, and the charge for service was not likely to be exorbitant.

As nights go, 11,000 feet above the sea, it was warm, and we had no rain, but most of the time was passed in walking up and down opposite each other like beasts at the Zoological Gardens waiting to be fed.

Dawn at 4 A.M. failed to show Charles where the track was, and we were just going to mount and cut our way across the snout of the Trift Glacier (which would probably have proved

a failure) when I espied a goat track which led to the waterfall. We got down without ropes, but had plenty of steering among crevasses before reaching Viesch at 1.30 p.m. It would have been much better to have made for Grimsel than Viesch, but Charles seemed to have forgotten the nature of the glacier we had to pass.

As you will remember, Viesch is celebrated for the variety of its beverages, and we tried most of them. Gladstone turned up just as we had finished, so we drove to Rhone Glacier in two traps, and sent a man up to Grimsel for our sacks.

We met Charles' friend (?) Legard fresh from Grimsel, who asked if we knew anything of the three Englishmen who had tried the Finster without guides—and perished. It would require the lives of a cat to keep up the credit of being alive with the Grimsel folk.

We made a fine day's travelling yesterday. Left Rhone Glacier at 9.30 on four horses; walked from Furca to Realp, waited  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour for Sandbach, who was botanising on the old road, and were driven in a three-horse shay, with two minutes to spare, and only one halt of 10 minutes (no change of horses) to the 5 p.m. boat at Fluelen. Schweizer Hof is full, so we came here—good cuisine, civil people, but in the town. The Schweizer Hof is immensely improved, and we had a table d'hôte at 4 fr. in a room which *à mon avis* surpasses the Grand Hotel. We wired in vain for rooms from Altdorf—where I did not see the lovely Minna.

Love to all of you.

Ever yours affectionately,  
(sd.) ALFRED T. PARKER.

#### *Note on the Descent of the Fiescher Glacier.*

It is very interesting to read these remarks on the Fiescher Glacier. It would appear that Charles Parker had been up or down this glacier on some previous occasion, and one may conclude that it was at that date not difficult, or he would not have suggested following it again.

In 'A.J.' i. 108 the party (Stephen, Hardy, Liveing and Morgan, with the two Michels, P. Baumann, C. Bohren, and Inäbnit) which, on July 9, 1862, had crossed the Fiescherjoch from the Kastenstein, 'left the Grünhorn Lücke on our right, struck into the Oberaarjoch route, passed the wilderness of

boulders and mossy slopes, where a few wretched sheep pick up a mysterious existence above the Viescher Glacier, descended the well-known waterfall, and after a rapid march found ourselves at 7.30 at the point where the stream from the Märjelen-See descends beneath the ice close to a few isolated huts.'

It is quite obvious that at that time it was a regular route, offering no difficulty. The 'well-known waterfall' is no doubt that referred to in Mr. Alfred Parker's letter.

From a somewhat cursory examination I find in the older Alpine literature three references to this Fiescher Glacier route.

There is an interesting description of 'the Glacier of Viesch' in chap. iii. of Forbes's 'Excursions in the Alps,' printed at the end of his 'Norway and its Glaciers,' and in Mr. Coolidge's edition of Forbes's 'Travels through the Alps,' pp. 427-440.

Forbes, with five companions, including Agassiz, Desor, and Duchâtelier, and six guides,<sup>3</sup> the leaders being the famous Jakob Leuthold and Johann Währen, who made in 1829 the first ascent of the Finsteraarhorn, left the Grimsel on August 27, 1841, crossed the Oberaarjoch when Leuthold 'decided that . . . the glacier of Viesch should be descended to the Möriller See. . .'

Forbes proceeds to give an eloquent description of the splendours of the ice-scenery of the glacier. 'The ice now became too crevassed to be passed in the centre, and an extensive tributary glacier . . . falling in from the right [the Walliser-Fiescher Firn] we were unable to follow the side, and were obliged to pass over the latter, which was fearfully crevassed and appeared all but impracticable. Nevertheless the skill of our guides accomplished this with very few bad steps, and we resumed the right moraine of the united glacier. After a pause we proceeded, not without difficulty, being forced in one place to leave the glacier entirely, and to climb the rocks and re-descend a considerable precipice again to its level.'

Forbes's further description of the romantic gorge, through which the neighbouring Great Aletsch Glacier reaches the valley ('Norway,' 327-9), makes one resolve to repeat, at the earliest moment, this magnificent walk.

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<sup>3</sup> Two of these were Johann Janon [Jaun] and Melchior Bannholzer. The travellers and guides named ascended the Jungfrau next day. Desor in 'Excursions et séjours' also describes this journey and mentions that sheep were got up the 'considerable precipice' by means of ropes, and left to graze all summer.

The next mention I have been able to find of this glacier is in Tyndall's 'The Glaciers of the Alps.' In 1858 Tyndall made with Bennen alone the ascent of the Finsteraarhorn. It was the first of their many great expeditions. They had started from the Faulberg, but 'finding, however, that we could traverse the Viescher Glacier almost to the Aeggischhorn, I made this our highway homewards. . . . The glacier was deeply fissured, but there was no swerving, no retreating, no turning back to seek more practicable routes. . . . We left the glacier for a time, and proceeded along the mountain side, till we came near the end of the Trift Glacier, where we let ourselves down an awkward face of rock along the track of a little cascade and came upon the glacier once more. . . . The glacier, as is well known, is greatly dislocated, and has once or twice proved a prison to guides and travellers, but Bennen led me through the confusion without a pause.'

In 1863 Tyndall, Jaun and Bennen crossed the Oberaarjoch in a thick fog. 'I knew the Viesch Glacier well, and how Bennen meant to unravel its difficulties without landmarks I knew not. I asked him whether, if the fog continued, he could make his way down the glacier. There was a pleasant *timbre* in Bennen's voice, a light and depth in his smile, due to the blending together of conscious strength and warm affection. With this smile he turned round and said 'Herr, ich bin hier zu Hause. Der Viescher Gletscher ist meine Heimath.' . . . By degrees the fissures opened, and at length drove us to the rocks. These in their turn became impracticable. Dropping down a waterfall well known to the climbers of this region, we came again upon the ice, which was here cut by complex chasms. These we unravelled as long as necessary, and finally escaped from them to the mountain side.' †

I notice that Mr. Valentine Richards, in his edition of Ball's 'The Central Alps,' Part I., p. 145, describes the route formerly followed on the Fiescher Glacier and mentions the shrinkage of the glacier, and on page 103 he goes on to say: 'This glacier presents the same contrasts to the Aletsch Glacier that a rapid mountain torrent does to a calm river,' with which I thoroughly agree. In the earlier edition of Ball (reprint, 1876), p. 126, the route down the Fiescher Glacier is described with great fulness, showing that it was formerly often followed.

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† See *Hours of Exercise in the Alps*. New impression, 1906, p. 175.

Of late years it has been very seldom visited. No doubt the Concordia inn has drawn off travellers to the Aletsch Glacier route, but apart from that the Fiescher Glacier has, from my own experience during the last thirty years, shrunk very considerably and become much more broken.

In 1883 we went from the Eggishorn to the site of the old Oberaar hut by the Fiescher Glacier, which we gained at the point 'Beim weissen Fläsch' of the Siegfried map, to which point there existed a path along the W. side of the glacier, and after traversing the Finsteraarhorn<sup>5</sup> next day we returned the same way. We had some difficulty with crevasses in the broken ice below the Rothhorn, where the pressure of the Galmi Firn is felt.

In 1913 Fynn and I gained the crest of the S.E. arête of the Finsteraarhorn<sup>6</sup> from the Finsteraarhorn hut, and as it was only 8 A.M. when we regained the glacier I suggested descending direct to Fiesch by the Fiescher Glacier. We accordingly picked up our porter and traversed the S.W. flank of the S.E. arête towards the point 2972 of the Finsteraar-Rothhorn. We then descended to the Fiescher Glacier, which we proceeded to follow to its very tongue. I counted four icefalls, which made the ice work most interesting. The last and greatest threatened to beat us, and I was almost prepared for a partial re-ascent, so as to try to get out on the rock banks of the glacier and thus turn the fall, although the bases of these, by the shrinkage of the glacier, appeared almost hopelessly smooth. Meantime, while we were looking about, the indefatigable Fynn had disappeared, and after a bit a loud halloo from the avalanche beds below the fall told us of his success. It appeared that he had cut down the right side of the glacier and then squeezed himself along between it and the wet rock-wall. The porter, whose previous glacier experience was limited to the walk up to Concordia, was much edified when we followed the same way.

I did not see the path on the W. bank followed in 1883, possibly as the glacier level is now too low. Nor am I aware whether the ice can now be gained or quitted 'Beim weissen Fläsch' as previously. It is very questionable, as the bounding W. walls seemed very polished.

The scenery on this glacier is very wild, the gorges descending from the Kl. Wannehorn being of the most savage description.

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<sup>5</sup> *A.J.* xi. 368-9.

<sup>6</sup> *A.J.* xxvii. 287.

It is a long way to Fiesch, which we only reached about 6, without pressing ourselves, and after a very enjoyable day. We were told that the Fiescher Glacier had not been descended for many years and had turned back more than one party, as indeed I can well believe might be the case in a less snowy year than 1913.

At the same time I can strongly recommend the expedition, especially for a strong party making an early return from the Finsteraarhorn or when the weather appeared too doubtful for a high ascent. The ice work will not disappoint the most exacting iceman.

J. P. FARRAR.

#### EARLY ATTEMPTS ON THE AIGUILLES DU GÉANT AND DU DRU.

By E. R. WHITWELL.

AT a Guest Night at a Temple Dinner about a year since I had the pleasure of renewing my acquaintance with Sir Edward Davidson, and we talked about our early Alpine days (mine a good deal earlier than his, of course), and the subject of the Dent du Géant came up and my unsuccessful attempt on it in 1872.

The sequel to this was that two or three weeks ago the energetic Assistant Editor of the ALPINE JOURNAL, Captain Farrar, wrote to me asking if I would give an account of my attempted ascent on the Dent du Géant, pressing me to make it as full as I could, and I promised to put down my recollections of a very exciting time.

On looking through my memoranda, unfortunately nearly the whole of that relating to this mountain is lost, but there are parts of the climb still very vivid in my memory. Under these circumstances I suggested that I could add an account of an attempt on the Aiguille du Dru in 1874, and he was good enough to say that this, he knew, would be of interest to the readers of the JOURNAL. I am fortunate to find what was evidently the beginning of a paper containing a short history of my attempt, never finished, no doubt because I hoped at the time to be able to combine with the attempt an account of the completed ascent! This, unfortunately, did not come off, as I never had another fine day on which to try the mountain.