

THE FIRST ATTEMPT ON THE PORTA DA ROSEG

(From the diaries of D. W. FRESHFIELD.)

[The Porta da Roseg (also known as the Fuorcla Tschierva-Scerscen, or Güssfeldtsattel), 11,572 ft., lies between Piz Scerscen and Piz Roseg and leads from the Tschierva Glacier to the Upper Scerscen Glacier.

The north side of the pass consists of a formidable ice slope, about 750 ft. high, at an average angle of 50–60°. The steepest part is in the lower third of the wall where the angle approaches 70°. The first passage was made on September 12–13, 1872, by Herr Paul Güssfeldt, with Hans Grass, Peter Jenny, and Caspar Capat. On the first day, Grass and Jenny cut up two-thirds of the ice slope and then returned. On the following day they resumed work and, after cutting in all some 450 steps, reached the pass. Herr Güssfeldt and Capat then ascended, being assisted up the last piece by a rope, 100 ft. long, thrown down by the guides from above.

Before this date, several unsuccessful attempts had been made to force a passage; the last of these was probably that of J. O. Maund and J. H. A. Peebles-Chaplin in August, 1872.¹ Güssfeldt states² that Grass and Jenny both took part in the most recent attempt before the successful first crossing.

The second passage was made by Dr. Emil Burckhardt, with Hans Grass and Peter Egger on August 1, 1874, after an unsuccessful attempt on July 29, and the third on August 4, 1889, by W. E. Davidson and G. Gruber, with Hans and Andreas Jaun, Hans von Bergen, and Andreas Stachli. On this occasion Hans Jaun and von Bergen cut up the whole wall, from the bergschrund to the pass, in 1 hour 35 minutes.

The first passage from south to north was one of Christian Klucker's most remarkable achievements. On June 21, 1898, he cut down the notorious ice-wall, lowering stage by stage his two companions, Herr A. von Rydzewski and Mansueto Barbaria of Cortina. When near the bergschrund a stake was driven into the ice, and round this a double rope was passed enabling the party to slide down over the schrund. It is believed that the south–north passage has never been repeated.

The first attempt to cross the pass was made by D. W. Freshfield and the Rev. James Robertson, with Peter Jenny and a porter on August 17, 1866. A brief account may be found in *A. J.* 2. 406–7.

We are greatly indebted to Miss K. M. Freshfield for permission to publish the following account of the expedition taken from the diary of the late Mr. D. W. Freshfield.—D.F.O.D.]

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¹ See *A. J.* 34. 70.

² *In den Hochalpen*, p. 73.

The peculiarly tempting pass offered to an Alpine enthusiast by the narrow saddle between Piz Roseg and Piz Bernina had long attracted my attention, and during my stay at St. Moritz I had time to attempt it. After waiting a week for my old companion Douglas Walker,³ he arrived with a rubbed heel which incapacitated him for the moment for mountain work. I was, however, lucky in finding at Pontresina a companion in Mr. Robertson of Rugby,⁴ an A.C., who was spending his holyday [*sic*] in the Engadine.

We reached the Misaun chalet by moonlight on the evening of the 16th of August, accompanied by Jenni⁵ and a porter. The latter was destined to be the victim of the party and began his misfortunes by sinking knee-deep in a marsh just before he reached the chalet.

We set out on a lovely morning, and mounted gradually by a very rough path along the side of the Tschierva glacier under the base of Piz Tschierva. Arrived at the level of the smooth glacier which lies under the upper fall, we crossed the nearer branch to the foot of the ridge of rocks which divides the two arms of the glacier and their ice-falls. There is no difficulty in climbing these rocks, until the more crevassed portion of the glacier is left below and it becomes best to return to the ice. Passing under a projecting crag conspicuous from the upper part of the Roseg Thal we soon reached the level névé-plateau which fills the corner between Piz Roseg and the ice-mailed flank of the Bernina. The distance to the foot of the wall which we had to attack was not great, but owing to the amount of new snow the walking was most laborious, as one sunk above the knees at each step. Here I took a turn at leading as the porter was incapable, and Jenni, I knew, would have lots to do on the ice-wall.

After a laborious wade we reached the bergschrund, which was too much choked with snow to offer any difficulty. Above it rose a steep but by no means terrific slope of hard ice. We had, of course, to begin at once step cutting; perhaps the safest plan under ordinary circumstances would have been to cut a staircase right up to the col, a height of perhaps 600 ft., but the very strong and bitterly cold wind prevented our doing this. It was quite clear that our only chance of success lay in cutting up as quickly as possible to the first spot where we could get onto the rocks on our left; these, we hoped, might be easy enough to let us make tolerably quick progress. Any protracted exposure to

³ James Douglas Walker. Born in 1841, he was elected a member of the Alpine Club in December, 1864, resigned in 1885, and died on June 24, 1920. Of his climbing career, Mumm records only that he climbed with Freshfield in 1864 and 1866.

⁴ Rev. James Robertson (1836-1903). Elected to the Alpine Club in April, 1864, he was a member of Whymper's party which set out from Zermatt on July 16, 1865, to search for the victims of the Matterhorn accident.

⁵ Peter Jenny. His name occurs in many of the early Engadine ascents, including the first ascent of Piz Bernina by the Loch with Herr Saratz in 1858, and by the Festung with J. F. Hardy and E. S. Kennedy in 1861. He accompanied Tyndall in an eventful ascent of Piz Morteratsch in 1864, as related in *Hours of Exercise in the Alps*. Jenny died in 1891, aged about seventy.

the bitter cold was out of the question. The steps took a long time, for the ice was hard, and more than an hour elapsed ere we gained the rocks. They proved very smooth and very rotten, all the crannies which ought to have given foothold were filled with ice.

With some difficulty we got Jenni up some 40 ft., and I followed; it took a quarter of an hour for both of us to do this. The porter, meanwhile, was moaning over the cold and his fingers, and poor Robertson, who was extended on the icy face with next to nothing to hold on by and had the benefit of the rotten stones we sent down, naturally was not disposed to take a cheerful view of our prospects. The crags above, though I think somewhat easier than what we had done, were by no means easy looking, and the alternative of frost-bites or return was too plainly offered to allow of any further progress. We accordingly turned round and carefully redescended to the bergschrund which, as all our steps were ready made, took comparatively short time.

I suffered little from the cold only because I was well wrapped up. Mr. Robertson and Jenni suffered from stiff fingers, and the porter's hands were regularly frost-bitten and festered rather badly afterwards. We returned to the Misaun Alp by the same route we had taken in the morning and I got back to St. Moritz in the evening in time for the supper 'table d'hôte.'

Our failure was entirely attributable to the weather. We had accomplished about one-third of the wall when we turned, but the first bit is the steepest. On a calm day any good party ought to reach the col, but it will always be a climb.