

ETON COLLEGE MEMORIAL SERVICE.—A memorial service for the four Eton masters killed on Piz Roseg was held in the College Chapel on September 22, in the presence of the Headmaster, Mr. Claude A. Elliott, Dr. C. A. Alington, the Provost, Governing Body and a great crowd of sympathizers. Sir John J. Withers, President, represented the Alpine Club.

Obituaries of Messrs. Slater, Howson and Powell will appear in the May, 1934, number of the JOURNAL.

---

## ACCIDENTS IN 1933.

THE season, save for a few unfortunate mishaps, was singularly free from accidents up to the end of July. Following the heavy snowfalls of May and June, conditions were most favourable, and the weather extremely fine and warm. Suddenly, about the end of the first week of August, catastrophes began to occur throughout the length and breadth of the Alps. So frequent were these that over 90 deaths are calculated to have taken place in that one month alone.

August 17 was a disastrous day for British mountaineering. It will be remembered for its twofold tragedies. Not since the Matterhorn accident of 1865 and the Gran Paradiso disaster of 1904 have the lives of four Britons—three of them members of the Alpine Club—been involved in one day on a single mountain. Let us say it at once<sup>1</sup>: Hugh Howson, Eric Powell, Charles White-Thomson and that sturdy veteran 'Sam' Slater, formed an experienced and thoroughly competent party. For many seasons, generally in company, they had accomplished first-class ascents regularly and without professional assistance. The ascent of Piz Roseg lay easily within their powers. Had we, a week previously, been asked the question of what was the chief Alpine characteristic of the doomed party, we should have replied unhesitatingly: 'Their high factor of safety.'

To Eton and the rising generation their loss is grievous; to British mountaineering it may prove a set-back as serious as the fatal July 14, 1865.

The same August day witnessed the death of a guide closely connected with the history of this Club—the incomparable Franz Lochmatter himself. We employ the superlative purposely. In the long list of outstanding Alpine professionals, beginning and ending with the two Christians, Almer and Klucker, Franz was perhaps unique. To paraphrase a great mountaineer and writer: '... In Franz was produced probably the most perfect mountaineer,

---

<sup>1</sup> An unusual amount of nonsense uttered by well-meaning but irresponsible persons has appeared in the Press.

physically and temperamentally, whom the Alps have known.' This is the considered and published opinion of one who had been present with Franz on a terrible occasion, 'the most dangerous expedition in the lives of two men, the writer and the guide.' No man, amateur or professional, will be more regretted. The noble tribute to his memory paid elsewhere in this same JOURNAL, will find an echo in the hearts of generations of mountaineers yet unborn.

Of other accidents, one of the most serious entailed the deaths on the Matterhorn, on July 7, of Signori Amilcare Crétier and Basileo Olliatti, together with the guide Antonio Gaspard. The party had attained the *Pic Tyndall* direct from the S.<sup>2</sup> and were descending by the ordinary Italian ridge. The party was composed of some of the most skilful of young Italians. No less than *five* other accidents have occurred on the Swiss side of the Matterhorn, for one of which at any rate, at the very base of the N. face, there seems to have been no excuse. Herr G. Kröner,<sup>3</sup> desperate climber and well-known Munich artist, was overwhelmed by falling rocks, his companion, Herr W. Stoesser, escaping by having taken cover in the bergschrund. It would have been hard to find a more unsuitable late summer for attempts on the N. face. We must consider this regretfully as a case of bad mountaineering, and on a par with the accident, reported in these pages, on Mont Blanc de Courmayeur.

Besides those related, other disasters have occurred on La Meije, Mt. Pelvoux (Momie Glacier), the Mer de Glace face of the Aiguille de Grépon, Aiguilles Dorées, Lysjoch, Zinal-Rothhorn, Piz Bernina, Gross Glockner region (in which an Englishman perished), Guglia di Brenta, where three young Germans, including a girl, fell while trying a peak far too severe for their powers. Besides these, countless others are recorded in the Eastern Alps and Dolomites.

Further comment is superfluous as well as useless.

#### *The Accident near La Grave.*

ON Sunday, August 13, R. P. Verschoyle and I set out from La Bérarde for the Promontoire hut. On the rocks below that hut we met Casimir Rodier, returning from his assault on the *Couloir en Z*, on the N. face of La Meije.<sup>4</sup> At the hut we discovered three other caravans which meant to traverse La Meije.

In view of the iced condition of the Glacier Carré, we decided to

<sup>2</sup> See *Alpes Valaisannes*, ii, 'route 633,' pp. 292-3. The party is stated in the Press to have been 'practising for the N. face of the Grandes Jorasses.' The British Press was ill-informed enough to magnify the two deaths that have occurred on that latter face, into the preposterous statement that 'twenty-seven persons had already been killed there.'

<sup>3</sup> *A.J.* 43, 371, footnote 3; 44, 334-6; 45, 107.

<sup>4</sup> P. 404.

make an early start. When I looked out at 2 A.M. the moon was beginning to illuminate the rocks above the hut, which had hitherto been in shadow, so we started at once. At dawn we were at the foot of the *Grande Muraille*, and at 7.30 were breakfasting on the summit. The sky had suddenly become overcast while we were on the *Cheval rouge*, and our arrival on the top was simultaneous with the first fall of hail. We decided that it would be better to go on than to turn back, particularly in view of the fact that there were three caravans behind us. We therefore continued the traverse, at first in hailstorms separated by fair intervals. Before however reaching the Pic Central, the hail began to be accompanied by thunder, while on the Pic itself we had the usual phenomena which an electric storm produces on a narrow ridge. We reached the summit shortly before noon, and immediately descended to the point where it is customary to leave the ridge. Here we joined the first French party, which had passed us while we were on the Grand Pic. As things were now extremely unpleasant on the arête we tied our climbing rope and theirs to our *rappel* (their *rappel* line had been used by both parties for the descent into the *Brèche Zsigmondy*, and left there for the third caravan) and in this way made a *rappel* which we hoped would be long enough to reach the schrund, though as visibility was then about 10 yards we could not be sure of this until the first man had descended. This duly succeeded. I was the last man to go, and as these proceedings had taken some time, the third party had arrived before I left. I learnt from them that they had left the other *rappel* cord for the fourth party, so I arranged with them that they should now use our cord, which we would leave *in situ*, and bring it in with them. It was no weather in which to linger on a sharp ridge.

Soon afterwards the weather cleared and Verschoyle and I arrived at the Refuge de l'Aigle at about 2.30 in bright sunshine, the sky being cloudless.

As the storm had been quite general throughout the district and very violent, I was anxious to telephone to my wife before nightfall; all the more as I had arranged to do this before leaving La Bérarde. I knew that the telephone exchange closed at 6 P.M., and that it would probably take more than 2 hrs. to reach the valley from the hut, since the Tabuchet Glacier might be expected to be badly crevassed in its lower part, making it necessary to take the rather circuitous route—'empruntant du sentier du Bec de l'Homme,' in M. Gaillard's words. Verschoyle had gone down by this route the year before with Casimir Rodier and he described the way to me. It was decided that I, as the faster member of the party, should go down first and endeavour to reach the telephone before 6, while Verschoyle should follow with the spare rope when it arrived.

I left the hut about 3 P.M., following the La Grave route to the base of the Glacier du Bec de l'Homme. La Grave is invisible from this point and I became involved in various scrambles and détours,

with the result that I finally got to Villard d'Arène just after the exchange had closed, and presently walked along the high road to La Grave. Shortly before 7 P.M. rain began to fall, and the storm was renewed later with great violence. On this day was the only bad weather experienced in 3 weeks.

I expected Verschoyle at the Meije Hôtel about 8 P.M., but when he did not arrive I concluded that he had been delayed at the hut, and when it became certain that more bad weather was at hand had then decided to stay the night.

The storm during the night brought down the telephone wires, and I therefore went round to La Bélarde by the first 'bus in the morning. It was not until our friend failed to arrive on the evening 'bus that we became alarmed. Immediately afterwards, while ordering a car to take us to La Grave, I received a message by the now restored telephone to say that he was dead.

From circumstantial evidence it seems to be possible to reconstruct the sequence of events with some degree of certainty. According to the French party, whom I afterwards met again at La Bélarde, he left the hut at 5 P.M. He was found at a point about 1½ hrs.' walk below it, so that it is not likely that the slip was caused by the storm, which was not renewed until later; this view is considerably strengthened by the fact that he was wearing no upper garment but a shirt, although he had four woollies and a wind-jacket with him. He was lying on the scree at the summit of the old moraine which runs up from La Grave to meet the rocks of the Bec de l'Homme at the present foot of the Tabuchet Glacier, and had evidently fallen from the rocks. He lay at the foot of a small buttress; had he fallen more than 60 ft. he would probably have been in one or other of the gullies bordering it. The back of his head was smashed, and he must have died instantly. Close beside him was the clip from one of the slings of his rucksack. The sack itself was missing. This is probably the explanation of the accident. On a previous occasion this clip had released the sling it held and upset his balance, but we were then roped. I was under the impression that the defect had been repaired, but as the clip when found was wide open and, since so light an article would hardly be damaged by a fall, it appears likely that it had released the sling as he was descending, and that in endeavouring to secure it he caught the clip only and lost his balance. The sack must have rolled far down the scree and probably into the torrent; I sent a porter to look for it, but he found nothing.

The rocks from which our friend fell were not difficult, although he was some distance below the proper route, having taken a direct line for the head of the moraine instead of steering towards the lowest reaches of the Tabuchet Glacier, below the serious crevasses. He was always careful—almost to a fault—and the theory outlined above appears the most probable on the available evidence.

The French party descending the following day came upon his body, and took the news to La Grave, where the Mayor, M. Juge,

organized a party of guides and porters, who brought it down. I cannot close this account without saying that the French authorities were all extremely kind and helpful; we were also particularly indebted to M. Tairraz of La Bérarde, who did everything possible to assist us, with the most practical and thoughtful sympathy.

We buried our friend in the little churchyard at St. Christophe, where Emil Zsigmondy and a goodly company of mountaineers lie.

G. F. PEAKER.

*The Accident on Mont Blanc de Courmayeur.*

SIGNOR DON R. CAJRATI-CRIVELLI is good enough to forward the following account :

' On August 25, five officers and fifteen rank and file of the 4th *Alpini*, together with the Courmayeur guide Evaristo Croux, were *en route* for Mont Blanc from the Dôme hut, intending to descend by the Midi route. Having attained the Vallot hut, we found there two men, Palozzi and Giolitto. The former stated that five of his companions were still bivouacking close to Mt. Blanc de C., while he and Giolitto had attained the hut the night before. I unroped from my soldiers and went over Mt. Blanc to Mt. Blanc de C., where, a little below the summit on the Brenva side, I found the five men, two still in a fairly good state, one half-frozen and two already dead from hunger and exhaustion. Having left them some food and drink, I went back at once to the summit of Mt. Blanc, where I found our party. I reported to my Captain, and decided with him to convoy to the Dôme hut the three survivors, as also the bodies of the other two. Accordingly, while some of us took charge of the living, Croux, the soldiers Carrel, Ronc, Jordan, Mochet, Rosetti (all of the 'Aosta' Bn.) and myself took charge of the dead. From the summit of Mt. Blanc downwards we were helped by three other soldiers and, from the Vallot hut, by two more and a 2nd Lieutenant. Three officers and five men accordingly escorted the five survivors, while two officers and ten rank and file were in charge of the bodies as far as the Dôme hut. We left Mt. Blanc de C. at 11.30, attaining the Dôme hut at 17.45. Transport of the bodies was rather awkward on the Bionnassay ridge.

' As you can perceive we accomplished nothing very remarkable, but I must say that the behaviour of our soldiers was magnificent for good-will and the spirit of self-sacrifice. Of course, we conveyed the five survivors from the Dôme hut to Courmayeur. The soldiers were accordingly on their feet from 01.30 on the 25th till 02.00 on the 26th—over 24 hours.

' If you are thinking of sending these details to the Editor of the "A.J." you are at liberty to do so, but please *do not mention* our names, only that of Evaristo Croux. If you wish to know of the adventures of the seven men who spent 7 days on the Péteret ridge, read *La Stampa* of August 27, where things are related sufficiently well. As I said before, if you care to do so, send this short account to Colonel Strutt, but *no names*. You may only mention to him

the splendid behaviour of the soldiers of the 4th *Alpini*, and particularly of those belonging to the "Aosta" battalion.'

[To complete the story, we publish the following summary from *La Stampa*.]

The party of seven left the 'Fiat' *gîte*, near the Péteret ridge, on Friday morning, August 18, to make the ascent of Mt. Blanc by the Péteret arête. They spent the night in the Gamba hut. On the morning of August 19, they left on two ropes for the Aiguille Blanche, bivouacking, according to plan, at the *Punta Gugliermina* (4000 m., *Vt.*), all being in good condition. On the 20th they traversed the Aiguille Blanche and attained the Col de Péteret, where night and storm overtook them. They were compelled to take shelter in a kind of hollow in the ice, the storm raging with the greatest violence. Tent-sacks were got out and the party, still in good condition, spent the night. With the dawn of August 21, no improvement in the weather took place and retreat was decided on. This proving *impossible*,<sup>5</sup> the party endeavoured to continue the ascent towards Mt. Blanc. In the afternoon of the same day, the weather appearing slightly better, they bivouacked in the upper Péteret *gîte*, some 1300 ft. below the summit. On the 22nd, in a raging snowstorm, they took the entire day to scale the intervening distance towards Mt. Blanc de C., which was attained at 17.00 in a terrible northerly gale. Again compelled to bivouac, they dug themselves into a crevasse at a height of 4700 m. The party is stated to have been still in good condition, but provisions were all exhausted on that same morning. During the whole of Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights (August 22-24) they were storm-bound in the crevasse, the fierce gusts preventing any movement. Finally, about midday on the 24th, after a vain effort to move the others, Palozzi and Giolitto decided to push on towards the Vallot hut to seek help. They state that the others who remained in the crevasse were still in good health. Towards evening they attained the hut and obtained provisions and drink from the *gardien* [?—*sic*] both for themselves as for their companions, but the late hour compelled them to wait in the hut for daylight. On the morning of the 25th the weather was clear and they met the officers and soldiers as reported above.

The names of the victims were Cuschera and Capo. Of the five survivors, four are stated to be in good health, but the other is severely frost-bitten.

[We are informed on the best authority that *two* only of the party of seven were capable mountaineers, and this for an attempt by the Péteret ridge, once considered the greatest expedition in the Alps. The escape of any of the party is nothing less than a miracle.

As regards all ranks of the *Alpini*, their courage, devotion and skill are surpassed only by the modesty of their leader.—*Editor*.]

<sup>5</sup> Our italics.

*The Accident on the Weisshorn.*

ON August 17, 1933, six parties left the hut to ascend the Weisshorn by the ordinary, E. arête, route. Four of these reached the summit at about 8.30 A.M. The weather, fine on starting, had deteriorated, and it was snowing as we went up the snow ridge. Owing to the cold and wind no halt was made on the top.

Except for the falling snow, which was more a nuisance than a hindrance, the conditions were excellent. The first party, consisting of two young Germans, descended very fast and soon outdistanced the other parties, though these, with Franz Lochmatter's party in front, were very soon down to the rock ridge. Here the rocks, which had been dry on the ascent, were covered with about an inch of snow, making the holds rather wet.

The parties were now in the following order: Hotz and Lochmatter; Malcolm, Herbert and Smith Barry; a Swiss climber and Niklaus Brantschen (guide and also guardian at the Weisshorn hut). As Hotz, who was in front, was somewhat slow, the three parties gradually closed up. Progress was quite steady to the first gendarme (*i.e.* 'first' when ascending the ridge), where we all arrived close together. Here Brantschen passed his tourist and the English party, so that he was with Malcolm at the top of the gendarme. At this point Herbert and Smith Barry proceeded to take some extra rope out of the latter's sack, as they considered that Smith Barry would require a greater length for roping down last. Smith Barry was thus occupied with the rope when the accident took place. Malcolm and Brantschen were standing immediately above Hotz and Lochmatter.

The difficulty on the gendarme (which is more of a step in the ridge than a real gendarme) is very slight, it being a question of a single hold only which is a foot or so out of reach. On the ascent this is negotiated by giving the first man a push up, and on the descent by passing the rope over a notch in the ridge and holding it from below, the last man sliding down the rope for the foot or so necessary to bring him to a foothold on a little ledge. Having let Hotz down on to the ledge Lochmatter got him to move to his left (facing inwards), till the former stood just at the corner, or on the actual ridge. Franz then placed the rope over the notch, which is on the actual ridge and a few feet above Hotz's head. Climbing down as far as he could, Lochmatter directed Hotz to hold his end of the rope taut and then slid down, using it as a hand-hold. Malcolm watching from a few feet above saw Lochmatter reach the ledge—certainly with one foot, possibly with both—and being sure that he was safely down looked away and prepared to descend himself. However, at that moment Lochmatter for some reason found it necessary to again put his weight on the rope, but it slipped out of the notch, and he lost his balance and fell backwards. It is not clear why the rope slipped out of the notch, but it must have been either because Hotz, seeing Lochmatter already down on the ledge beside him, had let go of his end, or that instead of holding his end down

vertically below the notch he tended to pull it out towards himself, when the notch being rather shallow and the rock wet and slippery with new snow, the rope slipped out. Brantschen, who saw it happen, is inclined to think it was from the latter cause.

Franz Lochmatter fell about 10 ft. when his legs struck a ledge. The N. slope of the ridge is very steep, and he fell about 20 ft. further before striking again, head downwards, on his back. The pull came on Hotz at about the same moment and, having no belay, he was dragged off with great force. They both struck about 100 ft. lower down and later disappeared in a flurry of snow towards the Bies Glacier.

The accident occurred at about 10.15. The other parties reached the hut at 12.30, and the accident was reported at Randa at 2.10 P.M.

G. F. SMITH BARRY.

A. D. MALCOLM.

H. R. HERBERT.

September 15, 1933.

Niklaus Brantschen, the guide, has transmitted some further details :

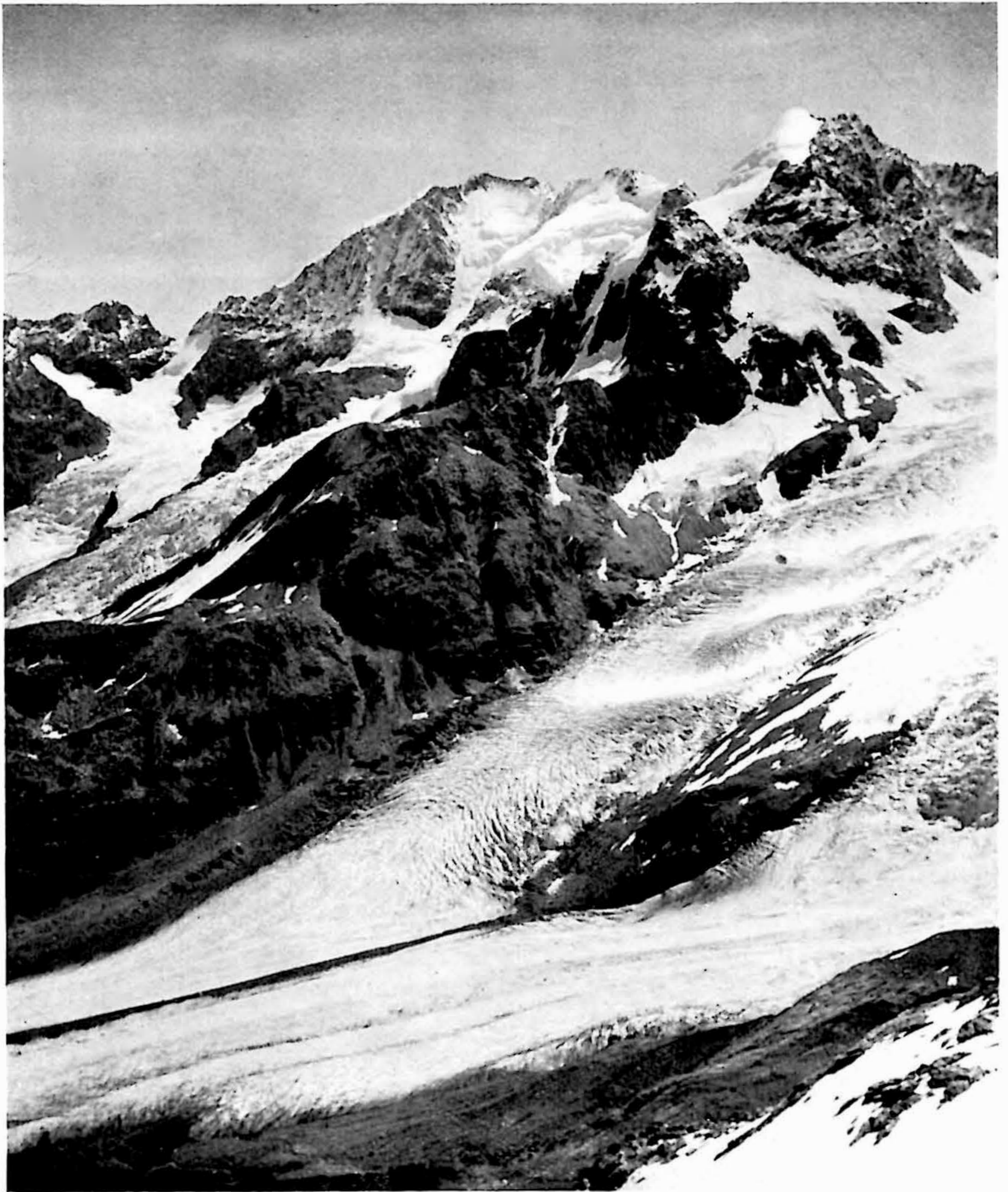
Franz called to Hotz to hold the rope firm over the usual notch ; and then let himself shoot down to full length, using his fingers on the last holds above, and possibly with one hand on the rope. He had, at full length, still 30 cm. of clear drop, to alight on the ledge below his feet. As he transferred his whole weight to the rope, he found that it was not being held, or had slipped ; and, simultaneously, that he was travelling down too far to the right for the foothold-ledge. He was moving with too great *élan* to be able to check pace or direction—failing the brake of the rope. He shouted warning to Hotz, and shot past the foot-ledge. If he touched it at all, his foot on it served only to hurl him outward. He was probably killed by striking the side of his head at the end of his first fall. With the exception of this wound, and damage to one foot, he was found apparently uninjured.—G. W. Y.

#### *The Accident on Piz Roseg.*

ON August 10, 1933, there arrived at the Hôtel des Alpes, Samaden, a party consisting of Messrs. E. V. Slater, E. W. Powell, H. E. E. Howson and C. K. White-Thomson. All four were masters at Eton, and were unmarried. The first three were members of the Alpine Club, and the fourth would have been qualified shortly ; he was a son of the Bishop of Ely. Subsequent to their arrival they climbed Piz d'Aela in the 'Bergün Dolomites.'

On Wednesday, August 16, they announced their intention of climbing Piz Roseg (12,934 ft.), and started for the Tschierva hut for that purpose. They slept that night in the hut and, the weather being fair, left next morning early to make the ascent. The weather was sultry and thundery during the day. The party never returned.

On Friday, August 18, two other parties, Swiss and Italian, one led



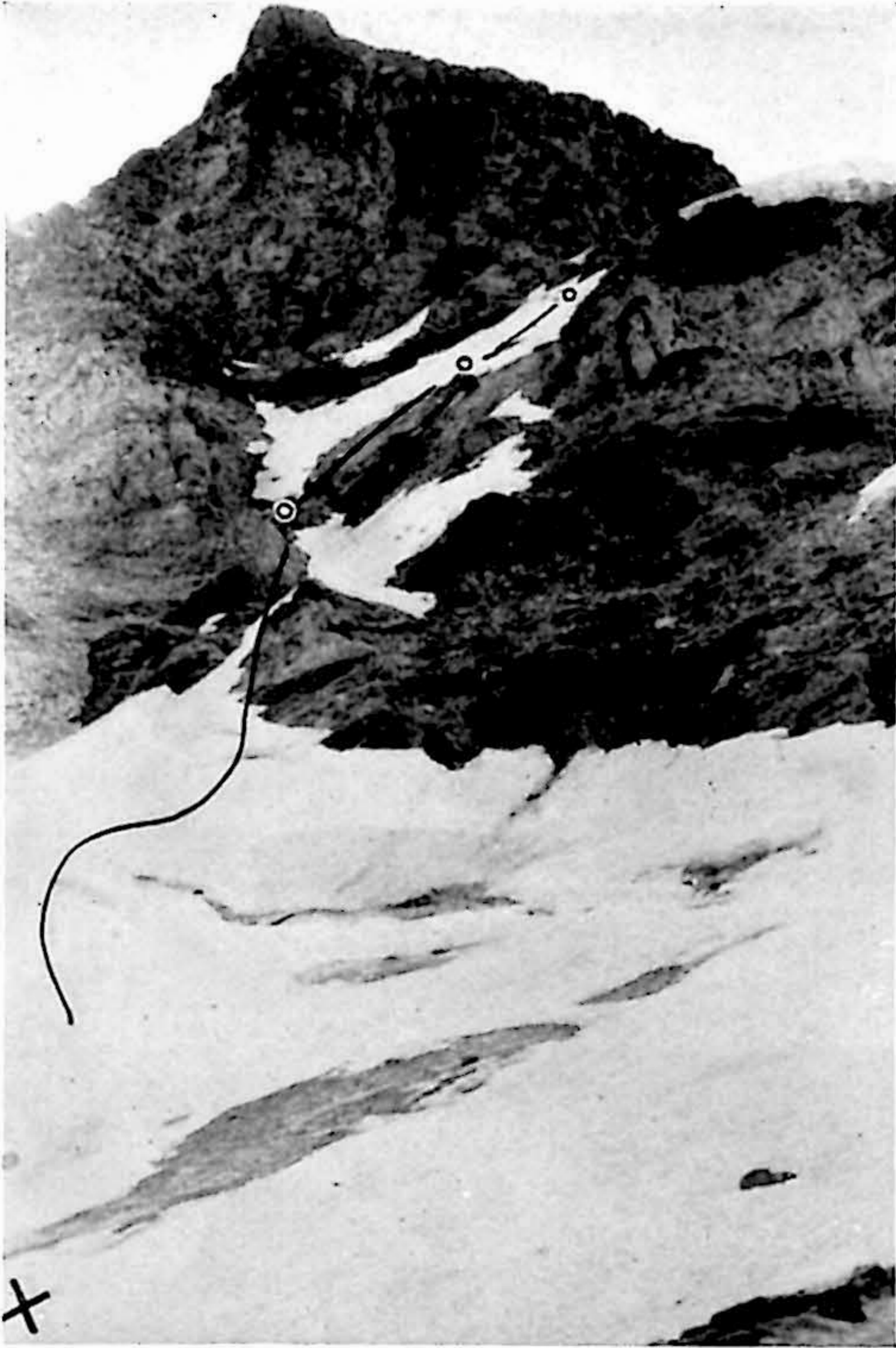
*Photo, J. E. Montgomery.]*

PIZ ROSEG, WITH SCENE OF THE ACCIDENT OF AUGUST 17, 1933.

(Taken from Piz Lej Alv at 11 A.M. on August 16, 1933.)

× Upper cross is scene of slip ; middle cross is place where bodies struck the rocks ;  
lower cross is place where bodies were found.

[To face p. 414



*Photo, Kaspar Grass.]*

SCENE OF 1933 ACCIDENT, VIEW MUCH  
FORESHORTENED.

○ represents the three stages of the accident (see  
large illustration). Continuous line is route  
taken by search party.

pt. 3599 m.

Schneekuppe



*Photo, Kaspar Grass.]*

DISTANT VIEW OF SCENE OF ACCIDENT, ALSO MUCH FORESHORTENED.

○ represents the three stages of the accident (see large illustration).

by Kaspar Grass, the well-known *Guide Chef* of Pontresina, started to make the same ascent from the Tschierva hut, choosing the route that skirts the N.W. arête. They traversed the rocks on the S. side of the ridge under the point measured 3599 m., *S. map*, and approached the great snow and ice couloir running down towards the Sella Glacier in a S.W. direction from the N.W. arête, just beyond and above point 3599 m. Having attained the base of the couloir, in which lay about 3 ft. of snow covering steep ice, they were surprised to see three ice axes, one with its pick deeply buried in the snow, a second with its shaft deeply driven in (almost up to the head), and another lying much further down the precipitous gully, to their right, S. From the topmost axe, a deep and narrow furrow in the snow ran right down the gully<sup>6</sup> till lost to sight. It was obvious that a party had fallen down that gully in a kind of avalanche of soft snow which had come away—probably *with* the party—leaving the bare ice visible. Nothing further could be perceived at that time. Kaspar Grass fetched the two uppermost axes and placed them on the rocks; the third was too low to be taken up, but was recovered subsequently and found to have Slater's name stamped on it. The parties proceeded on their way<sup>7</sup> and found obvious tracks of the fallen party, showing that it had made the ascent and that the fall had occurred on the descent. Coming back, the parties saw lying at the bottom of the gully two bodies joined by a rope, the further end of which was lost to view over an edge. The parties returned forthwith to the Tschierva hut and Roseg Restaurant and gave the alarm. As soon as possible that evening, a search party of 18 guides under Kaspar Grass set out. Next morning, August 19, after very considerable difficulty, the search party succeeded in reaching the bodies, which turned out to be those of the British party. They were all lying close together, and death must have been instantaneous. Three of the victims had their skulls crushed, and the neck of the fourth was broken; they had sustained other severe injuries. They were still roped all together at intervals of 3 to 4 m. in the order: Howson, Powell, White-Thomson, Slater. Kaspar Grass thinks ' . . . that the accident must have happened about 3 P.M., and that the party was in a hurry, as they feared a thunderstorm was

---

<sup>6</sup> This precipitous gully plunging to the surface of the Sella Glacier, lay of course below the guided parties' (of August 18) position. It should not be confused with the afore-mentioned 'great [S.W.] snow and ice couloir,' which is above.—*Editor*.

<sup>7</sup> The question will be asked, why did the two parties of August 18, having noted that an accident had occurred and having actually recovered the axes, *continue the ascent of the mountain*? Their action caused a delay of 24 hours in the recovery of the bodies and destroyed any chance of rescuing possible survivors. The amateurs of the parties were, we are informed, all novices, but the guides should have known that their conduct was not in accordance with Alpine traditions.—*Editor*.

approaching. They had only 20 m. of rope "out" for the four men, although another 20 m. were in their possession. The amount of rope in use was far too little considering the treacherous general nature of the terrain. It is improbable that any of the party were firmly anchored to the rocks. Grass considers that 40 m. (130 ft.) of rope would not have been too much. The height of the fall was some 900 ft. All had been wearing crampons, but two of the party had lost one each. The universal opinion was that the party had begun the slanting descent of the couloir towards the rocks, the snow had become very soft owing to the heat and, balling round the spikes of the crampons, thus causing a slip, had then avalanched, carrying the whole party, after a struggle, down with it on to the rocks of the gully below. . . .'

The bodies were brought down on ski to the Roseg Restaurant, and during the afternoon of August 19 were carried in a cart to Pontresina, most reverently and carefully, the search party of guides acting as a solemn escort. The bodies were placed in the picturesque little chapel of Santa Maria, which stands in the cemetery—a more beautiful and peaceful spot, in full view of the great snow mountains, cannot be imagined.

The funeral took place on August 22. It was very simple and impressive, and the four bodies were placed in a common grave in the upper part of the churchyard. The sun shone in the intervals between two showers. Sir John Withers was prevented by indisposition from attending, but Lord Wright and Professor H. K. Corning laid a wreath, bearing the inscription 'In affectionate Remembrance from the President and Members of the Alpine Club,' on the grave. Dr. Campell, President of the Section 'Bernina,' represented the S.A.C. Many relatives of the deceased were present, as well as a great and sympathetic crowd of all nationalities.<sup>8</sup>

J. J. W.

H. K. C.

[It should be understood clearly that the accident—as so often—occurred at a technically easy place. The unfortunate party would, in a few nearly level steps, have attained the system of simple and almost horizontal débris ledges leading from near the base of the main (S.W.) couloir in a N.W. direction to the so-called *Aguagliouls-Sattel*, between point 3599 m. and Piz Aguagliouls, 3126 m. This is the now usual route from the Tschierva hut, although discouraged rightly by the S.A.C. and C.A.I. *Climbers' Guides*. There is risk from falling stones and ice.<sup>9</sup> Although this danger is confined

<sup>8</sup> It is a lamentable fact that the leading British newspapers, although provided with an official account of the accident, preferred—with two honourable exceptions—to publish garbled reports concocted by fatuous correspondents.—*Editor*.

<sup>9</sup> See Kurz, pp. 149–151, sketch p. 150; Corti, pp. 364–5; Strutt, ii, p. 55.

more or less to those portions of the route lying more to the N. and to the passage of the easy ledges, its occurrence cannot, in the opinion of two competent judges, be excluded altogether as one of the possible causes of the accident. This route was taken by the two parties of August 18.

But it is noteworthy that a few days before the accident, a strong British party, led by a first-class Valaisan guide, who like his companions was ignorant of the now usual route (the party had made the ascent by the difficult N. arête), in the descent preferred, from the base of the great S.W. snow and ice couloir, which in reality resembles a hanging glacier more than a couloir, to bear S. (*not* N.W.) under the rocks of the *Schneekuppe* (3927 m.), and so attain the surface of the Sella Glacier by descending an easy snow slope. This party then followed the Sella and Roseg Glaciers to the Coaz hut. This is the safest route to take on the return from Piz Roseg<sup>10</sup> when bound for Pontresina.

With regard to the causes of the accident, a member of the above-mentioned British guided party writes as follows:—

‘ . . . I saw my companion this afternoon, and he says that as we were descending the broad couloir he noticed evident signs of stone fall on the right-hand side (looking down), and he reminded me that when we were crossing the small schrund low in the couloir there were stones on the bridge, and that I remarked on them and we all hurried over. I had forgotten this, but it now comes back to me. It does seem to me that much the most probable explanation is that as they were descending one above the other (this depends on the exactness of Grass’s statement that the metre-wide trough started from the top axe) a stone hit the top man, probably on the head, and he fell forward on to number two, who at that moment must have had both his hands off his axe, and that then they both knocked off the other two and made a sort of sitting glissade. . . .’

It is vain to speculate—and many of those best qualified to express an opinion hold divergent views—but to our mind and knowing the terrain well for some forty years, we think that the party was hurrying, that the snow suddenly balled round the crampons of one or more of the party, causing a slip and fall. The party was proceeding on a diagonal downwards *traverse*<sup>11</sup>: one man thereupon drove his axe vertically into the snow and endeavoured to hitch the rope round the shaft, but was dragged downwards before he could achieve his object, owing to the *short length* of rope in use (60 ft.). The fall provoked a small avalanche, carrying the party to destruction, although one of them

<sup>10</sup> Kurz, routes ‘145’ and ‘135,’ sketch p. 150; Corti, sketch facing p. 364.

<sup>11</sup> The stones noted by our correspondent do not fall, we think, towards the scene of the accident, but are diverted by the bulge, right bank, of the S.W. couloir.

—witness the pick of another axe buried deep in the snow—made a desperate effort to hold, resulting in the said axe being wrenched from his hands. The scene of the accident being so adjacent to the ledges, almost any party might have risked continuing on its crampons for the few yards separating the leader from the rocks.—E. L. S.]

*The Accident on the Morteratsch Glacier.*

ON Easter Sunday last, April 16, Cav. Ugo Balestreri with two companions was on a mountaineering ski tour, and engaged in the circuit of the central Bernina massif, coming from the Swiss side. While ascending to the Sella Bellavista, and well above the so-called 'Loch,' the party was unroped but proceeding cautiously, sounding at every step. Suddenly, at the well-known danger point, an almost level, broad and apparently uncrevassed snow plateau, Balestreri crashed through the roof of one of the numerous but invisible caverns, rather than crevasses, existent in the névé. It is almost impossible, owing to the depth of the bridges, to detect these chasms, but numerous fatal accidents (see 'A.J.' 19, 497-502) and minor mishaps have testified to their presence about this spot. Balestreri fell some 140 ft. to his death, and his body was only recovered with great difficulty three days later.

As is now recognized generally, 'roped' ski-ing—if it ever really existed—delays and hampers a party to so great an extent that most experts prefer to travel unroped. Long tours, involving the traverse of every kind of terrain, appear to be impracticable for roped parties, the time factor being against all such (see 'A.J.' 43, 288), more especially in the case of men *descending*, expert both as mountaineers and ski-runners.

Signor Balestreri, President of the Italian Academical Alpine Club, was a most admirable mountaineer, who had visited the Himalaya on two occasions, once with H.R.H. the Duke of Spoleto's expedition. He served throughout the war with great distinction, and his death at the early age of forty-four is a great loss to the C.A.I. and to his numerous friends in all countries.—*Abridged* from an account kindly sent by Professor Corti.

*The Accident on the Grosse Zinne.*

ON September 12, Signor Vittorio Sigismondi, one of the Italian delegates to the Alpine Congress at Cortina d' Ampezzo, together with two of his daughters, made the ascent by the ordinary route. Some 300 ft. below the summit there is a short (*ca.* 100 ft.) abrupt wall. During the descent, one of the ladies had attained the broad ledges below the wall, while the other was still descending the rocks, steadied by the rope held by her father above. A slip occurred, and Sigismondi, after holding his daughter for an appreciative time, was pulled off eventually, pitching on his head on to the ledge. The rope—one of those monstrous 18 mm. cables of *plaited* manilla, so common in the Eastern Alps—snapped like pack thread. Sigis-

mondi was killed on the spot, while the lady, who had, of course, fallen at the same time, lay on the ledge with a broken leg by the side of her uninjured sister.

A rescue party, including Count Aldo Bonacossa, brought down the ladies as well as the body on the same day.

The accident caused much grief at the Congress, where Signor Sigismondi, a man of some fifty-six years, possessed many friends. He had made the first ascent of the Bessanese by its difficult W. face from the Glacier d'entre-deux Ris.

## REVIEWS.

*Généraux Suisses commandant en chef l'armée suisse de Marignan à 1914.* By Charles Gos. Neuchâtel (Attinger), 1932, in 4to, with plates.

MOUNTAINEERS are always interested in things Swiss. M. Charles Gos's last book enables lovers of the Alps to discover practically unknown chapters of Alpine history. Early travellers in Switzerland kept relating a few anecdotes about Swiss armies but, through the course of two or three centuries, they hardly changed their topics and gave but very few accurate details. Some highly spectacular episodes of military history became popular, but no names survived this very amateurish way of dealing with the subject. The invasion of Switzerland by French armies in 1798-99 was denounced as a most heinous crime, but no one, not even Wordsworth, who had travelled through the country and wrote indignantly about the invasion, knew exactly what had happened.

M. Charles Gos has succeeded in giving a new life to this forgotten history. His book is much more than a biography of the eleven generals who commanded the Swiss army between 1515 and 1919. It is a vivid, though concise, picture of the life of the whole army through four centuries, and the figures of Hohensax, Erlach-Castelen, Muralt, etc., stand out against this very striking background. The last chapter deals with the part acted by the Swiss army during the war.

The long bibliography will be most useful to scholars interested in similar subjects. It is a pity the book has no index; I understand the author had compiled one, but it was cut out by the publisher, to save expense!

CLAIRE-ELIANE ENGEL.

*Modern Mountaineering.* By George D. Abraham. Pp. 198 +16 illustrations. Methuen & Co., Ltd. Price 7s. 6d.

THIS is a difficult book to review satisfactorily. It is hardly worthy of Mr. Abraham's reputation as a writer on Alpine subjects. The title does not seem very apt, since certain portions of the contents cannot be classed as modern mountaineering and a fraction only of the outstanding achievements of recent years is included. In short, the volume is too small for so extensive a subject. There is,