

## EARLY EXPEDITIONS IN THE PONTRESINA DISTRICT

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**I**N Volume 32 of the ALPINE JOURNAL the late H. F. Montagnier recorded some early extracts from the Visitors' Books at the Eggishorn, the Riffelberg, and the Monte Rosa hotel at Zermatt. These were of great interest, being the first accounts written by early members of the Club, and others, of their achievements in the Alps. Although fuller accounts of many of the expeditions subsequently appeared in the ALPINE JOURNAL, *Peaks, Passes, and Glaciers*, and elsewhere, the original entries with their first impressions will always retain their interest and value.

There follow the original records of some early expeditions in the Pontresina district transcribed from the Visitors' Books of the Kronenhof Hotel. We are very grateful to Herr Gredig for his kindness in making the books available and for allowing these extracts to be taken.

### PIZ ROSEG

1. The first recorded attempt. H. B. George and A. W. Moore. July 2, 1863.

' July 2. We came here with Christian Almer of Grindelwald to try the Piz Rosegg. On enquiring for a second guide we were told that the tariff was 250 fr. (though the peak has never been ascended) and that our guide, being a "foreigner", could only be allowed to go as an amateur. Declining these preposterous terms we went yesterday and slept at the head of the Rosegg Thal to try the peak with our own guide only. We had to reconnoitre for ourselves as Almer could get hardly any information about the unsuccessful attempt made by the native guides, and finally chose the only route possible up to the Sattel below the Westernmost peak of the Rosegg mass. Above this the difficulties were so serious and promised to be so much worse for returning than for ascending that we did not feel justified in going on with only our one guide. The rocks which constitute the chief difficulty do not extend very far, and once above them progress would, so far as we could judge, be tolerably straightforward, at least up to the lower of the two peaks, which is connected with the highest by a short arête of which we could see nothing.'

George and Moore 'reached the point whence the Pontresina guides, by all testimony but their own, retreated on their last attempt, after having failed on other sides of the mountain'; this was the point marked 3,599 m. on the North-west arête of the peak. The attempt by the Pontresina guides is not mentioned by Studer.

2. The second recorded attempt and first ascent of the Schneekuppe. F. T. Bircham. August 31, 1863.

'Ascended the Piz Roseg yesterday Aug. 31st. Left the Alp Misauna chalets at 4 a.m. and following the Roseg glacier side of the Aguagliouls reached the bottom of the rocks from which the mountain rises at 8 a.m. From thence up to the arête at the foot of Piz Roseg was a very steep and difficult ascent for  $3\frac{3}{4}$  hrs. during which time the step-cutting on the ice was continuous. On arriving at the arête at 11.45 a.m. the remainder of the route was plain though it was a stiff  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hour to the summit (the ice being exceedingly steep—and the step-cutting again laborious though not so continuous) which we reached at 1.15 p.m., the ascent thus taking  $9\frac{1}{4}$  hours from the chalets, including stoppages of about 1 hour or more. The descent from the Piz to the foot of the rocks on the summit of the Roseg glacier occupied rather less than two hours, it having taken  $5\frac{1}{4}$  hours to ascend. We reached the chalets at  $7\frac{1}{2}$  p.m., being there met by a "bergwagen".

The worst part of the ascent by far is from the Roseg glacier up the rocks & ice to the arête as the remainder, though all ice & steep, is plain sailing enough. The view from the summit is of course glorious and a grander view of the Bernina range could not be obtained. My guides were P. Jenni and Alexander Flury of Pontresina and better ones for their own mountains one could not want. The stone avalanches that are frequent down the ice slopes from the rocks above *may* make the ascent to the arête at any time dangerous as well as difficult. We met with but one—which luckily passed about 20 yards to our left—across our path. F. T. B. 1 Sept. 1863.'

In 1864 two further attempts were made on Piz Roseg, by J. J. Weilenmann with Franz Pöll, and, some weeks later by J. A. Specht with the same guide, but neither attempt got further than the Schneekuppe.

3. The first ascent of the highest peak. A. W. Moore and Horace Walker. June 28, 1865.

'We yesterday made the first ascent of the highest point of the Piz Roseg. We left the Misauna Alp at 3.10 a.m. and reached the lower peak (ascended by Mr. Bircham in 1863 and Herr Weilenmann in 1864) at 12.0, having lost much time on the road. The arête of rock and snow leading to the highest point is very tough,

and its passage occupied  $1\frac{1}{4}$  hour, till 1.15 p.m. In a less favourable state of the snow a still longer time might be required. We reached the Misauna Alp at 6.0 p.m. and this place in a char at 7.25. Our only guide was Jakob Anderegg of Meiringen, of whose skill, courage, and general conduct we cannot speak in sufficiently high terms. A bottle with the names of the party was deposited on a patch of rocks to the south west of, and a little below, the summit.'

This was one of Jakob Anderegg's most brilliant achievements. The experiment of taking only one guide was at that time almost without precedent but, as Moore wrote 'the complete success which attended the experiment was evidence enough of Jakob's merit'. Within ten days the same party had made the second passage of the Sesiajoch and the first ascent of the Ober Gabelhorn.

Dr. Güssfeldt, the distinguished German mountaineer, who made the ascent in 1869, suggested that Jakob alone had reached the highest summit and that Moore and Walker had remained on the Schneekuppe! (*J.S.A.C.*, 1870). He subsequently learned the true facts and published a full apology in *A.J.* 9. 383.

#### PIZ SELLA

The first ascent. E. N. Buxton, W. F. Digby, A. Johnston. July 22, 1863.

'Ascended the Piz Sella, the 2nd peak on the left seen from these windows, from the Roseg chalets in  $5\frac{1}{2}$  hrs., including  $\frac{1}{4}$  hr. halt. It must be a magnificent point of view but we were in clouds most of the time and could only see occasionally through the breaks. There is no difficulty till within  $\frac{1}{2}$  hr. of the summit, where a narrow snow arête leads up to the final rocks. This might be troublesome if the snow were in a bad state. We descended straight on to the glacier which comes down from the Roseg col and found some magnificent glissading.'

#### PIZ MORTERATSCH

An early ascent. J. Frederick Gosling and E. W. Blore. August 15, 1863.

'Ascended the Piz Morteratsch. Left the Rosegg chalets (good quarters) at 4.30 a.m., reached the top of the rocks in 2 hrs. 40 min., staying there 40 min. for breakfast, & reached the summit at 9.30 a.m. The snow was in excellent order owing to a heavy storm of the previous evening. Descended by a route new to everyone except Peter Jenni, by a steep descent of rocks & an untried glacier by wh. we reached the Morteratsch glacier in about 3 hrs. from the top.

Our principal guide, B. Walther, conducted us admirably down this route, wh. he had never previously tried. The ascent from the Rosegg chalet is easy when the snow is in good order but might under other circumstances be difficult.'

#### PIZ BERNINA

1. The third (and first British) ascent. J. F. Hardy and E. S. Kennedy. July 23, 1861.

'Started for the ascent of Piz Bernina at 2 p.m. July 22 and reaching Boval about 5 remained there till 3 a.m. July 23. Descending to the Vadret de Morterasch we crossed it & ascended the rocks & steep snow slopes which separate it from the Vadret Pers. Following this ridge, which occasionally presented considerable difficulties, we passed the base of the Pizzi Cambrena, di Palu, & Zupo and reached the corridor which separates the Pizzo Bernina from the Cresta Aguiza about 7.30 a.m. We then ascended steep snow slopes till within some 200 feet of the summit where the snow appeared so treacherous as to render it inadvisable for the whole party to continue the ascent. Hardy & guides, however, reached the summit at 10.45. We descended the same route to the Morterasch glacier along wh. we pushed our way to its lowest extremity. At a short distance from this we found a chaise awaiting us and on our entry into Pontresina at 10.15 were received with acclamations by the whole village. "God save the Queen" was sung in chorus and a band of music preceded us through the town.

We had 3 guides, Peter Jenni, his brother Fleuri, & Alexander [Flury]; all performed their duty most satisfactorily, but of the senior guide, Peter Jenni, it is impossible to speak in too high terms. We know of no guide either among the Oberlanders or the Chamonix men who possesses more courage, determination, & skill in forcing a way through the most intricate difficulties, or who evinces greater care in insuring the safety of the travellers. Taking all things into consideration we are each of us of the opinion that this is the most arduous ascent we have ever made.'

A delightful account of this expedition appears in *P.P.G.*, 2nd series, vol. 1. The first ascent of Piz Bernina was made by Herr Coaz in 1850 and such was the reputation of the mountain that eight years elapsed before the second ascent.

2. An unsuccessful attempt. E. N. Buxton, W. F. Digby, W. E. Hall, M. Woodmass. July 30, 1863.

'We left the Morteratsch cave at 5 a.m. this morning (an earlier start being prevented by the badness of the weather) to ascend the

Bernina. We kept up the right hand branch of the ice-fall, wh. it took us 1 hr. & a quarter to pass, and arrived at the great crevasse half an hour below the summit at 11.45. Here the violence of the snow and wind & the severity of the cold forced us to turn, & we reached the cave again at 4.30. Making allowance for the time saved by starting from the cave instead of from the chalet of Boval the route of the ice fall would be fully some hours shorter than that hitherto taken by the Gemen Freiheit. As the snow was in very good order on the upper fields and we walked very fast with hardly any rest, the bad weather did not probably make much difference to the time required for the ascent.'

#### FUORCLA DAL CHAPÜTSCHIN and FUORCLA FEX-SCERSCEN

The first recorded crossings. F. Craufurd Grove and J. M. Wedgewood. August 29, 1861.

' We went from this place to Chiesa in the Val Malenco by the Roseg & Fex glaciers. As this pass has hitherto been only crossed on one occasion by guides, a few words on it may be useful. We ascended the Roseg glacier keeping well to the right & passing to the left of the Piz Capucine. After passing this peak the principal, & indeed the only, difficulty of the pass occurred. We descended on to the Fex glacier by an awkward rocky couloir the difficulty of which was in our case increased by its being in several places covered with thin ice : in passing this part our guides Peter Jenny and Alexander Fleuri showed great skill. After this there is a short ascent on the Fex & Scerscen glaciers & then the descent into the Val Malenco. The pass occupied us  $14\frac{3}{4}$  hours from the chalets, but might be done by good walkers in an hour less. We were perfectly satisfied with our guides.'

#### MONTE DELLA DISGRAZIA

1. The first ascent. E. S. Kennedy, Leslie Stephen, Thomas Cox. August 24, 1862.

' On Aug. 24th the above party with Melchior Anderegg (of Meyringen) as guide ascended the highest point of the Monte della Disgrazia, a peak wh. it is believed had never before been reached. We left the baths of Masino at 1 a.m., ascended the Val di Mello & climbed the arête wh. descends from near the snow col N.W. of the summit. Then we descended some 50 ft. on to the glacier by some difficult rocks ; reached the col after crossing a short snow slope at 10.5. From this point  $1\frac{1}{4}$  hours climb up the arête brought us to the top. We remained there 20 minutes & returning by the same route

reached St. Martino at 5.45. N.B. The inhabitants of the baths are apparently unaware of the existence of mountains in the neighbourhood, & not at all disposed to give any assistance to those who wish to climb them.'

The first ascent was disputed. In 1865 Herr Siber-Gysi made an attempt on the Disgrazia but did not reach the highest point. He then proceeded to deny the authenticity of the British ascent (*J.S.A.C.*, iii, pp. 250-60). The British party unfortunately neglected to build a cairn on the summit, as is evident from the account that follows of the second ascent of the highest point; there is no mention of a cairn in Kennedy's account of the first ascent in *A.ŷ.* 1.

Subsequently, largely through the efforts of F. F. Tuckett, Herr Siber-Gysi was convinced that he was mistaken and withdrew his allegations (*A.ŷ.* 5. 46-8).

Baron de Beurnonville remained at the point reached by Herr Siber-Gysi, whose cairn he found on the lower summit.

2. The second ascent of the highest point. Alexander Fleury and Peter Jenny. October 23, 1866. The entry in the Visitors' Book is over the signature of Baron E. de Beurnonville.

'Le 23 ascension du Monte della Disgrazia par Fleury et Jenny. La fatigue m'a empêché de les suivre jusqu'au sommet. Arrivés à la première sommité, inférieure d'environ 30 ou 40 pieds à la véritable cime, nous y trouvâmes un signal en pierres précédemment construit mais sans pouvoir y découvrir aucun nom. Tandis que je restais à me reposer auprès de ce *Steinmann* les deux guides escaladèrent la sommité la plus élevée, où ils ne trouvèrent aucun signal, ni aucune autre trace d'une précédente ascension.

Après y avoir construit à la hâte un *Steinmann* ils revinrent me prendre et la descente s'effectua aussi vite que possible à cause de la nuit qui s'approchait. Partis du châlet à 5 hres du matin, nous n'avions pu parvenir à la première sommité qu'à 2½ h. de l'après-midi à cause de l'état de la glace excessivement dure en cette saison avancée. Arrivée de Fleury et Jenny sur la cime à 2-h.  $\frac{3}{4}$ . Départ à 3 heures. Retour au châlet à 8 heures du soir.'

#### PIZ PALÜ

The first authentic ascent of the East Peak. E. N. Buxton, W. F. Digby, W. E. Hall, A. Johnston, M. Woodmass. July 24, 1863.

'First ascent of the Palü. We ascended the Piz Palü to-day, sleeping yesterday at the newly built-up rock under the Piz Morteratsch with the intention of going up the Bernina, which was prevented

by a violent thunderstorm. At 7 a.m. the weather cleared sufficiently for the Palü, the summit being reached in  $5\frac{1}{2}$  hours, some time being lost by Jenni insisting on attempting the arête on the East from which we were driven back by loose snow on hard ice. We ultimately gained the point by a slope to the right steeper than anything in our experience. We discovered that the head of the Fellaria glacier comes up to within 100 ft. of the summit, with an easy descent over rocks. This clearly opens a pass between the Morteratsch and the Fellaria. We desired to make this pass to Malenco then & there, but Jenni refused owing to thick fog & late hour. We returned to the hut in  $4\frac{1}{2}$  hours having been delayed by another thunder and hail storm. Guides. Fleuri and Walther [and Peter Jenny].'

The East peak of the Palü may have been reached by Herr Oswald Heer and his companions in 1835, but Buxton's party made the first certain ascent. For a note on the first ascent of the highest peak see *A. J.* 61. 545.

#### TINZENHORN

The first ascent, D. W. Freshfield. August 7, 1866.

' On August 7 I made with F. Dévouassoud the ascent of the Tinzenhorn from Bergun, descending the other side of the peak to the Val d'Err and the Julier Road. Times : up  $5\frac{1}{2}$  hrs. down 5 hrs.

P.S. Since I wrote the above I have seen in the *Bundner Tageblatt* an account of the successful ascent of the Tinzenhorn by Herr Hauser and his guides which concludes as follows—" By their permission an Englishman with a guide joined them ". This sentence requires some explanation and obliges me to enter into details otherwise needless. The two parties were entirely distinct ; we found and led the way up the whole of the peak, and had been 50 minutes on the top before we were joined by Herr Hauser, who therefore can scarcely claim any peculiar ownership of the mountain.'

Freshfield wrote an amusing account of this ascent in *A. J.* 5. 206-11. He and Dévouassoud were on the summit for nearly an hour before the Swiss party came in sight. As they came up Freshfield ' knowing the importance attached by foreign mountaineers to such small points, indicated a boulder two feet higher than that on which I was sitting, and said, " See, sir, there is the ' allerhöchste Spitze ' ; it is still unclimbed ". With a sudden effort the Herr rushed on to it, and grasping Jenni and Fluri by either hand gave vent to his feelings in a sentence which, beginning with " Hoch " and " Vaterland ", soon subsided into " Geben Sie mir Schnapps ".'