Area Notes 2000

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Alps and Pyrenees 2000

This report looks at selected activity during the year 2000, not only in terms of exploration and high technical performance but also in the wider Alpine world. In preparing these notes Lindsay Griffin would like to acknowledge the assistance of Jules Cartwright, Mikhail Davy, Ed Douglas, Martin Gillie, Mireille Lazarevitch, Valdo Linek, Igor Koller, Andy Parkin, Michel Piola, Hilary Sharp, Blaz Stres, Erik Svab, Thomas Tivadar, Paolo Vitali, and Adam Wainwright.

The *Alpine Journal* particularly welcomes details of new routes and information on members' activities in the Alps, as well as changes to established routes. These should be sent to the Club or directly to 2 Top Sling, Tregarth, Bangor, Gwynedd, LL57 4RL.

WINTER 2000

Introduction

After the tragedies of 1999, with over 100 killed in avalanches, including 12 people at Montroc above Argentière, 39 in an avalanche at the Austrian village of Galtür, 49 in two major tunnel fires (one of which kept the Mont Blanc Tunnel closed for the whole of 2000) and several well-publicised fatal climbing accidents, it would be nice to report that 2000 marked a return to normal. Alas, the terrible funicular disaster at Kaprun in Austria in

November, in which 152 skiers died, was just one of several catastrophes in the Alps last year, continuing a sense of gloom that the region is overcrowded and unsafe. Earlier in the year the Valle d'Aosta/Gran Paradiso region was swept by violent floods and mudslides, which killed more than 35 people and completely isolated villages. As if that wasn't enough, scientists at Cardiff University announced that the permafrost beneath the Alps was melting due to the process of global warming, which almost all experts now agree is occurring as a consequence of human activity.

Dr Charles Harris at Cardiff said: 'It is now clear that rises in atmospheric temperature are producing significant changes in permafrost levels. Global warming is changing the nature of weather systems and this is having disproportionate effects on temperatures underground.' In the last decade underground temperatures have risen by 1.2°C, according to tests done in Switzerland, five times the air temperature increase for the same period.

The European Union has now launched an intensive study across the Continent's mountainous areas. Named PACE (Permafrost and Climate in Europe), this will attempt to evaluate the future impact of this change. There are already predictions of collapsing rock faces, crumbling foundations under cable car stations and mountain huts, and more mud slides. 'There is no doubt that there is a real danger to human life, thanks to permafrost warming,' Harris added. 'We want to minimise the destruction.'

Weather patterns were also erratic, although there were long periods of settled weather in the summer allowing plenty of activity. But as the Italian climber Cesare Maestri said in December 2000, the day after nine climbers and one skier were killed in the Italian Alps in freak conditions, this is 'a strange, nonsensical winter'.

Legislation covering rescue services in the French Alps faced reform in the Senate, as Jean Faure, Senator for the Isère region and Mayor of Autrans, introduced legislation to make climbers, skiers and snowboarders more responsible for the charges incurred during rescues. The move was opposed by the then President of the Groupe de Haute Montagne, Yves Peysson, who warned that it was wrong to promote adventure sports and then remove the principle of free rescue.

Pyrenees

Long periods of fine warm weather, especially during January and early February, led to well-consolidated snow, and straightforward gullies were often in excellent condition. However, only a modest number of worthwhile new routes were recorded. Tragically, the disappearance is reported of Francis Mousel, best known as the author of *Pyrénés – Courses Mixtes, Neige et Glace*, probably the most useful and up-to-date guide to selected winter climbing in the Pyrenees (November 1997: in French). Mousel, who was also a notable soloist, was thought to have been going to try a route, alone, on the North Face of the Zermatt Breithorn but went missing on the 16 January.

Western Pyrenees

Peña Pequeña o Collaradeta In the Far West Laureano Gômez and Isidoro Sanchez climbed a new 400m route on the N Face of this subsidiary summit of the 2883m Peña Collarada. *El Túnel* was climbed in February and graded IV/3+. There is a short vertical section on pitch two but straightforward 50-60° névé above.

Pala de Ip On the NE Face of this 2783m peak, a little east of the Peña Collarada and above the Ip Reservoir, Oscar Cacho and Isidoro Sanchez spent one day in February climbing Cafetu (300m: IV/4). Three pitches of difficult climbing, with the first a 80-85° icefall, led to an easier upper snow fan at 55°.

Central Pyrenees

Vignemale One of the most notable events in the Pyrenees during the season was the long awaited first winter ascent of the *North Face Direct* on **Pointe Chausenque** (3204m). From 20-22 August 1961 J Bescos, R Montaner and J Vicente climbed the lower wall of the N Face, finishing up the *Diagonale*. On 23 and 24 September in the following year the great Pyrenean activist of the time, Patrice de Bellefon, with P Mirabal, H Paradis and S Sarthou, repeated the difficult lower section, then continued above the *Diagonale* to finish up the prominent pillar on the left side of the upper face. The 700m route was graded ED2 (A3 and 6a) and it appears that until this year no one had made a second ascent, the route almost gaining 'mythical' status.

The well-known French activist, Remi Thivel, first attempted to solo the Direct last winter, fixing the first two pitches before descending and recruiting a partner. He returned on 13 March with Cyrille Dupouy and completed the route with one bivouac, climbing a total of 20 pitches up to 6a and A2+ but still considering the overall grade of ED2 to be appropriate after a lapse of 28 years. The route was well-ahead of its time

El Turbón On the NW Flank of the N Ridge of the Castillo in the Aneto-Maledetta region J Marmolejo and J Sáex climbed *De Excursión por El Turbón* (400m: 55° and IV mixed). The climbers approached from the Margalida Hut and ascended the previously unclimbed and prominent gully in the middle of the rocky face to the left of the Couloir de las Vacas.

Tuca de Literola On this 2745m point, which forms the first summit in the long crest dividing the Literola and Remuñe valleys, Daniel Ascaso and Jordi Marmolejo have put up *El Ultimo Maciello* (250m: TD). The new route climbs the rock buttress immediately left of the Arlaud Couloir on the NE Face to gain the prominent leftward slanting snow ramp below the summit. Two difficult mixed pitches (M5 and M5+) led to this ramp, which was followed left (55°) to the final tower. Here, a 40m chimney (M4) led to the summit. The climb was completed on 10 January and would appear to offer a useful addition to the growing number of worthwhile winter routes easily accessible from Benasque.

Gavarnie In the famous Cirque Richard Dupont, Rémi Laborde and Jérôme Thinières completed an impressive *enchaînement*. On 29 February these three linked *Freezante* (200m: IV/4+) on the lower tier, *L'Alpe Julienne* (150m: V/5+) in the Atico sector and then continued above to complete *Arana* (100m: V/5), all in a rapid 6½ hours' sprint

Eastern Pyrenees

Gra de Fajol Petit On 19 April, outside the official winter season, Albert Marcau and Marc Serradel climbed *El Martell de Lucifer* up the mixed ground immediately left of the classic Central Couloir Direct. The difficulties were hard to protect and the route probably only feasible when exceptionally well-iced. The 70m line is direct to the summit and was graded III/3 (70/80° and M4+).

The twin summits of Gran and Petit Gra de Fajol lie in the south-west corner of the Ull de Ter cirque, only 30 minutes walk above the hut of the same name. The many routes and variations on the north faces (up to TD) make this one of the most popular venues for winter climbing on this side of the Pyrenees.

Andorra

Pic Negra d'Envalira On the North Top of this easily accessible 2816m summit, reached in 2½ hours from the popular ski resort of Grau Roig, Pako Sánchez soloed Magna Solitudo on 5 March. The new 230m line climbs a 50-60° snow couloir towards the left side of the W Face, finishing with two difficult mixed pitches (M4 on mediocre granite) on to the NW Ridge.

Mont Blanc Massif

The hot summer of 1999 stripped a lot of the ice from north faces and nearly all of it from more marginal lines. Together with the heavy early winter snow, this put paid to attempts on routes at higher altitudes. One AC member with a number of winter seasons described it as 'not disastrous, but certainly not vintage'.

The north faces in the Argentière basin – Les Droites and Les Courtes especially – were quite grey. However, this didn't stop Slovenian climber Marko Prezelj and friends from making a four-hour sprint up the *Shea-Jackson* on Les Droites. For mere mortals, other routes at slightly lower altitudes were climbable; the *Carrington-Rouse Route* on Les Pélérins received a number of ascents, and ice routes on the Pré du Bar, like the neo-classic *Madness Très Mince* and the easier *Petit Viking*, were also climbed regularly.

Mont Blanc From 10-13 March Patrice Glairon-Rappaz, climbing with Paul Robach, followed his success on the Grandes Jorasses (reported below)

with a winter ascent of 1984 Gabarrou/Marsigny route, *Divine Providence* (possibly the third complete overall winter ascent to the summit of Mont Blanc). The lower section of the route was reported as icy, slow-going but safe and the pair were able to climb free in rock shoes up to 6b, aiding the harder sections. As they were settling into their third bivouac, they picked up a bad weather forecast and so moved quickly on, reaching the summit at 4am in the teeth of a ferocious gale. They subsequently sat out the storm in a crevasse before returning to Chamonix by midnight.

Chandelle du Tacul From 2-4 January Martial Dumas and Fred Mathieu created a fine little aid route on the SE Face, left of *Les Pets*. The 200m line, christened *Cocaine,* gives six pitches of steady A1 and A2. With the current focus on big-wall climbing around the world, this will no doubt prove a welcome addition for those wishing to gain experience at non-desparate aid climbing in the mountains; that is, until it gets climbed free.

Grandes Jorasses Stéphane Benoist and Patrice Glairon-Rappaz made the second winter ascent of *Serge Gousseault Route* (1150m: ED3) on the NE Flank of the Walker Spur. The route was first climbed by Bertone, Claret and Desmaison in January 1973, two years after the death of Serge Gousseault on an earlier attempt with Desmaison. The two young French guides started up the route on 13 January with nine days' food, reaching the summit on 18 January at 1am in worsening weather. Benoist, who made the third ascent of *No Siesta*, said the technical difficulty of the routes was comparable. They faced a lot of difficult mixed climbing, some pure rock of around V+/A1 and stretches of steep ice. Neither climber carried a heavy pack, preferring to haul their bivouac equipment.

In February, the Slovenian climbers Urban Azman and Andrej Markovic made a winter ascent of the 1977 *Slovenian Route* (Knez/Matijevec/Vidmar/Zupan: 850m: ED1/2: V/5 or 5+ with some F4+ and A2) which climbs the N Face right of the Croz Spur.

During the ENSA meet, held in February and disrupted by heavy snow, two British parties at different times (Richard Cross with Al Powell and Jules Cartwright with Sam Chinnery) attempted *Alexis* (Gabarrou/Robert, 1993: 1100m: ED3/4: 90/95°), a route up the Central Couloir, finishing to the summit of Pointe Whymper. The pairs bivouacked halfway up the face after 18 hours, just below the climb's main difficulties, but retreated next day in worsening weather. This route still awaits a winter ascent and possibly a second complete ascent.

Previously unreported from the end of September 1999 was a new line, *La Belle Hélène* (V/5+M, 85°) on the N Face of Pointe Hélène (4045m) by Chamonix resident Andy Parkin. Parkin soloed the route, which takes an ephemeral line between the 1970 *Polish Route* (Chrobak/Poreba/Wroz, July 1970: V+ and 55-60°) and the 1997 Aubert/Lafaille route *Michto*, in one day, descending along the W Ridge over Pointes Marguerite and Young to the Col des Grandes Jorasses, then down the Mont Mallet Glacier to the foot of the face. Rarely self-belaying, he took a fall high on the route and

was held by an equalised Friend and poor ice screw. Technical difficulties were comparable with the *Carrington-Rouse* on the Pélérins. Parkin's light and fast style contrasted strongly with that of the Russian climber, Valeri Babanov, who was attempting a new route on Pointe Marguerite at the same time, carrying bolts and using both fixed ropes and a portaledge.

Pointe Centrale de Frébouze In late February Andy Parkin and Adam Wainwright climbed a new route on this rarely-visited peak. *La Face Perdue* – an apt name for a line on the forgotten NW Face – lies to the right of the 1979 *Charlet Route*, climbing 400m of original ground before joining it for the upper section. Excellent conditions are required for this climb to be in condition and the pair graded it TD+: IV/5+.

Aiguille du Midi In one long day, 8 March, Andy Parkin and Adam Wainwright climbed a hard new eliminate line on the N Face to the right of the Eguster Couloir. The crux section proved to be the 300m corner in the steep rock buttress separating the *Eguster* from the *Carli-Chassagne Goulotte*. (Both these routes are TD, the former offering excellent winter ice when in condition.) The new climb is called the *Voie Ferroviaire*, a reference to the need for a new rail link to ease freight traffic that would otherwise use the reopened Mont Blanc Tunnel. Parkin and Wainwright graded their 1000m route ED2 V/6.

Rognon du Plan In mid-January Jules Cartwright made a first solo winter ascent of *Sylchris* (Profit/Radigue/Tavernier, June 1985: 700m: ED2: IV/5+) on the W Face. On the second day Cartwright spent four hours climbing the route's crux: 120 metres of Scottish 6. During this section he discovered his rope had been badly cut, so he needed to separate the two pieces and tie them together with a knot, after which progress was understandably much slower. He bivouacked for a second time on the snow ridge between the two gullies and on the third day climbed the upper section (Scottish 5) to the Col Supérieur du Plan. Wearing leather boots, Cartwright sustained slight frostbite, a situation made worse by running out of gas. He spent a short spell in hospital on reaching Chamonix but was happily soon climbing again within a month.

Petit Dru From 22-26 February Russian climbers Mikhail Davy and Alexander Klenov climbed a hard new route on the NW Face. Starting at more or less the same point as the *American Direct*, they took a line between *Passage Cardiac* and *C'est Arrivé Demain*. Two attempts were made, the first barely reaching a quarter of the way up the wall after five days' effort, when bad weather slowed progress to a near halt. On their second attempt they continued past their previous high point to reach the Niche then climbed variation pitches to the Classic 1935 *Allain/Leininger Route* above. Christened *Dream of Summer*, the route involved sustained climbing of around 6b/A2 with two pitches graded 7a and A3 and the possibly understated adjectival grade of ED2. However, this was very much an eliminate line and somewhat illogical in the upper section, where it climbed cracks either just left or right of the 1935 route in an attempt to avoid touching it.

Aiguille Sans Nom From 17-21 March Alain Ghersen made an inspired first solo winter ascent of the highly regarded 1978 *Gabarrou-Silvy Directissima* (ED2: 950m) on the mountain's N Face. Only climbed in winter for the first time in 1998 by Slovenian ace Marko Prezelj and Swiss Thierry Schmitter, the route has 300m of hard rock-climbing before giving way to an ice field and very technical mixed climbing above. It was the third time Ghersen had tried to make a winter solo, bad weather in early March putting paid to his second attempt. He reached the Sans Nom Ridge in perfect weather, continued over the Verte and was able to descend the Whymper Couloir in just 45 minutes.

Valais

Breithorn. On 21 June, Italians Claudio Bastrentaz and Jimmy Sesana made an impressive ski descent of the classic *Welzenbach Route* on the NNW Face of the Breithorn's West Summit (4165m). Although subject to some objective danger, the *Welzenbach* or *Bethmann-Hollweg Route* (Bethmann-Hollweg/Supersaxo/Supersaxo, 1919: Bachschmidt/Rigele/Welzenbach, 1926 via a variation start to the left: 1100m: TD) is probably the route least exposed to falling ice on the face. The crux is the leftward slanting couloir to leave the lower snow/ice field and this gave the greatest difficulty to the skiers with sections of 60°.

A little later, on 2 July, Slovenians Blaz Stres and Tomaz Tisler made the probable second ascent of *Karantanska* on the NNW Face, a route first climbed in 1994 by fellow countrymen Peter Meznar and Bojan Pockar. This route actually climbs little new ground. It follows a more direct line up the rock buttress immediately right of the 1964 *Arnold/Etter/Mader Route*, continues up the latter and, when that joins the classic *Welzenbach Route*, slants up right to finish via the 1974 *Arnold/Ineichen Direct Route*.

Stres and Tisler did this route in a weekend, driving seven hours to Cervinia on Friday 1 July, then taking the téléphérique to Testa Grigia and descending in 20 minutes to the Theodule Hut where they bivouacked. The next day they made a nine-hour ascent, finding rock at F5, water ice to 4+ and a mixed pitch of M4. *Karantanska* (meaning Corinthian, after the once independent state of Corinthia formed around 900 AD and formerly inhabited by Slovenians) is threatened by icefall but not too seriously in the conditions encountered last July. The pair roped up for seven pitches only and felt a grade of ED1 was appropriate.

The next weekend Stres returned with Matija Klanjscek and this time climbed the large snow/ice slope taken by the initial sections of the classic *Welzenbach Route* and *Arnold/Ineichen Direct Route*, slanting right to the shoulder of the *Prothero Route* at 3696m. This line had probably first been followed as long ago as 1974 and involved 50-60° slopes with short sérac walls up to 80°. Above, the pair continued up left on 50° slopes to cut through the final rock barrier via the *Barmasse-De Tuoni Route* (1989: D+: accessed

from the Breithorn Plateau to the south), which follows a leftward-slanting gully that steepens to 80° and narrows to two metres (WI3+). The climb took only seven hours, as the Slovenian pair roped, but generally moved together (placing intermediate protection) for much of this 1000m route, which was seriously threatened by sérac fall especially in the final gully.

Bregaglia–Masino

Long periods of fine stable weather during the early part of the year gave local activists the chance to make several first winter ascents.

Punta Allievi After fixing the first three pitches on 26 February, Dante Barlascini, Marco Colombo and Paola Pazzini made the first winter ascent of *Inshallah* on the following day. Climbed by Maspes, Motto and Olcelli in 1998, *Inshallah* (500m: 17 pitches: 6b/6b+, 6a obl) climbs smooth friction slabs right of the 1937 *Boga Route* to reach the central basin, then climbs a steep wall close to the upper section of *Cosi È Se Vi Pare*. It is the longest route on the wall.

Pizzo Cengalo On exactly the same day that the winter ascent of *Inshallah* was being completed, the Lecco trio of Silvano Arrigoni, Adriano Selva and Andrea Spandri made a nine-hour winter ascent (the first?) of the magnificent *Gran Diedro* (Maspes/Merizzi/Pasqualotto, 1992: c500m/13 pitches: 6b)) on the E Face of the Cengalo.

Cima del Cavalcorte On the East Pillar of this well-known watchtower overlooking the lower Ferro Valley, Gualtiero Colzada and Mario Sertori have made the first winter ascent of *La Rossa* (D'Alessio and friends, 1997: c350m 6b and A1: a subsequent variant to the fourth pitch allows the route to be climbed entirely free at 6c). The winter ascent appears to have been completed in just one day on 10 March.

Punta della Sfinge On 13 March Marco Beltramini and Mario Sertori made a possible first winter ascent of the naturally-protected, six-pitch *Amicizia Route* (Oggioni/Rogantini/Sinapi, 1987: 230m: 6b) on the SE Face of the Sphinx (2802m) close to the Omio Hut.

Pizzo Torrone Occidentale – Punta 2987m On this popular playground close to the Allievi-Bonacossa huts, Mario Sertori made a solo winter ascent of *Ciota Cicoz* (160m: six pitches: strenuous 6b) on 20 March. This curious route on the SE Face, first climbed by Maspes and Perlini in July 1993, ascends the now established line of the rappel descent traditionally used by parties completing the ultra-classic *South Pillar* (Merrizi/Miotti, 1975: V and perhaps the most frequented route in the entire Zocca Valley).

Bernina

Piz Bernina The approach to the classic *Biancograt* (N Ridge), on this most easterly of the 4000m peaks, traditionally involves climbing a steep ice slope/couloir of c130m to gain the Fuorcla Prievlusa at the base of the ridge. In

recent summers and especially towards the end of the season, this ice slope has all but disappeared, leaving unpleasant rubble with associated stonefall danger. For this reason local guides and hut wardens have created a new approach through the area of rock left of the couloir.

The route is rather convoluted, first reaching the base of the upper couloir, then making a long traverse left to circumvent a steep rock barrier before slanting back right over slabby terrain to reach the col. This rocky section is reported to be waymarked and well equipped with iron spikes, but the Swiss guides point out that this in no way detracts from the ambience of the route, which remains a superb high mountain expedition reserved for experienced alpinists.

SUMMER 2000

Mont Blanc Massif

The weather during the season was chaotic, keeping alpinists on their toes the whole time, ready to adapt to each day's uncertain forecast. There were numerous accidents with six climbers killed on 15 August alone, the day of the Guides Festival in Chamonix. Two of these fell down the Whymper Couloir after an ascent of the N Face of the Verte, the other four being unfortunate victims of a huge rock fall whilst descending the *Normal Route* on the Tour Ronde. On the Italian side of the range it would appear the continued closure of the Mont Blanc Tunnel has stifled a lot of activity, while at accessible venues on the French side Michel Piola and various other regular activists continue with their project to re-equip a number of quality rock climbs. Some of the best ascents of the 'summer' were actually achieved in the spring and are reported below.

Since 1997, when a project under the title of 'Mont Blanc 2000 – Safe Granite' was initiated to re-equip routes in the Massif, a number of great classics on popular venues such as the Grand Capucin, Pilier des Trois Pointes, Aiguille Pierre-Alain and Tour Rouge, have been re-bolted. This has involved replacing old and now dubious 8mm bolts with 10mm stainless steel (generally 12mm on the main belays). In order to preserve the spirit of the first ascent, no additional bolts have been introduced except in rare cases when a particular passage has been thought highly dangerous in its original form (for instance where a fall would result in hitting a terrace) or where new variations have been added. Last summer those involved in the re-equipping process turned their attention to a number of fine routes in rather more remote surroundings. Although these offer superb climbing, they have completely failed to gain the popularity they deserve. The main work has centred on climbs close to the Chapoua Hut (Flammes de Pierre and Pointes below the Aiguille Moine), the Leschaux Hut and in the Aiguilles Rouges - Brévent region.

Aiguille Noire de Peuterey Proving that it is still very possible to make a major high-quality first ascent in the Mont Blanc Range, August 2000 saw the completion of *Nero su Bianco*, a 19-pitch rock climb on the SE Face of Punta Brendel (3499m). The 700m high SE Face of the Brendel, the fourth tower on the S Ridge, was only previously climbed by the possibly unrepeated 1981 *Manera-Meneghin Route* (ED1: VI and A3). On 23 August, 37-year-old Maurizio Oviglia, well known for his development and subsequent guide-books to many of the important crags in both Sardinia and the Gran Paradiso, plus the 29-year-old Slovenian-born Erik Svab, resident in Trieste, started up the face left of the 1981 route, crossed it at the end of pitch five, rejoined it on pitch nine, then climbed three pitches up the slanting crack and wall graded V+ and A3 by the original ascensionists. The pair then rappeled and after a day's rest re-climbed these 12 pitches, placing gear on lead and free-ing the hardest pitches (7, 11 and 12); then, where the 1981 route escapes out left, they continued more or less directly to exit just left of the summit. The 19-pitch route gave 940m of climbing with obligatory difficulties of 6b+ and a crux of 7b. Two other pitches rated 7a. The most commendable and notable aspect of this ascent was that natural gear (nuts, Friends and conventional pegs) was used throughout. The only gear left in place apart from the rappel anchors (pegs, nuts and slings) was a single peg on pitch 12.

Peuterey Integral A notable ascent of the classic *Peuterey Integral* (ED1) was made in an incredible 20 hours from the Val Veni to the summit of Mont Blanc by the Courmayeur guides Armand Clavel and Matteo Pellin. The pair made the climb to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the creation of the Courmayeur Guides Association and were filmed from the air throughout their ascent (*Una Ciliegina sulla Torta – l'Integrale del Peuterey*).

Grand Capucin An new independent line on the Grand Cap seems an unlikely possibility in this era, but *La Tête dans les Nuages,* put up solo over 15-16 May by Dominique Brau-Mouret, climbs previously virgin rock right of the *Swiss Route* for eight long pitches before finishing up the last two rope lengths of *Le Sourire de l'Eté*. An overall grade of ED2 (6a and A3) was reported

Grandes Jorasses Starting on 27 June and finishing at 1.00am on the 30 June, Patrice Glairon-Rappaz made the first uncontested solo ascent of the celebrated *No Siesta* (Gledjura/Porvaznik, 1986: 1000m: 90°: 6b and A2). Glairon-Rappaz backroped almost all the climb, finding the ice on the lower section in very poor condition and the rock often mediocre, much worse in fact than that encountered on the *Serge Gousseault Route*, which he climbed the previous winter (*see above*), which appears to have gained an unjust reputation. Carried out in less-than-perfect weather with heavy snow showers at frequent intervals, this was an impressive effort from the 29-year-old French alpinist, for which he received a Piolet d'Or nomination. It will of course be remembered that a second ascent of this fabled route was claimed just one year after its first by the Slovenian, Tomo Cesen, who in 1987 announced that he had soloed the line in just 14 hours.

Pointe à Daniel Apart from the great routes on the Petites Jorasses, rock climbing in the vicinity of the Leschaux Hut has failed to gain popularity. Last summer Michel Piola attempted to address the problem by re-equipping his own 1991 route *Tonton Daniel* (230m: seven pitches: 6b, 6a obl) on the Pointe du Daniel, then adding two fine new routes alongside.

At the beginning of August, with Hervé Bouvard and Benoît Robert, he climbed the left edge of the huge slab that characterises this face, stopping after seven pitches at the foresummit. *Dark Cristal* was sustained, with the first six pitches either 6b or 6b+ and the last 6a+. A few days later and further to the right, cutting through *L'Esprit d'Escalier* on its third pitch, the same three climbers created *Cristal Palace.* This nine-pitch route (6c+ or 6b with two points of aid) continues up to the crest of the ridge over a series of stark, jagged towers.

Rognon du Plan On the N Face between the ultra classic *Fil a Plomb* and the Col du Plan Couloir, Philippe Batoux and Fabien Peyonnet climbed an independent line christened *Ice Tooling.* Completed in one day, 23 May, this route branches left just below the crux pitch of the Col du Plan Couloir to climb a conspicuous dièdre and mixed terrain above (c300m: III/4: 80°, M5), entirely left of Andy Parkin's December 1994 solo variation finish to the Col du Plan Couloir.

Tour Verte Parallel to but just left of the ultra classic *Le Piège* is a new offering, *Pasang, de retour d'Everest*, from Fanny Bellucci, Thierry Franc, Michel Piola and Benoît Robert. The route was completed in two sessions, on 16 August 1998 and 7 August 2000, and has six pitches with one of 6b+ and one of 6b (6a obl). Although harder than *Le Piège* it could potentially become the second classic of the Tour Verte.

Aiguille du Roc The 500m S Face offers a number of ultra classic climbs that are protected entirely by natural gear. However, nearly all parties will descend from the top of the routes by rappel, generally via the much-less-than-perfect anchors of the route *Tout va Mal.* Last summer Thierry Franc, Benoît Robert and Piola made things much less stressful by climbing and re-equipping *Tout va Mal.* They discovered the climb to be long, of great quality and quite strenuous, and during the ascent decided to equip several new variants. On pitch two they made a slanting traverse to reach the stance at the top of the original first pitch (6a+: glacier recession has affected this and many other routes in the neighbourhood). On the 8th pitch they followed the crest of the pillar at 6b and on the 10th pitch climbed direct at 6c+ (or 6b with three points of aid) in order to avoid the pendulum of the original line. Variants to the 12th and 13th pitches were both graded 6a.

Aiguille du Moine – Pointe 3064m Didier Gumy, Karen and François Pallandre have added another route to this fine granite pyramid on the SW Ridge of the Moine. *La Voix du Druide* (280m: ED1: eight sustained pitches with cruxes of 6c, 6b obl) climbs up the centre of the NW Face, right of the 1988 *Ratheaux/Renault Route* and is reported to be excellent.

Aiguilles Rouges

In the last few years a number of excellent routes have been created in the Aiguilles Rouges close to the Brévent and Flegère télépherique stations. Although the rock here is solid gneiss, it is extremely compact and very difficult to protect with natural gear. Hence these modern routes have been entirely equipped with bolts. Situated at a moderate altitude and receiving considerable amounts of sunshine, they dry very quickly. Add easy accessibility and a magnificent panorama and you have all the ingredients to appeal to a large sector of today's modern crag climbers. Around five new routes were recorded last summer.

The popularity of the Aigulles Rouges, and indeed many rock-climbing venues on the north side of the Chamonix Valley, is set to increase further with the publication of a new topo guide, *Les Aiguilles Rouges - Escalade au Soleil.* Written by Thomas Dulac and Godefroy Perroux, the 272-page guide, with many colour photos, describes the climbing to be found at Les Houches, Le Brévent, La Flégère, Lac Blanc, Poya-Chéserys, Praz Torrent, Rénard-Barberine-Passet, Emosson and Grand Perron. The book can be bought in the usual Chamonix shops at a cost of 187 Francs but is also available direct from Perroux at DP Editions, 182 Route du Pont, 74310 Les Houches, France.

Clocher du Brévent Julie Balmat, Patrice Hanrard and Emanuel Méot have created *Krakoukasso*n on one of the buttresses that descend south from the Clocher du Brévent (2398m). The 250m route sports eight pitches with a crux of 6a (5+ obl) and the descent is via an easy walk off the back.

Clochers de Planpraz Famous for its delightful little traverse above the Plan Praz téléphérique station, the Clochers now have another line put up on 19 August by Jérémy and Morgane Franc, Emmanuel Méot and Christophe Mussat. *Cocher-Cochon* climbs two successive buttresses in a total on nine pitches with difficulties of 5+/6a (5 obl).

Contrefort de l'Index At the start of the season Michel Piola completed his route *Mani Pulliti* on the East Spur of the Contrefort. This is the spur right of the descent couloir from the Index. Piola climbed this six-pitch route (4 to 5) in 1999 but returned last year to give it a thorough cleaning and add some equipment. Natural protection is still useful, notably at the start of the fourth pitch, and the route could potentially become a classic of the Aiguilles Rouges.

Grande Floria In September Laurent Collignon and Michel Fontès put up the four-pitch *Robin Wood* (6a, 5 obl) on the buttress to the right of the one on which the modern classic Piola route *Asia* is situated. The same pair also climbed the E Ridge of the same buttress to give a longer climb christened *A Isa*. This eight-pitch route has unavoidable difficulties of 5.

The Traverse of the Alps

Since the British alpinist Sir Martin Conway made the first really great traverse of the Alps in 1894 (from the Col de Tende in the Maritime Alps to the Ankogel in Austria) and celebrated it with his book *The Alps from End to End*, there have been many variations on this theme. The latest and almost certainly the most widely publicised took place from 26 August 2000 to 9 February 2001, when the well-known French alpinist, Patrick Bérhault, travelled by foot (walking, skiing or snow-shoeing) from Mojstrana in Slovenia's Julian Alps to Menton on the Mediterranean, south of the Maritime Alps, a distance as the crow flies of more than 1200km. Bérhault wanted to complete a traverse with a difference, linking together ascents of historic climbs that to him truly represented the evolution of alpinism. He eventually climbed 22 high-standard routes, often in demanding wintry conditions with a number of different partners. Several of these ascents were outstanding.

Starting on 27 August with the N Face of Triglav, he progressed to the Dolomites and a succession of nine climbs, which included the *Brandler-Haase* on the Cima Grande in seven-and-a-half hours, the *Phillip-Flamm* on Punta Tissi in eight hours and *The Fish* on the S Face of the Marmolada in seven hours.

With conditions far too snowy for the Badile, he climbed instead the classic N Face of the Cengalo and then moved on to the Oberland for an attempt on the *Harlin Route* on the N Face of the Eiger. However, with conditions again too bad, he decided to continue straight to Chamonix, where he arrived on 22 October. The weather was now fantastic and over 23-25 October he completed his most significant ascent of the entire journey when, with Philippe Magnin, he made the fourth ascent of the *Serge Gousseault Route* on the left flank of the Walker Spur. This was three days faster than the previous winter ascent, completed the preceding January (*see above*), and a day faster than the only summer ascent (the second overall ascent) by the talented duo of Gordon Smith (UK) and Tobin Sorenson (USA) in 1977. On 28 October he made an eight-hour ascent of the *Hypercouloir* on the Brouillard Face of Mont Blanc.

Three weeks now elapsed before the weather was good enough for him to return (by bike) to the Valais for an ascent of the Matterhorn by the *Schmid Route* and then onwards to the Oberland for an ascent of the Eiger by the *1938 Route*. Then it was on south via the difficult *Boivin Route* on the N Face of the Grande Casse, the Meije, the Ecrins, a solo winter traverse of Monte Viso and several hard routes in the Maritime Alps before he finally reached the Mediterranean coast on 9 February. He had spent 167 days completing his Alpine Voyage and ascended a total of 141,863m, 22,280 of these on the 22 climbs. Inevitably, the book will follow.

Huts

The **Tête Rousse Hut** on the *Normal Route* to the summit of Mont Blanc via the Gouter Ridge is being reconstructed. A new building, almost 3½ times the size of the present, is being built close to the existing hut. Costing an estimated 10 million francs, it should be ready by the summer of 2003.

The Saint Gervais Guides have improved access from the Col de Tricot to the **Durier Hut** (3,69m). From the 2120m Col a signpost indicates the path, which runs along steep alpine pastures to the Refuge du Plan glacier. From this hut cables lead to a system of ledges allowing parties to join the Miage glacier, from which an ascent, similar to that to the Aiguille du Gouter on Mont Blanc's *Normal Route*, leads to the Durier Hut. This now forms the best escape route from the hut in the event of bad weather.

A small reminder to alpinists visiting the **Gervasutti Hut** below the E Face of the Petites Jorasses. The final section of the approach from the Val Ferret is threatened by a band of séracs invisible from below. A British climber reports seeing his tracks completely obliterated by a large ice avalanche just five minutes after he had passed. In the early 1990s the well-known French climber, Alexis Long, was killed by sérac fall in just this vicinity.

Bregaglia–Masino

The summer season does not appear to have been too productive in the creation of new routes. However, it was notable for three extremely impressive first solo ascents on some of the most technically demanding alpine rock walls in the range.

Pizzo Trubinasca In June, Lecco climbers, Adriano Selva and Andrea Spandri, climbed *Dixon* on the sombre N Face. Put up over two days in 1989 by Paolo, Crippa and Dario Spreafico, this 14-pitch ED2 involves bold, thin and delicate friction work that should appeal to the devotees of the harder slab routes in the Mello Valley. With an obligatory crux of VIII–, it is considered to be one of the hardest routes in the Bregaglia and has today received no more than 10 ascents. Early the following month Selva returned for the first solo ascent, climbing the route in only five hours, backroping all but the first four pitches.

Cima Scingino In late July Adriano Selva made the first solo ascent of the rarely repeated *Delta Minox* above Bagni del Masino. This 12-pitch route on the steep compact S Face of the SW Pillar was first climbed by the legendary Tarcisio Fazzini (with Gianola and Riva) in September 1988. It is widely considered to be one of the finest and most difficult climbs of its type in the entire range and a lasting tribute to the late Fazzini. The route is sustained at a high level of difficulty, with unavoidable moves of VIII– and a crux of VIII+. Fixed gear is reported to be rather spaced, especially on the first and fourth pitch (both VII–/VII with only several points in 40-45m). It is not known whether Selva had previous knowledge of the route but he did take an enormous fall on the penultimate pitch (graded VII).

New Routes close to the Gianetti Hut Luca Maspes and Manlio Motto are reported to have put up a new route on the Torre Vecchia (aka Dente della Vecchia, 2913m), which is home to the old classic 1954 *Fiorelli Route* (150m: V) and the splendid, more modern 1987 Fazzini offering, *Champignon Merveilleux* (110m: VI–), and another on the Avancorpo del Porcellizzo, home to the classic *1968 Route* on the E Face by Isherwood and Kosterlitz (VII).

Precipizio degli Asteroidi Over the Easter Weekend, Gabor Berecz and Thomas Tivadar added another big-wall route to the SE Face of the Precipizio. *Dirty Dancing* lies in the Pejonasa Wall area close to Tivadar's existing aid lines such as *Kartykiraly* and *Mama Mia* and was climbed over four days with three nights spent on the wall in a portaledge. The route joins *Carretera de la Cocia* (Fazzini/Fazzini/Gianola, 1987: 750m: VII– and A2) after nine new pitches, at which point the pair were hit by a big rainstorm, which stopped further progress. *Dirty Dancing* (5.10 and A3), was reported as not particularly difficult and did not require the use of any bolts, making it the first route on the wall to be climbed without them. However, the crux, a roof on pitch five, required successive Bathook moves in drilled holes.

Monte Qualido On 16 August Palo Duris and Brano Hinca from Slovakia repeated *Qualifalaise* (Brambati/Carnati/Vitali, 1997: 120m of slab and crack climbing up to 7a+, 6b+ obl), a four-pitch route immediately left of *Mediterraneo* and right of *Il Paradiso può Attendere*. Then on 17, 18 and 20-23 they climbed *Melodramma* (Covelli/Covelli/Fieschi/Spatola, 1989: 500m: VII and A3). The two Slovaks repeated the original line (probably the fourth ascent), which finished after 13 pitches at the junction with *Il Paradiso può Attendere*. However, from 24-27 August, Czechs, Vojtech Dvorak and Radek Leinerth repeated the 1991 ascent, which continues for a further four pitches, finishing up the 1993 route *Melat*. This was probably the second ascent of *Melodramma* climbed in this fashion.

One day prior to this ascent the Czech pair had climbed the modern bolted route *Stargate* (Caloni/Pizzagalli/Soldarini, 1996: 700m: 17 pitches: VII/VII+ obl and A1) at 7b and prior to this had created a new variation to *Il Paradiso*. *Time to Leave,* a 22-pitch line climbed on the 18, 19 and 21 August, follows the first 12 pitches of *Il Paradiso* (Boscacci/Masa/Merizzi, 1982: 950m of climbing: originally VII and A3 but all free at IX– by Beránek, Koller and Machaj in 1995), then breaks out right to create a new two-pitch link with *Mediterraneo* (Brambati/Carnati/Vitali, 1997: 6c+ and A0, 6b+ obl), which is then climbed to join *Melat* (Brambati/Carnati/Vitali, 1993: 700m: VII+ obl and A2) five pitches below the top. Dvorak and Leinerth completed this route all free at IX–.

Picco Luigi Amedeo On the 'Grand Capucin' of the Bregaglia-Masino Group, local activist Luca Maspes made the first solo ascent of the celebrated Fazzini/Gianola/Riva route *Electroshock*. This 12-pitch route on the c400m high SE Face above the Torrone Valley was first climbed in 1989 at VIII+ and A0 and featured obligatory moves of VIII–. It was still considered one of the hardest lines in the Central Alps in 1994, when Slovakians, Oto Bajana

and Martin Heuger, spent two weeks on the route during July, finally making the first free ascent at IX (F7c) and thereby creating probably the hardest alpine rock route in the range. To date it has only received around 10 ascents and features very technical and strenuous overhanging sections, cracks and some slabby sections protected by a combination of natural gear, pegs and bolts. Maspes, a 29-year-old alpine guide from Sondrio, now living in the Mello Valley and arguably the foremost modern activist in the region, fixed the first three pitches on 1 July, then returned the following day to finish the route in a total climbing time of 14 hours. He backroped using a modified Grigri and climbed the route at F7a and A1, with two moves on skyhooks.

Punta Meridionale del Cameraccio It is still possible to put up long rock routes of a relatively accessible standard on the Italian flanks of the range. In June Lorenzo Lanfranchi and Luca Maspes put up a new 600m line on the SW Pillar left of the esoteric 1978 Guerini/Merizzi/Villa route, *Il Pilastro degli Dei*. The pair climbed their route fast using minimal protection and recorded maximum difficulties of only V+/VI.