MAURICE CRETTEZ, 1872–1948

By MARCEL KURZ
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Maurice Crettez was born at Champex, or Champey, as it was formerly spelt, on June 11, 1872. Two small inns were reflected in the green waters of the little lake ; one belonged to François Biselx and the other to Daniel Crettez, father of Maurice.

Biselx and Crettez were the two leading guides of Champex. From the age of fourteen, Maurice used to accompany them as porter to the Orny hut, which had recently been built. In the *livret de guide* of his father, Daniel, there is an entry by Eugène de la Harpe stating that Maurice Crettet [*sic*] accompanied him as porter on July 12, 1886, up the Pointe d'Orny and on July 11, 1889, up the Aiguille du Tour and ' Au passage de la rimaye, assez mauvaise cette année, il a déployé des qualités qui dénotent chez lui toute l'étoffe d'un bon guide ; prudent, solide, réservé.' On July 17, 1889, under the leadership of Jules Balley of Bourg St. Pierre, Maurice took part as a volunteer porter in an ascent of Mont Velan by the glacier de Valsorey.

The last part of Daniel Crettez's book, from p. 81 onwards, is entirely devoted to expeditions made by his son Maurice, who, in 1889, at the age of seventeen, began to take his father's place, and led tourists up the Aiguille du Tour and other peaks. On August 15, 1891, he led a party up the Grande Fourche : ' Grimpeur infatigable et très habile, solide, prudent, connaissant bien les glaciers et joignant beaucoup de réserve à une grande prévenance.' Even at this early age, all his tourists agreed in recognising in him the natural skill of one who would become a great guide.

In a family of fifteen Maurice was the seventh child, a lucky number which was to bring him good fortune. He spent his youth in looking after the sheep and goats of the little community, quickly passed from shepherd to hunter, and became passionately devoted to the chase, especially to chamois hunting, for, like them, he loved the high mountains.

In 1892, he was called up for his military service, joining a battalion of Valaisan riflemen, in which he distinguished himself as an excellent marksman. In 1904, when he was thirty-two years old, he married Célina Girard of Le Guercet, near Martigny, and went to live in a chalet on the Signal de Champex. He enlarged this little by little with his own hands, and eventually made of it a small hotel which he used to let during the summer months. Maurice had a family of eight children, five daughters and three sons. Nestor was a worthy successor to his father ; Georges was also a guide before joining the gendarmerie, and Maurice was fated to meet a tragic end in a crevasse while on duty with the glacier patrol between Zermatt and Verbier.



MAURICE CRETTEZ
as a young man.

[*To face p.* 304.

He passed his guide's test at Sion in 1896, and on June 18 received his first *livret de guide*. It was not a very good summer that year and Maurice's first season was commonplace enough until, on September 14, he achieved a notable success by making the first ascent of the Petit Clocher de Planereuse with Dr. Edmond Lardy and Emile Revaz of Salvan. He had set out alone on his own initiative on August 4, on a reconnaissance, and had discovered what was to become a classic itinerary. All his predecessors had failed to overcome the difficult rocks, but Crettez reached the North summit at the first attempt and found out the route to the highest point. But instead of completing the ascent he came down and looked for a client to whom he could present this virgin Clocher. This difficult new ascent, at the end of his first season, was characteristic ; Maurice was something more than a mere guide ; he delighted in looking for unclimbed peaks or new routes which might interest his clients.

In August, 1897, engaged by two Britons whose names are not known, he left his own district and traversed a ' High Level Route ' from Orny to Zermatt. One splendid conquest which is not mentioned in his book, for the very good reason that his ' Monsieur ' never reached the summit, was that of the Petit Clocher du Portalet on August 26. There is some doubt about the exact date for on p. 100 of his book the Britons claim that Maurice accompanied them from August 4–28. Probably they lent him to Dr. Lardy for the day on the 26th. Here again, Maurice recognised the best route at the first glance, though in truth there was not much choice. In order to climb what he humorously called the ' donkey,' a rectilinear razor-edged rock without any holds which one swarmed up astride, Maurice used five *fiches de fer* (pitons!) four of which he recovered on the descent. No account has appeared of this first ascent ; Lardy seems to have reached a point about half way up the arête, and should therefore have been able to describe for us the triumph of his guides.

The brothers Th. and L. H. Aubert were at this time two young students at Geneva and it was certainly not on their own initiative that, in July, 1898, they set out from Orny with Maurice for the ascent of the Tour Noir by the North arête. Both the idea and the execution of this expedition, a great part of which was new (from the North foot of the Col de la Neuvaz), were due to the enterprising spirit of their guide. Maurice repeated the ascent three weeks later, starting from the Saleinaz hut and returning there the same evening by way of the Col du Chardonnet.

The next day, August 13, he made the second ascent of the Aiguille Javelle with Dr. Georges Hochreutiner, an habitué of Champex, who could doubtless have told us many stories about Maurice. This was followed, four days later, by a traverse of the Grand Combin with five Britons, and his brother Etienne as porter.

Soon after this expedition Maurice made the acquaintance of Paul Sisley of Lyons and with him climbed on successive days (August 21 and 22) the Aiguille d'Argentière, with a useful variation on the descent,

and the Tour Noir by the *voie Aubert*. He was back again on the Grand Combin on the 24th and on the last day of the month made the second traverse of the Aiguilles Dorées with Mademoiselle Adèle Heiner of Geneva. In the midst of these great expeditions, he still found time to take tourists up the Aiguille du Tour ! By the end of this busy month of August, Maurice was well established as a guide.

In September he met W. G. Adams, A.C., who was to become one of his principal clients.[1]

At the beginning of the following season, 1899, he made once more his favourite traverse of the Tour Noir and then at the end of July made the first ascent of the splendid North-East arête of the Aiguille du Chardonnet with the brothers Aubert, starting from the Saleinaz hut, while for the Tour Noir they started from the Orny hut ; the reverse would have been preferable. Some days later, Maurice improved on this itinerary with Paul Sisley by starting from Orny and passing to the right (South) of the Aiguille Forbes. This traverse of the Chardonnet was to become a classic route and always remained, with the traverse of the Tour Noir, one of Maurice's favourite expeditions.

With another Lyonnais, Achille Escudié, he successfully carried through the third traverse of the Aiguilles Dorées on August 23, also making the first ascents of the Aiguille Sans Nom and the Eastern and Central peaks of the Aiguilles Penchées. The Tête Crettez was likewise climbed and so named in honour of Maurice, but this was probably only the second ascent.

The last days of August were passed with W. G. Adams, whose ambitions almost equalled those of his guide. Among other expeditions, the traverse Ruinette-Mont Blanc de Seilon may be mentioned, and the Dom-Lenzspitze, descending by the East arête. Finally, in September, Maurice had his first introduction to the Matterhorn, climbing it from the Hörnli with Mademoiselle Heiner and his brother Etienne.

It was in July, 1900, that, for the first time, I was lucky enough to find myself on Maurice Crettez's rope. He had come to take my father and me to our chalet de Saleinaz, and from the very beginning gave me an impression of herculean strength. I was only thirteen years old, and too young to appreciate his splendid qualities. We climbed in succession the Aiguille d'Argentière, the Tête Biselx and the Aiguille des Essettes, this last being a first ascent.

At the end of the month we may notice the third ascent of the Petit Clocher de Planereuse and the third of the North-East arête of the Chardonnet with Mademoiselle Alice Martin of Geneva and Dr. Hochreutiner. On August 20, Maurice traversed the Tour Noir with

[1] W. G. Adams, Jr. (1873–1950), a member of the Alpine Club from 1900 to 1925, was one of the leading British climbers of his day. He preferred climbing without guides and to take the lead himself ; he was distinguished for his energy and enterprise. In Maurice Crettez he found a companion to his liking, as keen as himself, and I well remember Maurice speaking of him as one of his best clients. Adams, without doubt, would have been able to give us some interesting details about his expeditions with Maurice, but unfortunately I only managed to obtain his address a month after his death.

three clients and had to cut 280 steps to reach the Col de la Neuvaz ; he brought his party back to Saleinaz by the Col du Chardonnet. (Maurice did not seem to fancy the descent of the La Neuvaz side of the Col d'Argentière !)

Then followed a tour with his brother Etienne and W. G. Adams, who recorded on p. 169—' 24/viii. Aiguille Javelle, first ascent by the West face and first traverse.' (In the *Kurz* and *Vallot Guides* this first ascent is wrongly attributed to Emile Fontaine, with Emile Crettex, August 30, 1906.) On the next day they traversed the Tour Noir from Saleinaz, descending to the La Neuvaz glacier. After being confined to the Ferret inn for two days by bad weather they ascended Mont Dolent, went down to Courmayeur, and then traversed Mont Blanc from the Dôme hut to Chamonix. This campaign ended on August 31 with the traverse of the Chardonnet from Lognan.

On September 6, Maurice fell in with an active young climber in the person of Georges Stouvenel of Geneva and together they traversed the Aiguilles Dorées (omitting the Trident), finishing on the Plateau de Trient at 2.30 P.M. They then proceeded to make the first ascent and traverse of the Aiguille d'Orny, returning to Champex the same evening. Stouvenel wrote (p. 172) : ' With him, the most difficult expeditions seem easy.'

This double was repeated on the 11th with Adams when they also climbed ' a new peak between the Tête Biselx and the Aiguilles Penchées.' This, no doubt, was the peak called by the *Guide Vallot* Pointe Fynn (*c.* 3,450 m.) the ' first ' ascent of which was assumed to have been made in 1929 ! On this razor-edged triangular rock, a kind of monolithic wedge, there were no loose stones with which a cairn could have been constructed. Adams' opinion of his guide is recorded on p. 173 of the *livret* : ' Maurice Crettex [*sic*] is the best rock climber I have seen, and would, I think, be hard to beat.'

On September 12, Maurice had a splendid day with Fernand Chavannes. Starting from the Orny hut by moonlight at 2 o'clock, they reached the summit of the Tour Noir at 8.25, went down to the Col d'Argentière and, after traversing the Swiss face of the Aiguilles Rouges du Dolent, rejoined the Frontier ridge at the Pointes de la Fouly, making the first ascent of the three peaks. Descent by the glacier d'Argentière to Lognan, where they arrived at 10.15 P.M.[2]

This exploit was a fitting termination to the splendid campaign of 1900. Immediately afterwards Maurice exchanged his ice-axe for his rifle and went off chamois hunting, his supreme passion.

The beginning of July, 1901, found him with the brothers Maurice and Alfred Roch and pastor Ernest Christen. Together they traversed the Aiguilles Dorées, the Chardonnet, and the Tour Noir ; these three

[2] Crettez was evidently contemplating the Tour Noir-Dolent traverse, which was only effected many years later, in 1935, by Blanc and Widmer. It is astonishing that so good a climber as Chavannes, after the brilliant account that he published of this expedition in the *Echo des Alpes*, 1900, pp. 383–94, never wrote any more.

were Maurice's favourite expeditions. Christen and Maurice then did the Aiguille Verte by the Whymper Couloir. ' Ce que je relève le plus volontiers,' wrote Christen on p. 185 of the *livret*, ' c'est l'amour intense et ardent que ce guide remarquable a pour les montagnes. Jamais on n'a le sentiment qu'il fait un métier en vous guidant. C'est pour lui une vocation irrésistible à laquelle il se donne tout entier, corps et âme. Il communique ce feu sacré à tous ceux qui l'approchent et sait relever au bon moment l'entrain et le courage de ses voyageurs.'

Maurice spent the last twelve days of August with his old client, W. G. Adams. On p. 195 of the *livret* there is this rather curious entry—' 20.viii.1901. Started from chalet d'Amont at 3, reached Col de Valsorey at 7.20. Started from col at 8, intending to traverse as many of the Aiguilles Rouges de Valsorey [*sic*] as possible. Reached the top of Trois Frères at 11.30, and passing over the point N. of the highest, reached the col between the points 3270 and 3248 on the Swiss map. From the col [probably the Brêche des Molaires] descended a couloir on the E. side and traversed back towards Col de Valsorey to get down. Passed Col de Fenêtre to Chanrion, arrived 9.30 P.M. I believe this to be the first ascent of Trois Frères 3270.' Adams was evidently unaware of the ascent of the highest point of the Trois Frères by A. G. Topham with Jean Maître and Pierre Maurys in 1893 and yet he was, like Topham, a member of the Alpine Club. He therefore received the *Alpine Journal* and ought to have read Topham's account in *A.J.* 16. 515–16. Maurice, however, later confessed to me that he had found a loop of rope left by Jean Maître.[3]

On August 21 Adams and Maurice traversed the Petit Mont Collon to Arolla ; next day they climbed the Aiguille de la Tsa by the West face and slept at Ferpècle. On the 23rd they went up Lo Besso and descended to Zinal. Two days later, they walked up to the chalets of Combasana [*sic*] with the intention of forcing the North arête of the Weisshorn, but bad weather drove them back to Zinal. They again ascended Lo Besso on the 27th and slept that night at Combasana. Starting next morning at 2 o'clock, bad weather came on and just below the Bieshorn they were compelled to abandon the expedition, and subsequently returned to Champex by a ' High Level Route ' via Arolla. This attempt on the Weisshorn by the North arête is worthy of special notice. Forced for the first time by Hans Biehly with Heinrich Burgener in September, 1898, the arête had been ascended only once or twice since then, and ranks as a very difficult and very long expedition, especially if starting from Combautana. But the Adams-Crettez combination seemed ready to tackle anything !

[3] The confusion probably arose from the fact that the *Siegfried Atlas*, 1901 and 1905 impressions, placed the Trois Frères much more to the North and marked Mont Capucin at Pt. 3270. In fact, Adams first wrote ' M. Capucin, 3270,' then he struck out the name and replaced it by Trois Frères, but the correction was doubtless made later when the nomenclature had been unravelled. On the other hand, the West and East Frères were still virgin and their conquest must therefore be credited to Adams and Crettez. The information in the *Guide des Alpes Valaisannes*, 1, pp. 150–1, should be amended accordingly.

In September there were two traverses of the Aiguilles Dorées, one of them with F. Chavannes on the 21st, and on the 18th an ascent of the Aiguille d'Argentière through 60 centimetres of fresh snow with a party of five young people, two of whom were girls. Some courage must have been necessary to start off under such conditions !

In 1902 Maurice traversed the Matterhorn from Zermatt to Breuil, and also Mont Blanc by the Dôme route to the Grands Mulets. He then went from Champex to Zermatt by the ' High Level Route ' with many ascents on the way but was soon back again at Chamonix after another traverse of Mont Blanc, and also ascended the Aiguille du Géant and the Grands Charmoz.

He added to his growing list of new expeditions on September 6 by making the first ascent of the Chandelle du Portalet with Dr. Guillaume Rossier, accomplishing the climb without the use of a single piton. Three more traverses of the Aiguille Dorées were followed by another campaign with W. G. Adams, who seemed bent on attacking the Grands Montets arête of the Aiguille Verte, but he had to be less ambitious and to content himself with the Petite Aiguille Verte and the Aiguille des Grands Montets followed on the next day by the traverse of the Aiguille du Chardonnet. L. W. Clarke was also in the party and refers to these expeditions in *A.J.* 54. 19–20 :

' There was a day in 1902 when W. G. Adams and I, led by Maurice Crettex [*sic*], made an unsuccessful attempt on the Aiguille Verte by the North ridge. Conditions were not favourable, and there was a good deal of snow on the big rock gendarmes. We did not get far beyond the Petite Aiguille Verte. Not long after, in the descent, we had passed that point, a curious kind of avalanche occurred. An approximately rectangular piece of the névé with horizontal sides about 300 yards long and ends pointing straight up the slope about 40 yards long, suddenly decided to slip, and take up a position 100 yards or so lower down. It effected the move very suddenly and quickly, without breaking into fragments or lumps, and with its shape and the directions of its ends and sides almost unaltered. A bit of the edge of the thing gave the back of my leg a hard knock, and all but sent me sprawling. How we should have fared if we had been in the centre of its downward course, instead of at the very edge of it, I hardly like to think.

' Next day, still in bad weather, we traversed the Aiguille du Chardonnet from Lognan to the Saleinaz hut. Crettex knocked masses of new snow from the tops of the short bits of snow arête between the gendarmes of the east ridge to make them safely negotiable. When it came to the descent of the north face, which was pure ice, snow was falling and a bitter wind was blowing. . . . Was Crettex extended ? I certainly saw no signs of it.'

According to Anatole Pellaud, his brother-in-law, Maurice first put on skis in January, 1903. He and Pellaud slept at Ferret, and crossed the Fenêtre next day to the Great St. Bernard hospice. Accompanied by the monks, who were already able skiers, they practised in the

neighbourhood of the monastery and even went up to the Col de Menouve.

The dreadful summers of 1901, 1902 and 1903 have not yet been forgotten. Maurice spent August, 1903, with the brothers Rossier in the Bernese Oberland, the Lötschental and the chain of Mont Blanc, and paid another visit to the Oberland in September, but many expeditions were not completed in consequence of the bad weather.

In 1904, the year of his marriage, his season commenced on June 20 with a traverse of Mont Blanc from Courmayeur to Chamonix and then accompanied by his brother Jules he made several expeditions with Henri Rieckel and Alfred Jaccard (of La Chaux-de-Fonds), including two of his favourites, the traverses of the Aiguilles Dorées and the Chardonnet. Between August 7 and 21, he led the brothers Rossier across the Rothorn, Matterhorn and Grands Charmoz and a month later made yet another traverse of the Dorées, his fourth in that season. At the end of the year came his first serious undertaking in winter mountaineering, the first winter ascent of the Grand Darreï, which he made from Saleinaz with Albert Picot and Edmée and Eugène Robert of Geneva. There was, however, very little snow and the entire expedition was made on foot.

The following summer, 1905, was likewise unfavourable for major expeditions. Maurice began by a few days, July 9–12, with Rieckel, Jaccard and Bourquin (Dolent ; Col de Triolet ; Moine ; Aiguille Verte, left Couvercle at midnight, summit 6 A.M., back at the Couvercle at 9 A.M. !). In August he had a fortnight with the Rossiers in the Bernese Oberland, doing the Gspaltenhorn, Eiger and Finsteraarhorn.

March 29, 1906, was a very important date in Maurice's career, for at last there came a client who wished to ski with him, F. F. Roget of Geneva. They made together the first ski ascent of the Aiguille du Tour starting from, and returning to, Orny. This success gave Maurice a new urge ; it enlarged his field of action and brought him new clients, for at that time efficient *guides-skieurs* were very rare in French Switzerland. He was thirty-four years old, and nothing seemed impossible to him ; in a short time he became the best skiing guide of the Bas Valais. At the end of June he took Julien Gallet and his inseparable companion Philippe Allamand up the Chardonnet by *his* arête, the finest of all the routes up the mountain, and early July found him traversing the Dorées and Tour Noir with C. Stanley Wise. After four days with Rieckel and his friends (another traverse of the Tour Noir) he accompanied the Rossier brothers from July 30 to August 20, going from Arolla to Monte Rosa (traverse Dufourspitze-Punta Gnifetti) and finishing with the Tresenta and Grand Paradis.

On March 24, 1907, he led F. F. Roget and myself up the Chardonnet (first ski and first winter ascent) and a few days later we made the first ski ascent of the Grand Combin, returning to the valley by the Col des Avouillons ; the expedition was carried out in perfect weather and conditions. (See my account in *Alpinisme Hivernal*, Chap. VIII.) At the beginning of July, Maurice did the Chardonnet again, through

a metre of fresh snow, whereas in March the conditions had been ideal !

He was at Zermatt at the end of August and beginning of September and carried out some splendid expeditions with that keen and insatiable climber, Madame Astier.[4] They traversed the Weisshorn from Randa to Zinal, descending by the arête Young, previously unknown to Maurice, came back to Zermatt over the Rothorn, and before leaving the district traversed a rather snowy Matterhorn from the Hörnli to Breuil. Finally, at the beginning of September, they did the Aiguille du Géant and the Aiguille Verte.

Before his visit to Zermatt he had spent a fortnight in the Engadine with Rieckel and his party. Between July 12 and 24 they climbed Piz Kesch, Morteratsch, Bernina, Roseg and Monte Disgrazia.

Maurice spent the Easter week-end of 1908, April 16–21, in making, in bad weather, a ski traverse of the Bernese Oberland with three famous pioneers, Paul Montandon, René Koenig and Albert Weber. He led his party from the Lötschental to the Grimsel by way of the Lötschenlücke, Grünhornlücke and Oberaarjoch.[5]

He passed most of the summer in the Mont Blanc district. After taking H. Carnal and some of his pupils up the mountain he had nine days with Théophile Payot, ascending the Requin, amongst other expeditions. Finally, with Madame Astier once again, he traversed Mont Blanc (Gonella-Col du Géant) and made another ascent of the Requin.

The following year, 1909, Roget and I wanted to engage Maurice in March for the High Level Route, but he was not free. Where, then, can he have been, for there is no entry in his *livret* to explain the mystery ?

On July 21, he started from the new cabane Dupuis with Louis Comberousse, and traversed the Tour Noir, returning by the Col du Chardonnet, and followed this by doing the Aiguilles Dorées with a large party from Lyons. With his old client Dr. Rossier he was in the Saas Fee district from July 29 to August 10, but their plans were much interfered with by the bad weather, and then he had another campaign with Théophile Payot in the Mont Blanc district (traverse of the Drus ; Blaitière and Grépon).

There are no entries in the *livret* for 1910, but we know that on January 3 Georges Couchepin of Martigny and Maurice carried out an attractive combination of rock climbing and skiing, the first winter ascents of the Tête Crettez and the Aiguille Javelle, descending to La Forclaz by the glacier des Grands. Only five days later, he climbed the Aiguille d'Argentière (first winter ascent) with Maurice Cottier, going

[4] Madame N. Astier was a Belgian. The Club Alpin Belge has been good enough to make enquiries in Brussels but has been unable to obtain her address and thinks that she is dead. Her account of some of these expeditions may be found in the *Echo des Alpes*, 1910, pp. 270–7 and 360–79.

[5] In his entry, evidently written some time after the tour, on p. 266 of Maurice's *livret*, Koenig made a mistake in the date, writing 1907 instead of 1908. See *British Ski Year Book*, 1923, p. 88 (Montandon).

on skis to the foot of the Couloir Barbey. At the end of March, with his brother-in-law Anatole Pellaud as second man, he took three well-known skiers, Paul Montandon, René Koenig and Charles Simon, up the Aiguilles du Chardonnet and du Tour, descending by the glacier des Grands.

In June came misfortune ; at hay-making time he was helping another brother-in-law, Paul Troillet, to get a wagon load of hay to Som la Praz when his head got jammed between the wagon and a wall. This was a serious and painful accident in the career of the worthy Maurice, and he had to go to Lausanne in the height of the season to be given electrical treatment by his friend, Dr. Guillaume Rossier. He remained partially disfigured as a result of the mishap and was not able to make any expeditions until after Christmas, but that scarcely affected his habitual good humour.

In 1911 his journeys on skis became more numerous and more extensive ; beginning in January, he did the High Level Route from Bourg St. Pierre to Zermatt with Roget and the writer, making the first winter ascent of the Dent Blanche. Shortly afterwards he repeated this run, substituting the Grand Combin for the Dent Blanche, with Dr. René Koenig ; this trip was made at great speed, from Valsorey to Zermatt in two days. On March 7, Maurice ascended the Aiguille d'Argentière with Madame Marie Schultz and four days later made the first ski ascent of Mont Dolent with members of the Ski Club of Martigny. On all these expeditions he had his brother Jules, also a good skier, as second man. In the middle of April, he set out once more for the Bernese Oberland with Montandon, Pellaud and Simon and climbed in succession Gross Fiescherhorn, Ebnefluh and Mittaghorn. On May 4, he and Dr. Koenig went on skis to the foot of the Tour Noir (French side) and completed the ascent on foot. These springtime expeditions are likewise not recorded in the *livret*, but are mentioned by Montandon in the *British Ski Year Book*, 1923, p. 88.

Then came the wonderful summer of 1911, but there must have been many expeditions which were not recorded in Maurice's book. At the beginning of July he traversed the Dorées and the Matterhorn with a young lady whose name is illegible, but who calls herself at various times ' pendule,' ' grenouille ' or ' chamois,' and with Georges Gallet, brother of Julien, he did the Géant, Requin and Tacul.

A new British client signs an entry at the end of this first *livret*, J. L. Grenville Hadley, member of the Diablerets section of the Swiss Alpine Club. With him, Maurice traversed the Aiguilles Rouges d'Arolla, an expedition he had not previously done, then crossed by the Col de la Dent Blanche to Zinal and from there climbed Lo Besso, but ' pas par le chemin des mulets partant du Mountet, pas par l'arête Nord, ni celui [*sic*] de l'Ouest, mais par une route nouvelle fournie [?] par les 2 arêtes N.N.W., la face et tout en haut le dernier ressaut de l'arête W. . . .'[6]

[6] This is not easy to understand. The N.N.W. arête exists neither on the *Siegfried Atlas* nor on the *Carte Nationale*, nor in reality. What is meant is probably the spur mentioned under (f) in the *Guide des Alpes Valaisannes* which

There were no special features in the rest of Hadley's campaign; he traversed the Rothorn, returning by the Triftjoch, and then crossed the Col du Mont Durand, ascended the Dent d'Hérens from the Rifugio Aosta, and finally took the Dent du Géant on his way from Courmayeur to Chamonix. The first *livret* finishes at the close of that wonderful summer of 1911, but we must also mention that, according to the *Echo des Alpes*, 1924, p. 133, Maurice took two Britons up the Arête des Quatre Anes during the course of the summer.

It is curious that Maurice's second *livret* only begins in July, 1914. What happened in the meanwhile is a mystery. Nestor thinks that the blank is simply due to neglect on the part of his father—a neglect which is truly disastrous for the sequence of these notes! We will try, however, to fix a few landmarks in this gap from 1911 to 1914. Arnold Lunn, in his *Mountains of Youth*, describes his first meeting with Maurice in 1903 in front of the Cabane d'Orny: 'He was a man of splendid physique and great height. In those days he wore an eagle's feather in his hat, and a magnificent black moustache. Dumas would have loved him, for he had a touch of not ungraceful swagger, a veritable D'Artagnan among guides.' Seven years later, during the summer of 1910, he found him disfigured, sitting on a bench at Champex. 'Je regrette beaucoup mes montagnes,' Maurice confessed to Lunn, who was himself temporarily disabled and could sympathise with him.

In December, 1911, they went together to the Engadine and, going up the Val Forno after nightfall, failed in the darkness to find the hut. After returning to the Oberland they attacked the Eiger and succeeded in climbing it on January 1, 1912, in spite of very bad conditions. After some expeditions around Morgins and Grimmialp, they went to the Gamchibalm hut at the head of the Kiental and from there, on January 12, made the second winter ascent of the Gspaltenhorn. Lunn wrote in *Mountains of Youth*: 'I could think of no better companion than Crettex [*sic*], for he is one of the few guides who not only enjoy the adventure of climbing, but who can appreciate to the full the beauty of the upper world. Again and again he has stopped to point out some sudden effect of mist or snow, and on the humblest of expeditions he reveals the enthusiasm of a boy on his first climb.'

There is no mention in Maurice's *livret* of these three weeks on ski with Lunn; another unfortunate gap in his collection of famous signatures!

Later in the same winter he led a party of British skiers to the Great St. Bernard, returning by the Col de Fenêtre and the Combe de l'A, one of the best itineraries in the district. (*Alpine Ski Club Annual*, 1912, pp. 27–33.)

The following year, 1913, Maurice went up Mont Velan on February 23 with members of the Ski Club of Martigny, following the whole length of the Valsorey glacier, a mistake that he was to remedy four years later when he went by way of the Tseudet glacier. From Dr.

branches off from the West arête. It seems extraordinary that the Zinal guides had not previously followed this route, and we must hope that it will be opened up again and suitably described.

Faes' article in the *Echo des Alpes*, 1913, pp. 260–9, we know that Maurice took a party of six skiers from the Pigne d'Arolla to the Breithorn at the end of February and beginning of March. They went up the Val de Bagnes to Chanrion and from there to Zermatt in sixteen hours by the High Level Route.

In May that same year, two German skiers Schantze and Seitz, perished in a storm on the Grand Combin. Maurice and Jules, with their cousin Emile Crettex, formed the search party and after crossing the mountain found the frozen bodies in a crevasse at the foot of the Mur de la Côte, and succeeded in getting them down to the valley. This was but one of the numberless search parties or rescues in which Maurice took part but are nowhere mentioned in his *livrets*. Maurice told me that in the Aiguilles Dorées he had many opportunities to recover the victims of fatal accidents, and was compelled to follow new routes which are nowhere described and which are most certainly not to be recommended.

J. W. Wyatt also throws some light on Maurice's doings in 1913 in *A.J.* 28. 170. He engaged him on June 30 and next day, after reaching the La Neuvaz glacier by way of the Col de la Grande Luis, ascended the Tour Noir by the North arête. Instead of returning by the Col du Chardonnet, Maurice took him back by the Cols du Passon and du Tour, but they found hard ice in the upper part of the couloir leading to the Fenêtre du Chamois and only got back to Champex after ' nearly twenty hours steady going.'

The second *livret* contains the *patente de guide-skieur* issued by the Central Committee of the C.A.S.—a well-deserved honour which Maurice obtained without any special formality.

The entries for 1914 call for no particular comment. We know from the *Echo des Alpes*, 1915, pp. 5–18, that from February 4–9, Maurice was making a ski traverse of the Bernese Oberland with Dr. Faes and his party. This classic expedition, from the Lötschental to the Grimsel, was carried through in beautiful weather and was enhanced by ascents of the Ebnefluh, Jungfrau and Studerhorn.

Maurice was now 42 and was mobilised for frontier guard duties, but he did not stay very long with his section. Later, and at intervals throughout the war, he accompanied Colonel Ribordy in his reconnaissances of the Italian frontier. Between these journeys, and in spite of the war, he continued his mountaineering. There was much bad weather, with snow, in 1915; in consequence there are not many entries in his *livret*. He did the Grand Darreï in July, and in the following month the Tour Noir, followed by an unsuccessful attempt on the Dent Blanche, then Lo Besso and the Triftjoch (where, as part of the day's work, he saved the lives of four Germans). He had to cut ' 3,000 steps ' during an ascent of the Obergabelhorn from the Mountet ! Among other expeditions the traverse of the Rothorn, the Matterhorn and the Charmoz-Grépon traverse may be mentioned. He finished his season by ascending the Aiguille d'Argentière on September 22.

In 1916, he commenced with some ski expeditions with Gabriel de Choudens ; from the Panossière hut they climbed the Combin de Corbassière, and the Grand Combin by the usual route. During the course of the summer, Maurice twice traversed the High Level Route from Bourg St. Pierre to Zermatt, taking the Grand Combin and Matterhorn on the way. On one of these journeys, shortly after his arrival at the Bertol hut, he carried a sick man on his back down to the Plan de Bertol and returned to the hut the same evening. From August 14–24 he was in the Pralognan (Tarentaise) district with Grenville Hadley ; Grande Casse, N.–W. traverse ; Aiguille de la Vanoise, traverse ; la Glière ; Grand Bec de Pralognan, also traversed, and the first ascent by the South-East arête of the Aiguille de Lépéna. This is a difficult ridge, and Maurice had need of all his determination to overcome it.

Several ski expeditions in February, 1917, may be noticed : Aiguille d'Argentière (fourth winter ascent [?], by the Couloir Barbey) and Aiguille du Tour, followed by the Wildstrubel and Wildhorn with some members of the C.A.S. With G. de Choudens he went up Mont Velan, making the first ski ascent of the Tseudet glacier and descending on foot by the rocky West arête, a quaint idea indeed ! Then Mont Dolent and the first winter ascent of the Grande Luis, traversed from La Neuvaz to the Cabane Dupuis.

Maurice had a few days in the Oberland during June and then did the Combin de Valsorey with a ' Monsieur ' from Bâle whose account of the expedition fills no less than three pages of the *livret* ! In spite of the bad weather of August, he was able to carry out some ascents in the Swiss part of the Mont Blanc chain and on August 25 made the ascent of the Matterhorn, followed on the next day by that of the Aiguille d'Argentière ! He also traversed the Tour Noir once again.

In September there are records of ascents of the Grand Combin and Finsteraarhorn with Guillaume Rossier, of the Aiguille d'Argentière and of the Tour Noir ; he traversed the latter on October 4 from La Fouly to Saleinaz with Madame Reutter-Junod and Ferdinand Droz, guardian of the Saleinaz hut.

There is mention of only one ski expedition in 1918, the Aiguille du Tour, but Maurice certainly made others. The war was responsible for the rare appearance of serious climbers, but in the course of the summer there was a traverse of the Dorées with M. Stöcklin-Müller and his son, of Bâle, then of the Chardonnet and of the Tour Noir, the classic expeditions in Maurice's favourite district. At the end of August he traversed the Dent Blanche, ascending by the Arête des Quatre Anes, with Dr. Charles Jeanneret ; the expedition was carried out in very bad conditions. The party was overtaken by a terrible storm, and only by a miracle got back in safety.[7]

Maurice was again in the Trient district in September and climbed the Petit Clocher du Portalet.

[7] An account may be found in the *Echo des Alpes*, 1924, pp. 133–46, which gives but a poor impression of the reality.

The following year, on July 7, he did the Petit Clocher de Planereuse. Col Durand and Dent Blanche from Schönbühl came next. He then had a month, July 25–August 25, with his old client, Grenville Hadley, and they carried out some fine expeditions ; Aiguille d'Argentière (' trav. S.–N.'), Tour des Courtes (a peak not often climbed), Tour Noir, Aiguille Adams-Reilly, Requin, traverse of the Drus and finally Mont Blanc by the Rochers du Mont Blanc (probably Route 768 of the *Guide Kurz*, an itinerary not often followed but a very direct route, starting from the Quintino Sella hut). We may mention, in September, the Petit and Grand Combin and traverse of the Grand Darreï. A few expeditions in the Trient massif with E. B. Beauman of the R.A.F. brought the season to a close.

One day in January, 1920, Maurice met me at Verbier and the next day we climbed the Rosa Blanche on skis, descending to Nenda ; we went on to Arolla and thence to the Rifugio Aosta, from where we were able to climb the Dent d'Hérens on foot, so dry was the mountain as a result of the fine weather. After crossing to Zermatt by the Col de Valpelline we went up to the Trift inn, where we were weatherbound for two days. The cellar was excellent !—but Maurice, having a great deal to do at home, preferred to go back to Champex. I was thus compelled to find another guide with whom I could continue my campaign, the story of which forms the final chapter of my *Alpinisme Hivernal*. There are no other entries in the *livret* for the winter of 1920.

In July, Maurice spent three weeks with Gottlieb and Frida Thoma of St. Gall, covering the district between the Grand Combin and the Matterhorn. The only entry for August includes a complaint that Maurice was engaged by two Britons with whom he climbed the Grépon, and who were not willing to release him ! So far as one can decipher the scribble following this entry, he next proceeded to do Mont Blanc from the Grands Mulets and the Grépon once again. And that is all for 1920 ! Maurice was no longer bothering about testimonials—so much the worse for our little history !

In 1921, a second journey with M. and Mme. Thoma occupied the period from June 23 to July 13 ; Aiguille d'Argentière, traverses of Mont Blanc, Grand Paradis and Matterhorn in very bad conditions. ' Wer mit ihm geht, der geht sicher,' wrote Thoma, and then translated his eulogies into English and added : ' my wife adds that he is with ladies the true Chevalier.' Thoma relates in *Alpina*, 1923, p. 324, that when the party reached the summit of Mont Blanc, his wife complained of the cold, but Maurice said it was nothing. He then drew from his pocket a curious sort of chaplet ; fastened to a string were all his toe nails which had dropped off some years previously when he had had his feet frost-bitten on that very same mountain. One would have needed Maurice's sense of humour to take such a gewgaw around on mountaineering expeditions !

From July 17–20 he accompanied a *course collective* of the Tödi section of the C.A.S. (11 people) ; Mont Blanc from the Tête Rousse to the Grands Mulets, followed by the Col du Géant to Courmayeur.

The excellent testimonial is signed by Mathias Jenni, future President of the C.A.S. With C. Vischer of Bâle, Maurice then traversed the Dorées, Chardonnet, Tour Noir and Grand Combin and followed the High Level Route to Zermatt to finish with a traverse of the Matterhorn. Immediately afterwards he crossed the Col de Valpelline to ascend the Dent d'Hérens, and returned the same way. It seems curious that a guide of Maurice's capabilities did not prefer, to this immense détour, the route up the West-North-West face (itinerary No. 611 of the *Guide des Alpes Valaisannes*). Between August 29 and September 3, with Dr. Alexander Loetscher of Zurich, he twice crossed the Col du Géant, traversed the Drus, and ascended the Aiguilles du Tacul, Moine and Chardonnet, the Aiguilles Dorées and the Aiguille de l'M ; a remarkable sequence of expeditions in so short a time.

At the beginning of July, 1922, a Scottish beginner fills three pages of the *livret* with praises of Maurice, after ascents of the Aiguilles du Tour and d'Orny. The first fortnight of August was spent with Loetscher and Rudolf Frey (an original member of the A.A.C.Z.). The party climbed in succession Grépon, Triolet, Grandes Jorasses, Requin and Aiguille Verte by the Moine ridge, which Maurice and Loetscher had attempted the previous year. Subsequently, he was busy among the Chamonix aiguilles with his old friend Dr. Guillaume Rossier.

The 1923 campaign began by a journey with his brother Jules and G. de Choudens ; Col du Sonadon, Ruinette, Val des Dix hut, returning to Chanrion by the Col de la Serpentine. From there they went to Zermatt, and the *livret* records that during the descent from the Col de Valpelline ' Maurice passe en vitesse dans une gonfle de neige, chute, distorsion du genou et foulure à la cheville droite.' In spite of his injuries, Maurice, thanks to his great strength, descended after dark to Zermatt without assistance.

On July 5, he traversed the Aiguilles Dorées after a fall of snow with C. E. Montague of the Alpine Club. On this expedition his son Nestor, at that time fifteen years old, accompanied his father as porter for the first time. He had a fortnight in Dauphiné in the early days of August with Rudolf Frey, ascending the Grande Ruine and traversing La Meije and the Ecrins ; then came the Grandes Jorasses and Mont Blanc from the Rochers du Mont Blanc, another of Maurice's favourite ascents. The *livret* certainly does not record all the expeditions carried out during that splendid summer of 1923.

Maurice's doings in 1924 are recorded by a haphazard collection of entries, not in chronological order, and evidently written at a later date. He was with the Thomas from June 27 to July 9. After crossing the Col du Midi and Col du Géant, they went to the Tarentaise, walked over the Col de la Leisse and climbed the Grande Motte, Pointe de la Réchasse and Aiguille de la Vanoise. They next traversed the Grande Casse from north to south and finished their tour with ascents of the Dôme de Chasseforêt, Dôme de l'Arpont and Albaron.

It was a bad summer, with a lot of snow, and Maurice had no long

engagements, but made many minor ascents in his own district. In August he attempted the Matterhorn and organised and carried out two rescues of tourists who were lost on the mountain in storms.

The following year there are no entries between June 13 and August 21 (Matterhorn and Trifthorn) but early in September he had some climbs in the Chamonix aiguilles with Ed. Correvon (President of the Jaman section of the C.A.S.) and with a young American, Walter A. Wood, a future President of the American Alpine Club. Wood's entry, p. 166, records ascents of the Aiguille Javelle, Weisshorn and Zinal Rothorn. In Nestor's *livret* he mentions, in addition, the Grépon, Aiguille de l'M and Petits Charmoz.

In 1925—and for six or seven years thereafter—Maurice took his son Nestor as porter on almost all his expeditions. Nestor, at seventeen years old, was a lanky lad, all legs and arms, and could run like a chamois. Some of the particulars which follow are taken from his *livret de guide*.

In January, 1926, an attempt on the Dent Blanche from Schönbühl with Wood and J. P. Vittoz was followed by an ascent on skis of the Breithorn. On April 4, Maurice, with Nestor, took G. Saugy (C.A.S. Section Jaman) up the Grand Combin, and on May 25–26 they went with C. Vuagnat of Geneva from Chanrion to Zermatt. Meeting him again a month later, they crossed the Adler Pass from the Bétemps to the Britannia hut, and after ascending the Allalinhorn, Rimpfischhorn and Strahlhorn, returned to the Riffelberg.

As Maurice's long engagements became less frequent, his *courses collectives* became more numerous. At the end of July he was with the Jaman Section of the C.A.S. at the Oberaletsch hut (Aletschhorn and traverse of the Nesthorn). He had some good days with Walter A. Wood in the first fortnight of August, climbing the Petit Clocher and Chandelle du Portalet and the Aiguille du Moine, and traversing the Dorées, Grands Charmoz, Drus and Les Courtes. They also went up the Requin.

In February, 1927, we may note a short ski campaign with his old client, G. de Choudens : Col du Passon, Petite Fourche and Aiguille du Moine. On March 20, with W. A. Wood and J. P. Vittoz, Nestor as usual being porter, Maurice ascended Mont Blanc from the new Requin hut by way of the Epaule du Tacul and Col du Mont Maudit (first descent on skis by this route). In May there was a *course collective* on skis of the Section Pilatus, based on the Concordia hut, the expeditions including the Jungfrau, Mönch and Lötschenlücke.

During the summer he traversed the Matterhorn from Breuil to Zermatt and followed this with some climbs from Chamonix (Charmoz, Requin, Grépon, Peigne, Cardinal), finishing his season in September by traversing the Aiguilles Dorées and the Aiguille d'Orny.

The entries become fewer with the passing of the years, and Maurice does not seem to have been very busy in 1928.[8] In August he had

[8] The *cours de ski alpin* of the C.A.S. at Moiry in February is not mentioned in Maurice's *livret*. On the 28th of the month, we made the second winter ascent of the Grand Cornier.



MAURICE CRETTEZ.

c. 1935.

nearly three weeks with Dr. Imhoff, an American, and ascents are recorded of the Aiguille de la Tsa, Bouquetins, Requin and Grépon amongst others, and in addition a traverse of the Grands Charmoz. These expeditions were followed by a traverse of the Drus with Walter A. Wood.

The one entry for 1929 records ascents of the Aiguille du Tour, Tête Crettez and Aiguille Javelle, and that for the following year of the Dent Blanche (Ferpècle arête) and Zinal Rothorn at the beginning of September with Sigward Munck.

His doings in 1931 and 1932 are covered by four entries, but there were no expeditions worthy of comment.

Maurice was now sixty years of age, and as time went on his son Nestor often took his place, but he himself was present at two *courses collectives* in 1933, doing the Chardonnet, of course by the North-East arête, at the end of July; then Mont Velan, Grand Combin and Ruinette, and finished the season by traverses of the Aiguilles Dorées and the Chardonnet.

The following year he went from Orny to Arolla with another *course collective* (July 16–21, 1934), and after returning home made two ascents of the Grande Fourche and traversed the Dorées. There is only one entry for 1935, a *course collective* of the Rossberg Section of the C.A.S., recording, amongst others, ascents of the Aiguille du Tour and the Aiguille Purtscheller. The last page of the second *livret* has the visas for the next three years, but no expeditions are recorded.

At the beginning of August, 1936, Maurice, after climbing the Aiguille d'Argentière by the Couloir Barbey, was descending the glacier du Milieu (so called on Vallot's map) with his three tourists. As step-cutting was necessary, he was leading. The last man on the rope stumbled, lost his footing and fell, dragging the whole party with him in a fall of more than 300 ft. which only terminated in the bergschrund. One of the tourists broke his leg, and Maurice's back was severely bruised. The rescue work was most difficult. After this accident, he gave up major expeditions.

Charles Gos has related in *Les Alpes*, 1939, pp. 27–33, how his party skied to Courmayeur in March, 1938, going by the Petit Col Ferret and returning by the Col du Bandarrey. This was Maurice's last ski expedition and he much enjoyed seeing his old Courmayeur friends once again, for he was popular with guides as well as with tourists, with his own countrymen and with foreign guides.

That same year, in the middle of July, it seemed as though Fate wished to finish his career once and for all. He was walking up to the Saleinaz hut with the guardian, when the latter, on reaching the foot of the Petit Clocher de Planereuse, wanted to move a great rock off the path; in doing so, he disturbed a mass of boulders which fell on Maurice and dragged him down 60 ft. He managed to get free and reached the hut where his clients were awaiting him, but he was not fit enough to accompany them and had to go down again next day. He

only made one other expedition, and that was in 1940, when he volunteered to take a party of school children up the Aiguille du Tour. Handicapped by the effects of his accidents and his swollen legs, he had some difficulty in making the ascent, but returned delighted at having been able to reach the top.

I met Maurice at Champex several times during the last war. He could only walk with difficulty but consoled himself by cutting granite boundary stones and by doing odd jobs in his chalet on the Signal. He obviously suffered from the proximity of the small forts which were being built close by, and from the second-rate inn, the 'Alpina,' whence a great deal of noise proceeded at night. But he never complained, and from time to time he trained his telescope on the Combin range to follow some party, or, in the autumn, to watch the chamois. When I saw him for the last time in May, 1948, he seemed to me composed and resigned to his lot, always smiling and without an enemy in the world. How much I regret now that I did not draw upon his wonderful memory for some of the stories that he used to tell so well, or to clear up any obscure points in his long and eventful career.

At his passing there disappeared the greatest guide French Switzerland has ever had, a type of man that we shall never see again. His clients united in praising him for his great strength, his courage, his activity, and for his happy and enthusiastic character. He was a delightful companion who loved both the mountains and his profession. 'You have only to look at this Prince of the Mountains to feel boundless confidence. You engage him as a guide, you leave him as a friend. With him, nothing is impossible.' But in spite of the praises which run throughout the entries in his *livret de guide*, nothing, to my mind, is more touching than the testimony of the octogenarian sister who survives him—'His life was filled with goodness, and with love for all mankind.'