Climbers' Playgrounds—Europe

31 Fontainebleau

Charles Mont

Some 50km S of Paris the Forêt de Fontainebleau of 17,000 hectares has 400km of waymarked paths. Extensive heathlands and a wide variety of forest trees are broken by numerous groups of sandstone rocks, among which an English climber familiar with the environs of Tunbridge Wells would immediately feel at home. This is a famous practice ground for Parisian climbers, who have frequent meets in the area; in fact many a French climber first developed his skills hereabouts.

The town of Fontainebleau is world famous for its palace, second only to Versailles. The chief outcrop and boulder areas lie to the W of it within the triangle Melun–Nemours–Etampes. Though the highest is only some 13m, there are very large numbers of rocks widely scattered; indeed the climbers' guide-book lists close on 30 groups, among which Cuvier, Apremont, La Dame Jeanne, Eléphant and Puiselet are perhaps the best known.

The unique rock-climbing circuits are an outstanding feature. A series of climbs of similar standards on different rocks in an area have been linked together and waymarked to provide continuous courses; there is now a standard colour code—PD (yellow), AD (orange), D (blue), TD (red), and ED (black). Accounts of various of these appear frequently, particularly in the CAF Paris–Chamonix Section bulletin (*La Montagne Paris–Chamonix*).

As on our own Wealden sandstone the climbing is likely to prove harder than it looks; extensive practice is the only way to achieve the easy elegance of the habitué. Mountaineers, passing on their way to higher things should not neglect to inspect, or even sample, rocks which, in spite of their lowly stature, have played a significant role in the making of many great mountaineers.

References

Climbing: Guide de Bleau 1970 (FSGT & GUMS, Paris).
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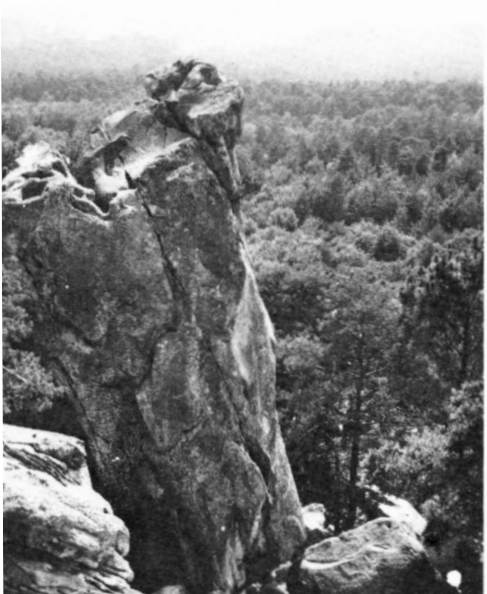
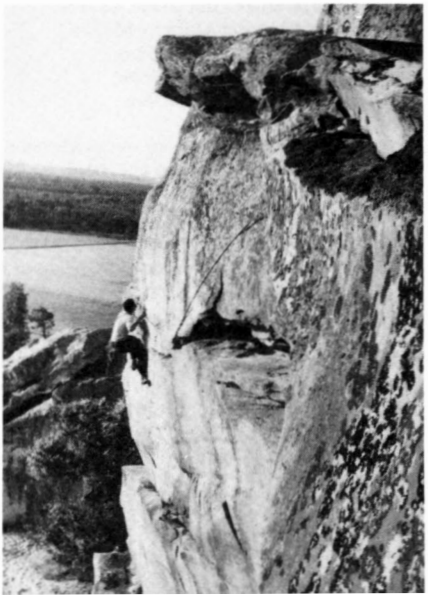
Map: Forêt de Fontainebleau (IGN 1 : 25,000).





32 Südpfalz (South Palatinate)

Joachim Schneider
(Translation: E. N. Bowman)

The Südpfalz is the largest continuous area of deciduous forest in Germany and a much-prized goal of those afficionados who shun the crowded tourist regions. Here it is possible to walk for days on end without encountering another soul. It is also a veritable El Dorado for climbers who can find much enjoyment on the magnificent red mottled sandstone of the Vosges.

Location The terrain, which is one of the largest training areas in Germany, extends from the forest surrounding Bitsch in Alsace to Trifels near Annweiler.

Accommodation The main sources of accommodation are: the huts of the 'PK' (Palatinate Climbers' Club) on the Asselstein near Annweiler and in the Rärenbrunner Valley; the Naturfreundenhaus near the Vorderweiden Valley and also at Lemberg; an Alpine Club Hut at Langmühle near Lemberg, one on the Rauhberg near Reinighof and a DAV hut close to Reinighof. Moderately priced accommodation is also to be obtained in inns and private pensions, which are renowned for their hospitality. Old hands will doubtless erect their own habitation in this still unspoilt natural paradise or camp out under the stars.

Type of rock The ridges and towers consist of mottled red sandstone (Buntsandstein). This term denotes an era in the history of the evolution of the earth. Some 200 million years ago detritus emanating from a granite mountain range—in the

90 Fontainbleau (Photo: E. Pyatt)
91 At Le Puiselet (Photo: M. Millet)
92 Südpfalz rock (This and next photo: J. Schneider)
93 The Teufelstisch, Hinterweidenthal

present Danube basin—was carried N by the great rivers. In the course of this movement, which only the quartz survived (granite consists principally of quartz, mica and felspar), all the corners were rounded off, ground down and reduced to grains of sand. Over a period of millions of years, a layer of about 450m thick was superimposed, on top of which more sedimentary rocks several hundreds of metres in depth were subsequently deposited. The sand was consolidated by the ensuing pressure and this produced sandstone.

Break-up of the strata in the earth's interior crushed the rock and fissured it and in course of time the strata overlaying the sandstone were worn down by erosion, leaving only the hard portions. This erosion spread rapidly throughout the less-resistant layers of sandstone producing the quite fantastic rock formations, the honeycomb structure or so-called table rocks, the top part of which consists of a very resistant rock layer supported by a pedestal of less solid sandstone.

Exploration The first climbers arrived on the scene in about 1904 with the object of ascending the most prominent peaks without the use of too many artificial aids. Thus a number of isolated rock towers, such as the Heegerturm and the Jungturm, were climbed. In 1909 the Asselstein near Annweiler which up to then had only been climbed with artificial aids, was climbed free for the first time. This feat was accomplished by E. Ney and E. Schlemmer, thereby inaugurating the second part of the exploration history. The last difficult summits were conquered, including several difficult variations as well as the standard routes. The most successful climbers of that period were: E. Ney, E. Schlemmer, the brothers Matheis and F. and T. Mann.

At the end of the First World War, Pirmasens became the principal centre of activity of the Palatinate climbers. The ropes of R. Scheerer and H. Kauther, P. Pfundstein, A. and C. Reinbold as well as climbers like F. Frey, R. Scheiber and E. Gessner were responsible for the ascent of new and difficult routes. Technical aids, such as pitons and running belays, came gradually to the fore.

A new era was introduced even before the Second World War by the insertion of aid pitons in the 'Klosterwand' and after 1945 the use of technical aids was augmented. The most successful rope of the post-war period was that of H. Laub and F. Frey, who made over 500 new ascents over a period of 2 decades. During the past 15 years the development and exploration of the terrain has continued hand in hand with the increased use of technical aids. Regrettably one has to report that a certain amount of cheating has occurred on some of the more extreme routes, in that after first cleaning out the holds with the aid of a rope from above, the route has been assessed as to its feasibility and after knocking in pitons (still held from above) the route has been then climbed from below as a 'first ascent'. In such cases it can hardly be considered as a first ascent but rather the setting up of a Klettergarten.

Climbing rules Considerably fewer pitons were used in the Südpfalz than in any other climbing area in Germany except in the Elbsandstein Mountains. The reason for this was the adoption of the rope-sling technique of the Saxon climbers. In this way no routes were pitoned and every climber found the route in its pristine state, so that all problems had to be solved anew by all comers. The following rules must be observed by all climbers:

1. The Landschaftsschutz prohibits any alteration in the rock formation (i.e.

making of artificial holds, boring holes etc) and the removal of trees, flowers and rocks.

2. No additional pitons may be inserted in any existing route.

3. The use of wooden wedges is not allowed. Screw pitons (Bohrhaken) may only be employed as a safety measure on a stance.

4. New routes must not be pitoned and/or reconnoitred beforehand (ie by means of a rope from above).

General Sandstone rock offers a variety of good climbing, principally crack and face routes requiring considerable technique, courage and great ability. Newcomers should exercise considerable caution as the technique employed differs from that used on limestone. Friction climbing is the order of the day and existing holds, generally speaking, are not as firm as on limestone. It should be noted that in the spring or after long periods of rainy weather the rock is more friable and its frictional qualities are greatly reduced by moss and lichen especially on the N and W sides. On some less-frequented routes old pitons may be found. They are mostly in a bad state and should be replaced. There is a summit book at the top of every climb together with a cemented-in abseil ring.

Climbs There are over 1500 climbs of up to 60m in height, on firm but friable rock, spread over more than 140 rock-bastions and about 80 detached rock-towers. The best of these is the Asselstein near Annweiler, which is the largest and highest detached tower in the Südpfalz, with over 25 routes of standards ranging from III to VI.

Many climbers who apart from their 4-week Alpine holiday, spend the rest of their free time in the Klettergarten of the Central Alps and think they know everything, would do better to go to the Südpfalz where they will find a vast territory with innumerable fresh climbs.

A guidebook of the district was published in 1975 and is obtainable from Hans Laub, 38 Adam-Müller Strasse, Pirmasens 6780.

One hundred years ago

(with extracts from the *Alpine Journal*)

C. A. Russell

'Throughout the upper Alpine region the winter has been extra-ordinarily sunny and snowless. At Davos perpetual sunshine reigned, while the lowlands of N Switzerland were under a roof of frozen fog. At Zermatt, and also in Dauphiné, the cattle have been able to remain out on the meadows instead of being confined to their stables. Many club huts, which last season were scarcely accessible till June, have been this year visited by guides in mid-winter. The Simplon was open for wheel traffic on March 23!'

Alpine conditions during the early part of 1880 were notable for the very small quantity of snow on the high peaks. The favourable weather was particularly evident in the Engadine where on 4 February the Rev. Cecil E. B. Watson, with Christian Grass senior and Valentine Kessler, made the first winter ascent of Piz