

## THE NORTH FACES OF THE TRE CIME DI LAVAREDO

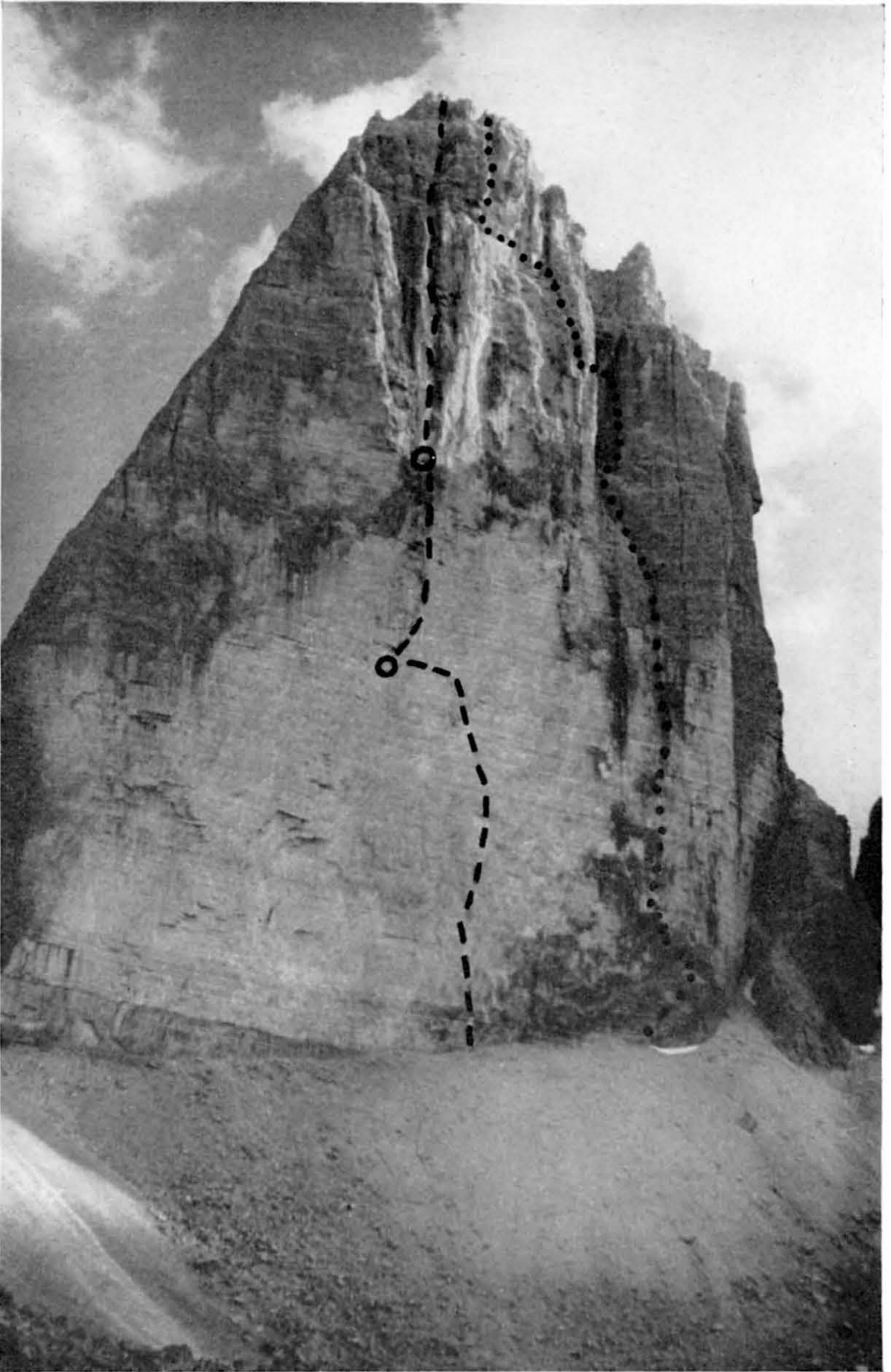
BY C. J. S. BONINGTON

THE North faces of the Cima Grande and Cima Ovest present one of the most impressive spectacles in the Alps. They rise, from a plinth of scree slopes, in two huge smooth walls, unbroken by gullies or chimneys, with overhangs as their only feature. Their first ascents, in the thirties, were representative of the great advances then being made in the science of *pitonage*. The two brothers Dimai with Comici climbed the North face of the Grande on August 12 to 14, 1933, and Cassin, with Ratti, climbed that of the Ovest on August 28 to 30, 1935. In each case, however the routes left the main part of the face untouched, the former creeping up the western side, and the latter traversing into the wall from nearly half-way up. They were dependent on good cracks for pegging. By 1957 the Comici route had had many hundreds of ascents, including some British ones, the first being made by I. G. McNaught Davies. The Cassin Route was harder and not climbed so often, indeed not by a British party till 1959 when three parties climbed it: J. Marshall and another, D. Whillans and J. Smith, C. J. S. Bonington and I. G. Clark.

In 1957 these great faces were subjected to another revolution in technique. Improved *pitonage* and the use of expansion bolts made it possible to climb even blank walls. Also, on close inspection, it was found that the great yellow wall of the Cima Grande did possess both shallow cracks and small, at times friable, holds. In 1957 a number of German parties attempted an inroad on the wall, one getting about 300 ft. up. In the following year Dietrich Hasse, Lothar Brandler, Jörg Lehne and Siegfried Löwe succeeded in forcing the route, taking five days from July 6 to 10. They used altogether fifteen expansion bolts and about 200 pitons. These were all left in place. The climbers carried a thousand-foot line with them, which they used to haul up food, drink and further stocks of pitons, from the ground. By the end of 1959 the climb had had about 18 ascents.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE 'DIRECTE'

The climb can be divided into three sections. The first goes up the smooth, featureless wall to the foot of the big overhangs in the centre of the face (800 ft. of climbing). The next section goes through the overhangs, and the final one follows a series of grooves and chimneys to the 'Ring Band'. Standard—VI sup.



NORTH FACE OF CIMA GRANDE.  
----- DIRECT.    ○ BIVOUAC LEDGE    ..... ORDINARY (COMICI).

*1st Section*

The climb starts about 300 ft. from the right (west) hand end of the face, where a series of broken rock steps merge into the smooth yellow wall. The first pitch is up a thin crack (V), with a piton at 20 feet. Three pitches of crack climbing over shattered flakes (IV & V) lead to the start of the major difficulties. From here traverse leftwards and upwards (A<sub>1</sub> & V+) to a small stance below a conspicuous roof. Climb up to the roof, and straight over it (V+ and A<sub>3</sub>). Climb the wall above, first right and then left (V) to a wide groove (VI & A<sub>1</sub>), which leads to a stance on a sloping ledge. Climb up to the left to a stance at the start of a horizontal line of weakness (V). Follow this to the left on unpleasantly loose pitons (A<sub>1</sub> & VI) until it is possible to step up into a crack, leading to a narrow ledge (V). Follow this to the left (III) and step down onto two good bivouac ledges, below the big overhangs. This is undoubtedly the most exacting part of the route, giving continuously delicate free climbing combined with artificial on widely spaced and insecure pitons.

*2nd Section*

The route is obvious, following the pitons for four pitches through the overhangs (A<sub>3</sub> strenuous). The first two stances are in *étriers*. Another pitch up a groove (IV) leads to some wide ledges. A Route Book can be found here.

*3rd Section*

Follow the chimney on the left of the bivouac ledge. After an overhang at 70 ft. (A<sub>2</sub>) there is straightforward climbing to the 'Ring Band' up a series of grooves and chimneys (IV, 700 ft.). From the Ring Band, it is normal to traverse off to the left, or the rocks above can be climbed to the summit about 150 ft. above.

*Equipment*

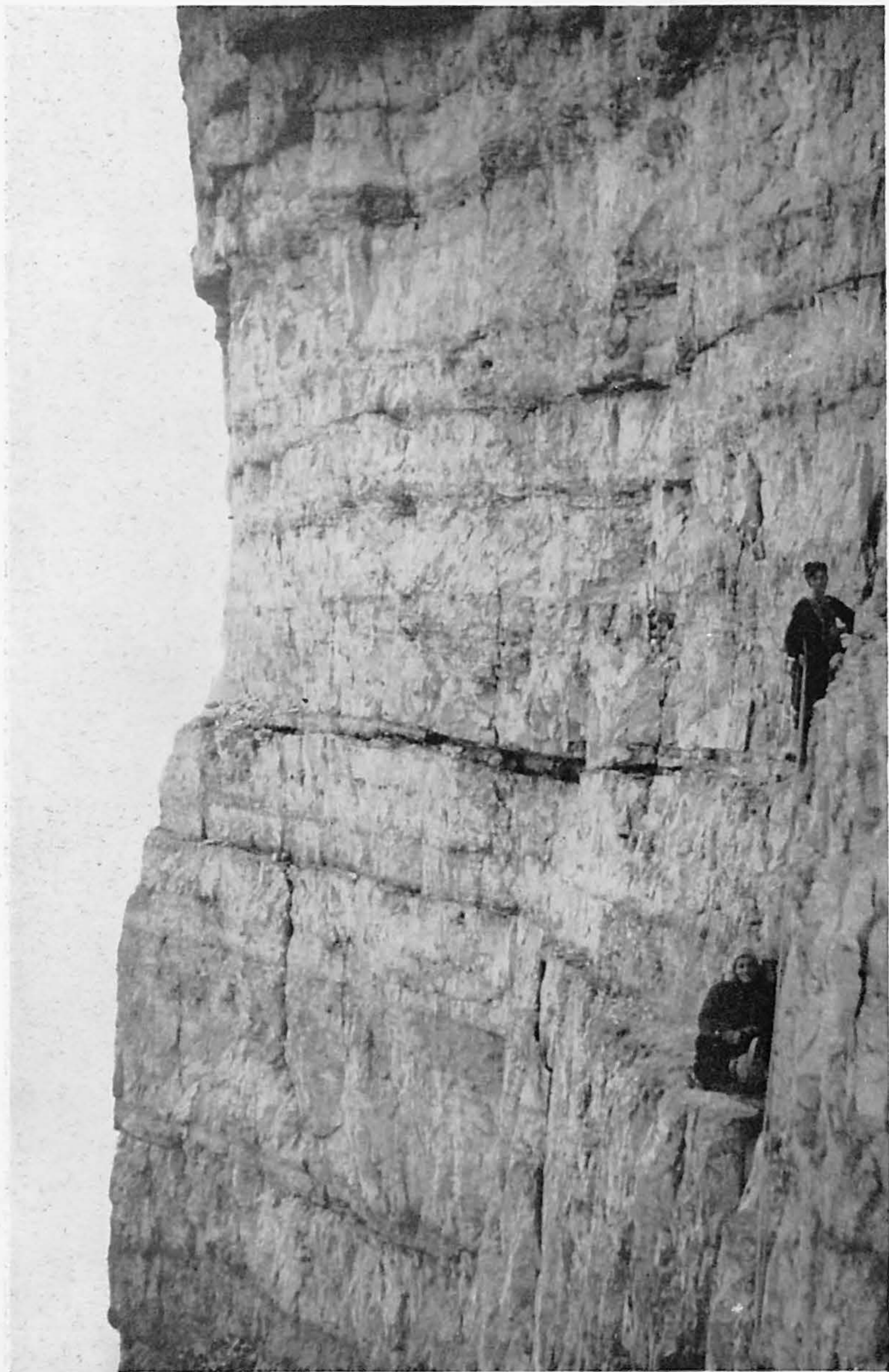
300 ft. of climbing rope, preferably the Continental variety; British nylon ropes get into appalling tangles, owing to the number of pitons they pass through.

150 ft. of sack-hauling rope.

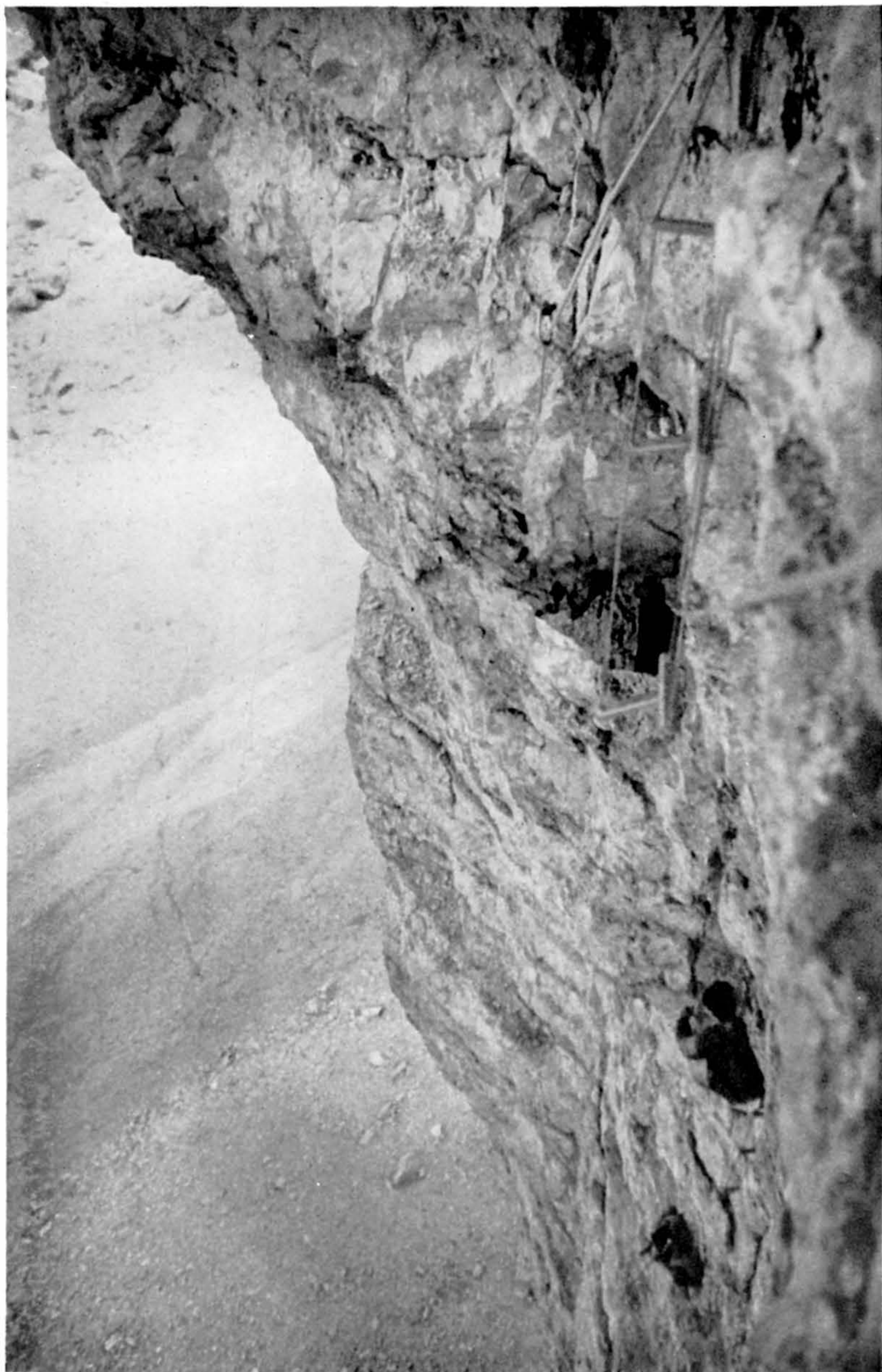
40 karabiners.

*Étriers* to taste (at least two each).

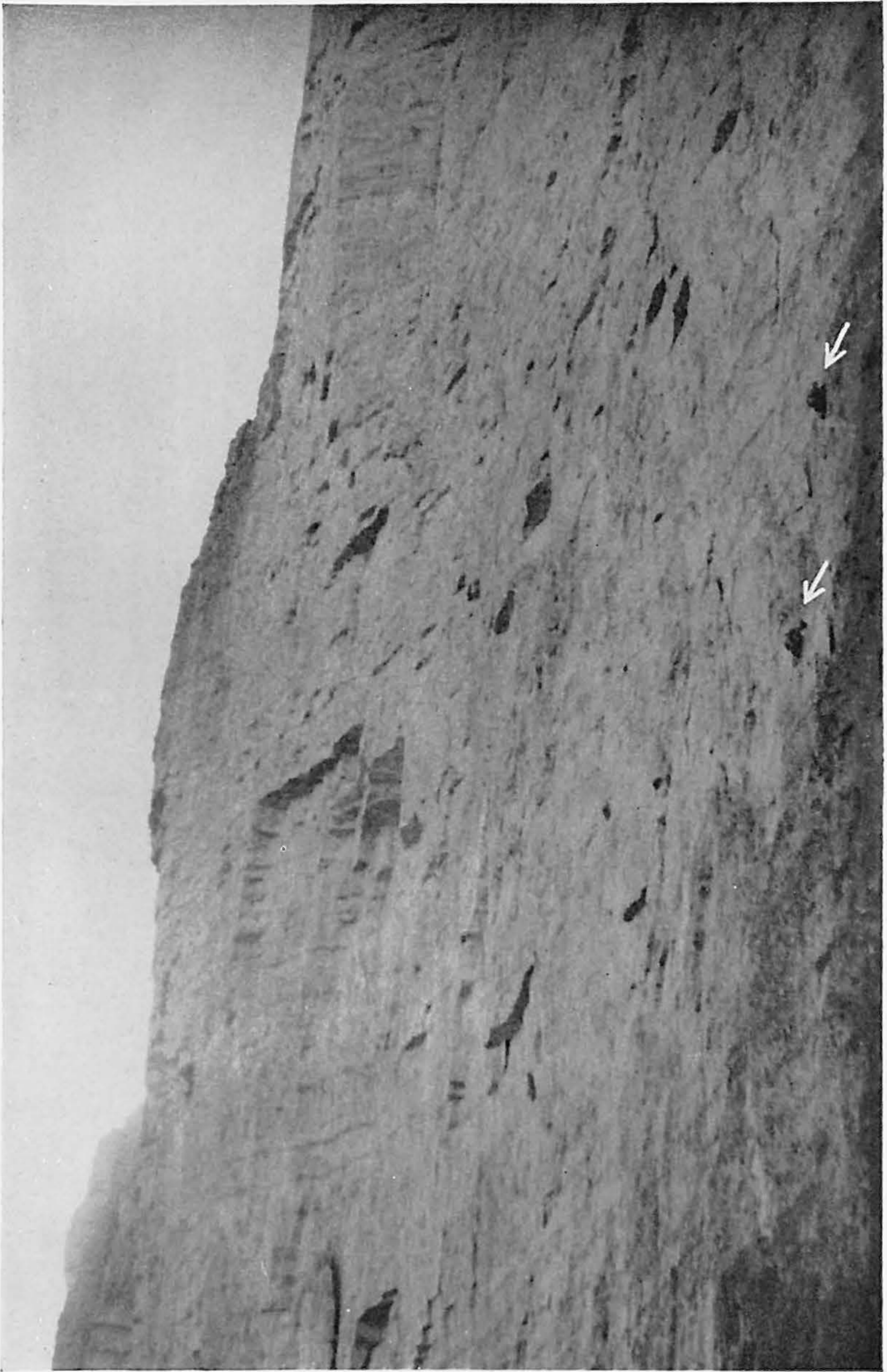
12 pitons (channel, leaf, short thick ones for expansion bolt holes where the bolts have fallen out). All the pitons were in place in 1959, and the party only put in two, during the entire climb. Many are loose, however, and the expansion bolts seem to be rusting away. Bivouac gear and water. There is no water on the face. One bivouac is normally necessary. It had only once been climbed without one in 1959.



THE FIRST BIVOUAC LEDGE, BELOW THE BIG OVERHANGS, ON THE DIRECT,  
CIMA GRANDE.



I. G. CLARK ON THE SECOND PITCH OF THE BIG OVERHANGS ON THE DIRECT,  
CIMA GRANDE (TWO AUSTRIAN CLIMBERS BELOW ON FIRST BIVOUAC)



TWO CLIMBERS ON THE THIRD PITCH OF THE DIRECT, CIMA GRANDE

## NORTH FACE, CIMA GRANDE, ORDINARY ROUTE

This is a magnificent route, which most competent British rock climbers, with some experience of artificial climbing, should be able to enjoy. It should not take more than 10 hours, in normal conditions. Standard—Grade IV.

Start at the foot of the broken rocky steps on the right (west) of the face. Scramble up these steps for a 100 ft. to a broad ledge, below where the wall steepens. Climb a 20 ft. crack to the left (IV) to another ledge. On the left climb a narrow crack until it is possible to traverse left for 12 ft. (A1). From here climb a wall to another ledge, 80 ft. above the first one. Go back to the right for 30 ft. towards a whitish wall (peg), climb up and across this for 45 ft. on doubtful rock. Climb a crack (easier) to another ledge. Climb diagonally to the left for about 30 ft. to the foot of another crack, which leads to a stance. Climb the groove to the right of this, over an overhang at 30 ft., to another ledge. From there, go straight up for 20 ft., on sound rock, and then cross to the right for 10 ft. to some small roofs, which can be passed on the left, to reach a stance.

Climb the big overhanging groove, above (60 ft., plenty of pitons), then slightly right for a few feet to reach a stance. Another pitch over dark coloured rocks, leads to a large ledge. From its left-hand end climb a crack for 50 ft., to a roof, which is turned by a crack on its right.

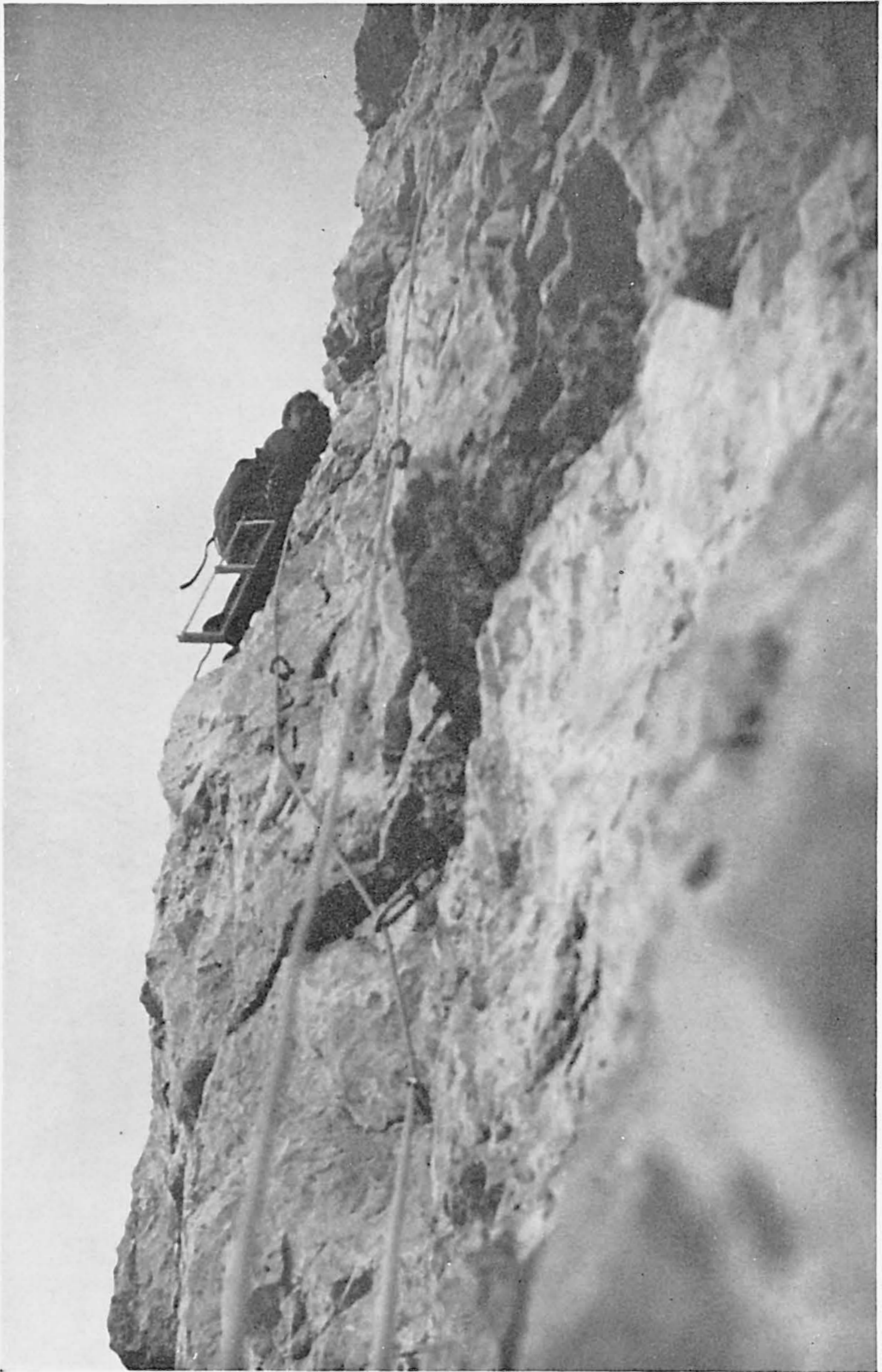
The angle now eases, and the main difficulties are over. Traverse to the left, into a series of open chimneys that lead to a groove, roofed by a huge square-cut overhang about 300 ft. above. At the foot of the groove, traverse right, and climb a steep crack, in yellow and black rock, on good holds, pulling over a small roof. Above this a wide, usually damp, chimney leads to a niche, above the big overhang.

From here, traverse left immediately above the overhang, until it is possible to step down a few feet, and across into some open chimneys. Follow these up onto the Ring Band. Follow this to the right for 60 ft., and then up easy rock towards the summit. After 100 ft., a chimney is reached. Follow this, avoiding a big yellow roof to the right, up to the summit.

## NORTH FACE, CIMA OVEST, ORDINARY ROUTE

This route is considerably harder than the Comici Route on the Cima Grande, owing to the serious nature of the long traverse into the centre of the face. The standard time seems to be from nine to twelve hours, and plenty of parties are forced to bivouac on the summit. Standard—VI sup.

The start is at the foot of the North-west arête. Climb broken, but increasingly steep rock to the foot of a gully contained between the



NORTH FACE OF CIMA OVEST DI LAVAREDO; THE  
A2 DIAGONAL TRAVERSE OUT ON TO THE WALL.



wall and a great detached gendarme. To the left of the gully, just on the North face, climb two cracks leading to some large blocks (IV+). Ascend a steep wall, trending first to the right, and then round the corner to the left (V), to a crack which leads to a large ledge on the crest of the North-west arête.

Follow a narrow ledge for 30 ft., out onto the wall. From here, climb obliquely to the left, up the line of pitons (V & A2) (security of pitons not inspiring) to a line of weakness that crosses the entire face. Follow this to the left for 120 ft. (VI & A2, crux of climb). A further 80 ft. (IV) leads to a point, about 60 ft. short of the great black couloir, where it is possible to climb the grey wall above. Climb up to the left for about 120 ft. (V) to a narrow ledge leading into the couloir. Climb the overhang above (A2, pitons), escaping to the left on to another narrow ledge. After another 30 ft. of climbing, it is possible to cross the couloir, and climb the slabs on the other side to a long wide ledge, roofed with overhangs (good bivouac site).

Walk along the ledge for 70 ft. to the left, until it is possible to pull up over the overhangs (A1). Climb back towards the right over slabs and ledges (100 ft.), to the foot of a crack, in a conspicuous shallow corner to the left of the couloir. Climb it for three rope lengths until the angle eases. Then continue up easy-angled slabs back into the bed of the couloir, where two pitches (IV) lead on to some wide scree-covered ledges. Follow these up to the right onto the West face, just below the summit.

### *Equipment*

300 feet of rope.

20 karabiners.

A few pitons for emergencies (all in place).

Two *étriers* each.

A sack hauling rope is not practical, since the hardest patches are traverses.

Bivouac gear to taste (depending on self-confidence).