

## BRITISH TRAVELLERS IN THE DAUPHINÉ

BY EMILE GAILLARD<sup>1</sup>

FROM the years 1828 to 1830 when Captain Durand carried out his great topographical survey in preparation for the *carte d'Etat-Major*—a campaign culminating in the conquest of Mont Pelvoux—the high regions of the Dauphiné lost much of their mystery. Botanists, geologists and other scientists had been visiting La Bérarde for more than fifty years. But the real tourists, those who crossed valleys and passes for the sake of enjoyment, had not yet arrived, still less the Alpinists who climbed the great peaks for the fun of climbing.

Amongst those who blazed the trail in the Alps of the Dauphiné British tourists and mountaineers occupy an important position. The first of them to visit the region seems to have been Professor J. D. Forbes, who, on July 10 and 11, 1839, visited the valley of the Vénéon and followed it as far as La Bérarde. Attracted by what he had seen he returned two years later with the Rev. J. M. Heath, and this time undertook a series of more serious Alpine expeditions. On July 21 they climbed from Allevard to La Ferrière and on the following day crossed the Col des Sept-Laux and descended to Allemont. On the 23rd they were at Bourg d'Oisans and the 24th at La Bérarde. The following day they made a first crossing of the glacier Col du Says and descended to La Chapelle-en-Valgaudemar. They then rested for a day, apart from a walk in the Navettes valley. On July 27 they had another *première* to their credit in crossing the Col du Sellar to Ville-Vallouise—although at this time practically every route was a *première*—and on August 2 they went from La Grave to Saint Michel de Maurienne by the unpleasant Col de l'Infernet.

Fourteen years elapse before we see another British climber in the Dauphiné. On September 26, 1855, F. E. Blackstone arrived with a friend. They slept the first night at Bourg d'Oisans and the second at La Grave. There they took a local chamois hunter as guide and with him went to Saint Christophe-en-Oisans on the following day, by the Col de la Lauze. This also was a first crossing of the col, at any rate by a tourist.

Up to this point we have seen only tourists, that is to say men who walked the valleys and crossed the passes, even though the Col de la Lauze involves quite a long glacier ascent. But in 1858 the first real Alpine climber arrived in the Oisans, a pioneer who sought out the various summits and played an important part in the discovery of the Alps, R. C. Nichols. He was content however with one short incursion and crossed the Haut-Dauphiné in three days, having other projects in mind. On August 8 he went from Bourg d'Oisans to La Bérarde.

<sup>1</sup> We regret to record the death of Commandant Gaillard since this article was written.

On the 9th he crossed the Col de la Temple to Ville-Vallouise and on the 10th, after crossing the Col de l'Eychauda he descended to Monestier and Briançon.

On August 10, 1860, T. G. Bonney and J. C. Hawkshaw were at Bourg d'Oisans and W. Mathews at Saint Jean d'Arves, whence he crossed the Col des Prés-Nouveaux to Fréney d'Oisans. The following day he crossed the Col de l'Alpe and went down to Venosc whilst Bonney and Hawkshaw went up from Bourg d'Oisans to Saint Christophe. On the 12th these two crossed the Col du Says and returned that evening to La Bérarde, where they met Mathews by arrangement. They then joined forces and decided to climb Mont Pelvoux, which they believed to be the highest point in the Oisans. They had with them the Chamonix guide Michel Croz. Together they went down to Bourg d'Oisans, crossed the Lautaret, and on August 15 arrived at Ville-Vallouise.

There was at that time at La Bessée a young surveyor called Jean Reynaud, who, always finding himself looking up at Mont Pelvoux, had also made up his mind to climb it. Learning that the English had just arrived with the same intention, he installed himself as if by chance in the inn of Claude Giraud who was the only inn-keeper in Ville-Vallouise. There the Englishmen soon fell in with his plans, and having secured the services of the brothers Sémiond as guides, the whole party left the same night to sleep at the shepherd's shelter on Soureillan, in the valley of Celse-Nière. Throughout the 16th they were unable to move because of the bad weather and on the 17th an attempt on Mont Pelvoux became instead an exploration as far as the glacier du Clot de l'Homme, after which the whole caravan descended to the Hôtel des Alpes at Guillestre.

Some days later a young man of twenty coming from the Valdensian valleys by the Col del Colour del Porco, descended the valley of Queyras and slept at La Bessée in the valley of the Durance. The following day he arrived at Grenoble by way of Briançon, the Col du Lautaret and Bourg d'Oisans, a march lasting eighteen hours in torrential rain. This intrepid traveller was none other than Edward Whymper, a man destined to play an important part in Alpine history. Whilst passing through La Bessée he had quite by chance met the surveyor Reynaud at a local refreshment house, who told him about the recent unsuccessful attempt on Mont Pelvoux by the English party. He proposed that he and Whymper should attempt the climb together. And so the following year whilst Mathews set off for Monte Viso, of which he made a first ascent, Whymper went up to Vallouise where he met Reynaud on August 3. That same evening they went up to a bivouac and made an attempt on Mont Pelvoux on the following day. On the 5th they came down to Vallouise feeling rather discouraged. However they met on the path a British climber J. S. Macdonald who was coming up and had little difficulty in persuading them to turn around and accompany him. Reynaud and Whymper had with them one of the Sémiond brothers and a cobbler from La Bessée named Petit-Clou, an excellent climber,

and so they set off again to sleep in a bivouac higher than that of the previous evening. On August 6 they reached the summit where they found the cairn erected by Captain Durand. Whymper remarked with some bitterness that a higher summit, the Barre des Ecrins lay in front of them to the north and seemed to throw out a challenge to him. From this moment a new and keener desire took hold of him and would allow him no peace until he had conquered the highest point in the whole Dauphiné, called at that time the Pic des Arsines, although nobody knew exactly where it was. But he also had the Matterhorn in mind, and he had to wait three years before returning to the Dauphiné. In the meantime others were turning their attention to the solution of this problem.

In 1862 the Haut-Dauphiné was visited by a mountaineer who had already attracted attention elsewhere and had to his name several sensational first ascents, F. F. Tuckett. When he arrived at Guillestre on July 6 with his guides Michel Croz and Peter Perren, they had just passed a night on the summit of Monte Viso. They went on to Ville-Vallouise. On the 8th they slept at Soureillan and on the 9th at a bivouac higher up, from which they climbed both summits of Mont Pelvoux on the following day. Instead of following Whymper's route Tuckett climbed a snow couloir which carries his name to this day. He also observed that the summit of the Barre des Ecrins was higher than that of Mont Pelvoux and was quite distinct from it. He was supported in this statement by the fact that, during his journey through Paris, he had been given a sight of the *carte d'Etat-Major*, which had not at that time been published, at the Ministère de la Guerre. Tuckett who had no Matterhorn to distract him immediately planned an ascent of Les Ecrins. On July 11 the party came down from their bivouac to Vallouise and went on that afternoon to sleep at Ailefroide. The following day they reached the upper plateau of the Glacier Blanc, but there, owing to the great amount of freshly fallen snow in which they sank up to their knees, they were soon persuaded that it was useless to try and climb Les Ecrins, and that they would have to return another time. Tuckett had to be content with a first crossing of the Col des Ecrins which was for the period a very fine undertaking, and the caravan descended to La Bérarde where they rested on the following day. But Tuckett had not given up his idea of climbing Les Ecrins by the North face—snow and ice being much more in favour at that time than rock—but with the idea of leaving it at a point higher up. With this in mind he crossed the Col du Sélé and returned to Vallouise. On the following day he bivouacked under a large rock on the left lateral moraine of the Glacier Blanc. The place was known for a long time as l'Hôtel Tuckett, and it was used by all parties in this area until 1876 when the Club Alpin Français cleared the site and erected the Refuge Tuckett, well known to all climbers, which has recently been replaced by a modern hut. On July 16 Tuckett made a new attempt on the Barre des Ecrins. He failed, but being a great bagger of first ascents—not such a rare bird in 1862—he made the first crossing of a col which he named the Col

du Glacier Blanc, and thereby reached the Glacier d'Arsine and descended to La Grave. The same evening he dined at Bourg d'Oisans at the Hôtel de Milan, *chez* Martin, which was becoming the headquarters of British mountaineers in the Oisans. At midnight he left by diligence for Grenoble where he arrived on July 17 at five in the morning 'perfectly reposed by a deep sleep in most luxurious surroundings' as he himself summed it up.

Does he take a rest after such a day? Far from it! He immediately set off for the Grande Chartreuse where he climbed the Grand Som on the following day—which gives some idea of the great spirit of the man as a mountaineer. He had made the first ascent of the Aletschhorn in 1859, he had climbed the Finsteraarhorn and many other summits over 4,000 metres in height, and that year he had climbed Mont Pelvoux, the Grivola, and Monte Viso. He reached some of the highest summits in the Oisans and finished the season by an ascent of . . . the Grand Som. Only true lovers of the mountains can understand the beauty of such a programme.

Thus by his own brilliance Tuckett had thrown considerable light on several problems hitherto unknown to mountaineers. He was not to return to the Dauphiné, where he had collected a mass of barometric observations, but his 1862 season produced in fact a triple glory. He had given his name to a couloir on the Pelvoux, to a mountain hut and to a high col near the Montagne des Agneaux. What a glorious epoch, when a climber—albeit an indefatigable one—in satisfying a noble curiosity and his own pleasure, could in the course of only ten days make sure of immortality!

Just over a month after Tuckett's departure T. G. Bonney and W. Mathews arrived in the Dauphiné in his tracks. They came from the Tarentaise where they had made a first ascent of Mont Pourri, and they spent the night of August 23 at Guillestre. They went up the next day to Vallouise to the *auberge* of Claude Giraud, which had become a centre for mountaineers. They were accompanied by Michel Croz and his brother Jean-Baptiste. After having engaged a porter who soon showed himself quite unequal to his task, they went up on the following day to sleep at Tuckett's *gîte*. On the 26th they made an attempt on Les Ecrins but were turned back below the Dôme de Neige. Croz was quite convinced they would reach the summit and had already exclaimed 'Ah! malheureux Ecrins! vous voilà bien morts!', but he had to swallow his words because time was getting on. The caravan followed in the footsteps of Tuckett and reached La Grave by the Col du Glacier Blanc.

The only British caravan in the Dauphiné in 1863 was that of Bonney and Mathews and the latter's brother George. Their guides were Michel Croz and Joseph Basile Simond of Argentière. On August 4 they slept at La Ferrière in the little inn kept by Jourdan. They carried a theodolite, a mercury barometer and various other instruments for topographical observations. In order to carry this scientific equipment the son of Jourdan was engaged as an extra porter. The party

left La Ferrière on August 5 and went up to Sept Laux. They crossed the Col de l'Agnelin, descending to the Grande Maison on the Eau d'Olle and slept at the chalets de la Cochette. An important new summit had attracted their attention, and the next day, having crossed the Col du Couard, they made the first ascent of the Pic de l'Étendard. After this they descended to La Fonderie d'Allemont, whence a carriage took them down to the gastronomical wonders of Mme. Martin at Bourg d'Oisans. On the 7th we find them at La Grave, *chez* Juge. On the 8th they crossed the Glacier du Mont de Lans with a local guide, Alexandre Pic, and climbed the Jandri descending into the Romanche valley to Balme by a difficult route. They returned the same evening to La Grave where they rested on August 9. The next day going *via* the Villard d'Arêne and l'Alpe they reached the Col de la Casse Déserte, but, having formed the opinion that the descent on the other side was impossible, they returned to La Grave. They spent another day there and on the 12th they crossed the Col du Clot des Cavales to La Bérarde. The following day they crossed the Col du Sélé and returned to spend the night at Ville-Vallouise. On the 14th they went to Monestier over the Col de l'Eychauda where they spent a good night *chez* Arnaud at the Hôtel de l'Europe. Then they crossed the Col de Buffère, descended to Névache, went up again to the Col de l'Echelle, to reach Bardonnèche the same evening, the end of their stay in the Dauphiné.

Edward Whymper returned to the Dauphiné in 1864. He was accompanied by A. W. Moore, H. Walker and the guides Michel Croz of Chamonix and Christian Almer of Grindelwald. It was thus a very strong party. On June 20 they went up from Saint Michel de Maurienne to Valloire by the Col des Trois Croix—at that time the road did not exist. They spent the night at the chalets at Commandraut in the valley of the Aiguilles d'Arves. They intended climbing one of these aiguilles, and with this in mind they reached the Col des Aiguilles between the central and north peaks. The two peaks appeared to be quite inaccessible on examination, so the party was content to cross the col and descend to a night at the chalets at La Sausse. On the 22nd they climbed a summit to the east of the Col de Martignare, probably the Bec de Grenier or the Central Aiguille de la Sausse. They then descended to La Grave. On the next day they went over to La Bérarde, making the first traverse of the Brèche de la Meije. The next day they bivouacked on the moraine of the Glacier de la Bonnepierre, and on the 25th crossed the Col des Ecrins and reached the summit of the Barre des Ecrins (4,103 m.) which had never before been trodden by the foot of man. This time it certainly was the highest point of the Oisans that Whymper had beneath his feet. His ambition was satisfied and he never returned to the Dauphiné. The party descended by the Glacier Blanc and bivouacked on the Pré de Madame Carle on the spot where at a later date the Refuge Cézanne was to be built. On the 26th they went down to Vallouise by way of Ailefroide, and there met Jean Reynaud. In the afternoon they went up to the

chalets d'Entraigues, from which on the following day they made the first crossing of the Col O. de la Pilatte to La Bérarde, from which they descended to Venosc to the house of their old friend Etienne Paquet. On June 28 Whymper crossed the Col de l'Alpe to Fréney where he rejoined his friends who had gone down by way of Bourg d'Oisans. They all slept at La Grave and the next day went over the Galibier, returning to Saint Michel de Maurienne, their point of departure.

On July 17 in the same year T. G. Bonney arrived at the Hôtel de Londres at Saint Michel. With him was R. W. Taylor and their guide Basile Simond who had been with Bonney the previous year. On July 18 they crossed from Saint Michel to La Grave by the Col du Goléon. On the 19th they were turned back by bad weather on the Col de la Lauze from which they hoped to reach Saint Christophe. They returned to La Grave and went down as far as Fréney. The next day they reached Saint Christophe by the Col de l'Alpe and from there they made on July 21 the first crossing of the Col de la Muande by which they reached La Chapelle en Valgaudemar. They then returned to Grenoble.

The following year, 1865, in the Dauphiné was not a particularly fruitful one. R. W. Taylor and W. G. Adams with the guide J. B. Simond as usual, arrived at Venosc on July 10 and slept the following night at the chalet de la Selle, from which on the 12th they made the second ascent of the Jandri, and returned to Saint Christophe by the Col de Jandri, the only *première* of the year.

On July 13, whilst they were going down to Bourg d'Oisans, Michel Croz, the friend of Simond, was setting out with Whymper and a large party for the Matterhorn. This brave Chamonix guide who had played such a brilliant part in the discovery of the high peaks of the Haut-Dauphiné, was to achieve on the following day his last and most glorious victory. At 1.40 in the afternoon he was on the summit of the Matterhorn which he had just conquered. With his party he spent a glorious hour on the summit with the world at his feet. A few moments after starting the descent the fatal slip occurred which carried Michel Croz and three of his companions to their death.

In the month of August C. H. Pilkington, one of the pioneers of guideless climbing, crossed the Col de la Lauze. No British party appeared in the Dauphiné in 1866, nor during the summer of 1867. The golden age of British mountaineering in the Oisans had finished. In 1870, with the arrival on the scene in the Dauphiné of W. A. B. Coolidge (who was in any case not British but American), a new era dawned, the era of detailed and systematic exploration.