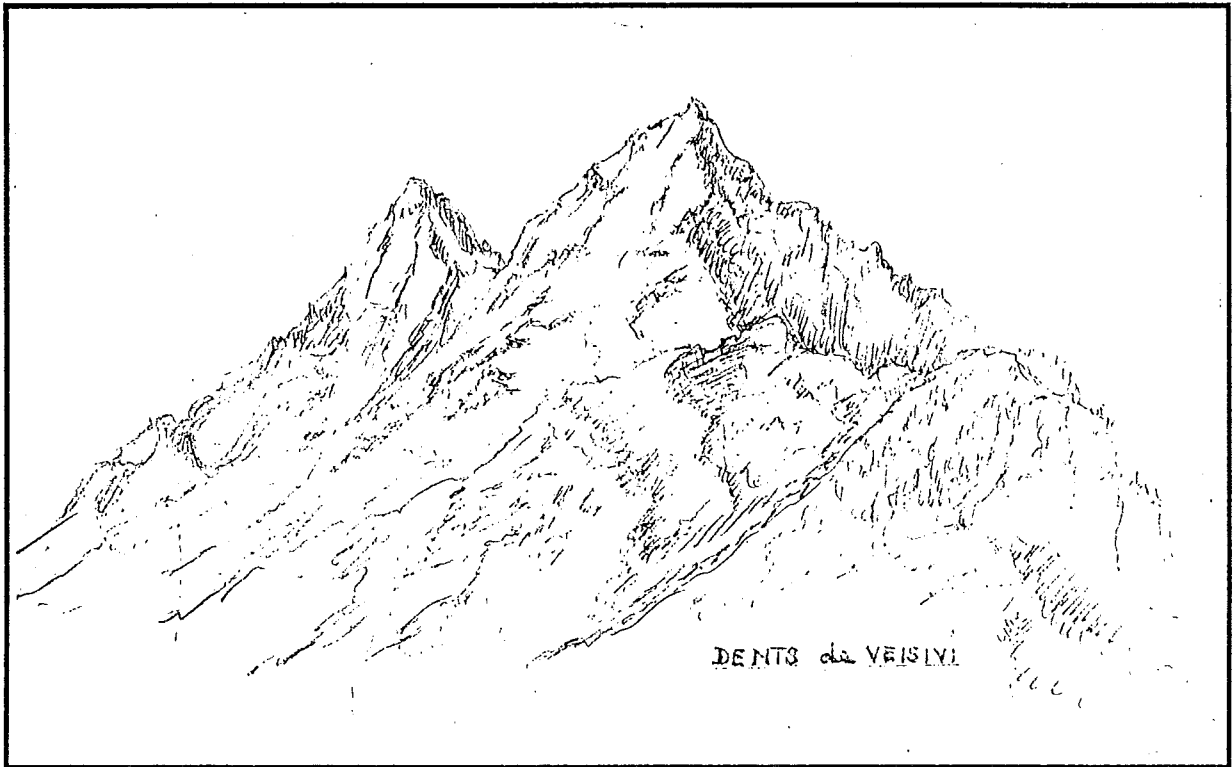


Yorkshire Ramblers' Club
Alpine Meet:
Les Haudères
(Val d'Hérens, Switzerland)

July - August 1990



*"Taste the infinite joy of existence
Labour accomplished, a victory won.
This is your thought as you turn from the summit
Gripping the rock gingerly as you go."*

YORKSHIRE RAMBLERS' CLUB ALPINE MEET 1990

The Meet

The fifth YRC Alpine Meet was held between 21st July and 5th August 1990, and was based at Les Hauderes in the Val d'Herens in the Valais region of the Swiss Alps. The following 26 members and guests attended the meet organised this year by Peter Chadwick, who arranged the excellent campsite and coordinated all of the travel and insurance arrangements:

Alan Brown (President)	Harvey Lamas
Ken Aldred	David Martindale
Roger and Susan Allen	Jonathan Riley
Dennis and Joan Annstrong	Arthur and Shirley Salmon
Dermis Barker	Graham and Barbara Salmon
Peter Chadwick	David and Elspeth Smith
Albert Chapman	Mike and Helen Smith
John Devenport	Richard and Fiona Smith
Mike and Marcia Godden	Tim Smith
David Hick	

The Location

The Val d'Herens is a beautiful, largely unspoilt and uncommercialised valley in the Valais region of Switzerland, running almost due south from Sion in the Rhone Valley. Les Hauderes (1452m) is a small village situated at the junction of the Ferpecle Valley to the south east and the Arolla Valley running to the south west. This area is the most important climbing centre in the Western Pennine Alps, and provides a very wide choice of snow and/or rock peaks at all grades, as well as being an excellent centre for a large number of walks on well marked tracks through Alpine pastures and woodland. It is possible to undertake many walks from the campsite or by using the Postbus or car to take you to the roadheads at Arolla or Ferpecle. There were also several roadside crags and boulders for those wishing to sharpen up their rock climbing skills on "rest days", and easy access to the impressive snout of the Arolla Glacier where ice climbing skills could be practised. During our stay we were able to take part in the festivities of the village fête and the Swiss National Day celebrations on August 1st.

In contrast to last year in the Charnontx area, there were far fewer people about, and in the mountains it was generally very quiet. Some of the mountains ascended during the meet looked as if they were only climbed occasionally.

The Campsite

It was a return visit to the well appointed Camping De Molignon site located just outside Les Hauderes as the YRC Alpine meet of 1986 was also based there. This time the group was allocated its own terraced area located above the rest of the site, and by the first Sunday evening most of the party had arrived and parked caravans or pitched a wide variety of tents, including the Presidential palace, which looked as if it was fresh from a Lawrence of Arabia film set and Albert and Tim's tent that bore a striking resemblance to that depicted in an engraving in Edward Whymper's "Scrambles Amongst the Alps"!

The campsite was located in the valley bottom, which meant that the sun did not appear until about 8.30hrs. and disappeared behind the horizon at about 18.30hrs. Although during the main holiday season, the campsite was never full.

This year we even had entertainment at the campsite provided by Richard and Fiona, les deux enfants Smith. Fiona just charmed everybody by smiling happily for two weeks, whilst Richard kept everybody occupied by cajoling them into games of cricket, football, golf and a particularly lethal frisbee.

The Weather

Quite simply we could not have wished for better weather! In fact it was rather too hot on some occasions, especially on the long walks up to some of the huts and on glacier crossings once the sun had been on the snow for a couple of hours. **making** it slushy and hard work underfoot. The soft, melting snow also made it quite dangerous as there were many areas with hidden crevasses. On virtually every morning at the campsite, we rose to find perfectly blue skies, although it did cloud over **during** the afternoon on some days. Even in the high mountains there was virtually no wind. It was so mild that I only wore a cagoule twice; on the summit of the Plgne d'Arolla where there was a bracing wind on the summit ridge, and on the descent from the Dent Blanche, where we were caught in a storm for about four hours during which time there were heavy hailstones that turned to rain lower down.

Maps & Guidebooks

The most useful map covering the whole of the district was the 1:50000 Carte National de la Suisse sheet number 283 (Arolla). For those who preferred a larger scale, it was necessary to buy more than one sheet in the 1:25000 scale series as Arolla is on the edge of four maps:

1325	Rosablanche	(area to NW of Aralia)
1327	Evolene	(area to NE of Arolla)
1346	Chanrion	(area to SW of Aralla)
1347	Matterhorn	(area to SE of Arollal)

Two of the Alpine Club Guide Books were needed to cover the area in which the meet was held. The first covered all of the peaks ascended, except the Dent Blanche:

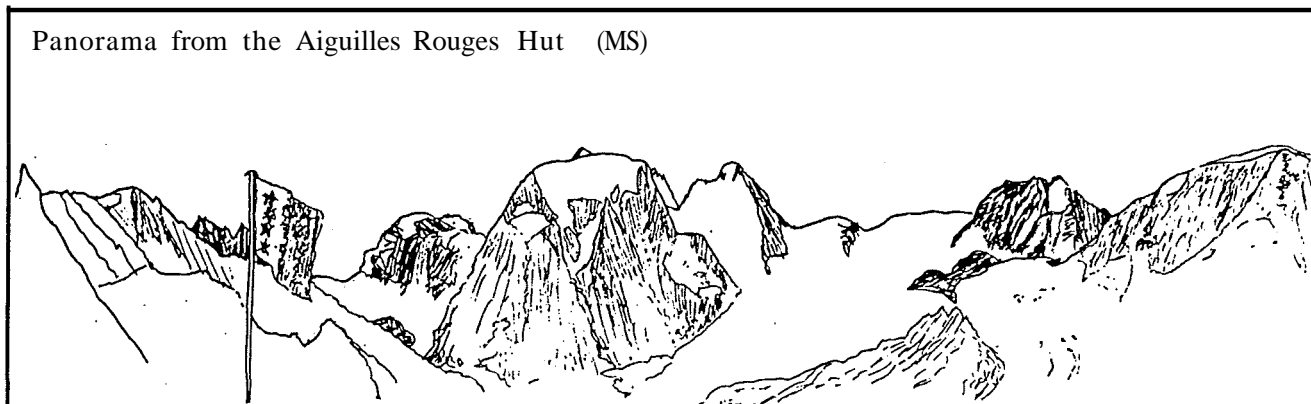
Pennine Alps West (Arolla-Dix-Oternma-Valpelline North-Combin-Oreat St. Bernard)

Pennine Alps Central (Weisshorn-Dent Blanche-Monte Rosa-Matterhorn-Italian Valley Ranges-Valpelline South)

The Experiences

The remainder of this report is given over to accounts of some of the excursions and activities by members and guests on the meet, and is a joint effort as all Alpine efforts must be!

Panorama from the Aiguilles Rouges Hut (MS)



First Impressions of the Alps by Jonathan Riley

After weeks of anticipation and waiting, the time to leave for the Alps arrived. Peter, Dermis and I packed the car solid and set off on the long drive to Arolla. Apparently, it was quite hot, but I didn't notice from inside Peter's car!

We arrived at about nine on Saturday and I was immediately impressed with the scale of the mountains, the severity of the peaks and the depth of David Smith's sun tan!

The following day it was decided to go up to the Vignettes Hut to climb Petit Mont Collon and the Pigne d'Arolla, It wasn't without a good deal of nerves that I set off up the moraine with crampons and axes adorning my rucksack.

It all felt like backpacking in Britain and I was in my element. This all changed however when we reached the glacier. It was like stepping onto another planet with real crevasses and real snow. We followed the tracks up to the hut, booked in, ate and attempted sleep, which is difficult in a cramped human sauna!

4.30 arrived much too quickly and by 5.00 we had left to conquer Petit Mont Collon. After leaving the route, almost abseiling off a moving belay and climbing a chimney with holds that were so good you could pull them out of the rock and inspect them first (!), we arrived on the summit exhausted; at least I was, Peter looked as fresh as a gentian!

A very tedious descent, abseiling, falling into two crevasses and being pulled over the glacier like a sledge by Peter, we arrived back at the hut after thirteen hours of toil; not quite guide book time!

But as they say, "things can only get better" and they did.

I had great ascents in great weather of the Pigne d'Arolla, the Grande Dent de Veisivi and most of the Perroc ridge (all planned of course, the north peak of the Aiguilles Rouges d'Arolla, the Petite Dent de Veisivi, the Dent de Satanna (twice) and the Dent Blanche. And of course Wednesday night when I found out that the Yorkshire Ramblers Club is just an offshoot of the Yorkshire Raclette Club!

All in all, I had a fantastic time and it is a meet that I hope to be able to attend again and again.

Petit Mont Collon by David Hick

"A curious snow and rock pile" the guide book said. Well, the rock pile was falling around our ears or so it seemed to the six YRC members climbing the final 200 metres of Petit Mont Collon (3556m) by the south flank route.

Earlier, the plod across the Glacier d'Otemma and the ascent of Petit Mont Collon's own small glacier had gone without mishap on a beautiful Alpine morning.

One look at the crumbling summit pile dictated our tactics and two ropes of three took parallel routes to avoid stonefall from each other. One rope started up a loose gully and looking for better rock ended on the west summit after some hair raising exploits. They then traversed the mountain to the east summit, abseiling back to the snow line. The other party stopped at a high point in the middle of the summit ridge. After spending most of the afternoon out of earshot on the mountain, the two parties met back on the terrace of the Vignettes Hut, tired but happy, after a substantially harder first day in the high Alps than we had actually bargained for!

The members making up the party were David Hick, David Martindale, John Devenport, Graham Salmon, Peter Chadwick and Jonathan Riley (whose thoughts on this Alpine baptism of fire are recorded elsewhere in this report).

The Col de Tsannine (3051rn) and the Grand Dent de Veisivi (3428rn) by Arthur Salmon

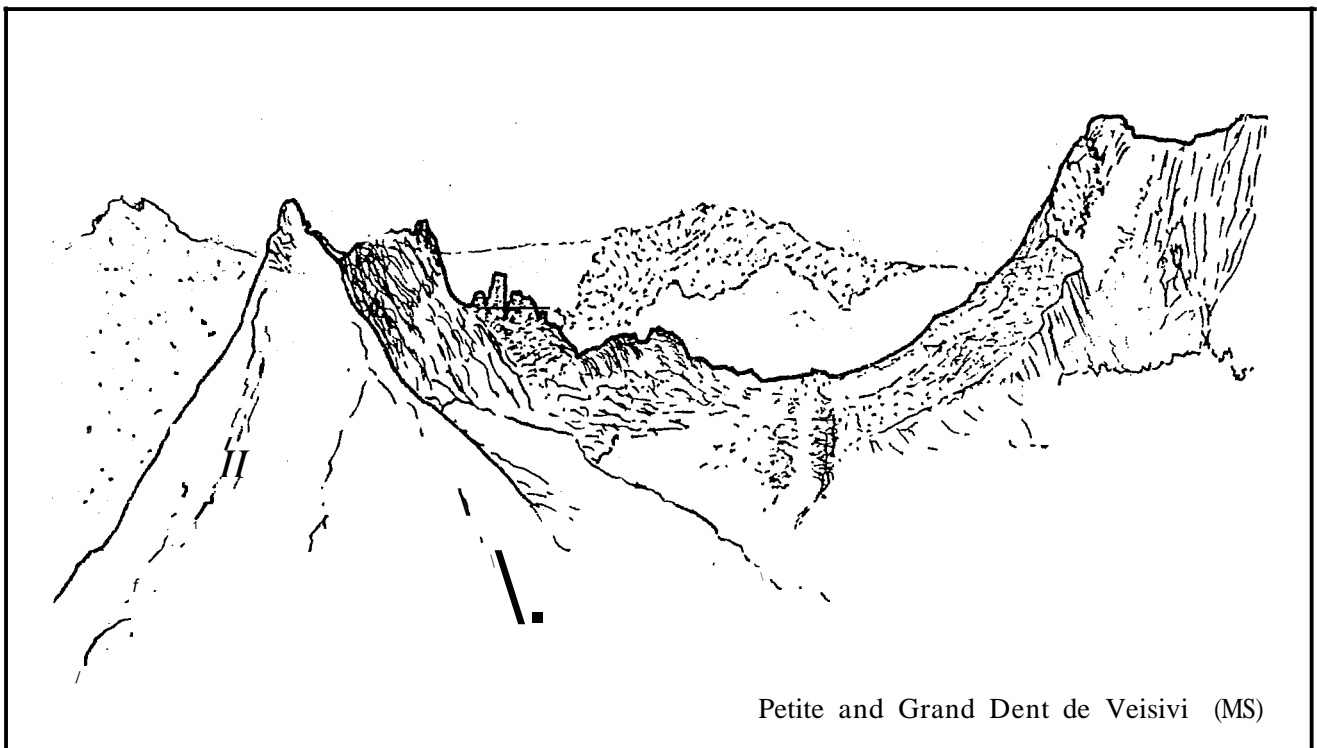
The President, Ken Aldred, Dermis Barker, Albert Chapman, Marcia and Mike Godden, Arthur Salmon, David Smith and Tiro Smith made up the large party attempting the ascent of the peak which dominated the valley above our campsite.

In spite of the efforts of the President, it was well after 8am that the rather large party left camp squeezed into Albert's Range Rover and the President's limousine for the drive up the valley to Satarma. The weather was clearly set fair and in the knowledge that our intended route did not go above the snow line, everybody was lightly loaded as we crossed the wooden bridge and started through the meadows in the valley bottom where a local farmer and his wife were already hard at work **turning** the freshly cut hay.

On leaving the meadows, the path climbs steeply through the pine forest that cloaks the slopes. It is still the early days of the meet and most of the party were noticeably suffering from the exertion of the steep climb which seems to go on interminably. Above the trees the path emerges onto the open hillside and winds its way by the stream that flows from the cwm that is flanked by the Petit Dent and the Dent de Perroc. The views across the valley to the Aiguilles Rouges and the Lac Bleu nestling lower on the Alp are superb; up the valley the snowfields of Mont Collon and the Pigne d'Arolla dominate the view. Below us herds of goats, their bells tinkling, surrounded the lone chalet on the Tsarmine Alp. As we approached the slabs of the upper cwm a herd of bouquetins darted across our view. Near the col, the gravel patches between the rocks are carpeted with royal blue gentians and cushions of pink saxifrage, thus providing a remarkable contrast to what would otherwise be the bleakness of the immediate surroundings.

A leisurely lunch was taken on the sun-bathed rocks of the col, **This** gave us ample opportunity to absorb the grandeur of the situation, To the east the slopes plummet 4,500ft to the valley floor, while to the north the spectacularly pinnacled ridge of the Petit Dent starts immediately from the col; to the south the foreshortened form of the Grand Dent towers over us.

Time was slipping by, and we realised we must stir ourselves if we were to climb our peak. Still feeling the effects of their first-day walk, Marcia and Mike decided to call it a day and make their way slowly back to the cars. The rest of us left our rucksacks at the col to collect on our return and, without due consideration, also left the rope which had been laboriously carried up from Satarma. The ridge climbs



Petite and Grand Dent de Veisivi (MS)

steeply from the col and after a few hundred feet we were bitterly to regret leaving the rope behind. At the point where the ridge narrows and the exposure suddenly became noticeable, we were brought to a stop by a rather smooth looking slab. Also our lack of acclimatisation was beginning to tell as manifested by our laboured breathing and pounding hearts. The net result was that three of the group decided that discretion is the better part of valour and so made their way back to the col. However, the remnants of the party (Alan, Albert, Arthur and David), duly encouraged by our senior Alpinist, pressed on. Loose rock called for care in places and even more nasty was fine rubble on sloping rock, but no real difficulties were met. Soon we left the ridge and a short shallow gully brought us to the firm rocks of the summit. The weather was still perfect and the panoramic view from the peak. defies description; the Dent Blanche, the Matterhorn, the Dent d'Herens and, nearer at hand, the shattered ridge of the Dent de Perroc.

The descent was uneventful and the troublesome slab was passed almost unnoticed. The real grind of the day was the long downhill walk back to Satarma, particularly for Albert who was suffering the effects of an injured knee. Not surprisingly, it was a rather weary party that returned to camp as the ascent to the col is about 4,100ft with a further 1,200 ft to the summit of the Grand Dent. However, all agreed that this had been a truly excellent day.

The Dent de Perroc by Roger Allen

The Allens set out from the Tsa Hut on a Variably cloudy morning, for the WSW ridge of the Dent de Perroc. The lower two-thirds of the ridge was mainly scrambling, but the upper section included three pitches which were climbed with belays. Extensive but Intermittent views were obtained from the summit (3676m).

Descent was by the same route, but on the second abseil, Roger was hit behind the waist by a falling rock about twice the size of a building brick, The pair were able to descend without help by abseils and scrambles back to the hut and the valley.

However, after two days and nights of various pains, Roger was directed by a local doctor to Sion Hospital. where he was examined and promptly subjected to emergency removal of his spleen. This put an end to his Alpine capers for 1990 and left Sue to be comforted by the rest of the meet.

The Aiguille de la Tsa & Dent de Tsalion by Graham Salmon

After parking about 2km up the valley from Arolla, near the snout of the Bas Glacier d'Arolla, four members (John Devenport, David Hick, Arthur Salmon and Graham Salmon) commenced the walk to the Bertol Hut (3311m). The approach to the hut took about three and a half hours, with only slight hindrance due to the poor state of the Glacier de Bertol, which was soft snow and slush at the lower reaches and ice with a thin coating of slush on the upper section just below the hut. The Bertol hut itself is situated in a fantastic position on a narrow rocky outcrop above the Glacier du Mont Miné, built quite recently in 1976 next to the site of the old hut. Unfortunately the guardian at the hut took an instant dislike to us, saying the hut was full; he even refused to allow us to sleep on the dining room floor (The reason for his outburst was because we hadn't reserved places by telephone, so future visitors to Swiss huts should beware). After more discussion, however, we were shown to a near empty dormitory where we rested until after 3pm when the guardian eventually agreed to cook our food. Even a simple task such as obtaining water for our bottles was turned into an ordeal, rendering our stay somewhat unpleasant.

The start the next day commenced quite late, about 4am, with the initial section taking in a traverse of the upper sections of the Glacier du Mont Miné and below the Bertol hut toilets; on the return trip in the afternoon great care was taken to keep the rope from touching the ground! After crossing a rocky band, the rest of the trip to the foot of the Aiguille de la Tsa was all across fairly easier glacier slopes with only a few crevasses to negotiate. The Aiguille is a rock spire with its summit reaching 3665m, which is a prominent feature on the skyline from Arolla, and is a rock climb with pitches reaching a standard of around Hard V'Diff, The exposure on the climb is only very slight except for one point where



a steep, narrow ridge is reached, which allows for spectacular views down to Arolla. After reaching the summit in hot sunshine, some easy climbing and three abseils returned us to the glacier.

.As the Dent de Tsalion (3589m) was so near, only half an hour away, we couldn't resist taking in an extra summit. The Dent de Tsalion is again a rock summit, but this time involving easy scrambling.

An excellent trip, more than making up for the difficulties experienced at the hut!

The Tête Blanche by Harvey Lomas

.Ascent to the Bertol Hut took four hours plus. What a climb, used ice axe and crampons to reach the rock ridge upon where the hut is situated and reached by climbing fixed ladders. In splendid mountain sunshine viewed the Dent Blanche, the Matterhorn and of course our own Tête Blanche.

4.30 hrs. wake to breakfast looking out at the stars. Under a clear sky we began the ascent of the upper Glacier du Mont Miné to reach the Col des Bouquetins and a straight forward snow climb to the summit. The party in front were a Guide and his client; the latter was 85 and the former was 90 years of age! Three weeks previously, the Guide had climbed the Matterhorn!

Our return to the hut and valley was straight forward, except for the brilliant sunshine and spectacular view which dominated our happy climb.

(Albert Chapman thought it interesting to point out that although seven members ascended the Dent Blanche (4367m), only two managed the ascent of the Tete Blanche (3724m)!!!

The Pigne d'Arolla by Mike Godden

The morning of Tuesday 24 July saw the dawn of another fine and sunny day and the beginning of a first time experience, definitely for one member of the party of nine about to set off for the Cabane des Vignettes. The President and his party left camp at 13.00hrs and commenced the walk from Arolla at 13.30hrs. The burden of rope carrying was shared by all during the three and a half hour trek with superb retrospective views. Rain briefly fell prior to ascending the final snow field where soft snow and poor walking conditions underfoot were experienced in places.

The cabane accommodation was good and the party settled down to great volumes of tea while the evening meal was prepared. Food eventually arrived in the form of a large bowl of pasta covered with a mix of various sauces. One member enjoyed a vegetarian meal and two others sampled the chefs menu. The weather watch indicated poor visibility and some apprehension for the next day. Beds were reached by 21.00hrs but little sleep achieved in the first few hours due to the noise of hearty singing coming from the dining area.

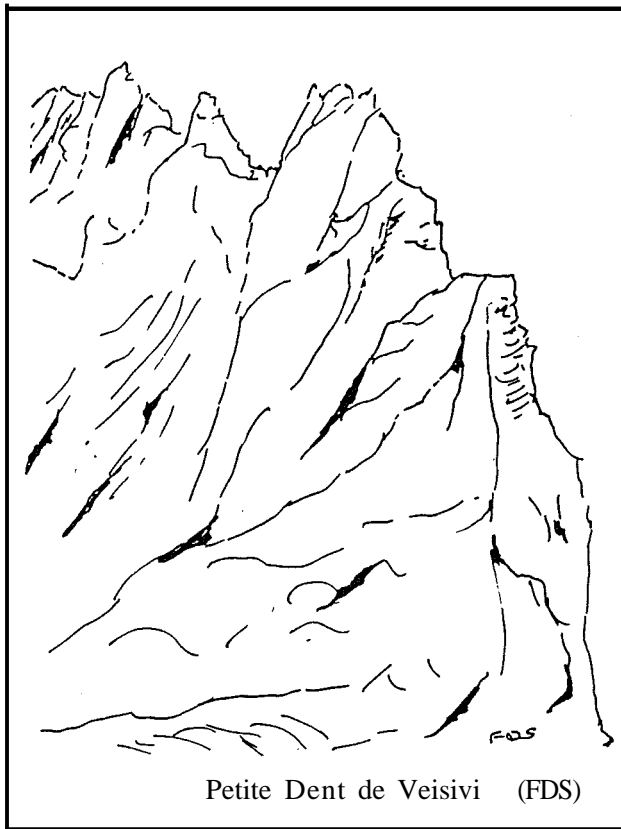
At 04.30 hrs the following morning reveille was signalled by numerous watches, a dull thud, and an "Ouch!". Laughter followed, then another thud. Not to worry though, as it was a YRC member waking himself up at the expense of a wooden beam. We all hoped that the cabane would not collapse before we set off!

The weather was crystal clear as members made their way downstairs to tea and sandwiches prior to preparations for the summit trek. At 06.00hrs off we went in parties of three to each rope. Sadly, difficulties were encountered with the crampons of two members, which resulted in one having to return to the cabane. The remainder trudged on across ice and snow to reach the summit of the Pigne d'Arolla at approximately 08.30hrs. The views were magnificent and many photos were taken. Hands soon became cold holding cameras. After ropes were sorted out and dress adjusted, the party commenced the descent back to the cabane to enjoy more tea and sandwiches. Ropes and crampons were finally stowed and the walk back down to Arolla began. At approximately 13.30hrs, the hotel near the car park came into view. Beers were quaffed and satisfaction enjoyed before returning to the camp site at Les Hauderes.

Tsarmine Ridge - Petite Dent de Veisivi by David Smith

The twin peaks of the Dents de Veisivi dominate the head of the valley as seen from our campsite at Les Hauderes. The smaller of the two, the Petite Dent at 3186m, in contrast with the Grand Dent with its loose rock and gravel, sports a superb ridge. The rock is sound and offers first class scrambling and pitches of I and II, forming one of the classic Alpine routes.

In sweltering heat, we meandered up the steep path through the trees from the hamlet of Satarma. The path winds upwards to the Tsannine chalet at 2325m where a welcome stream is crossed before gaining the grassy cwm: flowers and butterflies adding interest to the walk.



Petite Dent de Veisivi (FDS)

It took about three hours to reach the Col de Tsarmine (3051m). It may have been the heat that slowed our pace, but it was a remarkable contrast to the first time that I was in these parts. In 1955 with a YRC party including Arthur Salmon and Cliff Large, I recorded Cliffstep cutting a route to the col.

The col overlooks the Ferpecte valley and our first close view of the Dent Blanche demanded a photographic interlude. A "Skye like" ridge led to a series of five gendarmes, the fifth being the summit. As the rock steepened we got to grips with the sound rock, warm to the touch. The handholds were numerous, their quality "fantabulous", each of the party competing for some part in the action. It was sheer delight; this ridge climb certainly merits its reputation for being one of the finest in the Alps.

I enjoyed the luxury of being the middle man. Jon making his first alpine lead with his youthful enthusiasm and Peter, so confident and dependable. Half way along the ridge we were confronted by an interesting looking chimney. We decided to sack haul in order to gain maximum enjoyment from the climb. The sheltering walls of the chimney offered a welcome respite from the incredible exposure that we were subject to on the traverses. We reached the summit in guide book time to see what

is considered to be the finest panorama in the Alps, but the clouds had removed the summits of many peaks from view.

The route down was by the west ridge, which in the old days was the usual way up. We abseiled two or three pitches for speed and enjoyment, reaching the path some way down from the col. The return speedier than the ascent bringing us quickly back to Satarma, an excellent Alpine day.

"Taste the infinite joy of existence
Labour accomplished, a victory won,
This is your thought as you turn from the summit,
Gripping the rock as you gingerly go"

AD.Godley

The Cabine de Bertol Revisited by Ken Aldred

A party of three, Alan Brown, Ken Aldred and Dennis Barker made the steep ascent to the Cabine de Bertol. The way up to the hut has changed dramatically over the past ten years. What is now a sheet of steep ice was a large snowfield which extended both above the top and below the bottom of the ice.

The rock scramble to the hut was up the Aralla side of the rock ridge as the snow used to extend up to the fixed chains. Now the way is over the col and up the eastern side.

6.20 start for the Aiguille de la Tsa. Again, very big changes in the snow conditions. Ten years ago we had no crevasses to contend with. but this year it took three hours of slow progress to arrive at the final crevasse before the rock peak. A brief discussion regarding the best place to cross led to agreement from all that a return was prudent. Dermis put one foot through the snow. The hole left by his foot appeared to extend sideways in all directions. A slight detour was made to the Col de la Tsa but mainly it was a job picking a safe way back. At the Col de Bertol we met a Guide who was interested in our account as he had been booked to take a party to the Tsa that morning, but on seeing the conditions had gone to the Tete Blanche instead. Back to Arolla.

Mont Blanc de Cheilon by Albert Chapman

The morning in camp began with a cold shower. Not by choice but through my inability to push a French Franc into a Swiss Franc slot! Then the usual late morning scene of collecting gear and weighing ropes against spaghetti and tinned meat.

Arthur's daughter Barbara decided to come to the Dix Hut to experience its comforts and culinary delights as described by brother Graham, joining the party of Albert Chapman, Harvey Lamas, David Martindale and Arthur Salmon.

A comfortable twelve kilometre car journey took us to the dusty, hot car park by the "Grand Hotel", way above the square in Arolla. We left the car at 1.30 and at a pleasant pace struck up towards the Pas de Chevres, the Pass of the Goats. For the first mile, we were sheltered from the hot sun by a pine and larch forest. The pines were the native Arolla (Pinus Cembra) with needles in groups of five compared with our Scots pine in groups of two.

Out of the forest shade the sun drew perfume from the Alpine flowers carpeting the grass slopes. Refreshing mountain streams. good views of the Aiguilles Rouges and the whistle of marmots helped us reach the Pas de Chevres (2835m). No goats but a good vantage point. Even saw the small top triangle of the Matterhorn peeping above the Dents de Bertol.

Down the metal ladders and onto the dry glacier with its spectacular assortment of glacier tables. The sun departed and the rain came down as we arrived at the Dix Hut. As we unbooted on the steps. the mountain took on a dark appearance and looked like the side of Cheop's pyramid, with its summit covered in icing.

The hut filled to its capacity of two hundred and twenty during the evening. most late arrivals soaked with the downpour. Barbara raised smiles from our group and puzzled expressions from the guardian when she asked to be shown to the shower room and whether there were clean towels and soap in the ladies loo!!

The evening was spent drinking expensive Dole and beer. and trying to find meat on a huge plate covered with twenty generous helpings of spaghetti. Sleep is not a companion of mine at an Alpine hut; I merely pass the night and listen to the snores of my chums!

Up at 4.30, down with a light breakfast, a queue at the soapless toilets under a star covered, cloudless sky. Then with difficulty sorting our ropes and equipment. Were we really going on the same route as those three Dutch parties who seemed to clank and jangle with lots of expensive climbing aids at every step?

We left the hut at 5.30 in half light and walked across the moraine, then the dry glacier. We roped up for the snow and reached the Col de Cheilon from where we had beautiful views of the cloudscapes on the Grand Combin, One moment it was clear and two minutes later covered in fantastic shaped clouds. Similarly the wisps of morning mist covered the dark rocky outline of La Ruinette. By contrast, the Alguilles Rouges really did look red in the first rays of the morning sun.

Off with the crampons and on to the west ridge of Mont Blanc de Cheilon. The rock was loose and rotten so we turned it to the south and kept to the snow for ten minutes. Then on regaining the ridge we found the rock stable and firm. On climbing above the rocky ridge we cramponed up ice and firm snow sheltered from the sun which was now showing slightly over the summit ridge. We passed the three Dutch parties laden down with superfluous equipment and after an interesting crossing of the bergschrund, gained the saddle (3785m) at 9.00am.

Good views were had all round from the Matterhorn to Mont Blanc. Also the spectacular east ridge with a party of two, who had no doubt also traversed from the Col de la Serpentine and maybe the Pigne d'Arolla.

We left rucksacks and axes on the saddle and enjoyed an exhilarating scramble along the narrow ridge to the summit. The clouds boiled up from beneath as we started our last summit pitch. The sun poked a hole through the mist and projected a superb broken spectre on the cloud behind. A ideal rocky summit only one metre square!

Our return by the same route was pleasant and exhilarating, if uneventful. We arrived back at the Dix Hut at 1.30pm and drank cans of beer at 3.5 Swiss Francs each. We hoped our chums in the "A" team on the Dent Blanche were also enjoying a fine day!

The North Peak. of Aiguilles Rouges by Mike Smith

Settling to sleep in the Aiguilles Rouges hut, I had plenty to think about. Having arrived in the Alps later than the others, this was my first trip up to a hut this visit and a chance to climb in a sector I had not tried during my previous visit a decade ago. The invitation was to try a possible traverse of the Crête de Coq or cockscomb of rock pinnacles with David Smith, Peter Chadwick* and Jonathan Riley. The hut was not well placed for this part of the ridge.

On arrival, I had discussed our plans with some MAM members, a BMC group leader and Pat Littlejohn, who had suggested that our guide book was unreliable and that a traverse of the North Peak was both feasible and entertaining. The hut guardian just kept repeating that there was no route and danger of stonefall on each ascent or descent I mentioned. This had led us to abandon the Col Slingsby** approach in favour of tackling the North Col. This col was between the Central and North tops and beyond the Crête de Coq.

Unoccupied bunks beside me belonged to an English party now benighted on the ridge. Their spare clothes and headtorches were left presumably in an attempt to save weight. They served as a warning not to tackle too much of this ridge with its lack of escape routes.

My final concern was the horrific tales of shattered rock and tottering screes exposed by retreating snow witnessed at first hand by the rest of the party.

After a long wait, 4.15am arrived and we were off by 5am. We made good time with the route to ourselves over moraine and glacier slopes, rising to traverse the upper glacier below the ridge with views back to Mont Blanc in the early morning glow. Reaching the bergschrund 400m below the North col, we were soon moving together on the rock face slightly to the right of the shallow couloir. After an initially annoying section of about 30m covered in scree, the gabbro gave all the sound climbing our guide book had promised. Having arrived at the narrow col in excellent time, we paused for a second breakfast and briefly considered tackling the tantalisingly close but steep and overhanging Central summit which towered over us. Prudence prevailed and we enjoyed the short sound ridge to the North Peak. The "rochers solides et facile" as the 1963 CAS guide book describes them were appreciated most by those in the party who had inadvertently previously tackled the rotten rock of the Dent de Perroc!

Reaching the top at about the same time as those at base camp were stirring for breakfast caused a degree of lethargy to set in. An hour passed in reminiscence, conjecture and identifying the peaks tackled on last year's meet around Chamonix.

The descent of the North ridge was slower and involved many twists and turns on the steep ground. The view back to the summit was imposing as the Aiguille overhangs on the west side. This sight increased our sense of achievement as from so many angles our Aiguille appears as no more than a bump on the side of the Central summit.

Below us on the east face were the ascending MAM four who soon became aware of our presence as we passed a stone strewn patch. A few days later, they contacted us to thank us for taking care to dislodge so little. Ahead of us the long chain of the BMC training group was making its first venture onto a glacier. Within minutes they had rescued a Belgian from a crevasse. As the helicopter took the chap down from the hut, the group resumed their crossing to a top near the Col de Darboniere overlooking the Lac des Dfx,

To arrive at our descent col required two abseils. The first one required the full length of our longest rope and deposited us on a small sloping ledge. The rope pulled through the sling alright but jammed as it fell. Thankfully it yielded to combined flicking, jerking and pulling. The second followed immediately and after the others had disappeared over the lip and out of sight, I was left watching a twitching rope middle and listening to plenty of shouted advice. That was when the loneliness of the situation struck me.

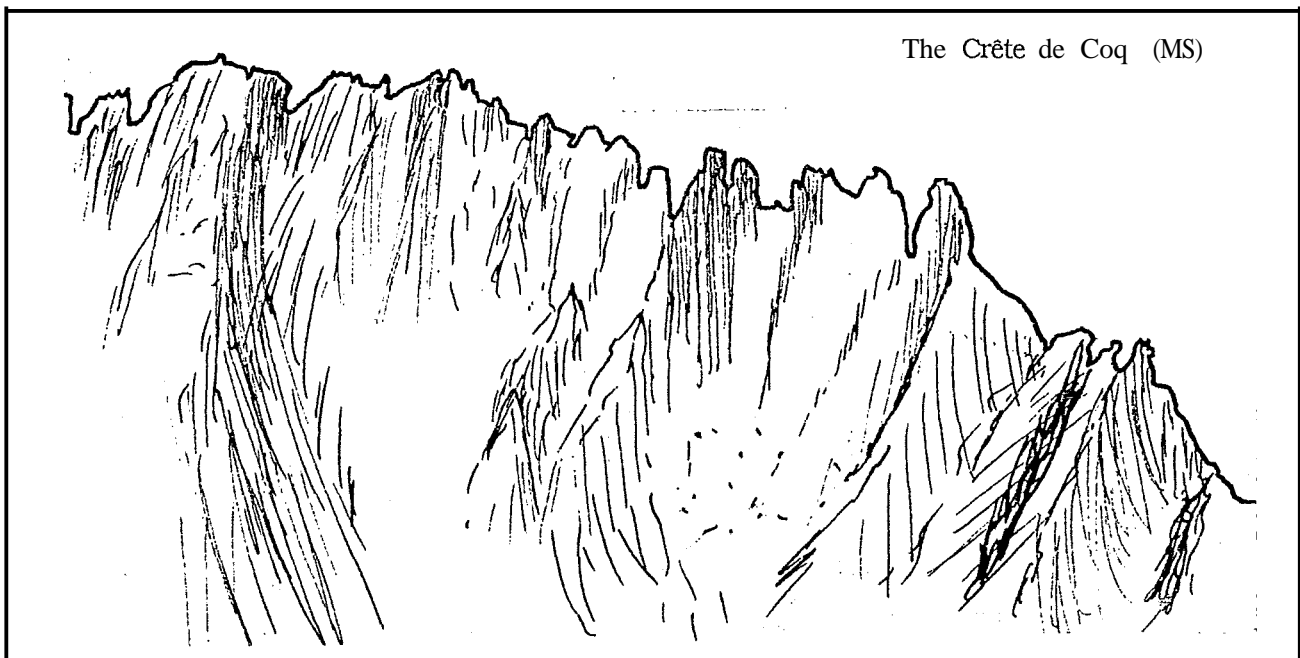
Below the col, more scree covered slabs lead to snow and a bergschrund to be crossed on slushy snow. Then a short glacier walk brought us back to the hut by 2pm.

All our difficulties however were not behind us as Peter had parked at about 2200m on a rough track over the Pra Gra above Arolla. On our return we found that an official looking barrier had been cemented into place during our absence at the point where the track left the road. Luckily it was only held shut by a grass straw.

The ridge deserves a longer traverse but not from the hut. A bivvy at the south end would give a better start. The way off at the North end is easy enough and route finding is not Critical. From the Central peak a ridge leads off east but the start may be difficult to find. Perhaps in another ten years time.

* An appropriate member of the party, as E.Chadwick was the first to complete a traverse of the ridge in 1897.

** Col Slingsby after W.Cecil Slingsby, first ascenstontst of the Aiguille Sud in 1887 with Topham & Macnamara after his first ascent of Point Barnes (a route I climbed with Peter Elliot, and WCS did with Barnes and Miss B Oliphant) and a few days before his fellow climbers made the first ascent of the East ridge of Mont Blanc de Cheilon, which we climbed at the end of this years meet.



The Ascent Of The Dent Blanche by John Devenport

Since a failed attempt to ascend the Dent Blanche on a previous YRC meet in the Val d'Herens in 1986, in my mind, its size had decreased and its slopes had become less steep, so I was in for a rude awakening as I drove up the valley from Sion to join this years Alpine meet and turned a corner to see the bulky shape of the Dent Blanche totally dominating the end of the valley, looking very high and very, very steep!

In the second week of the meet, a group of seven (Peter Chadwick, Mike Smith, Jonathan Riley, Graham Salmon, David Smith, David Hick and John Devenport) set off from Ferpecle for the long walk up to the Rossier Hut, for this years attempt to ascend the mountain by the South Ridge (Wancflue Ridge). The latter three had a previous attempt foiled in 1986 by a severe storm the night before. In blazing sunshine the party made good progress, passing through Bricola before reaching the extensive moraines at the edge of the Glacier des Manxettes. We were able to keep on rock for most of the way by keeping mainly below the glacier, before the initially steep ascent of the convex ice slope leading to the Rossier Hut. On arrival at the hut, we were very pleasantly surprised to find it had been extended and totally refurbished, beautifully decorated throughout in new pine. Even the female guardian managed a smile this time!

After a mountain of spaghetti, the group retired to bed early knowing that whatever happened, tomorrow would be a long day on a big mountain!

After an early call at 4.30 and a speedy breakfast, we set out into the cool, clear night, with the stars shining brightly above the black shadow of the Dent Blanche loommg above us. As soon as you leave the hut the way is tricky, as you quickly reach a very narrow rock arete, which comes too soon so early in the morning: After that, a steep snow arete leads up to a broad snow col at the Wancfluellicke (3703m), from where stunning early morning views across to the Matterhorn and Monte Rosa group are revealed. Here we turned left and started up the south ridge, crossing familiar territory; the broken rocky ridge, then the traverse across the steep ice slope with its enormous scoop and large cornices, leading up to the the main ridge proper. We were moving well in ropes of four and three, and before long we were at the foot of the Grand Gendarme, turning it on the left via the couloir, which is partly filled with snow (and which caused us so many problems last time with its verglassed sloping slabs!). The ridge was quickly regained and before long we were making more good progress winding our way past the many rocky obstacles along the ridge, some small, some very large. Surprisingly soon we were at the crux of the ridge, which involved an awkward move round an exposed corner followed by vertical wall (10m of II+). I was elated after climbing this, as it was where we'd turned back last time.

By now, cloud had gathered around the ridge, somewhat restricting visibility, but the angle of the ridge started to decrease indicating that we were nearing the summit. Our rope of three met the other rope of four as they appeared out of the mist on their descent from the summit, which they indicated was about twenty minutes away. As we passed, with a smile on his face, David Smith said to me "I think you'll make it this time, John", which was wonderfully encouraging. Surprisingly, about ten minutes later, we were walking carefully along the exposed summit ridge with a crucifix at the end. It was quite a moving moment as the three of us congratulated each other in the swirling mist.

We hung around for about half an hour, taking photographs, hoping that the mist would clear to reveal the surrounding peaks, but it never did. So we set off back down, after taking about five hours for the ascent.

Things went fairly well to begin with. but then we were held up above the Grand Gendarme by other parties queueing/pushing past us inconsiderately and dangerously to use the abseil points. At one point we caught up with the other four in our party. By now the weather was taking a turn for the worse, and before long we were in a severe hailstorm as we descended the ridge. Things were getting decidedly unpleasant as the large hailstones stung our hands and necessitated putting a cagoule on for the first time in the holiday! We went as quickly as possible, though it was taking us ages, but eventually we were crossing the scooped snow slope and then descending the snow arete to the last rocky ridge, made very tricky by the rain which was now falling at the lower altitude. Eventually the welcoming sight of the hut roof appeared out of the mist a short distance below us at about 5.45pm.

By the time we reached the hut, the other four in our party had already set off back down to the valley, and after a quick drink at the hut, we too set off into the inclement weather, in order to get down to

the valley before dark Surprisingly, the weather cleared, and we had a very pleasant walk down in the warm glow of the evening sun. We arrived back at Ferpecle at about 9pm, after a fourteen hour day, very tired but very happy at having reached the summit of the Dent Blanche, and getting down safely.

The Traverse of Mont Blanc de Chellon by John Devenport

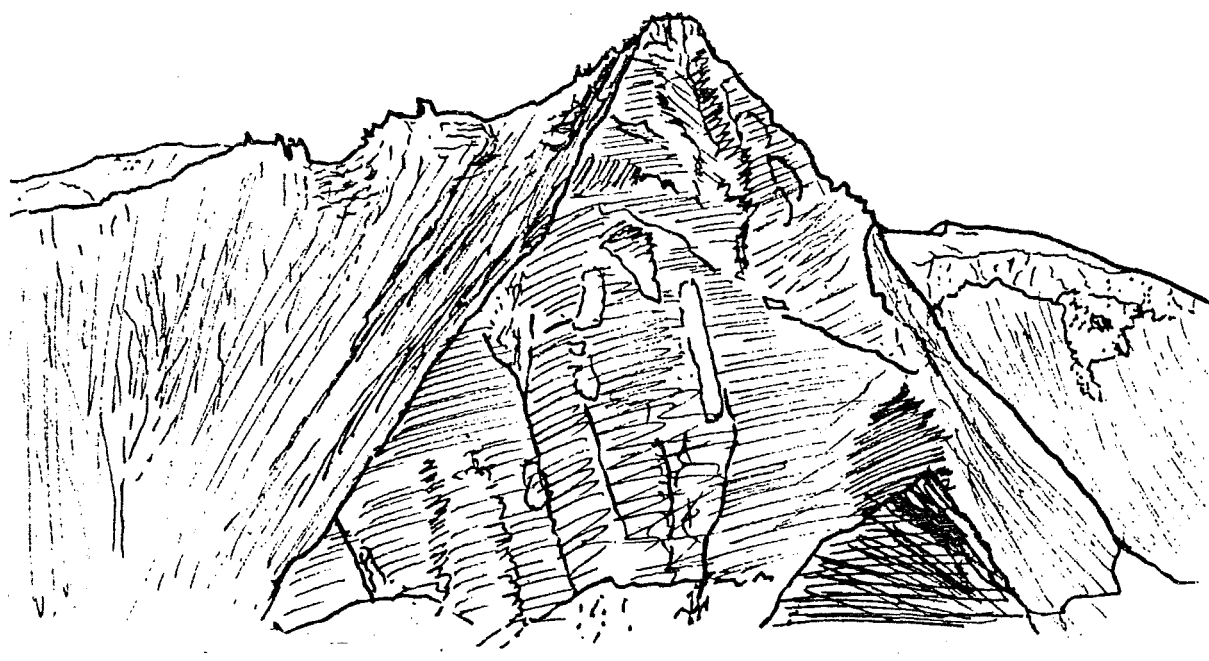
And then there were three! .As members drifted home towards the end of the second week, the camp became emptier each day. However three members, Mike Smith, Graharn Salmon and John Devenport, were determined to tackle another peak in this marvellous area of the Alps. .As we sat in the Dix hut we suddenly realised that we were the same group of three who had successfully ascended Mont Blanc at the end of last years meet!

Our objective was another Mont Blanc; this year it was to be Mont Blanc de Cheilon (3870m), which although substantially lower than Mont Blanc, is an equally impressive mountain. Our aim was to traverse the mountain by the East and West ridges. which is described in the guide book as "one of the best expeditions of its class in the Pennine Alps" , so we were really looking forward to a grand finale to the meet.

From the Dix hut we could get a good impression of the route and also a superb view of the huge triangular North Face of the mountain. What was really disturbing was the total lack of snow or ice from such a spectacular rock face (real evidence of the greenhouse effect and global warming?), and making nonsense of the descrtption of the North Face in the guide book which refers to it as a "huge ice couloir"

After a good night's sleep, we woke up full of enthusiasm for the last big effort. We didn't get called until 5.15 so that it was almost 6am before we'd had breakfast and left. The first part of the trip was actually made in daylight - a most unusual experience - and involved a brisk walk across the dry glacier from the Dix. hut to the left of the mountain to the fairly gentle slopes of the Tsena Relfen glacier leading up to the Col de la Serpentine. It was badly crevassed in places and extremely hollow in one particular place, where there was a huge ice chamber with ice columns and arches. We had one extremely precarious ice bridge to cross, above a very deep crevasse, but all negotiated it successfully after Mike confidently led the way. Soon we were at the broad snow col and in glorious sunshine once again. From there we headed up the steep snow slopes of the eastern flank of Mont Blanc de Cheilon, where something new greeted us - strong wind!

North Face of Mont Blanc de Cheilon (MS)



This didn't last long though, and all in all it was a perfect day among superb mountain scenery - hot and sunny. The next big effort was a steep ascent of the snow slopes to the forepeak of Mont Blanc de Cheilon with its **stunning** corniced ridge from where we could see the broken **rocky** ridge leading to the summit, some way in front of us and a long way above us. After **removing** crampons and a quick photographic break to try to do justice to such wonderful **scenery**, we literally got to grips with the superb rock ridge. After descending a short way, we then climbed on sound and warm rock over the gendarmes and towers forming the crest of the ridge. When we looked at the guide book after returning to the valley we learnt that we should have actually turned these obstacles, but we were **enjoying** ourselves so much that we revelled in the additional challenge.

Eventually we arrived at the foot of the last long, **very** steep rocky ridge leading directly to the summit. Graham led confidently up this marvellous arete, the jigsaw of the warm, fairly **difficult** rock all **fitting** very nicely into place in an extremely exposed location. As we got closer to the summit, we could look across to our right to see several climbers ascending the Jenkins Ridge at the edge of the North Face, also leading directly to the summit. We didn't want the climb to end, such was the enjoyment, but soon we'd arrived at the summit, and were very surprised to find that despite all of the photographic stops and extra obstacles we'd negotiated, we'd made the ascent in guide book time.

Several minutes were spent on the very narrow summit soaking in the tremendous atmosphere in the mountains before **starting** down the easier West ridge. Before long we'd arrived at the upper Icefield leading down to a ridge of **very** broken rock forming an unstable staircase down to the Col de Cheilon. The broken, loose rock was rather tedious, but eventually we arrived at the col. Just below this, I ended up in a hidden crevasse up to my waist, but was able to pull myself out with my ice axe, and thankfully no damage was done. A short, slushy walk across the glacier, and a pleasant walk along the moraine led us back to the hut where we celebrated with a cold drink and some delicious Tarte Aux Pommes (thanks Mike).

Reluctantly, we set off back across the glacier, over the Pas de Chevres and back down in the afternoon heat to Aralia, reflecting on what for me had been one of the most enjoyable and **uplifting** days I have experienced in the mountains.

Report compiled by John Deoenport

*Illustrations by Mike **Smith**, David Smith and **Tim** Smith.*

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