

reached the Plan de l'Aiguille we knew our cave was near, but where? We managed to lose it and tried to shout to Greg to wake him up. Not a sound. Then I found the lake by falling into it. I shouted hoarsely to Pete who was wandering about below me among some rocks and eventually we reached our cave at 2am, about 22 hours after leaving it. We felt absolutely exhausted and dehydrated. After many brews we fell asleep.

At 7am we had the unpleasant task of trying to retrieve our ropes, so we plodded slowly back up towards the glacier. At every corner we were hoping that we would meet a climber with our ropes neatly coiled over his shoulder, but we had no such luck. They were still hanging in the same place. Not relishing the thought of a 45 metre prusik I asked several Japanese and French parties on the 'Vaucher Route' a few metres to our right to retrieve it for us. They all said they would but my faith in other climbers disappeared as they failed to do so. Cursing them we looked at each other and Pete said 'I'm not much good at prusiking'. I started up the good old fashioned way as we had no prusiking devices. Eventually I reached the top and abseiled down from another piton. We coiled our ruined ropes and descended to Chamonix.

In retrospect I do not think either of us had ever lost or ruined so much equipment on a route before but after our second bottle of wine it was all forgotten. Soon we were telling our friends what a great route it was. 'Was it hard?', they asked. 'A wee bit strenuous', we replied with a smile.

The Grossglockner: Its climbs and pioneers

Eric Roberts

The Grossglockner (3798m) is much more than merely the highest mountain in Austria, a position in fact held by the Ortler prior to the annexation of the South Tirol at the end of World War I. Other values account for its long-term standing both in the eyes of the mountaineering fraternity and the general public. It offers the mountaineer a variety of climbs unsurpassed by any other peak in the Eastern Alps; these range from the short normal route to middle grade ridges, two outstanding snow/ice couloirs and intimidating face routes. The mountain presents a magnificent spectacle from any point above the E bank of the Pasterze, the longest and largest glacier in Austria. This famous view is now admired daily by large crowds due to the construction in the 1930s of a high Alpine road with its terminus at the Franz Josefshöhe above the glacier snout. Indeed, this road with its annual frequency figures in excess of one million people has brought the Glockner region to the notice of the general public. This present-day popularization of the Grossglockner contrasts starkly with its late discovery by geographers. An atlas published in 1580 depicts thick forest on the site of the mountain!



73 From the summit of the Grossglockner looking to the Kleinglockner (This and next three photos: E. Roberts)

It was not until the late 18th Century that a French botanist, Balthazar Hacquet, suggested that the Grossglockner might be climbed. A few years later, Bishop Salm decided that the mountain should be climbed. Unlike most pioneers of the era, he was not motivated by scientific research projects but purely by sporting ambition. He organized an expedition to attempt the mountain in 1799 and for this venture supervised the construction of a hut on its S slopes. That year 6 members of the party reached the forepeak of the Kleinglockner, but the late hour of the day ruled out continuing by the short ridge across an exposed saddle to the tantalizingly near main summit. In the following summer the bishop renewed the attack upon the mountain, and in preparation a second higher hut was built at the Hohenwartscharte. All sorts of scientific instruments were taken on this occasion to justify a far bigger expedition numbering 62 people. On 28 July 1800 the highest point was reached by 5 men – the Klotz brothers of Heiligenblut, 2 local carpenters and P. Horasch, the priest of Dollach. This first ascent is a famous date in the history of mountaineering, for it marks the birth of alpinism in the Eastern Alps.

A little later, in 1804, Dr J. A. Schultes' work entitled *Reise auf den Glockner* brought the Grossglockner to the attention of all mountain lovers, having the sort of effect that had been achieved some 20 years previously for Mont Blanc by the scholarly writings of H. B. de Saussure.

John Ball became the first Englishman to reach the summit in 1854 and he later enthused in particular about the E side of the mountain: 'The exquisitely sharp cone of the Grossglockner, rising in an unbroken slope of 5000ft above the Pasterze glacier, is not surpassed for grace and elegance by any in the Alps . . . No true mountaineer can behold that beautiful peak without longing to attain its summit'. In 1894 Martin Conway approached the Grossglockner from the SW and commented in his book *The Alps From End To End*: 'It is a fine peak, with the toothed ridge of the Glocknerwand leading away from it and the Stüdl rock arête descending hitherward — a peak that bears comparison with the higher snow pyramids of the Central Alps . . . It is beyond contradiction a noble mountain mass, finely built and well proportioned, so as to convey a sense of magnitude and bold upward thrust.'

There are 2 valley bases for the Grossglockner, Heiligenblut to the SE and Kals to the SW. Heiligenblut (1288m), a picturesque village by the River Möll, is the leading climbing centre in the region and due to the popularization of the Grossglockner during the early 19th Century once ranked next in importance to Chamonix and Grindelwald in Alpine mountaineering terms. From the village the already mentioned high Alpine road facilitates access to the mountain. Kals (1325m) is a peaceful and pleasant resort, set amidst the green meadows of a broad valley opening.

The normal way up the Grossglockner now suffers from all the hustle and bustle to be expected on the highest summit of any Alpine country. It is an immensely popular tourist climb from the Erzherzog Johann hut which is

74 *The lower part of the NW ridge of the Grossglockner with the Teufelhorn*



situated in a commanding position on the Adlersruhe shoulder a mere 350m below the top. The various approaches to this route all converge before or at this highest hut in Austria. In all events, a glacier journey is involved, but coming from the Franz Josefshöhe and the Hormans hut or by the traditional way from Kals via the Stüdl hut, a deep trail is assured in average conditions. Subject to reasonable weather, the hut is almost always crowded during the summer season. The route from the hut to the top should not be treated too lightly despite its brevity, its ease and the presence of artificial aids. In fact, from the start of the climb proper at the foot of the so-called Glocknerleitl, one can belay every rope length from iron stakes. Although there are no technical pitches in good conditions, ice is common on the Glocknerleitl slope which rises to a shoulder on the Kleinglockner spur. This slope has been the scene of many accidents in descent (see *AJ* 63 250-1) and for that reason the Austrian mountain rescue service attached fixed cables to the rocks on its right-hand edge in 1972. Broken slabs and a block ridge lead steeply up to the snowy summit crest of the Kleinglockner where the passage of feet almost forms a trench in settled weather on the exposed traverse of the left-hand flank. The far end of the corniced crest is marked by a large block above the steep 15m drop to the Obere Glocknerscharte, a pitch tamed by a fixed wire. The situation at this knife edge gap is sensational for the inexperienced tourist-Alpinist. Beyond and above, a short slabby rock crest is all that remains to the large cross on top and a glorious panorama of endless mountain ranges in all directions. Martin Conway aptly referred to the traverse between the Kleinglockner and Grossglockner as 'the theatrical portion of the mountain' and on this section guides at times fix a continuous rope for ushering unsteady clients across! In its natural state this would be a nice little climb and even so it holds interest subject to the absence of time-wasting queues.

The second most frequented route to the summit lies by the Stüdl ridge, the SW ridge. This very classic ascent ranks nowadays as the most popular rock climb in the Glockner region. The opening up of this new way to the summit in 1864 held an economic significance for the guides of Kals. Thus far nearly all tourists had climbed the Grossglockner from Heiligenblut. In the hope of encouraging tourists on to the Stüdl ridge, the local guides spent 2 months in 1869 placing artificial aids such as fixed cable wires, iron spikes and cut rock steps. This route was first known as the Neuer Kalser Weg, as opposed to the more circuitous traditional Kals approach which joins the ordinary route from Heiligenblut at the Adlersruhe shoulder (Erzherzog Johann hut). After 1869 it was re-named the Stüdl ridge after Johann Stüdl, a co-founder of the German Alpine Club from Prague, who instigated and paid for both the work on the ridge and the construction of a starting point for the climb – the Stüdl hut on the Fanatscharte. Happily for the modern climber, the route never attained the anticipated popularity and the fixtures were allowed to deteriorate. None the less, some still remain and do simplify the harder pitches. In its present state the ridge is considered a PD climb, prone to verglassed rock in early summer and with exposed pitches on its upper part. The pioneers gave specific names to several pitches, some of which are difficult to identify. The most noteworthy, in rising order of altitude, are: 'Peter's Staircase' marking the first difficult pitch which Peter Groder led; 'High Counsel' being a platform where the first ascensionists discussed whether to continue or retreat;

'The Pulpit' being a prominent pinnacle which is turned on its right airily above the Ködnitz glacier; and 'The Hatch' indicating the final short rock step which is climbed by an open corner on its right-hand flank. Four and a half hours is the average time from the hut to the summit.

The NW ridge, marked about mid-way by 2 closely linked conspicuous rock pinnacles – the Teufelshorn and the Glocknerhorn, stands out as the most variable and varied line to the summit. A superb mixed climb by any approach, it gives the most worthwhile middle grade undertaking on the mountain and can be adapted according to the prevailing conditions. The ridge starts at the Untere Glocknerscharte, a tiny gap between the Glocknerwand and the Grossglockner, most conveniently reached from the Stüdl hut to the S by the Teischnitz glacier and a snow couloir. By contrast, a steep ice-flank defends its NE side. However, by far the most rewarding way to the Untere Glocknerscharte is given by the traverse of the Glocknerwand (3721m), a long crenelated rock ridge marked by 5 named towers and in itself a classic outing. Though the mixed crest up to the Hofmannsspitze, the first of the Glocknerwand towers, is accessible from the Oberwalder and Hofmanns huts as well as from the Stüdl hut, the finest prelude to the traverse is found by the elegant Glocknerwandkamp arête from the Glockner bivouac hut. The Glocknerwand – Grossglockner traverse as proposed here, constitutes the most important ridge expedition in the region and is arguably the finest climb of its kind in Austria – well worth 12 hours effort. First traversed by Moritz von Kuffner with Christian Ranggetiner and Engelbert Rubesoier in 1884 by an indirect line, it is comparable with several long classic ridges in the Western Alps – not least the Mont Maudit Frontier Ridge which was also pioneered by von Kuffner in 1887. To return to the NW ridge itself, the direct route traverses the Teufelshorn (3677m) and the Glocknerhorn (3680m), though the lower part of the ridge can be avoided by an obvious snow-band on the S flank. This by-passes the delicate rock pitches into the notch before the Teufelshorn and the airy abseil down the SE overhang from its summit. Beyond the Glocknerhorn, the ridge narrows to a delicate snow arête, often corniced and known as the 'Gröger knife edge' after Gustav Gröger who made the first ascent of the upper section of the ridge in 1879 with Christian Ranggetiner. The terrain becomes mixed before steep sound rock with excellent holds leads up to the summit crest.

The Pallavicini Couloir not only provides the most famous climb on the Grossglockner; it is also the best known ice route in Austria. The couloir rises from the head of the Inneres Glocknerkar glacier in a superb line to the Obere Glocknerscharte between the Kleinglockner and Grossglockner. The first ascent on 18 August 1876 by Count Alfred Pallavicini with 3 Heiligenblut guides – G. Bäuerle, J. Kramser and J. Tribusser – was a remarkable performance for the period. For the Eastern Alps it was comparable in historical significance with the first ascent of the Marinelli Couloir on Monte Rosa, and the couloir is likewise, albeit to a lesser extent, exposed to avalanche risk. It should be remembered that Pallavicini's party had neither crampons nor pitons. Tribusser cut the record number of 2500 steps in 7 hours and was unaided by his fellow guides who were unable to lead on such steep ground. Just how far this climb was in advance of developments in alpine climbing techniques is illustrated by the fact that it was repeated only once in the next 45 years. When Alfred



75 N face of the Grossglockner

Horeschowsky soloed the couloir on the third ascent in 1923, his sensational achievement brought the route into the limelight again.¹ Nowadays it is climbed frequently subject to favourable conditions prevailing. Being E-facing, the couloir is exposed to the rising sun, thus increasing the need for an early start from the Glockner bivouac hut. The bergschrund can be awkward; above, the route is self-evident and the climbing itself almost monotonous. The objective dangers also include rocks dislodged by careless parties on the normal route! Though the couloir culminates in the Obere Glocknerscharte, a line is usually taken up the final rocks directly to the highest point. Times for the climb vary tremendously: parties have had to bivouac, yet by contrast Toni Kinshofer's solo ascent took just 1 hour. The first ski descent of the couloir by Gerhard Winter and Herbert Zakarias on 7 August 1961 caused a sensation. For this outstanding feat the 2 Austrians used very short skis only 60cm long.

¹ Horeschowsky was criticized by J. P. Farrar in the *AJ* for his daring solo exploits during the 1920s. Such climbs on major peaks were beyond the mountaineering concepts of that era.

The most formidable proposition on the Grossglockner is presented by its N face, one of the most serious mixed climbs in the Eastern Alps. It was the last great route to be attempted in the Glockner region, falling in 1926 to Willo Welzenbach and Karl Wien, 2 of the best and boldest German climbers between World Wars I and II. This 600m high face above the wild glacier cirque of the Inneres Glocknerkar can fairly be described as a smaller scale version of the Lauterbrunnen N Wall or the Fiescherwand in the Bernese Alps. As for the Pallavicini Couloir, one nowadays sets out from the Glockner bivouac hut (3260m), a starting point that did not of course exist in the days of the pioneers who were first faced with a complex glacier approach from the Pasterze. The route first gives a pure ice climb, steepening to at least 60° below the 200m high summit rock wall. This is either climbed by a system of rock ribs on its right-hand side as on the first ascent or more directly (TD overall in grade) by narrow 70° steep rock and ice-gullies. In either case, verglassed rocks are likely to be encountered.

Between the Pallavicini Couloir and the N face there rises the impressively steep NE ridge, first climbed by Richard Gerin and Otto Pitschmann in 1911 after an earlier failure even to get on to the ridge. Indeed, the principal difficulties occur on the ice approach from the bergschrund by the foot of the Pallavicini Couloir and on the lower part of the ridge. Surprisingly, the technical standard of the rock climbing does not exceed grade III in good conditions. It has been aptly said of this route, that rock climbers are put off by the initial ice-slope and that ice specialists are too tempted by the reputation of the neighbouring Pallavicini Couloir. Yet this route is worth considering against the face climbs on either side on the following counts: it takes a direct and aesthetically satisfying line to the summit, it offers interesting and varied climbing, it is free from objective dangers, and from it breathtaking views are constantly at hand of the Pallavicini Couloir on the left and of the awe-inspiring N face on the right. In any event, it gives a fine climb meriting more attention.

To complete this survey, comments follow about other routes on the mountain.

From the Kleinglockner a narrow hanging glacier falls E to the Pasterze. This is the Äusseres Glocknerkar glacier which with its supporting ridges yields 3 routes. The Glocknerkamp ridge, first climbed by the fanatical and brilliant soloist Eugen Lammer in 1893, is an elegant line marking the right-hand edge of the glacier, but is exposed to ice-fall in places. It rates AD in grade. The glacier itself gives a variable 1000m high snow and ice climb, with 2 avoidable ice bulges. The easier Glocknerkarkamp ridge, better known as the Meletzki ridge, defines the left-hand edge of the glacier and is sometimes used as a sporting alternative to the Erzherzog Johann hut. It gives entertaining scrambling to the upper slopes of the Hofmanns glacier.

The S face is divided below the Obere Glocknerscharte by a long obvious couloir, named after Viktor Pillwax who made the first ascent of this 580m high face with the guides S. Huter and P. Untersberger in 1891. Their route started up the Kleinglockner face, then crossed the couloir around half height. Their plan to use the upper part of the couloir was thwarted by an unexpected vertical step and they finished on its left by the Grossglockner face, encountering grade IV pitches. Another more direct line by the steep rock arête



76 W and S faces with the Pillwax Couloir

rising to the Kleinglockner immediately right of the Pillwax Couloir was put up by Richard Gerin and Otto Pitschmann in 1911.

Pillwax twice returned to the mountain with his guides: in 1899 to achieve the second ascent of the Pallavicini Couloir; then in 1905 to make the first ascent of the W face, a poor climb involving much shattered rock but climaxing in the vertical 150m high summit wall (IV+).

One more climb must be mentioned: the Bergler Couloir, which rises right of the N face to the NW ridge shoulder. It gives a snow and ice route similar in nature and standard to the Pallavicini Couloir, by which it is overshadowed. The couloir itself veers up to the right at the point where the N face route steepens below its upper rock wall. A pear-shaped rib divides the head of the couloir. It is usual to take the easier right-hand branch. Finishing direct by the narrower left-hand branch on 55° ice is more serious.

Two other achievements on the mountain are historically noteworthy: the first winter ascent by W. A. Baillie-Grohmann with 4 guides on 2 January 1875 (see *AJ* 80, 231-2) and the first ski ascent by Fritz Strobl and Max Winkler at Easter 1909.

The concentration of outstanding climbs on the Grossglockner has been illustrated by this review. Numerous traverse combinations beckon the experienced alpinist. The ultimate possibility in this respect lies in approaching the mountain by the 15km long ridge from the Kalser Tauern, the pass defining the W limit of the Glockner region. It was first traversed in its entirety by Franz Illitsch and Hias Kumnig in September 1946. This marathon test of endurance and ability follows the main ridge in magnificent situations over the Hoher Kasten, Ödenwindelwand, Eiskögele, Schneewinkelkopf, Romariswandkopf and Teufelskamp to the jagged crown of the Glocknerwand before culminating in the NW ridge up to the large summit cross of the Grossglockner.

References

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Piz Balzetto, Bregaglia

W. Kirstein

This summer the weather was very helpful. Coming from London's heatwave the cool weather in the Engadine was a relief. There was no snow under 3000m; even the snow-field on the way to the Diavolezza Hut was free of snow, which meant that the ascent from the valley to the hut took only 2½ hours instead of the 4½ hours last year when there was 3ft of snow.

In March we had found the S slopes in St Moritz bare. For us that was a blessing in disguise. Our leader Stuart Ferguson knew that there was plenty of powder snow on the N slopes though there had been hardly any new snow since November 1975. That meant there was no avalanche danger at all and