



ARMY

# AMA ALPS 2000

A FULL ACCOUNT OF THE EXPEDITION



FRENCH - BERNESE - PENNINE

# ARMY MOUNTAINEERING ASSOCIATION ALPS 2000

## Foreword

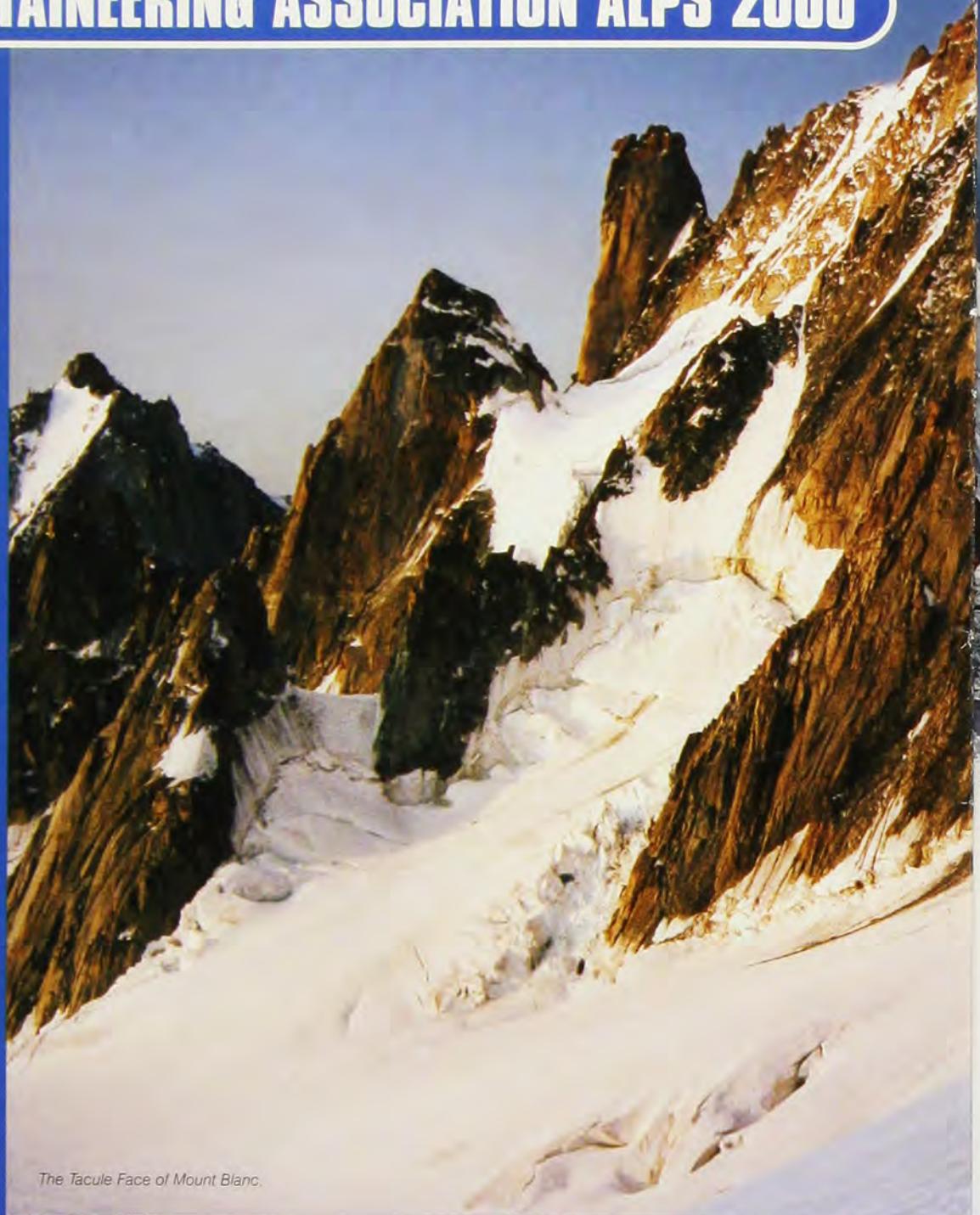
By Lieutenant General Sir Scott Grant

AMA ALPS 2000 has been one of the most inspired expeditions organized by the Army for many years: it had a simple, well-understood aim (namely to climb all 61 Alpine peaks over 4,000 metres); it had wide participation (over 40 climbers, of all ranks and of every experience, from novice to international mountain guide); and it genuinely fired the imagination of the mountaineering community within the Army. It was a measure of AMA ALPS 2000's importance that it received substantial backing and support from the Royal Geographical Society, the Berlin Infantry Brigade Memorial Trust Fund and civilian industry, and particularly from Lex Service plc, whose loan of 5 minibuses made the whole expedition possible.

Over the last couple of years, the operational pressures on the Army have been extremely demanding. However, AMA ALPS 2000 has not only shown that, despite these operational commitments, adventurous training is still alive and well in today's Army, but it has also demonstrated to young men or women throughout Britain that soldiering is a challenging and exciting profession, in which the opportunities for travel, friendship and fun are enormous. I am delighted to have been the Patron of such an ambitious undertaking and I would like to thank all those individuals and organizations who helped to convert an inspired idea into a highly successful expedition.

## Introduction

AMA ALPS 2000 was a series of adventurous training expeditions to the French, Italian and Swiss Alps mounted by the Army Mountaineering Association (AMA) from the 11 July to 12 August 2000. Over this period the AMA hoped to climb all 61 of



The Tacul Face of Mount Blanc.

the European 4000m peaks. A total of 42 AMA members participated in the three expeditions.

The aim was to introduce alpine novices to alpine mountaineering to provide a firm bedrock of experience for the future and to raise the technical standard and experience of team members. The expedition was divided into three teams:

Group 1. The Mont Blanc Range, Grand Paradiso and Barre des Écrins.

Group 2. The Bernese Alps.

Group 3. The Pennine Alps and the Monte Rosa Group.

Due to the appalling weather conditions during the 2000 climbing season, AMA ALPS 2000

was unable to achieve its main aim of summing all 61 of the 4000 metre peaks. Many peaks were not in a safe condition after the unusually heavy snowfalls in June and July. However, the exercise was a great success despite less than ideal climbing conditions. A total of 41 peaks were summited and numerous other alpine routes were completed, some in appalling conditions.

## Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements and thanks are due to the following whose support and advice were fundamental to the success of AMA ALPS 2000: The committee of the AMA for their advice, support and a grant towards the costs. The Berlin Infantry Brigade Memorial Trust Fund for their generous financial support. Lex Service plc for the provision of 5 minibuses for the three expeditions.

Final edit by Steve and Amy Willson

# MONT BLANC MASSIF, ECRINS MASSIF, AND GRAN PARADISO



Tim Bird with Biowassay behind.

## Conduct Of The Expedition

There were 18 expedition participants on the Mt Blanc phase. Due to operational and exercise commitments some team members arrived late or departed early. A list of the expedition members is below:

Initial training phase (first 7 days). The weather prior to the expedit's arrival in Chamonix had been appalling. The snow had fallen and remained down to 1800m and

the forecast for the coming week was poor too. After the first day spent crevasse rescue training (in a blizzard at the Grands Montets) and running through belay drills and prussiking (in the pouring rain in the valley) with Mac MacKay there was a distinct need to find somewhere good for morale fast. The improvement in the weather was forecast to come from the SE. After phoning a British Guide based in Ailefroide it was established that the Ecrins Massif was due to gain good

mountaineering conditions several days before the Mt Blanc Massif. After only 36hrs in Chamonix the exped therefore decamped to Ailefroide and the first group reached the summit of the Dôme des Ecrins (4015m) the day after - full marks to Dave Smith (DS) and his team of five. This was the first good climbing day in the Ecrins for several weeks and the AMA had its timing right! The day after, DS and his team moved to the Gran Paradiso, following the good weather back to Chamonix.

They completed the Gran Paradiso (4061m) the day after before returning to Chamonix! The others had a day multi-pitch climbing in Ailefroide and reached the summit of the Barre des Ecrins (4101m) a day behind Simon (SW) and Jason (JA) by way of the Barre Noire Couloir. After a further half-day's climbing they too returned to Chamonix.

Acclimatisation and confirmatory training phase (next 10 days). The weather had by now turned for the better in Chamonix but there was still concern over the snow conditions. However, the snow in the Ecrins had just reached perfect condition when we had arrived and the Mt Blanc Massif was therefore likely to have just reached the same point. It was decided to go high for acclimatisation and get on snow! DS took a group up Mt Tondu (3196m) and then over the Dômes de Miage (3752m) the following day. SW took the remainder on a dramatic two day traverse over the Dômes de Miage and the knife edge traverse of Bionassay (4052m) and staying overnight in the Durier Refuge, a small hut at 3358m. During this time AS and JR had also completed a traverse

Rank	Name	Svc No	Unit	Adv Trg Qualifications
2Lt	Ainley	Jason A	550611	38 Engr Regt
SSgt	Bird	Tim	721 Sqn RLC	MLW; JSRCI
Capt	Broad	Andy B	539542	RCL; MLWT; AJSMEL; SPSA
Capt	Campbell	Ewen	534771	WCP
Capt	Garner	Andy G	542688	RLT; UEL
Cpl	Hill	Jason H	25000858	JSRCI; UEL
Mr	Jones	Steve		MIC
Capt	Kivell	George	542723	RCL; MLT
Capt	McKay	Mac	542052	BMG; HBF
SSgt	Miller	Dusty	24707905	JSRCI; SGL; MLWT; SPSA
OCdt	Roberts	Steve	24962477	IAM; UEL
Capt	Roddis	James	541524	BW
Capt	Smith	Andy	24664614	2 PARA
SSgt	Smith	Dave	532270	JSME(W); SGL; WCL; RCL
LCpl	Taylor	Craig	25064733	JSME(S); SPSA
Lt	Truett	Alasdair	548296	PARA ITC
Capt	Wetherall	Simon	524393	LISA Fd Sys
Cpl	Woodhead	Woody	25025349	NICSS
				RCL; WMLT; JSME(S)
				RCP; WMP



Malcolm G & Tim with the Freney Pillar of Mt Blanc behind.



Jason Hill climbing with Dusty Miller watching.

of Mont Blanc du Tacul, Mt Maudit and Mt Blanc. By now the entire group were well acclimatised and it was time to concentrate on more technical multi-pitch skills. Over the next few days a number of routes were completed including Chapelle de la Glière (IV+) and Pyramide du Tacul (IV+), Aiguille l'M (IV+), Arête des Papillons (M) and a number of routes at the Envers Refuge including Amazonia (V+). Two groups also attempted the Dent du Geant (4013m) but were defeated by the weather.

Continuation training and summit attempts. During this final phase the less experienced team members were encouraged to complete routes already known to some team members and of appropriate grade and hazard; but without the assistance of the most experienced team members. Routes completed by these teams included the Cosmiques Arête, Midi Plan traverse, l'Index, Dent du Geant, Chardonnet, Aig du Tour and the Mt Blanc Traverse. Numerous rock routes were completed high up around the Envers Refuge and also from the Vallée Blanche. The Whymper Couloir on the Aig Verte (4122m) was climbed too but the other 4000m peaks remained elusive because of the snow on the rock ridges. An outstanding number of climbs were completed despite the worst Chamonix weather since the 1920s. This is testament to the hard work of the entire team.

## EXERCISE DIARY A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF THE MONT BLANC GROUP

BY CAPTAIN ALASDAIR TRUETT, PARA

Wed 2 Aug

The weather once again totally dominated plans – all of them! A sunny start was expected, but bad weather was known to be fast approaching. As a result, Steve & Steve, Simon & Andy B decided to go and have a first or second attempt at Arête des Papillon. Jason A & Al and Woody & Dusty all decided to go on Lépidoptères. On arrival at the Midi telecabine station, although the early morning sky was clear, there were a few clouds gathering in the valley. The telecabine was late and we departed with the first car at 6.20 and by then some cloud was materialising on the summit of Mt Blanc. The walls to the left of Lépidoptères were bare and no one was ahead on the approach to the climbs – the threat of stormy weather keeping all but the most determined away.

On Lépidoptères Jason & Al set off first, with Jason A leaving a trail of burning rubber from his stickies. The majority of the climb is not difficult, however the first two pitches rely upon friction, so dry weather is preferred! Above Chamonix, when the weather comes in, it does so very quickly. For that reason Jason climbed double pitches as often as possible and used limited pro. In dry-ish conditions, if confident, this is not a problem. However, the rock was becoming increasingly damp as we progressed and Woody & Dusty (immediately behind) found the slabs much harder as the friction diminished. The last pitch is a simple chimney, but by then the clouds arrived and broke. The chimney, whilst easy to climb, acted as a funnel for the water. As Al started to second up the last pitch Woody began to belay at its base. On arriving at 'Windy Gap' at the top the thunder and lightening began so Jason and Al hastily abseiled off down the normal descent (same as Arête des Papillons). Woody and Dusty, who even in the conditions, could undoubtedly have completed the climb, rightly made the cautious decision and beat a hasty retreat. The weather once again thwarting completion on the last pitch.

Half way down the descent Jason and Al saw Steve and Steve on their way up the Arête des Papillon. No sign of the others. This was quickly explained by their presence in the café at the Plan de l'Aiguille telecabine. They had all arrived at the base of the first pitch, but had decided the weather was too dicey unless you were a an absolute speed demon like Steve Jones – not a bad decision if you wanted to stay dry!

Eventually the two Steves joined us and we all retired once again to the Poco Loco planning cell. After dinner, the vast majority moved to the Office Bar in Argentière for a Beach Party – our first night out for almost three weeks! Much raucous behaviour was enjoyed by all. With very conspicuous dancing being displayed by the Shrivenham Club.

Thu 3 Aug

Dusty, Tim, Woody, Dave, Andy, Steve, Jason and Steve all braved varying degrees of hangovers to go to Le Fayet cragging. Skills were taught at the lower end of the experience scale by Tim and Dusty with the

others (Woody, Simon, Steve and Dave) attempting the overhang further along the crags. Rumours subsequently heard suggested that Woody had made it look so easy because his feet were touching the floor!

#### Fri 4 Aug

As we have come to expect the weather was promising to be diabolical. None the less an intrepid few made off to N & S of the valley. Simon and Al, and Dusty and Dave respectively headed for Chapelle de la Glière in the Aiguilles Rouge. Steve departed for the Aiguille de L'M accompanied by Jason and Darren (acquired from the Bernese ALPS 2000).

Simon's group arrived for the first lift at the La Flegère at 07:40, but in a particularly French fashion the lift was delayed. The group moved off from the Index telecabine in reasonable weather, but with stormy clouds approaching. Simon and Al managed to miss the base of the climb. It was eventually found when Dave headed back to find Dusty who had vanished.

Dave led off just as the heavens opened, not just rain but hail as well. Dusty, tenacious as ever, refused to be budged off the first pitch, although in his heart he knew that he was going to come down. Even if he hadn't, Dave was sat belaying stating very plainly that if Dusty did not come down he would tie him off.

Simon and Al, after a short conference decided to complete "at least the first pitch" (by now a river of hail). Everyone knew what that really meant. The climb went on to become something of an epic. 10 pitches in the rain and hail, of 4 and 4+, and somewhat bravely led by Simon. Although there was no view to speak of, (although Chamonix was sighted in sunshine on several occasions), the razor ridge (4+) was none the less an experience to be savoured. Under the circumstances the last two pitches (11 and 12) were abandoned. A fast descent was led well by Simon who proved absolutely right when he had been sure that you could walk off the top heading for the l'Index couloir. Maintaining the rope for some of the descent was found to be worthwhile, especially if a less experienced climber numbers one of the pair. After Dusty and Dave had withdrawn at the start, Al and Simon were surely the only two left on the mountain. To Al's surprise the lift was still functioning and the descent remained civilised. It is safe to say that with the series of 4 or 5 harsh storms accompanied by steady rain, the pitches were at the harder end of their grade.

On the Aiguille de L'M, Steve's group were equally successful in completing their objective. After feedback from Tim's earlier efforts they took daysacks with them and avoided the marathon move in stickies. The climb begins in a small couloir, (the Col Blanc) that not surprisingly, was still snow covered. The climb of 8 pitches remained snow covered in an alarming number of places. However the group, with an equal amount of soul searching to those on the opposite side of the valley, remained focused on all the pitches between 3 and 4+.

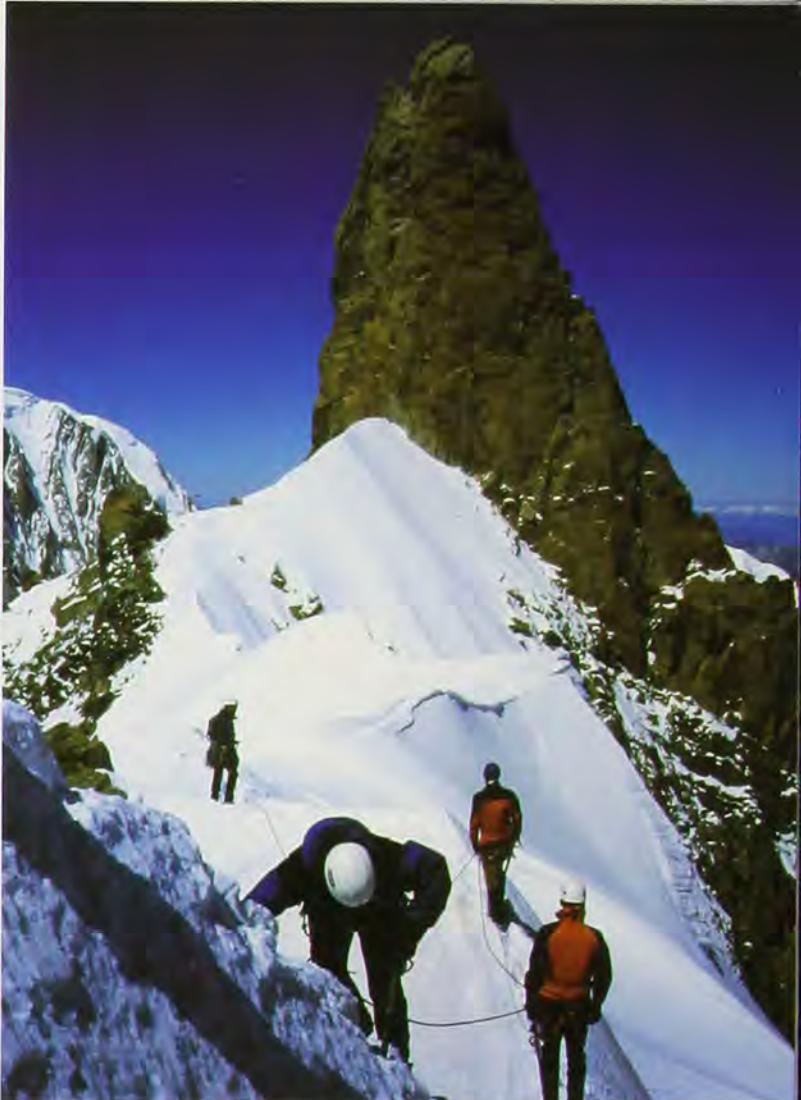
The day for both parties was characterised by a short quote by Michel Piola in his book. On writing about the Aiguille de L'M: "... I, myself, think that on the whole, all the routes in the Mont Blanc Massif should be approached as mountain routes, the natural elements always having the final word."

#### Sat 5 Aug

'A day of rest'. This may come as a surprise, however, the weather was getting everyone down. The term 'rest' has many different interpretations. As a result Simon, Jason, Dusty, Woody, Dave and Steve all shot off, once again, to assault the Le Fayet overhangs. More rumours of Woody with his feet on the floor, although this time he is totally excused as he moved deftly across 6b+ and some moves of 6c. More planning at the end of the day accompanied by various interpretations of the meteo leading to an agreement on better weather approaching. All are to move to the Refuge d'Envers above the Mer de Glace. A quite superb location for rock climbing, and one of the most atmospheric scenes in the Chamonix valley.

#### Sun 6 Aug

Plans for an early breakfast failed as all were still in bed at 0730. No need for an early start anyway as the 7 moved to the Refuge d'Envers in the rain. The Mer de Glace railway was wonderfully quiet emphasising the sense of going to a hut the day before the weather breaks. The route to the hut is one of the most outstanding of its kind. The first hour spent



Rochfort Arete Dent du Beant.

Halfway up Mount Tandu





Crevasse rescue - Mer de Glace.

crossing the lower/middle reaches of the Mer de Glace. Sticking to the right hand side, going up, there is no need for crampons and rope, just a little confidence in mountain boots. Following the yellow markers takes one along the best path. This is especially important at the crossing point when one leaves the glacier for the lateral moraine. Most chose to go straight up the moraine. This is a particularly treacherous route with relatively frequent rockfalls. Following the yellow markers takes one along the edge of the moraine a short distance. Thereafter, a short, but steep climb, marked clearly, to the ladders. The walk is a long but spectacular one as the path winds its way up to a natural ledge above the glacier, and then a final climb to the Refuge.

The afternoon was spent working as a DIY team on the Refuge whilst it rained outside. Steve and Simon were hard at work putting a casing around the pipes in the downstairs bathroom!! Babette (the *guardienne*) is a most hospitable lady, providing fantastic and fulsome food, but she may expect some extra mural activities on a slack afternoon.

#### Mon 7 Aug

Breakfast called at a most civilised hour (for the first time in a refuge!), with everyone agreeing that the day promised to burn bright. Once again the 'Meteo' was absolutely on the nail. Simon's sceptics kept quiet. Steve and Dusty left a trail of dust in their wake as they headed for Amazonia (TD/280m/5a compulsory). The route is a particularly popular one 5/5+ and two pitches of 6a. A very good one for a competent leader to extend to 6a grade. The 6a grades are sustained. An early start worked perfectly, allowing Dusty to take the lead a number of times, and they were back at the Refuge in the early afternoon to enjoy the sun and the shenanigans going on on the peaks around.

Jason and Dave, wanting a half day only, moved off for Gagafou. A 200m climb characterised by sustained chimneys of grade 5. Perhaps the harder end of the grade. They made excellent time, with Jason once again showing prowess at TD level. The climb, only 15 mins from the Refuge was over and descended in time for Jason to RV with Darren (who raced up from the valley on the first train) and move off to climb Ambience Eigerwand TD/250m/ 5+ compulsory.

Woody, Al and Simon, after much deliberating, and narrowly avoiding unpacking the underslung load delivered by the helicopter, moved off to the Pilier Sud. The approach begins on rock and then moves into a snow slope. Crampons and ice axe are essential to cross the 20m patch of blue ice criss-crossed with small, but hidden crevasses and snow bridges.

The start of the climb is confusing and a careful deliberation is required with the guide book to ensure one begins correctly. The snow joins the rock at the beginning of the first pitch, making the change from boots to stickies particularly treacherous. If one is to avoid unnecessary and adrenalin pumping ice axe arrest practice, then a nut or friend with a sling in the rock, or a substantial snow cone and sling, should be used for security before the climb begins. Using the ice axe alone, cannot be relied upon, with snow conditions under the heat of the summer sun. After a number of false starts, and allowing others queuing to pass, Simon decided that considering the length (500m) of the climb, that we should retreat and attempt a shorter route. (Dusty and Al were intending to walk down and needed time to catch the last train).

The group moved to Gagafou. Al offered to climb with a small daysack as Woody and Simon were leading. The first pitch was an easy start grade 4. After that one moves straight into the two following chimneys. Woody led exceptionally well at the upper end of 5. Al got stuck with the daysack and had to back out and rope the daysack up to Simon. Simon led the 3rd pitch, characterised by a long crack. Woody led the 4th only to find it very similar to the one before. After hanging with the daysack, Al was forced to humble himself in the face of grade 5 layback. Unfortunately this signalled the end and all 3 were forced to abseil back down to the Refuge. The 3rd and 4th pitches have nothing for the feet and little to choose for protection.

Dusty and Al beat a hasty retreat back down to the Montenvers railway hoping for the conditions to allow at best a traverse of Mount Blanc du Tacul, Mount Maudit and Mount Blanc. Or at worst, a plod up the motorway on the Gouter Ridge.

#### Tues 8 Aug

Simon, Woody and Steve made off for the classic "Bienvenue an Georges



Chapel de Gillére.

V" TD sup. A 350m route characterised by its beauty, especially in the summer sun which shone bright. A 13 pitch route of grades 5 to several sustained 6a. The group was chased closely by Jason and Darren, who were beginning to tick off some of the classic routes.

Back down the valley, Dusty and Al were chasing weather forecasts and phoning Guides for the latest and most reliable advice on a Mount Blanc traverse including Mont Blanc du Tacul. Eventually, a decision was made to pitch the tent at the Col du Midi and see what the weather would do. A glorious day (the second in a row) promised better snow conditions and the possibility of tracks on the route. Arrival at the Aiguille du Midi at 1100 showed good signs. The Col du Midi was dotted with colour like an aerial photo of Glastonbury music festival. The snow was awash with 40 odd tents and a continuous queue to the Cosmiques hut. A late phone call (God bless mobiles!) to a Guide (with binoculars on Brevent!) confirmed tracks on Mont Maudit (the most likely to avalanche of the three Mt Blanc peaks).

#### Wed 9 Aug

Back at the Refuge d'Envers, the 'hut rats' enjoyed yet another civilised start with Mediterranean sun and 'hot rock'. Simon and Woody headed off for the Ambiene Eigerwand, assured by Jason that it was not as difficult as it seemed! The book assured TD for 250m with 5+ compulsory. 8 pitches averaging grade 5 with two grades 6a promised an interesting morning. Steve, Jason and Darren (now joined the Chamonix group) decided to attempt An Soleil des Isles. A short 120m climb of 4 pitches. The good book promises TD sup with 6b compulsory for those with the nerve.

Around the corner, whilst the above were all asleep, Dusty and Al decided the traverse was in. Midnight proved a good start as the pair headed off well ahead of the rest of the crowd. The night, although stable was not as cold as one might have asked, so the timing of the start was essential. The move to the base of Mont Blanc du Tacul was a short 15 mins with still no sign of any company. The route, fortunately was still visible, although now covered in spin drift. Dusty led an efficient distance covering pace through the seracs. An eagle eye is required to identify the snow bridges, as one passes under some of the most staggering

seracs one can still walk amongst. The tracks were still visible so a route was there for the taking. One twists and turns amongst the seracs and eventually reaches the col. A spaghetti junction of paths seems confusing, but the route is clearly to one's left. A very steady snow field, firm under foot leads to the final 30 feet or rock. One can climb through, or take an easier path, if a little exposed to the left. The summit characterised by a sort of scaffolding cross assembly with a myriad of stickers from various mountaineering associations.

Two ridges led off to one's left and right. Both look equally uninviting, and both form part of the 'Frontier Ridge'. A quick orientation of the map, and common sense show that Mont Maudit is off to the right. Use of the compass is not sensible due to the unusual mineral composition of the rock on the Mont Blanc massif (ref the geological survey by Alison Evans in the front of the Michel Piola guide, an easy to understand and suitably short guide to the history and geology of the range). The ridge showed no tracks, and in the close darkness of 02:20 looked like the steps to Hades. A third route presented itself. A swift back track down to the Col took less than 15 mins, and a turn to the left at spaghetti junction leads directly to the bottom of the climb to Mont Maudit.

In the book the classic traverse of Mont Blanc includes only Mont Maudit and the summit of Mont Blanc itself. At first this seems bizarre not including Mont Blanc du Tacul. The reason is quickly understood. The route to Mont Maudit is a steady 2hr climb (for those fit enough) on a 50° slope. There is no variation in the environment and only one change in the general direction, and this only 20m short of the col. At the top, the summit is a surprisingly short 30m walk along the ridge to the left. The peak proved an extraordinary anti-climax. At 0430 with legs aching more than at any other time on the expedition, and with 2 x 4000m peaks accomplished, the summit of Mont Blanc beckoned, but certainly not with the expectancy of before.

By now we were part of a train of approx 10, the majority having left the Col du Midi at 0130 and ascended straight through the Col du Mont Blanc du Tacul and on up to Mont Mandit. The cheats. To add to the amusement, Army Duracell lead torch batteries were found wanting, and Dusty very deftly changed batteries on a 50° slope with a very cold



Darren, Woody, Simon, Michel Pidu, Steve & Jason at Euvers Refuge.



Mer de Glace Glacier.

Tim Bird, Malcolm G, Jason A, Dusty M on the Dômes de Minge with Bionassay on the left and Mt Blanc on the right.



wind biting at anything exposed. A short, but steep descent leads to yet another gentle Col, hand railing the 'Frontier Ridge'. At this stage, the first pangs of fatigue really begin to show, even for those who went straight to Mont Maudit. Dusty having valiantly broken trail for 4 hrs (and not just for his pair, but for 10 or so others) handed over to Al.

The view is staggering as Italy falls dramatically away on the left. The Italian valley, viewed for at least 100km showed distant and believably dangerous storms. Flashes of lightning broke the darkness. Both Dusty and Al shared concerns over the truth of the 'meteo' for "une journée en soleil" and so decided that the route back the same way was going to be too hazardous. On Mont Maudit the snow was slabbing dangerously with every step and surely the summer sun was not going to help matters. Therefore the only route down is by the Dome de Gouter. With the upper reaches of the Glacier du Bosson between, the only solution is to gain the summit.

Ever since 0300 one had seen a steady queue of head torches moving up and down the Bosse ridge from the Gouter hut to the summit. One considered that Guides were there, the summit was not yet in cloud, so therefore a summit attempt was still viable. Although fatigue is setting in, determination must play the stronger part. A steady but determined pace moves one along and up the lower face before the summit snowfield. The wind was blowing steady and hard and formed the snow into small dunes of powder, making breaking trail that much harder. A couple of Irish climbers and two Englishmen who had been ahead were obviously tiring badly at this point and slotted in behind.

The guide books promise a steady climb to the summit. However, an ice fall at about 45/50° blocks the route onto the final slope. Armed only with one classic axe each Al and Dusty picked a vertical route and front pointed straight up. A second and technical ice axe would have been a great bonus. Not because the slope is so hard, but more for security against weak calf muscles not holding decent foot placements. A group behind decided to turn back and head for home.

Once passed this pitch there is a short plateau. The route is always covered over with spindrift when the peak is in the wind. Although a straight path on the summit line is perfectly feasible, one must remember that one is moving on a glacier and there are crevasses, often covered with light snow bridges. The final approach is about 300m and requires a steady determination to reach the summit. As always there is indecision as to the best line. A winding path helps those that are too fatigued, but one straight up on the right stays on stronger ice and allows for a far quicker ascent. The temptation to take



Dawn on Vallée Blache.

a breather after every few steps is tempting and a great deal of time (valuable for the descent) can be wasted on the final approach.

Again the weathermen were absolutely correct, and the summit was gained at 07:25, as the sun began to assert its dominance. Needless to say the summit was shared with approximately 40 others. General fatigue amongst most who had come by the traverse, and a distrust of the snow on the descent from Mount Maudit led to a correct decision to descend by the Bosse ridge. A steady stream of people makes for an irritating passage on what is clearly a high altitude copy of the 'Autoroute Blanche'. A sad experience detracting from the feeling of achievement of having stood on the top of Europe.

The descent is deceptively long, and time should not be wasted. A speedy change and two paracetamol tablets at the Gôuter Refuge ensured a place at the head of the queue below the hut. A most hazardous mountain path winds its way left and right. Wires are in place and a cows tail and karabiners are firmly recommended for security for even the most sure-footed. Crampons are essential for the first half of the route. The path winds its way down into the valley, moving through a sort of moonscape of red rock and eventually, after 2 hours from the Gôuter Refuge, reaches the Train du Mont Blanc. Off at Belierne and the Telepherique down to Les Houches completed the journey. The two Irish lads, who had accompanied us from Mont Maudit had no funds, but appreciated Dusty's wise words about the avalanche risk on Mont Maudit came all the way down at our expense.

Anne (the Guardienne at La Cordée, ever the star, provided transport back to Base, where Dave took over, driving Al and the two Irish lads to the Aiguille de Midi telepherique - the tents were still on the Col du Midi. After an adrenalin boosted collapse of the tent and a 25min climb back up to the telepherique the day finally closed at 1800. The descent and the collection of the tent having taken longer than the ascent and traverse of all three peaks.

A staggering and fantastic route, but one that unfortunately provides little satisfaction other than that gained by the physical challenge of completing the three. Many decisions were made, all proved correct with the exception of one. It is best to bivi at the Aiguille du Midi. Contrary to the book the staff do not hang draw and quarter any climbers hiding in the ice tunnel. Facilities are opened again after the last tourists have gone down, and the tunnel provides adequate warmth and protection. Start the route at 2300hrs and you will have plenty of time and one avoids the problem of leaving tent and kit at the Aiguille du Midi.

Dusty on the Dôme de Gouter.



# THE BERNESE ALPS

## Monch, 4099m

By Jonathan Barnett

Date: 21 July 2000

Valley base: Grindelwald

Start point: Ober Monchjoch

Mountain hut: Monchjoch Hut

### Description of route:

From the Monchjoch Hut we traversed col to the west before gaining the first ridgeline of the Monch. The first part of the route was steep but in good snow conditions and did not require the team to be roped up, although all team members had their harnesses on. Once on the ridgeline you make an exposed trip up past a prominent metal air-particle catcher (part of the sphinx observatory equipment). Once past this the ridgeline steepens and becomes a mixed snow and rock ascent. It was at this point that the team roped up. As you progress further you get to the first rock scramble (grade I/II) with a belay point at the start and at the top of the steep section. (it is possible to go around the second section of this feature on snow to make it easier for novices - there is also another belay point on the snow section a further 60 feet higher up and off to the left {the leader needs to ensure that he has enough rope to get to this point - with 4 on a rope I didn't!})

The route continues on a steep snow ridgeline exposed on both sides with a number of belay points if required. A ridge eventually joins the route from the right (E/NE) and then you swing right and up on a corniced slope to reach the summit (3 hours)

**The descent:** The descent follows exactly the same route as for the ascent. Belay points provide the leader with a safe and reassuring way of getting novices down from the mountain. The only tricky section is the rocky outcrop and again one can make the choice between down-climbing the rock directly or swinging west to descend on the snow. With 4 on the rope (2 novices amongst them) it made the descent slow. The team took 2 hours to descend but an experienced group should not take more than 1½ hours.

Difficulty: PD.

Equipment: 1 x rope; harnesses; sling; prussik; 2 x karabiners.

**Special information:** It is best to make an early start as you are best to be off the route before the summiteers from the first train of the day (arrives at the Jungfraujoch at 9.00am) start their ascent between 9.45 and 10.00.

**First ascent:** R MacDonald with C Almer and M Anderegg, 29 Jul 1863.

**Recommended guidebooks:** Bernese Oberland - Selected Climbs, Les Swindon, Alpine Club Guide Books.

**Recommended maps:** Landeskarte Der Schweiz - 1:50,000 Sheet No 264 - Jungfrau.

## Jungfrau, 4158m

By Jonathan Barnett

Date: 21 July 2000.

Valley base: Grindelwald.

Start point: Sphinxstollen.

Mountain hut: Not used (Monchjoch would be normal one).

### Description of route:

Although it is evidently against local regulations, these are not strictly enforced and it is possible to overnight at the exit of the Sphinxstollen. The warden of the Monchjoch hut is the most likely enforcer, as this practice represents lost business for him! Following a decent night's sleep in the tunnel, we set off across the Jungfrau firn at 5am towards the East ridge of the Rottalhorn. This appears to be a crevasse free area of the glacier and therefore can be crossed at speed. On reaching the east ridge (3400m) there was a short section over rocks, past a rain gauge, onto the south side of the ridge and then a climb of about 20m to gain the ridge line. It was then a steady climb up the broad snow ridge (during which warm gear was taken off as we moved into sunshine) until it was possible to traverse right above the obvious bergschrund and reach the Rottalsattel (3885m). This was achieved in 2 hours by three on a rope. From the col it was a short climb (50m) before traversing an exposed slope (accident blackspot) and then climbing the rocks and snow on the left to the summit. There are metal belay posts in place on this section, but because the snow was in excellent condition they were not used. In icy conditions this climb would be a different proposition altogether, with belaying a wise precaution. We achieved the summit in just under 3 hours to find completely calm conditions and a fantastic panorama of the Alps.

**The descent:** This took about 2 hours, with care needed down to the col, but otherwise fairly straightforward. It was a hot slog back across the Jungfrau firn and a climb back up to the Jungfraujoch.

Difficulty: PD.

Equipment: Crampons, ice axe, helmet and rope.

**Special Information:** Worthwhile making an early start (before 5am) due to the popularity of the route and the easterly aspect of much of the climb. Returning across the Jungfrau firn is also desirable before it becomes too warm.

**First ascent:** Summer: 3 Aug 1821. Winter: 22-23 Jan 1874

**Recommended guidebooks:** Bernese Oberland by - Selected Climbs Les Swindon, Alpine Guide Books.

**Recommended maps:** Landeskarte Der schweiz, 1:50, 000, No 264, Jungfrau



Darren Graves and Ruaraidh Hill on top of the Gross Grunhorn.



## Gross, 4048m & Hinter Fiescherhorn, 4025m

By Jonathan Barnett.

**Date:** 22 July 2000.

**Valley base:** Grindelwald.

**Start Point:** Obermonchjoch.

**Mountain hut:** Monchjoch Hut.

### Description of route:

A team of four set off from the Monchjoch Hut at 5am, descending E and then SE across the Ewigschneefeld to a point 3360m at the SW Ridge of the Gross Fiescherhorn (1hr). From here there is a safe snow band up through to the head of the bowl formed between the Gross and Hinter Fiescherhorn (1hr). This is to the route described in the guidebook which guides you further SE to hug the SW Ridge of the Hinter Fiescherhorn, but provides a safer (less crevasses) route to the Bergschrund. At this point there is a Bergschrund to be crossed and then a steep (40°) snow slope to ascend (requires good snow conditions) to reach the Fieschersattel (3923m) (45mins). From the col, in good weather both summits can be reached within about 30 mins. Both routes have a mixed ascent.

**The descent:** We had two teams on this route which gave us the option to take two descent paths.

1. NE Ridge (AD, II/III - mixed & ice to 50°) and then westward to rejoin the Ewig higher up. The NW ridge has significant exposure, a 60m ice slope and several corniced sections. An exciting and exacting climb, particularly in descent

2. Fieschersattel descent to foot of SW Ridge from Gross Fiescherhorn provides an interesting down climb from the saddle with snow to 45°. Good snow is a must for this route and you need to ensure that you are not coming down too late in the day. Luckily the route is west facing so doesn't get the full brunt of the sun until later on. From the foot of the ridgeline is an extremely slow and tiring route back to the Monchjoch Hut in the full glare of the sun. This takes up to 2 hours to complete.

**Difficulty:** PD (Descent of North-West ridge AD+).

**Equipment:** Rope; harnesses; karabiners; slings; prusiks.

**Special information:** These are two separate mountains in their own right and the guidebook suggests that you should not consider trying to tackle them both. We were lucky with the weather and it would have been a shame not to have done both, but in difficult conditions this would have been a major undertaking. There was a thought to send a group to attack the Grosser Grunhorn from this direction but the North East Ridge of the Grunhorn was imposing and it was understood why the guidebook suggests a route from the south. The return from the foot of the mountain to the west, back to the Monchjoch Hut, should not be underestimated. Thought should be given to this before deciding whether to go for both peaks.

**First ascent Summer:** Gross - H George and A Moore with C Almer and U Kaufmann, 23 Jul 1862 Winter: G Lammer and A Lorria, 28 Jul 1885.

**Recommended guidebooks:** Bernese Oberland - Selected Climbs, Les Swindon, Alpine Club Guide Books.

**Recommended maps:** Landeskarte Der Schweiz; 1:50,000, No 264 - Jungfrau.

Aletschorn seen from near the Monchjoch hut.

## Aletschhorn, 4195m

By Jonathan Barnett

**Dates:** 24/25 July 2000

**Valley base:** Fiesch.

**Start point:** Eggishorn.

**Mountain hut:** Mittelaletsch Bivouac Hut.

### Description of route:

Descend from the top of the Eggishorn cable car to the hut (Gletscherstube) next to the dam at the mouth of the Marjel valley (45mins). Access to the glacier was on the north side of the valley with a prominent, secured route to the glacier. The glacier is monotonous but easily crossed (1hr) but getting at the far side was tricky with moraine deposits making route finding difficult (see descent for alternative route). You eventually traverse around to reach the foot of the valley that the Mittelaletsch Glacier runs down. The first part of the valley was gentle with a grassy section and the route was marked intermittently with cairns. The route rises steeply through another moraine field before gaining the glacier proper - this takes what appears to be an interminable amount of time. Once on the glacier, travel is much faster up to about point 2791m and then climbs steeply on yet more moraine to the Mittalaletsch Bivouac. The party split and one group went up this last part on the glacier and the other taking the moraine. The glacier makes for easier climbing but is marred by some large crevasses at the top. This would not be a sensible route if the glacier were not dry. The Bivouac was reached in 4 hours from the Gletscherstube hut.

The hut is unmanned but always open with plenty of blankets and 13 beds and some spare mattresses. Cost - 10SFr for BMC members.

We set off at 5.20am and climbed north to the base of a rock ridge at point 3482m and then headed NW to the Aletschjoch. Fresh snow had fallen which made the ascent far more physically demanding and one had to be careful of the risk from crevasses. (just over 2 hrs, but this would be quicker in better conditions). We then ascended the E/NE Ridge keeping to the S of the corniced edge and then gained the snow ramp. This next section to the fore summit is extremely tiring in bad conditions with a Bergschrund about 2/3 of the way to the fore summit that was not easy to cross in these conditions. We gained the ridge of the foreshummit and then up to point 4087m. The route then continues in a SW direction up a gentle gradient and then a short steep section with another Bergschrund to gain the summit ridge. The summit was reached at 12.00 (just under 7 hours from the Bivi Hut).

**The descent:** The first part of the descent proved awkward because of the conditions, but once down below the top Bergschrund it was easy descending to the Fore Summit. From the Fore

Summit we retraced our steps back to the bivi hut reaching it at about 1.30pm. At this point we believed that we would be able to catch the last cable car back to Fiesch (6.30pm) for an early evening drink! We set off at about 2pm and made fast progress down the now very soft snow glissading to the moraine that had been ascended the day before. Once on the glacier we made quick progress to the mouth of the valley to rejoin the Aletsch Glacier at about 3pm. We opted for a different route back to avoid the soul-destroying moraine walk that we had encountered the day before. We went straight onto the glacier heading directly SE heading to the right of the Eggishorn summit to the far side of the Glacier and then walked N/NE following the edge of the glacier. The best route is a matter of choice! On the way out the route across the glacier was easier but left a difficult traverse of the moraine. The return journey was hillier but avoided the moraine - take your choice! We reached the Gletscherstube at 4.20 which gave us 2 hours to get back for the final cable car down from Kuhboden. There was a steep climb to the top of the Tälligrat ridge (2610m) which we reached at about 5pm, before descending down to the cable car at Kuhboden which took us another 45 mins.

This was an extremely tiring walk out but one is given a number of options:

1. Do what we did!
2. Stay another night at the Bivi Hut
3. Stay overnight at the Gletscherstube Hut
4. Stay in a hotel in Kuhboden

**Difficulty:** South - East Flank and North - East Ridge (PD).

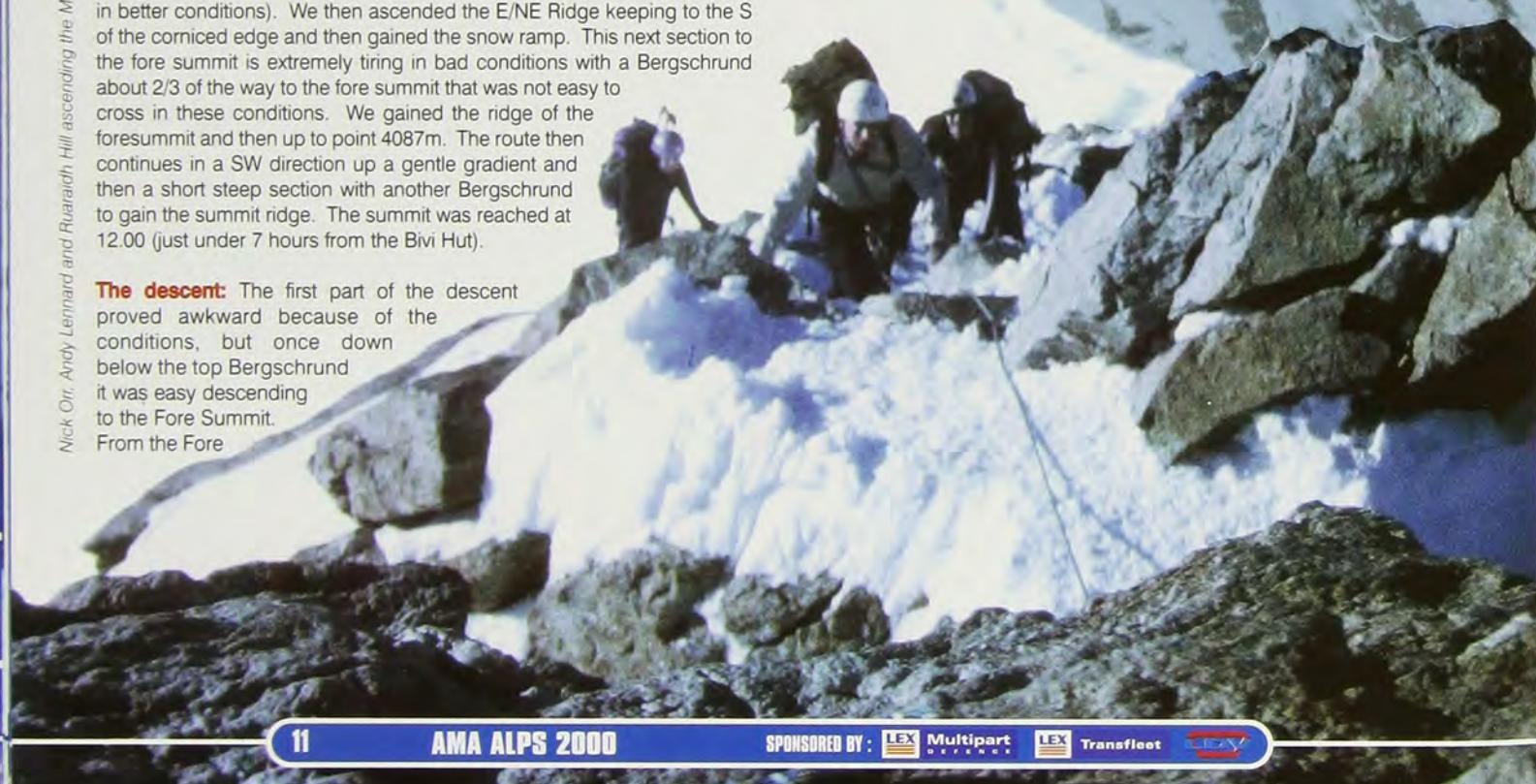
**Equipment:** Harness; Rope; Karabiners; Ice Screws; Slings; Prussiks.

**First ascent:** F Tuckett with J Bennen, P Bohren and V Tairraz, 18 June 1859.

**Recommended guidebooks:** Bernese Oberland - Selected Climbs, Les Swindon, Alpine Club Guide Books.

**Recommended maps:** Landeskarte Der Schweiz 1: 50,000. Sheet No 264 - Jungfrau.

Nick Orr, Andy Lennard and Ruairidh Hill ascending the Monch.



## Finsteraarhorn, 4273m

By Jonathan Barnett.

**Date:** 25 July 2000.

**Valley base:** Grindelwald.

**Start point:** Finsteraarhorn mountain hut at 3100m.

**Mountain hut:** Finsteraarhorn Hut.

### Description of route:

From the Finsteraarhorn Hut ascend the rock band directly behind the hut for 45 minutes. From the rock band head in a northerly direction to intercept the south-west ridge at 3616m. Then ascend a steep snowfield contouring the base of the ridge veering around to the left. From the Hugstettel col follow the ridge NW ridge to the summit. Height of summit 4273m.

**The descent:** Followed same route as ascent., Snow conditions however had deteriorated which made descent more difficult.

**Difficulty:** PD.

**Equipment:** Walking axe, helmet, two screws, two prussiks, crampons, harness, two slings, four carabinas and rope 50m.

**First ascent:** Summer: 1812 from SE by three guides; Alois Bolker, Joseph Bortis and Arnold Abbuhl.

**Recommended guidebooks:** The Alpine 4000m Peaks by the Classic Routes, Richard Goedeke.

**Recommended maps:** Jungfrau, Blatt 264 1:50,000.

## Piz Bernina, 4049m

By Jonathan Barnett

**Date:** 2 August 2000.

**Valley base:** Pontresina.

**Start point:** Diavolezza chair lift at valley station at 2050m. First lift at 0830hrs to Diavolezza hut at 2973m.

**Mountain hut:** Marca Rosa Hut.

### Description of route:

From the Diavolezza Hut descend on a path on to the Vadret Pres glacier. Take a SW route to cross the glacier, skirting the east side of Rifugidais outcrop. From here travel due west up the broad snow field to gain the Fortezzagaret ridge. Continue along the narrow ridge (sustained at II and I). Climb this to the Bella Vista terraces. Before reaching the notch of the Fuorcla Bella Vista turn right and traverse westwards on the snow terraces gradually gaining height, as far as north of the most westerly Bella Vista summit. Descend steeply into the snow trough of the Morteratsch glacier. Before reaching the ice falls descend further to about 3600m and traverse westwards to the saddle of the Fuorclacast Aguzza. From here travel due west to the Marca Rosa hut, 3597m, which is situated in the rock band.

Having gained a peaceful and tranquil overnight stop an early start beckoned. From the hut ascend a steepening snowfield to gain the rock ridge. Cross this rock ridge onto the eastern side which will provide access to the snow ridge above. Follow the undulating knife edged ridge for 400m to the summit. The ascent from the Marca Rosa hut takes approximately 1h30mins in ideal conditions.

**The descent:** Followed same route as ascent. A recommended alternative is the ridge walk including Piz Palu.

**Difficulty:** PD.

**Equipment:** Walking axe, helmet, two screws, two prussiks, crampons, harness, two slings, four carabinas and rope 50m.

**Special information:** The Marca Rosa hut is full of Italian character typified by the effeminate waiter and music.

**First ascent:** Summer: 1850 by Swiss surveyor Johann Croaz and the brothers John and Laurenz Ragut Tscharner.

**Recommended guidebooks:** The Alpine 4000m Peaks by the Classic Routes, Richard Goedeke.

**Recommended maps:** Piz Bernina, Blatt 1277, 1:25,000.



Looking down the Aletsch glacier.

## Gross Grunhorn, 4043m

By Jonathan Barnett.

**Valley base:** Grindelwald.

**Start point:** Jungfraujoch.

**Mountain hut:** Konkordia Hut.

**Difficulty:** PD+.

**Equipment:** Ropes, crampons, harnesses, ice screws (for crevasse rescue).

### Description of route:

This route should be done in conjunction with a number of other routes in the area as it requires a long slog from the Junfrau joch down to the Konkordi hut which takes approximately 3 hours. At foot of the cliff that houses the hut one can immediately see the enormity of the glacial retreat that has occurred in the area. A huge flog ensues at the end of your journey to get you up to the hut (approximatley 700 steps!).

The Konkordia is well appointed and very friendly unlike the privately owned Monchjoch Hut which is very much a money making venture. We spent the afternoon relaxing in the sunshine and preparing for the route up the Gross Grunhorn.

Leaving at approximately 4.30 am which left the hut turning NE to ascend the Grunnegfirn glacier. This is a straight forward section that does not require roping up providing the the galcier is dry. At the end of the prominent rock a route turns N-NW up to point 3475 which can be topped with a cornice. On our ascent this was easily pushed through as it had been used by groups on previous days. Once you have gained the ridge you should keep to the snow field to the west of the ridge which makes for the easiest ascent of the Gruneghorn at 3860m. From this location there are wonderful views of the Finsteraarhorn and across to the Jungfrau and the Monch.

From the Grunneghorn the route drops dramatically to a col that splits the Grunegghorn from the Gross Grunhorn. In good conditions one can descend this singularly but it is inclement weather one should take care of on this section.

From there one should stick to the western side of the ridge that gives an obus route up to the summit. This is the most technical part of the route and one should take care of novices on this section as short-ropeing is necessary.



L-R: Darren Graves, Al Stewart and Seb Bullock on the Summit of the Jungfrau.



Looking at the prominent ridge of the Gross Grunhorn from the Gruneggorn. A small dot of a climber (circled) can be seen near the bottom of the ridge.



Darren Graves crossing the Aletsch Glacier on the way up to the Mittel Aletsch bivouac hut the day before climbing the Aletschorn. At this point the glacier was 2km wide!



A view from high on the Aletschorn looking across at the Jungfrau on the left and the Monch on the right.



Moving up the Aletschorn in less than ideal conditions. Darren in the near ground.



Darren Graves takes a closer look at a crevasse. Ruairidh Hill braces for the fall and Seb Bullock watches on with amusement.



The Monch - showing the normal route of ascent in the foreground.

# THE PENNINE ALPS



Lagginhorn from the Weissmies.

## Lagginhorn, 4010m

**Date:** 19 July 2000.

**Team:** Glynn Sheppard, Robert Smith and Stewart Boughtflower (also three other ropes of three).

During the Monday we had advanced up to the Weissmies Hutte, run by the Alpen Club Suisse. We had stayed the night to acclimatise (the hut is at 2726m) and whiled away Tuesday practising crevasse rescue.

On Wednesday we rose at 0330hrs and breakfasted and were set to go at 0430hrs. (There were a lot of us, and many other groups in the hut). We set off for the Lagginhorn up a large moraine rib and from there 'directissima' up the mountain. The view to the south (our right as we ascended) showed the path up the Hohsaas Hut and the route of the other teams where they would crawl up the flanks of the Weissmies.

We appeared to make fairly good time over steep broken ground. There was some grade 1 scrambling and some precarious

walking over broken rock. The last section was usually a rock climb but we had possibly 500m of snow field to climb. Glynn was on the front of the rope, Rob was in the centre and Stewart at the end. The well trodden path zig zagged up the slope and by resting often for only a few minutes at a time, the team kept up a good pace to the summit. There was enough time for a quick 'Berg heil' and photos at the top. (Where we were joined by two attractive young ladies, a guide (from Plas Y Brenin) and client. It was their last Alp and our first of our respective trips).

The team descended in reverse order without incident, quickly making our way down to a rock slab (Grade 3/3S, Moderate in the rain) which was of course, a little more thought provoking on the way down. Now clear of any snow which affected the route we stopped for a rest and something to eat and drink. We were quickly joined by Kev's team and settled in to wait for the other two ropes.

When these last two teams reached the snowy col above the rock slab, it was in the sun and they were expecting to see us there, so they too stopped for lunch. Two sets of two ropes, waiting for each

other within a few hundred meters of each other. Eventually reunited, the group set off for the Weissmies hut, scrambling back down the ridge to the well defined path down the moraine rib.

## Weissmies, 4017m

By Daz Hall.

**Date:** 19 July 2000

**Teams:** Daz Hall, Mark Hedge, Jay Hill, Don Stubbington.

The Weissmies is the highest mountain in the north eastern Pennine Alps at 4017m. At 0415 on 19th July myself (Daz Hall), Mark Hedge, Jay Hill and Don Stubbington stand outside the Weissmies hut at 2720m ready to claim the first peak of AMA ALPS 2000. The first section is 50 min of hard slog up the track to the Hohsaas hut (3098m). We take a quick break here to get our breath back and use the heads. A short walk leads us down to the Trift glacier. We climb the initial steep path up the edge

of the glacier and stop on the ice to put on warm kit, crampons and practice our ice axe arrests by towing each other down the slope as it is not steep enough to slide. We then rope up, Don leading followed by Mark, Jay and myself bringing up the rear.

We cross the glacier sure in the knowledge that Don, being the heaviest, would find any crevasses that lurked beneath the snow cover. Then climbing up steep snow slopes, below hanging seracs and between large crevasses, we meander up to below the west summit. After a short north east traverse stop on the joch (saddle) for a rest and to get out glasses and creme as the sun is rapidly approaching although it is still bitterly cold. Mark has a problem



finding his glasses and the remainder of us "chill out" whilst he digs them out of his bergen.

The next section is up the heavily corniced west ridge and then a final steep climb up snow slopes to the summit were the first of many photo sessions ensued. A second team arrived 10 minutes later and

after helping them with their photos, we set off down while the snow was still frozen.

We followed the same route down and after a lunch stop at the Hohaa hut we arrived at the Weissmies hut seven and a half hours later.

## Castor, 4223m

By Pte Robert Smith

Date: 21 July 2000

Team: Brian Parry M.I.C., Rob Lawrence, Robert Smith, Dave Bugle.

An early start allowed us to catch the 7am cablecar from Zermatt to Klein Matterhorn. This saved hours of hard walking but carried the disadvantage of rapidly placing us at a height of 3883m. Even with acclimatisation from the previous peaks the sudden height gain was felt by all. Leaving the engineering feat of the cable car station, skiers

and tourists behind we crossed the Breithorn plateau at 3795m. travelling East. The Breithorn Pass took us across the border into Italy where we contoured around the top of the Glacier de Ghiacciaio di Verra to the planned bivi at Rossi e Volante 3787m. Keeping a high approach to the hut proved to be the best option avoiding a steep climb from the base of the buttress. The C.A.I. hut perches precariously on a steep outcrop with stunning views across the Dolomites. Once inside we found we did not need the bivi kit we had stuffed into our rucksacks at 5 that morning, as mattresses and bedding were

provided. Later on the hut was filled well beyond capacity and, without booking procedures, bivi kit is recommended in case there is no room.

Leaving the comfort of the hut with lighter sacks containing only the bare essentials for our ascent, we roped up and dropped down the steep mixed ground on the East side of the hut to the glacier below. Passing Pollux on our left we reached the base of Castor to begin the steeper ascent. Our planned route on the North ridge was snow covered and out of condition leaving the direct ascent of the West face. Although not technically demanding the slope is in places up to 50 degrees rather than 35 degrees as the guidebook states. Fifty minutes of heart pounding climbing was rewarded with

extensive views across the Pennine Alps, while a short knife edge ridge forced a return of concentration to summit at 11.26am. A short break for photos and food in the lee of the wind was followed by tentative steps down the ridge to reach the firmer footing of the main slope and retrace our previous route. On returning to the bivi we found it bristling with life and very "cosy" sleeping arrangements were soon arranged. The afternoon passed enjoyably with stunning views to the South and East and shots of some potent liquid shared around by friendly Slovenians. Dave's Paisley linguistic skills soon became invaluable as English, Scottish, Irish, Italian, Swiss and Slovaks all failed to understand each other with flowing banter and many a laugh.

## Rimpfischhorn, 4198m

By S Boughtflower and P Scott.

Date: 22 July 2000

Team: Kevin Edwards, Philip Scott and Stewart Boughtflower (also Glynn Sheppard, Brian Spivey and Richard Hathway).

On Fri 21 Jul we took the funicular train from Zermatt, followed by the Rotthorn cable car and a short walk, up to the Fluealp Hutte. The privately owned hut is definitely a cut above the Aplen Club Suisse hut we had previously stayed in. Obviously, the fact that one of the ACPT veterans had used the hut for apres ski for several consecutive years helped.

In true alpine style we set our alarms for 0245hrs and after a brief breakfast set off at about 0330hrs. Having rigorously studied the guide book we were comfortably familiar with the route: Follow the path, take the left fork onto the ridge (just after the pond), advance onto the snowy whale back (Rimpfischsattel) and then climb up to the peak. In this case, the guide book is entirely accurate.

However, something could be said of the murderous boulder field (after the aforementioned left fork). Next, there is a subsidiary peak (Pfulwe 3314m), on the ridge which we passed on its' northern side. This handy bypass saved time and effort which were needed on the main summit. The following snow dome was a long hard slog.

We roped up just past Pfulwe, with Kev at the front, Stewart in the centre and Phil at the back. The top of the Rimpfischsattel led us to the south west ridge which was the major obstacle betwixt us and the summit. Climbing a grade 1 scramble at altitude in crampons is not as scary as you would think. The fact that you are tied to two other people and are trying to move as a three without pulling each other off, takes your mind clean away from the 500m drop onto the Alder Glacier. The route was sprinkled with a generous helping of shattered rock to kick down onto each other. We could feel the temperature drop with each upward step.

Eventually we reached the summit, surmounted by an ornamental cross. The cross would be a great aid to someone toppling out in poor visibility as the drop down to the glacier is still over 400m. There was just enough time for a quick summit photo before we had to down climb the scramble (Alpine 11+ and 50 degree ice) before going back down the snow hump, some faster than others.

The sun burnt down on the almost entirely unshaded slog back to the Fluealp Hutte. Had the start been any later the descent would have been more hazardous as the ice and snow were beginning to thaw. The team sat on the veranda and waited for the Strahlhorn team, who came in forty minutes later. From there it was a leisurely repack and retreat to the cable car station.

## Strahlhorn, 4190m



Mark Hedge on the Summit of Schwarzhorn (Corno Nero), 4322m.



Belo Castor' Summit Ridge, Castor, 4228m.



Sunrise over the Vincent Piaramide, 4215m



Ascending Slabs on the South East Ridge of the Dufourspitze, 4634m.

By Phil Carrotte.

Date: 22 July 2000

Team: Phil Carrotte, Cath Davies, Don Stubbington

Despite trying to hide under my blanket at 0245hrs when the light was turned on, I left the Fluealp hut (2607m) at 0330hrs with Cath and Don. Having carefully studied the guide book and map and a recce the previous day, we felt confident that the awkward looking moraine on the northern edge of the Findel glacier could be easily overcome. We would have negotiated the join between the Adler glacier and the Findel glacier within a couple of hours and be on our way to the Adler pass and the summit of the Strahlhorn. Our confidence was misplaced.

As per the Vailais Alps East guide book (published by the Alpine Club) we walked up the path behind the hut and up to a small lake. Here we bid good luck to the other teams attempting the Rimpfischhorn and continued our journey. Keeping high and left on the moraine we made steady progress along the narrow track. I was out in front and feeling quite pleased with myself for following the cairns and slightly defined path, that was until I could no longer see any cairns or path, only a twenty foot drop below me and no way around the re-entrant. Then the fun started. Still using our head torches and the light of the half moon we backtracked to a point we could slip and slide our way down the steep moraine. We then continued clambering over loose rock and huge boulders trying in vain to pick up the path which is high and left as described in the guidebook. We eventually decided

that the walking over the glacier would be easier, it was. When we reached the snout of the Adler glacier a quick scramble over rocks towards the centre of the glacier proved quick and easy, as did the climb up the centre of the snout onto the main glacier.

We then started to make up some of the time lost crossing the moraine by following a track along the left (northern) side of the glacier up to the Adler pass. Here the snow steepened to around 45°. We zigzagged our way up the pass, climbing out of the shadows into the glorious morning sunshine and views over towards the eastern side of the Saas Fe valley. Despite the sunshine we had a brief stop to put on as many clothes as we could to keep warm from the biting north westerly wind. The summit was now in view, a mere 1000m distance but 480m height away. A steady plod up the snowy slopes, and another stop to take off all our warm clothes once out of the wind found us on the summit ridge at just after 1030hrs. Another quick stop to put warm clothes back on and we sumited at 1040hrs, 7 hours after starting. A few quick photos and we were on our way down, un-rope and making good progress. We roped up again for the descent of the Adler pass and then continued the same route down the Adler glacier. We tried to find the path we had been searching for but failed so descended to the Findel glacier over the right hand (northern) edge of the Adler glacier snout. Here we met two other British guys who had been bivouacking on the moraine. They told us of the route they had taking from the hut and how it was much easier. We returned this way which would have been much quicker in ascent than the route taken. We returned to the hut at 1415hrs much to the relief of the Rimpfischhorn teams.

Alternative (better) route up to the Adler glacier from the Fluealp hut. Leave the hut terrace from the southern side and follow a rocky winding path east. Approximately 300m after crossing a small stone bridge turn right after a cairn up onto the top of the moraine. Follow the grassy path along to a cairn and a steep path descending right on to the glacier. The path right is a few metres before the grassy path ends abruptly and continues over grey moraine. Once on the Findel glacier keep to the left hand (northern) edge and aim for the centre of the Adler glacier, taking care to avoid the clearly visible crevasses.

## Lenzspitze, 4294m

By Phil Carrotte.

**Date:** 30 July 2000.

**Team:** Phil Carrotte,  
Glyn Shepherd.

After nearly a week of staying in camp due to poor weather, it was good to be doing some climbing again. Despite the long walk in to the Mischabel the previous day we arose at 0400hrs to a misty morning. After a quick breakfast we started our ascent of the ridge behind the hut up to the Schwarzhorn (3620m) and the col at the top of the Hohbalm glacier. It was here that Glyn and I decided on our route. Now well above the clouds and under a bright moon we had a good view of our two possible routes up the Lenzspitze. The ENE ridge (AD) was covered in fresh snow and according to the hut warden had not been climbed for a few days. The NNE face (D/D+) looked a little more promising, and with two parties under way we, well Glyn, would not have to break trail. At this point Glyn asked whether I felt up to it and explained that the route would be long and hard. I said that I felt up to it and then spent the forty five minutes it took to cross the glacier to the bottom of the face hoping I'd made the right decision. We crossed a small bergshrun at its smallest point and had a quick stop to prepare for the climb ahead. Glyn keen to be carrying as little weight as possible for the ascent answered a call of nature before we started to climb the steepening snow. Moving together we followed tracks made by the parties

ahead of us, first tending left then taking a straight line towards the summit. As the sun began to shine on the slope the snow started to soften making climbing harder. The slope was about 55° steepening slightly towards the top.

When about 50m from the top we had caught up with a member of a German party who was making a solo attempt. He appeared a little apprehensive and was having difficulty climbing over some very soft snow. After some words of encouragement from Glyn he continued towards a rope dropped down for him by his friends. Glyn and I continued onto the summit ridge where we waited for the Germans to climb the final few metres over mixed ground to the summit. I the lead up and secured a belay, and when the Germans had finished faffing brought Glyn up. After some more time waiting for the Germans to descend we started our descent, Glyn belayed me as I climbed off the summit ridge to the top of the slope. The fresh snow had thwarted our hopes of traversing the ridge across to the Nadelhorn, so we descended the face. For the first 200m Glyn would belay me as I climbed down a rope length, I would put in a belay and he would come and join me. When Glyn was confident I could descend safely we moved together until the slope became gentle enough to glissade down. Once back on the glacier we moved quickly back to the hut to collect our kit and meet Kev's team before descending to the cable car.

## Nadelhorn, 4327m

**Date:** 30 July 2000.

**Team:** Kevin Edwards, Don Stubbington, Stewart Boughtflower and Rob Lawrence

The normal route up the Nadelhorn is from the Mischabel Hut (3335m). This is easily reached from Saas Fee by a brief cable car ride and short walk along a level path. Followed by a hard slog up a path so plagued with switch backs it must come from Disneyland and then a little Via Ferrata to spoil perhaps a kilometer of good scrambling (including a bolted ladder up a one pitch MD chimney). So our Saturday was fairly eventful as one surprise followed another.

Somewhere else there should be a guide to SAC huts. The hut shoes here have smooth wooden soles. The rocks around the huts (accommodation is always separate from the dining room) were steep (with no run out, just a drop) and icy. The bunk room was shared with a large Spanish party. Well, it sounded like a party. All of them screaming and wrestling into the night when everyone else was trying to sleep. In the morning one of our socially responsible teutonic comrades clattered down the stairs to see what the conditions were like, then he stomped back up to tell his buddies, then he went to see what time breakfast was (stomping back up to tell his friends). Then he went to check on their equipment (stomping



The Weissmies Huts.



Ascending the Alphubel, 4206m.



Summit of the Lagginhorn, 4010m.



Summit of the Allalinhorn, 4027m.

back up the stairs again...). The only people able to sleep through this great public service were of course the Spaniards.

We quit the hut and followed the obvious path up the ridge behind the Mischabel hut. You can't miss it, except by wandering off the ridge... The path goes fairly easily onwards and upwards for a kilometre or so before turning right (North) onto the Hohbalm Glacier at 3600m. Quickly roping, the route gently follows the bowl of the glacier around to the Windjoch, a saddle at 3830m. The route turns a sharp right and follows the ridge up to the summit. Our difficulties were: going too fast for me (unfit and dehydrated) and going too slow for Rob (not wearing much!). The steep ice field (no time to change gloves) and the other parties on the route (including one guide who let his clients sit on the summit for ages whilst four or five other groups waited for him to get a move on).

Eventually, the guide moved, with a little encouragement from Don, and we got our moment on the summit. We quickly retreated down the ridge walk below the ice slope and Kev and Rob set off for the Stecknadelhorn. Don and I followed the route down and across the glacier to wait for the others in the relative comfort and warmth of the sun. We dried out our wet kit, examined Don's cold damaged knuckle, watched various parties

on the NE face of the Lenzspitze and ate and drank.

All too soon our peace was shattered by Kev and Rob returning triumphant. We retreated back to the hut and waited for Glyn and Phil to return from the Lenzspitze. All reunited and feeling pleased with ourselves we retraced our route to the hut. Down the Via Ferrata, Down the zig zag path (whatever happened to those sock puppets?). Around the flanks, under the snout of the glacier, and back up to the cable car.

We had a quick cuppa at the cable car station and then rode down to Saa Fee where we negotiated the, by now, awfully steep streets back to the minibus. Only to find that it had been left with the sidelights on. A very helpful Dutch man with a camper van tried to give us a jump start but it didn't work. A Swiss coach diver had us push the minibus around the back of his coach and plug straight into his mighty power pack. Despite all efforts still nothing happened. Kev, possibly looking for something else, was reading the emergency start instructions. Moving the earth lead from the minibus' negative terminal to a handy nearby flange (Provided for the purpose?) produced an instant start. So we were able to drive home with only a half hour delay. Alls well that ends well.

how he loved it when that happens, I wasn't a believer, for now anyway. I stamped my feet back into the ice and took control of myself again, it was all over so quickly but it was enough. I decided not to tell Kev about my little slip straight away but wait until we were safely off the mountain. I didn't want to worry him about being pulled off into the valley below. There would be plenty of time for story telling later. After the ice we entered deep snow again which I felt a lot more comfortable in. The rest of the traverse passed without incident. Coming off the traverse we came on to the south east ridge of the Stecknadelhorn, this was a very thin ridge and covered in fresh snow. We each took one side of the ridge so as to cover each other from falling and steadily approached the base of the summit, here I led the short scramble over mixed ground to the peak at 4241m. Being slightly lower

than the surrounding peaks we were sheltered from the wind so took our time to enjoy the view. All around we had amazing views of the likes of Matterhorn and the Dom, two very imposing mountains still to be climbed by our expedition. Our route back to the North East ridge of the Nadlehorn was similar to our route out, we did however take a lower traverse line to avoid the icy patch. Kev told me this was because it was hard work, I couldn't help thinking, maybe he had a slip as well and decided to keep quiet, never the less I was happy avoiding the ice and we were soon back on the north east ridge of the Nadlehorn. Our descent back to the Mischabelhutte took the same route as our ascent of the Nadlehorn and was over without incident.

\* Steven Haston is a famous UK Based Ice Climber.

## Hoberghorn, 4219m

Date: 30 July 2000.

Teams: Kev Edwards, Rob Lawrence.

The Hoberghorn is situated along the Nadlgrat between the Stacknadelhorn and the Durranhorn. It is in quite a tricky position to get to as the ridges from both sides provide some quite tricky scrambling (mainly II but there are some areas of I).

Leaving camp with the Durrenhorn team, Kev and I stayed with them for the most part of our journey. A very early start at 03:00 after very little sleep due to a Swiss national holiday. We set off from the hut in looming presence of the Balfrin 3795. Cutting up alongside this we progressed on to the Reid glacier which we crossed from the east. The mighty Nadlgrat became an awe inspiring sight as the day broke and the sun shone along the length of its ridges and faces.

We arrived at the bottom of the couloir, north west of the Hornberghorn. This proved to be quite steep but only one axe is needed. There are also absail stakes situated along the colouir which help the descent greatly. Reaching the top of the ridge we split from the group attempting the Durranhorn. This was where the scrambling can be quite tricky but is easily protected by weaving the rope around the sharp rocks along the ridge. After the rocks, continue up a broad snow ridge to a rocky rise. The climb direct is II but can be passed on steep snow on the left. Unfortunately at this point the Matterhorn to the west became engulfed in dark clouds that were now quickly approaching us. The decision was made to forfeit the summit in return for a descent in clear weather. Our descent took the same route as our ascent and we returned back to the Bodier hut as the weather did indeed close in.

## Durrenhorn, 4035m

By Don Stubbington

Date: 2 August 2000.

Team: Glyn Shepard, Don Stubbington, Stewart Boultflower, Phil Carrote.

The Durrenhorn is situated on a mighty crest ridge between the Saas valley and the Mather

valley, it is at the end (or the start) of the traverse of the Nadelgrat.

The team departed the campsite, in one of our famous white LDV jalopies, and made our way down to the bottom of the valley. Also on board were 2 fellow climbers who were going to accompany us on a vast majority of the route but then

cut off and attempt the Hohberghorn. We followed the signs for Grachen and then Gasenried. Parking can only be had in one place, if you intend to stay in it for over 2 hours, that is opposite the local firestation. You then head up the hill and you come to the end of the road. This is where you pick up the signs for the Bordierhütte (2886m) which informs you that you are 4hrs and 15 mins away. Sadly this does not tell the whole truth and suffice to say be prepared for a very sweaty uphill slog of massive proportions. The track gradually winds its way up through the forest for about an hour. You then come to a small clearing, from which you can see in the far distance and up the glacier the hut. Ensure that you rest here as it is the last point that really offers itself for the remainder of the uphill slog. The route skirts the glacier on the moraine. You follow the obvious track. On reaching the top you then have to cross the snout of the Ried glacier. This offers no danger as the track is marked with permanent metal markers. Most visitors accomplish this in no more than T-shirt and shorts.

The hut is deceptively small and has a cosy feel to it. You need to take water with you or be prepared to pay about £1.50 for a litre and you will need plenty to rehydrate yourself. The owner's wife makes delicious cakes but again at a price. The team settled down and with dinner cooked for us we all retired for the night at 2000hrs. Sadly for us this coincided with a Swiss national holiday, which involved the owner inviting all his valley friends to the hut for a bash, including the use of pyrotechnics until the small hours. The call at 0250hrs for rise and shine was a short one and after much grumbling, at least from Kev Edwards, we departed at 0330hrs to the route to follow the top of that moraine bank up the valley until you hit the glacier. You climb this until you come to a very steep rock face. Turn right and follow this for

20 mins. Climb up a crevassed area, from where you will see in the distance, the Durrenhorn to the right of the obvious couloir. Make your way to the bottom of it by a circuitous route to the left. There is room to prepare yourself at the bottom of the couloir. The couloir which is about 250-300m long.

Once reaching the top, we separated with the other team and moved to the right. The ridge was snow free for the majority and classed at AD, but some of the moves and exposure seemed more at the time.

We all moved swiftly as the weather was due to close in and we could see the clouds changing rapidly as we climbed. Halfway along the ridge Stewart decided that he was not confident of his back climbing abilities, and was attached to a rock whilst Glyn and myself went for the summit with the obvious cross. After much scrambling and hanging on we achieved our goal in 5 hours and 15 mins from the hut. Time was then of the essence and we pushed our way down, picking Stewart up on the way. The couloir at this point had been softened up and the handily placed abseil posts on the left as you descend were being used. Stewart and I took a tumble at the top and were thankfully rescued by Glyn's body belay before we went into freefall!!!! Reaching the bottom we met up with Phil who had somehow managed to lose his passport whilst being bored at the bottom of the hill. A search was initiated but with the weather closing in a hectic pace was set back to the hut with Glyn pulling and tugging us all along. We made the hut in good time only to be reminded of the horrendous slog all the way down that was waiting for all of us. We made it down at different speeds and a long cool drink was awaiting us all in the restaurant in Gasenried. A good 13 hours of a lot of ups and downs.

## Dom, 4545m

By Phil Carrotte.

**Date:** 8 August 2000.

**Team:** Phil Carrotte, Phil Scott, Jay Hill, Kev Edwards, Don Stubington

Climbing up and down 3160m, nearly 2 miles, in two days was quite hard work to say the least. If I had looked up to the glacier and seen the hut on Monday morning when we were leaving the minibus I don't think I would have gone.



Final steps to the Summit Weissmies, 4023m

at the Festijoch we removed our crampons and shortened our ropes. The scramble up and over to the Hohberg glacier provided no major problems, and with the aide of some fixed ropes we were safely on the other side. Once on the Hohberg glacier, we moved quickly below some towering seracs climbing up some quite steep ice at one point. We stopped for a few minutes once the summit came into view and had a bite to eat. All members of the team were feeling tired, myself especially, so we opted for quite a slow pace. The climb followed a fairly broad track southwards,

taking large zigzags to the final summit slopes. Despite our slow pace we made the summit, of the highest peak in Switzerland, in six hours. We stopped for a few minutes to take photos before reversing our route. Greater care was needed crossing the Festi Glacier since the sun had softened most of the snow bridges. When crossing the moraine numerous good bivi sights were obvious between 30 minutes and an hour above the hut. We finally got back to the hut at about 1300hrs, where we waited for the Täschhorn team before walking back down to the minibus.

## Matterhorn (Mount Cervino), 4478m

By Robert Smith

**Date:** 8-9 August 2000.

**Team:** Mark Hedge, Robert Smith, Bryan Parry, Richard Hathaway.

For weeks we were told the Matterhorn was out of condition due to an unusually high level of snowfall for the Swiss Summer. The more experienced in the group flinched at the sight of the upper slopes adorned with further snowfall and talked of winter conditions. Wisely plans for the North Face and the Italian Ridge were left to another day, though a late change of plans saw four making a bid for the Hornli Ridge.

Taking the cablecar to the Scharzsee places you at the base of perhaps the most recognised mountain in the Alps. No such concessions were available to Whymper and his party in 1865, though once developments exist few choose not to benefit, and likewise we welcomed any advantage we could gain on the Matterhorn. We anticipated the route ahead would not be easy but

I doubt any of us imagined what lay ahead. We reached the Hornlihütte (3260m) ahead of guidebook time, passing day-trippers on the way, from where we viewed the impressive scale of the Hornli Ridge. We could find no one who committed that day or even attempted although it was 2pm and parties would normally be sunning themselves at the hut by now. Tourists with binoculars watched insignificant black figures move backwards and forwards with little progress on a snow slope above the Solvay Hut.

Four am. the following morning saw a handful of teams of various nationalities kitting up and leaving the hut. Due to the conditions no Guides were on the Matterhorn, leaving only a small number of independent and determined teams. We dismissed their absence through the Continental dislike for difficult conditions thinking little of it. On hindsight it was obvious why someone would turn down several hundred pounds of guiding fees in such circumstances. Bryan had diligently explored the first section

of the route the previous afternoon, which made easier going in the cool hours of morning darkness. A pair of Japanese climbers let us lead up the first rock step marking the true start of the ridge, tasking us with route finding while they could easily follow on behind. Numerous route variations are possible on the lower section of the ridge and it is best to rely on a combination of your own judgement and guidebook description. Climbing through dawn was uneventful bar an exposed traverse on the left of a rock tower above a couloir, requiring the removal of gloves and the balancing of boots on the thinnest of ledges. Once past this tower, a spike is obvious on its top so an easier approach may be directly up the face. At this point we were joined from below by a different Japanese team who soon fell behind and turned back within an hour. Verglas melted in the rising sun while snow conditions softened underfoot giving unsure holds. We passed several descending parties who had not managed to summit the previous day and had sought refuge in the Solvay Hut for the night. We reached the Solvay (4003m) behind schedule at 11am with no difficulty on the lower Moseley Slab. Indeed, it was rare to move solely on rock and came as a welcome rather than a hindrance. After a brief stop to remove Gore-Tex and fix crampons we continued on our way. We made steady progress over rock, snow, ice and every combination of the three to reach the foot of the summit block at 2pm. At this point the decision was made to turn around as conditions, time and the weather were against us. Although the summit was within some 200 metres we could not afford the time in what was now deteriorating weather to pitch the final section, as

conditions demanded. The cloud boiled and swirled around us as we downclimbed to a point where we could set up an abseil. A rescue helicopter neared to us and hovered close enough to acknowledge a nod as indication that we needed no assistance. Later the same helicopter airlifted a dead climber from the bottom of the East face by the Hornli Ridge, to emphasize the fact that this was no place to sacrifice safety for speed. We knew that we were the only roped party to reach that high but it offered little consolation. It can be a much harder thing to turn your back on a summit than to reach it.

Even with two fifty metre ropes now joined for abseil pitches, progress was time-consuming. The selection of anchors and descent line could not be compromised despite our eagerness to get off the mountain in the remaining hours of daylight. Several times the ropes snagged when pulled and had to be re-climbed and freed. Daylight faded within an apparently short distance of the Hornlihütte as we pressed on abseiling from new bolts, antique pitons and our own gear when necessary. It is at times like this that accidents can easily happen with tired limbs and minds weary from a long day's climbing. It is to the credit of Bryan and Mark who set up abseils, scouted routes and freed stuck ropes, that the party got off the mountain in safety. So it was that with a keen eye on altimeters we finally reached terrain where we could coil the ropes for good and walk off. On this final section we met ascending climbers where we had been 24 hours before with little idea of what lay in store.

leader. The Festi-Kin Lucke is a spur running east-west from the Dom. The bergshund was crossed without difficulty. However, descending the other side was not quite as straight forward as the guide book intimated. We moved left along the ridge for about a hundred metres, and after crossing some near vertical flakes of rock, left the ridge and picked a way through the loose scree and snow, making a descending traverse left, to the northern branch of the Kin Glacier.

After a short break, we resumed. Luckily having been overtaken by a guide and his client, the going was somewhat easier, with a well chosen route to follow. Moving around the curve of the cwm formed by the glacier between the Dom and Taschorn to avoid the heavily crevassed centre of the glacier, the route then moves onto the North West Kin Face. The route to the summit ridge required determined plodding up 40 degree snow, with occasional steep sections of about 55 degree ice to make it more interesting. We finally made it to the summit ridge, about 100 metre to the south of the summit cross. Here Daz and Dave, who had taken the lead, moved left, trying to find a safe

route for the final few meters. On reaching the crest, Daz found that the ridge was very narrow, and choked with ice. We were now in a precarious position, with both ropes on ground that afforded little or no security. Glyn moved up along side Daz, where they came to the conclusion that the few remaining metres, about 2 up and thirty across, were not worth the risk. After a cheeky little piece of down climbing by Daz and Glyn we managed to reverse back to safer ground, and from there descended, through rapidly softening snow back to the south side of the Festi-Kin Lucke.

The ascent back to the col on the ridge was uneventful, helped by our foresight in placing a few cairns on the outward journey, and from there we retraced our steps back to the Dom hut. After a short break at the hut, where we were reunited with the Dom group, we then made the, by down painful, descent back to the minibus.

Although we had failed to top out, and deep snow had made it one of the most physically demanding routes of the trip, 14 hours from hut to minibus, it was a good note to finish on.

## Alphubel, 4206m

By O/Cdt Lawrence.

**Team:** Rob Lawrence, Dave Bogle, Rob Smith, Glyn Sheppard.

By use of the normal taxi service we took the road as far as we could up the Tash alpen valley to the small village of Ottavan, 2214m. From here it was a simple walk in to the Tashhütte, at 2701m which only takes about one and half hours. This was our home for the night and we soon settled in with brews, and an early night so we could get up ready for

that alpine start we were all becoming accustomed to. Fierce storms raged throughout the night and the worse was thought by most. I, however, was praying to hear Glyn say it was cancelled so I could get my lie in!

The Alphubel is situated in the east of the Pennine Alps and from the south appears to be mostly rocky. However a snowy ridge to the south east gives an easier ascent. This was our chosen route due to the fact that the storms had put the south east ridge out of condition. Leaving the hut take the path towards the Alphubel glacier,

crossing two rivers and keeping the third to your right. The Alphubel glacier is split down the middle by a moraine. The path brings you on to most southerly of these. Stay to the north of this half of the glacier and at a spot height of 3510m there is a natural break in the rocks, which allows you to pass through to the northern side without difficulty. From here continue up to the alphubeljoch, 3773m. It was here that the winds suddenly hit us. Moving up in to the saddle we suddenly had lots of fresh snow blowing into our faces, which was to stay with until we returned below the saddle. The ridge line was quite easy to follow and doesn't become too steep until you reach 4040m. From here it becomes quite a slog until you reach the plateau which the Alphubel is famous for. For us it was quite an easy walk to the summit, but I can imagine the true summit may be hard to find in low visibility. A quick photo session and a few hand shakes later we quickly left the summit to avoid getting too cold in the winds. Our route home took the same path as our outward journey. We got back 8 hours after our 4am start, sorted out our kit and left the Tashhütte back to Ottavan, where we caught a taxi back to the campsite.

## Taschorn, 4490m (North West Kin Face)

By Brian Spivey

**Team:** Dave Bogle, Daz Hall, Rob Lawrence, Glyn Sheppard and Brian Spivey

After an hour's steady climbing from the minibus parked at the start of the footpath to the Dom hut, 2940m, the unpleasant thought occurred to me "I don't remember putting my axe on my pack". Two minutes later, after stashing my pack in the trees and with howls of derisive laughter from my mates ringing in my ears I was on my way down hill. Three hours after leaving the minibus for the second time I arrived at the Dom hut. The hut was packed

and as a bonus for my bad personal admin. I ended up on the floor, and as I later discovered, next to the local doubles champions for snoring.

It was a relief to get up and away from hut at about 3:30 AM, and a steady plod took us along the path to the edge of the Festi Glacier. Here we geared up for the glacier crossing, a rope of two and one of three. We threaded our way through the crevasses, dry to begin with, following the well defined track which is the normal route up the Dom, before moving SE, heading for the Festi-Kin Lucke, 3734m, where deeper snow made progress tiring for the

## Liskamm, 4527m

By SSgt Brian Parry.

**Team:** Jay Hill, Brian Parry and Brian Spivey.

Once we had decided on Liskamm as our next summit attempt we began to plan our next adventure. Liskamm is described as a mighty five km ridge which is notorious for its cornices. The route we had chosen was the easiest, the East Ridge which is an AD. But before we could climb our next peak we had to get there. The decision was made to approach the peak from the Italian side. We travelled with the group who were to attempt the Monta Rosa Massive, who would continue on to Zermatt, while we returned in the minibus. We first drove to Alagna to catch the cable car up, followed by a two hour walk in. On arrival, we found that the cable car station was closed until December for repairs. Fortunately there was a very helpful information office which informed us of another cable car about an hour and a half away in another valley. We set off in the minibus, three hours later we finally arrived having missed the last lift up. People were getting a bit irritable by now after listening to Bon Jovi on the bus stereo for eight hours. We found a place to stay for the night and enjoyed an evening of beer and pizza. The following day we caught the cable car up, this lift added an extra hour to our original walk in, which lasted three hours. We were keen to get going by this stage and completed the walk in an hour and forty five minutes. This brought us to the Gnefeti hut, our accommodation for the night.

The following day we set off at five o'clock. Conditions under foot were good with good crisp snow and a temperature of minus 4 degrees. The wind was blowing

and, as we moved up the well trodden track to the Lisjoch, it increased in its ferocity. We moved across to the base of the ridge and made the decision to leave our rucksacks at the start of the ridge. So it was warm kit on and off we went, the initial slope wasn't too bad with good firm snow. The ground then levelled out, almost becoming flat, before rising again and narrowing into a knife edge. The wind was howling by this stage and a concentrated effort had to be made with our footwork as this was not a good place to fall! The track was well trodden but care had to be taken not to blindly follow the tracks. Keeping to the northern side of the ridge due to the cornice danger we started up the final slope, the wind still making it a painful task. The summit was gained at 0900 hrs, the climb taking us two and a half hours from the Lisjoch. After a quick photo session, it was time to descend taking care to keep the ropes tight at all times. The wind was beginning to drop as we retraced our steps, descending to the Lisjoch in an hour. We picked up our rucksacks and began the return to the Gnefeti hut, the track now looking like a motorway. After stopping for a bite to eat and a drink at the hut, we began our descent to the cable car. We raced past groups coming up and going down. Finally as the cable car came into sight we were horrified that they were stationary. Not relishing the thought of the long descent to the valley, we were relieved to find that the lift was only closed for lunch. After an hour it re-opened and we finally arrived at the bus at 1500hrs. Without a pause we began our four and a half hour drive back to our base camp site near Tasch, arriving at 1930 hrs. The day ended with our having climbed the Liskamm and having circumnavigated the Pennine Alps by road!

## Pollux, 4092m [S.W RIDGE]

By SSgt (SSI) Mark Hedge, APTC.

**Team:** SSgt Mark Hedge, Sgt Daz Hall and LCpl Jay Hill.

**The Route:** Zermatt to the Klein Matterhorn. From the Klein Matterhorn Station (3820m) follow the ski tow a short distance then head east towards the Breithorn. At the Breithornpass (saddle 3824m), staying south of the Breithorn ridge, head in SE direction over the Gde Ghiacciaio

Di Verra glacier passing below the rock outcrop that is home to the Rossi and Volante Bivouac (3787m). From below the bivouac a slight rise gains the foot of the SW ridge of Pollux.

**The Summit Route:** This easy angled ridge is profiled on the approach walk. Gain the ridge from its most southerly tip and scramble upwards to a steep rock section where passage is furthered by a chain protected

rising traverse. Just above this section brings an end to the rock climbing and a statue of the Madonna marking a snowy shoulder. Here begins the final 120m of snow ridge leading airy to an unmarked summit. From the start of the ridge 1.5 hrs.

**Descent:** Reverse the ascent route to the Madonna. From here (dependant on snow conditions) it is possible to drop down the broad western flank (290m PD) to the sanctuary of the glacier.

**Account:** With tickets for the first cableway of the day already purchased and ready for action we headed for Zermatt. Travelling first by taxi to the town's outer limits (0600 hrs), then shank's pony to be first in line at the cableway. Being polite Englishmen we foolishly allowed all and sundry to push in front of us before asserting our rightful place in about the sixth car. Two car changes later, our group of three emerged from the Klein Matterhorn tunnel to be welcomed by crisp morning sunshine and lycra clad beauties out for a day's skiing.

To prevent an unnecessary later stop we immediately roped up for glacial travel, and bravely walked down the prepared piste! A break in the ski fence permitted us to venture onto the glacier and head up towards the Breithorn. Several parties were already heads down plodding up the Alp's most accessible 4,000'er. Leaving the hordes at the Breithornpass we moved SE over the Gde Ghiacciaio Di Verra glacier. Not too far in the distance the Rossi and Volante bivouac's rock base came into view. The hut is initially obscured by a rock shoulder. Forty-five minutes later via short undulating line our party dropped into a new, superbly situated venue. Rightly or wrongly our sleeping bags assumed a horizontal position on the top bunk along with cooking utensils, our load now lessened. From the moment we left the bivvy I could hear the kit calling us back!

Descent from our future B&B took but a few minutes as we quickly regained the glacier trail. The roped walk took us to the very base of the SW ridge. Pollux's most obvious feature from this side of the mountain. No route finding skills required for this line. The true ridge is gained in seconds by scrambling up loose rock. Akin to many Welsh ridges, albeit of a somewhat loose nature, everything was fine and dandy and we progressed swiftly. Upon reaching the ridge's only problematical section, a break

was enforced upon us due to a guide and his two clients wobbling their way down a fixed chain section. My presumption is that the rope pitch described in detail by most guide books had now been replaced by a harder material. No sooner had the guides' feet touched down than our trio, still roped together, clipped in via 'cows tails' to the chains and pushed on. Upon pulling over the final rock step we were greeted by a statue of Madonna with baby stood firmly on a large snow plateau. Now wearing traditional clothes, having probably grown tired of the '90's pointy bra phase! Madonna marked the end of the rock section at the beginning of the final snow crest, the summit now in view a mere 120m away. Fifteen minutes later our small party were the proud owners of a 4092 m peak. Conditions were cold but pristine. A quick photo session ensued.

Our bodies were the dispatched efficiently back down for a brew with Madonna. Ropes having been converted into lowering mode and by means of a stomper belay my two companions quickly found themselves 50m down the west flank. I faced the slope and with a combination of front pointing and dagger technique we were quickly re-united. This process was repeated a further three times, then dispensed for plunge steps to take us to the haven of the glacier.

Tired but jubilant the now slushy steps up to the bivvy took an age. I slumped onto my pre-claimed bed space and closed my eyes. Upon opening them a few minutes later I found myself to be in the midst of a United Nations gathering. Germans and Italians gesturing showing obvious contempt at our initiative for energy conservation on the hill. Two Slovakian's huddled in a corner shared our lack of concern over such petty matters. Despite sharing no common language, barriers were broken down on the production of a hip flask containing lighter fluid or a similar tasting beverage.

Obviously a treasured national brew, our eastern European friends took great delight in watching us cough and splutter. Being true men of the mountains and friends to all like minded people, one of the Slovaks thrust a small cup under the nose of an Italian who impolitely declined his offer. This tickled me somewhat. With this image and the thought of slogging up the Breithorn in the morning I drifted off into an intermittent night's sleep.

## Breithorn, 4164m

(Via south-south-west Spur and Central Summit)

By SSgt Mark Hedge.

**Team:** SSgt Mark Hedge, Sgt Daz Hall, L/Cpl Jay Hill.

**The Route:** Zermatt to the Klein Matterhorn station (3820m). Follow the ski tow a short distance then head east to gain the Breithornpass. The climb steepens from here on the south west slope, work steadily left to gain the south west ridge and onto the summit. This description is for the normal route. Via the south south west spur is as follows; from either the Breithornpass or the Rossi + Volante Bivouac traverse along the Breithorn ridge until below the central summit. The summit is above a spur bounded on its right by steep rocks dropping away to the east. 350m of snow/ice up to 50 degrees (PD) leads directly to the central summit (4159m). Traverse west to the Col and follow the simple summit ridge.

**Descent:** Reverse the simple snow slopes of the normal route.

**Account:** Four o'clock in the morning, two alarm watches harmonise in the still air of the bivouac. Five minutes on a group of Italians emerge creating a cacophony of noise ensuring that no ones continues with their sleep. The Italian orchestra disappears 40 minutes later, leaving our group of three to leisurely brew up and prepare for the day ahead. The Rossi + Volante Bivi hut had provided our creature comforts for the night. Situated immediately below Roccia Nera, the first peak on the traverse of the Breithorn ridge and within spitting distance of Pollux and Castor, making it an ideally sited venue. After far too much lounging myself, Daz and Jay rope up for glacier travel and head west below the Breithorn Ridge.

The steady rise on steep snow takes us past snow sloughs and sunballs dispersed by yesterday's warm sun on the ridge. Ahead and always in view is the south south west spur of the central summit, easily identified by the steep rock marking its easterly side. In the pleasant evening sun of the previous evening we decided this to be our route to gain the Breithorn summit. Chosen over the tourist plod as being of greater interest and gaining height early.

Standing below the spur the line looked much steeper than guide book descriptions, possibly due to unusually large snow deposits for this time of year. The nine metre rope intervals used for Glacier travel remain untouched but helmets add to the equation. Daz leads off. The slope is energy sapping despite our bodies being reasonable acclimatised. Every 15 metres or so breather is earned. Snow conditions are good. In most places the slope readily accepts a boot in some cases the frontpoints. At about 300m (just short of the central summit) on a shorter but steepest section of neve, Jay decides to test his companion's arresting skills. A combination of poor front pointing and lack of concentration brings the need for a textbook arrest from Daz. Being in the middle of the rope I found myself jerked violently downwards temporarily losing the battle against gravity. Fortunately the friction of my cheekbone pressing against the ice slows my progress. The red tinge left behind on the slope creates a pleasant contrast to the whiteness all around and for a very few seconds brightens my day! I look upon the incident as giving something back to the mountain. After re-iterating the need to focus and emphasising the precise depth of axe placements the party moves on reaching the central summit a few minutes later. The North side of the ridge has a dramatic drop which we admire for a while whilst taking in fluid.

A short but steep descent taking a couple of minutes brings you to a saddle separating the central summit from the main. Leaving rucksacks at this point to aid our speed we soon found ourselves stood on top of the Breithorn. Far below, the first cablecar of the day had begun to dispense its load onto the glacier and pistes. This reminder of humans spurred our return to the fleshpots of Zermatt. Quickly we reversed the ridge to our kit cache and took the tourist plod back to the Klein Matterhorn. Local guides with the pick of the fitter clients were now at the beginning of the snow slopes. Behind them a trail of punters dressed in a multitude of strange clobber huffed and puffed their way skywards. I felt contented on having the hill to ourselves for the majority of the morning. Sadistically I enjoyed steaming past the hoards, intent on a 10:10

## Bishorn, 4159m

clock pint in Zermatt's nearest bar. By Staff Sergeant B Parry.

**T**asked with the mighty Bishorn we set about planning the trip.

The opening paragraph in one of the guide books describes the ascent as the ideal climb for the slouch, with an overall grade of Facile. Seeing this as little challenge to our adventurous spirit, we decided to use a different route to the normal one and chose the East Ridge, Assez Difficile. The route's initial attraction, the Turtmann Hut, involved two hours of walking compared to five hours to the Tracuit Hut, used for the normal ascent. Thus the decision was made and the die was cast.

The Facile route describes the summit effort from the Tracuit hut as two to three hours. However our chosen route involves three hours to the start of the climb and three hours for the climb itself, followed by a descent of the Facile route down to the Tracuit hut and then on down to our start point, the Turtmann hut. Followed by the return to our vehicle that required a further one hour of descent. We estimated an overall twelve hour trip, from Turtmann hut to vehicle via the summit.

The journey to the Turtmannal was uneventful, even though the European Atlas we were using to navigate, did not feature the valley, causing us to guess where the valley should be. The valley proved to a very picturesque one and we parked our van at the end of the road. We quickly shouldered our rucksacks and followed the pleasant footpath for two hours to reach the hut. The hut was undergoing extensive restoration, which did not present a problem until about an hour after going to bed when the resident builders decided to extend their evening time festivities with loud talking and heavy drinking until about 3 am.

All good plans when made under the cover of canvas seem quite simple and straight forward. It is their application on the mountain which becomes far from simple or straightforward, due to unpredictable conditions.

These unpredictable conditions showed themselves not long after our 04:30 hour start. We set off in good form along the path following the cairns and paint markers along a moraine spur, which led us into our first, time stealing error, when

we attempted to delay our entry onto the glacier, by traversing along the south side of the Bruneggorn. The ground was steeply angled, broken slabs interspersed with loose scree, all covered with a thin, frozen layer of snow and verglass. This made progress in crampons a slow and precarious process. The traverse also proved impossible to descend down to the glacier, forcing us to climb two short pitches to get to safer ground and eventually to the glacier and to the start of our climb at the Bisjoch, some two hours behind schedule. The short climb up to the Bisjoch was an energy sapping trudge through deep snow which we should have taken as evidence that the route was not in condition.

The time continued to slip away as we began to climb. The ridge had a great deal of soft snow that was laid on loose scree and sometimes large and alarmingly loose boulders. Any running belays were off the non-existent variety. This combined with the conditions underfoot made movement together a very dangerous option. Consequently, we were forced to pitch the whole route, taking us approximately eight hours and in excess of twenty five pitches to reach the summit.

We certainly felt that the mountain was guarding her beauty from us and only offering us glimpses of her malevolent side. The cloud, which now surrounded us, only cleared occasionally to give a glimpse of the sheer six hundred metre drop to the glacier below and tantalising us with each pitch length being the only view ahead. Once we reached the summit plateau, at 17:30 hours, we found it in near whiteout conditions, with very little to endear itself to our photographic talents.

We quickly left the summit and descended the normal, Facile route, only slowing to avoid some crevasses. However, this simple process, when done in whiteout conditions had us walking in the wrong direction until we recognised a previously encountered crevasse. We quickly sorted out our direction of travel and at the same time the mountain seemed to tire of its game with us and gave us a glimpse of the main route down to the Tracuit hut, to which we quickly descended. We entered the doors of the welcoming hut at

18:40 hours, some fourteen hours after our start and decided that we would stay there the night and tackle the remainder of our descent the following morning. The hut was very crowded. However they found space for us and provided a very welcome hot meal. Our luck held out as this hut also has its own entertainers; rather than Bob the Builder and

his mates this was the Swiss version of Chas and Dave. Fortunately they stopped their performance at a sensible hour. After a relaxed start we left the hut at about 7 am and crossed the glacier system back to the Turtmann hut, descended the path down to the road and made our way back to our campsite near Randa in the Mattertal - well tired!

## Endpiece

Zinal Rothorn, 4221m - A Very Minor Epic

By M G LeG Bridges.

**Team:** MG LeG Bridges, Tim King.

**O**n arrival in the Zermatt valley for two weeks' climbing at the beginning of August, inquiries soon revealed that summer 2000 was the awkward season. Recurrent snowfall was ensuring that many of the big peaks were out of condition and were staying that way. The Matterhorn, perhaps the most overworked mountain in the Alps, had not had an ascent for weeks. The Weisshorn, one of the finest peaks in the valley, had not had an ascent in the whole season. A week later, Kevin Edwards, who was leading the AMA 2000 element in the Pennine Alps, told us that they were homeward bound the following day. Notwithstanding that they had climbed a remarkable number of summits in their month's deployment, and had even made a sustained but unsuccessful attempt on the Matterhorn which had lasted for 24 hours(!), they were leaving five 4,000m summits unclimbed behind them. Conclusion: "The war's going badly, Perkins. We need a futile gesture to bolster morale! I want you to .....

Being people of infinite resource and sagacity, Tim King and I decided that we could not decently leave without securing at least one of these for the honour of the AMA. The choice included: The Weisshorn (no chance), the Matterhorn (a bit hackneyed even if we succeeded), the Dent d'Herens (a sod to get to), the Obergabelhorn (yeah, well maybe), and the Zinal Rothorn (probably the best chance). We settled for the latter.

The hut bash to the Rothorn hut is a bit of a swine, but it offers the consolation that the hut is very high, thus taking the sting out of the following day. It can be approached either via a track which climbs steeply up a rock buttress behind the Zermatt

railway station, or via one up through the Trift gorge, westward from the upper part of the town. Of these, the buttress allows rapid initial height gain and takes some of the pain out of it. The gorge is a long steady flog, and offers a better descent route. The two meet above the Trift hut, and thereafter follow the valley floor to the end of a steep moraine. This is the sickener, as the gravelly track climbs steeply for several thousand feet up to the hut at 3200m. The guidebook suggests 5 to 7 hours to the hut, but we, being fit athletic fifty something years olds, did it in 4 - and nearly killed ourselves. However when the day is fine, and you haven't booked, it pays to keep ahead of the rest of the mob if you want to ensure you get a bedspace!

The forecast for the following day was for deteriorating weather, with electric storms developing later - bad news. However this was the only window available to us. From the hut the route for the voie normale - the East Ridge - goes right handed directly past the khazi - can be handy, but on the other hand it pongs. The guidebook has a pretty picture which shows the line rising across a snow field and then swinging up and back left, still on snow, to gain an upper snow field, and eventually via a short rocky section, to a further snow field which allows access to the ridge below the final rock pyramid. The guidebook lies.

There is a curious paradox prevailing in the Alps at the moment: there is both too little snow and at the same time too much. With the steady recession of the glaciers and snowfields there's a hell of a lot more rock on the lower sections of some routes than the guidebook would have you believe, while on the upper sections where you think you're going to find a classic Alpine rock route, recent dumps



Above: Final Pitch of the Lenspitze, 4294m.

Below: The Madonna on Pollux, 4092m.





Summit of Alphubel, 4206m.



Summit of Weissmies 4023m.



On the Summit of Parrotspitze, 4436m. From L to R: Rich Hathaway, Dave Bogle, Daz Hall, Rob Smith, Mark Hedge.



The Summit of the Allalinhorn, 4027m.

mean you find it plastered in snow. Leaving at about 0250, the footprints in the snow beyond the khazi led us uncompromisingly a rocky wall. Dutifully we scaled this, (Diff), to become lost in a sea of loose rotten crap. Guided by an infallible sense of direction, and diverting only for a few scenic variations, we gained the upper snow field at a point quite unrelated to the guide book's proposals, and climbed this on hard nevee. The new track we found led us uncompromisingly to a second rock wall, (also Diff), which again dutifully we climbed.

The hounds were out below us now, and head torches were flashing all over the place. Some seemed to be quite drastically off route, until we realised they were heading up the Trift glacier, and in due course, the Wellenkuppe, with the ultimate objective of the Obergabelhorn. Above the second wall was a second sea of loose rotten crap, trackless in the dark, but providing unlimited scope for trundling deliberate or otherwise. We were tempted. Again our inimitable route finding skills led us out of the choss, with only a few scenic variations, to gain the final snow field which would give access to the ridge.

As the light came, we had watched with detached interest the growth of a vast thunder head to the east. It was very pretty, and laced with gold in the approaching dawn, quite photogenic. In an idle moment of wheezing and gasping we pondered on its probable direction of travel.

The ridge is deceptive. From a gentle rolling mantle of snow, it leads the innocent onwards, slowly narrowing, while the declivities on either side steepen. It dawns upon you suddenly that you are on seriously steep ground, with 600m drops on either hand, and the rope is still in your partner's rucksack – ahead of you. With a sudden tightening of the sphincter you lurch towards the rock ahead, only to find that rather than improving, the situation has deteriorated, in that you are now on exceedingly steep ground, and that instead of good solid grippy gneiss, you are seeking security on verglassed slabs, and you should have put your crampons on long ago.

From this point, although still gaining height, things went down hill if you follow me. What should have provided a classic rock climb of several hundred feet of sun warmed gneiss became several hundred feet of icy nasty.

Our thunder storm was feeling sociable, and had casually wandered over to join us. Various aspirant storms seemed to want to come to the party, and were growing like mushrooms from the valleys around, also quite pretty in their way, I suppose. However given the effort put in to get this far, and the need to bag the peak to increase the Zermatt team score, we weren't going to be put off by a little thunderstorm and its mates. No way. We continued to scrabble up the steep snow that plastered the lower part of the final pyramid.

The route takes a rising traverse left across what is normally a steepish rock wall, leading into a shallow gully, and I must admit there's a lot of loose rock in there, which jolly Continentals are wont to shower down on one's head. The up side of the snow was that it secured all the loose stuff. It was also quite sound, so we made good progress up to the notch on the south ridge, despite Tim being assailed by a passing attack of glacier lassitude. From here the route climbs exposed slabs out on to the West face, with super north face views of the Matterhorn, Obergabelhorn, and Dent Blanche, if you are happy to let your concentration wander at this point.

The opposition had caught us on the traverse, and a Hungarian pair came past exhibiting more speed than style, and indulging in profligate expenditure of energy. Whether from hunger (no pun intended) or apprehension, they halted long at the notch, and we followed a solo Frog up the slabs. Being on the shaded side of the peak the slabs were very cold and quite nasty, and at the top there are some interesting places on the crest where you step round blocks directly above the vertical 800m east face. Again on a fine sunny morning this can be exhilarating, but in bad conditions it can simply add to the laundry bill. However this intrepid pair pursued their way to the summit, which was reached at 0730, thereby reducing the outstanding balance of Pennine peaks by 20%.

We thus qualified to write this drivel for the corporate account of Alps 2000, and with a combined age of 110, we anticipate we may also qualify for the geriatrics' prize for participation in the exercise. As an afternote, we met a Brit pair on return to Zermatt that afternoon who had just climbed the Matterhorn, and the Obergabelhorn fell to two parties the same day. Bad luck, Kevin!

# A SUGGESTED ALPINE KIT LIST

By Captain Simon Wetherall

## Basic essentials:

Boots + gaiters  
crampsons  
ice axe  
rucksac  
waterproof jacket  
gaiters  
warm top  
zarski sack  
Headtorch  
+ spare bulb/batteries  
compass + map + whistle  
sunscreen + lipsalve  
glacier glasses+spare  
hat/gloves + spares  
WATER bottle/bag 2L  
spare food  
helmet  
harness  
prussiks + slings  
rope 50m  
first field dressing  
camera  
notebook + pen  
money/cards, insurance

## Technical route:

belay / rappel device  
extenders  
rocks  
cam devices  
slings  
rappel tape + knife  
ice screws?

## With bivi:

sleeping bag +bivi bag?  
mat  
stove  
pot  
mug  
food  
water container

## For hut and bivi:

dry socks  
dry thermal top

## For VALLEY

small tent in case  
sheet/liner for La Cordee

## Some thoughts:

### Boots.

Most important purchase you will make? Leather better than plastic for scrambling etc and more compact for fitting in your sack when wearing stickies. La Sportiv Nepal Top is excellent. There is an excellent range available in Chamonix – wait until you arrive.

### Crampons.

These should have good front points. Binding should not rely upon bail at front – with all the rock scrambling the lip at the front of the boot for the bail often wears away and then the crampoon is less than secure. Top rec-

ommendation is Charlet Moser Black Ice with Rapid fix binding – this is a good weight, compact, and with the anti-ball plate a very safe all round crampoon – yet will be quite happy doing Grade 6 Scotland!

### Gaiters.

Don't under-estimate gaiters – most importantly they stop your crampsons catching in your trousers and tripping you to an untimely end. For this reason I reckon they are essential. Gaiters also stop snow getting into your boots, melting and giving you cold feet when the weather turns!

### Ice Axe.

No clean answer for this – as always it's a compromise. If I'm doing a predominantly snow route eg. Domes de Miage or Mont Blanc then I use a Charlet-Moser G. - its good attributes are that it has a strong one piece head which is comfortable to hold; the whole shaft is rubber coated for insulation and it has a hole 2/3 way up shaft for me to secure a simple tape sling; it has a standard alpine pick and an easy to use adze for step cutting – it's 60cm long and I'm 5'10". I definitely wouldn't want anything longer! If I'm doing a technical route – rock or mixed – then I tend to use a technical axe because it is lighter; shorter and therefore more stowable. I would rather take two technical axes on the Frendo Spur in case the snow arete is ice. If you are just bringing two axes then 50-55 cm technical is probably best bet; but remember ice axe arrest is harder with technical axes!

### Rucksac.

Not too big, not too heavy, not too bulky. The ideal bergen is a very subjective and personal issue. However, my view is that the very upper end of what you want for the Alps is a rucksac of the size, weight and complexity of the Karrimor Alpiniste 40 – I tried one once and decided it was too big, heavy and bulky! 1.2kg is a good weight to aim for – many sacks are 2kg plus – forget them.

It needs to be a big enough to carry bivi kit and your boots if you're climbing in stickies – yet not so big it can interfere with climbing. Of course the problem is that until you have a non-bulky sleeping bag you need a bigger sack!

### Sleeping Bags & mat.

Again, no definitive answer. Probably compact and lightweight before warm!!! I use a down bag – a very old MacPac – I let it rain on the bag with no bivi sack as I find the weight and condensation worse than the rain! Maybe a bivi bag is a good idea after all. Something like a ME lightline is more than adequate – you

don't want warmer/bulkier than this – so about 500gm of down fill. I reckon down bags dry quicker too so long as they have a decent shower proof shell to start off with. 'Ultralight Therma-rests' are lightish & compact and I've used them extensively; but instead I occasionally use a thin karrimat folded as a frame for my rucksac.

### Other bivi stuff.

Stove – gas is best, you only need it for bivis because hut food is good and doesn't need to be carried. Cylinders are plentiful in Chamonix. MSR/Coleman not really worth the weight on a climb – but if you're on a non-technical route then clearly the weight's not such an issue.

### Safety.

Helmet.  
Headtorch  
Compass.  
Mapcase – A5 Ortlieb is excellent size  
Sunscream.  
Factor XXX + block absolutely essential  
Lipsalve.  
Glacier glasses. Must be good quality and  
MUST be a spare in your sack!  
Woolly hat. Must be good quality and  
MUST be a spare in your sack!  
Gloves/mittens. Must be good quality and  
MUST be spares in your sack!

(lost glacier glasses, lost hat and lost gloves are all show stoppers – you must have a spare in your rucksack – these items are so easily lost and can turn awkward situations into disasters).

Note that windproof gloves or mitts are essential when carrying a cold ice axe in strong winds early in the morning especially. If you have a 2 – 4 man zarski sack please bring it – they are excellent for having a rest in poor conditions and a good way for two pairs to rest together.

First field dressing + personal first aid kit.

### Climbing gear.

Harness - padded is good for rock routes; but lightweight style also has advantages if you're just crossing glaciers etc.  
Helmet.  
Rope (9mm/double for technical routes requiring rappel descents; 10.5/single for groups crossing glaciers etc).  
Prussiks – crevasse rescue.  
Belay/rappel plate.  
Extenders – 30cm+ slings are a good length for extenders on alpine routes. They help reduce rope drag and can be used on spikes, threads etc. try to avoid using short sport extenders.  
Pro-selection of rocks, some camming devices.  
Slings and rappel tape.

Lex Multipart Defence focuses the group's supply chain and demand forecasting expertise of the Defence sector's specific requirements. Either partnering the MoD, or as supply chain partner to Defence Prime Contractors, we offer a range of innovative managed services which improve asset utilisation without compromise to operational effectiveness.



## **LEX** **Transfleet**

The Fleet Support Services Company

As the UK's leading independent supplier of tailored transport and fleet solutions, Lex Transfleet owns and manages more than 19,000 vans and commercial vehicles on behalf of its customers, including 2,500 vehicles on the MoD's White Fleet.

With a true national presence, Lex Transfleet's key focus on providing expertise and service to meet specific customer needs, ensures that we deliver the right fleet solution to our customers.

Employing more than 1,400 people, our common vision to lead our market in customer service drives everything we do.



LDV is the only specialist van maker producing the widest range of panel vans and their derivatives in Europe as well as automotive pressings. The company has recently been appointed as primary supplier of minibuses to the MoD White Fleet. Each van will be tailor-made to meet the MoD's exact specifications. LDV has worked closely with the MoD for a number of years and will utilise its military experience, flexibility and vast light commercial vehicle knowledge within the new contract.

