

## TROLLRYGGEN FROM ROMSDAL

BY ARNE RANDERS HEEN

AT THE narrowest part of Romsdal, within a few kilometres of the small village of Åndalsnes on the Romsdalsfjord, a favourite port of call by the Tourist steamers, Romsdalshorn, on the north side, rises almost vertically from the bottom of the valley to 1,550 m., and Trolltindene to 1,800 m. on the opposite, south side. From the ridge of the latter, fairly easily reached from behind, a climber may have the pleasure of dropping stones down a sheer precipice of more than 1,000 m., possibly the highest vertical mountain wall in Europe according to an estimate by Mr. Vandeleur, which appeared in *A.ŷ.* 57. 188.

Just south of Store Trolltind, a gully leads up to the ridge from Romsdal. This was climbed by Eirik Heen and myself in 1931, an expedition referred to by Mr. N. E. Odell in *A.ŷ.* 44. 137.

To the south-east, this wall runs into a 1,600-m. high, extremely steep buttress called *Trollryggen*. The foot of this defiant-looking buttress being situated less than 10 km. from the pier at Åndalsnes and easily reached by rail and car, it is not surprising that the ascent of it has for years been the secret aim of climbers of many nationalities. Attempts have been made, but all have been stopped about one-third up by an 8-m. high perpendicular crack, which can nowhere be bypassed and up to which point the ascent is difficult enough.

The ascent commences just above the Fiva Farm on the Rauma river, famous for fishing, belonging for more than a century to the British Bromley Davenport family. In his book, *Sport*, published in London in 1886, 'Gamlelorden' (the old lord), gave a vivid description of this district: '... the Romsdal valley, surrounded by scenery unsurpassed in its abrupt wildness by anything to be seen in that wildest of wild countries'.

From the opposite side of the valley, a grass-covered gallery can be seen to commence from the top of the crack, apparently leading to easier ground about half-way up, and where a snow-drift remains the year round.

I had long since given up the route as being too difficult and exacting, when the young Norwegian rock-climber, Ralph Høybakk, came to Åndalsnes one day in the autumn of last year. With a friend, he had just made an ascent of Romsdalshorn by a new route which I knew to be very difficult, so I asked him if he would care to accompany me and take a look at the crack. He agreed and we made our start in the



afternoon of September 2, 1958, reaching the grass shelf below the crack in three hours from the Fiva Farm; here we decided to spend the night, sleeping in a tent-bag. A fine place for a bivouac, except for the lack of water, in dry weather.

We started again at 8 o'clock in the morning, in bright and warm sunshine, and got up the difficult slabs leading to the crack. As I knew this part of the route from before, I took the lead here and managed to reach a security piton just below the crack, left there during one of my earlier attempts. No one had ever been higher. Pitons are difficult to get in higher up, and handholds are practically non-existent. I squeezed myself into the crack, clinging on in a most uncomfortable position until I felt my strength deserting me, so had no alternative but to wriggle down again as best I could.

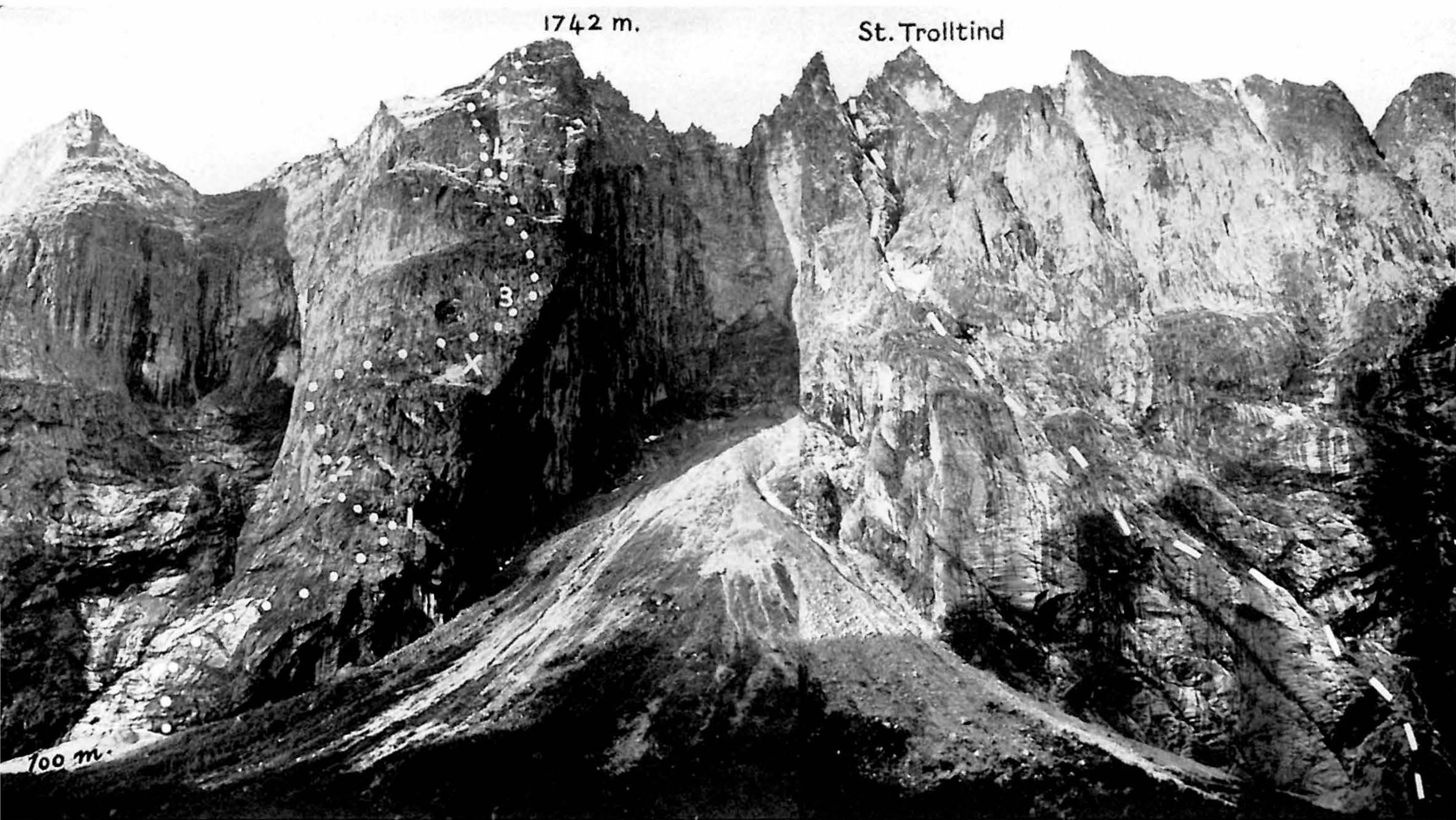
I explained to Ralph how things were up there and suggested that he should have a try and endeavour to pass the critical point without lingering there for too long. He departed and met with great difficulties, but managed to pull himself up the formidable overhang, whereupon first the rucksack and then I, followed. This proved to be the key to the route.

The grass gallery sloped upwards rather far out to the left, where it ended in a high crag. Thereupon further upwards over somewhat easier ground far out to the right, unfortunately a couple of hundred metres above the snow-drift, where water might have been found. As it would have taken us too long to descend to the snow, we had to continue in the scorching sunshine, almost without water in our pocket-flasks.

We were now approaching the middle part of the buttress, where there was nothing but high and clean-polished slabs, all terribly steep. The situation appeared to me so critical, that I told Ralph it would be quite justifiable to beat a retreat. He replied that he would first have a peep round a corner before giving in, and this resulted in about a rope's length of very severe climbing, after which he reported that new possibilities seemed to offer. Tempted by this, we continued with difficulty a couple of rope lengths upwards towards the right, only to find we had been driven so near to the edge of the extremely steep precipice, that the possibility of a safe retreat demanded all our attention. For in the case of an 'abseil', the risk of swinging out over the precipice would be imminent. We found it safer, therefore, to continue the ascent.

A series of extremely steep slabs now followed, but Ralph managed to force them one after the other, while I secured him as best as I could with the necessary piton-belays. Two pitons were needed for technical purposes, and these had to be left there. Above the slabs, the route became somewhat easier and we finally got a glimpse of the great gully





# TROLLRYGGEN AND TROLLTINDENE

..... 1958 TROLLRYGGEN ROUTE    - - - - - 1931 ROUTE    1. GRASS LEDGE    2. CRACK    3. THE DIFFICULT SLABS    4. THE GULLY



above us, which descends far downwards from the summit, 1,742 m., to the south-east of this.

I had once myself, years ago, been down part of this gully from the ridge, and it had appeared practicable as far down as I could then see. Below the gully, we found a small patch of snow, from which we could at last quench the thirst we had suffered from so terribly all day. It was now 15.30 hours, so we took half an hour's rest and a bite.

Resuming the ascent and on reaching the foot of the gully, we were alarmed to find the lower part of it blocked by an overhang which looked entirely prohibitive. This had to be overcome, however, as there was no alternative but to reach a slab projecting from the left edge of the gully, some three rope-lengths above the overhang. The ascent up to that point proved extremely severe, and quite impossible from there onwards, without the aid of pitons. Otherwise it would have taken too long, if practicable at all. From the top of the projecting slab, we were obliged to proceed far out round the edge by a lofty and highly exposed traverse in the direction of the gully. The route on the edge ended with a severe overhang, after which we at long last reached the gully proper. This gradually became less steep, allowing us to climb more rapidly which was very fortunate, for it was getting late and began to darken, moreover we had no outfit for spending another night out. Happily, the weather continued fine.

I was on the tiptoe of expectation as to how this adventure should end, but was relieved all of a sudden by a shout of triumph from Ralph, who had discovered and reached a cairn high up in the gully. I followed, and soon after we were both standing beside the small cairn I had myself built there years before, so now knew for certain that we should be able to manage the rest. From this spot the ascent was fairly easy and the summit was reached at 20.00 hours, in pitch dark. It had taken us 12 hours' continuous climbing from the grass shelf where we had spent the night, excepting the half-hour's rest we had allowed ourselves shortly after 15.00 hours.

As I was well acquainted with the route down from the summit on the other side, we had little difficulty finding our way down to the Trollsteg Hut which we reached at midnight, happy to find people there and to get indoors. As usual in the autumn, a detachment of Norwegian soldiers was stationed there, going through a course of mountain training. With them were two British climbers taking part in this course. They appeared to have had plans of attempting an ascent of Trollryggen, but were told that this had now been accomplished.

The next morning we took the 'bus down the Trollsteg road to Åndalsnes, and climbed before noon from Fiva up to the grass shelf for our tent-bag and the other things we had left there.