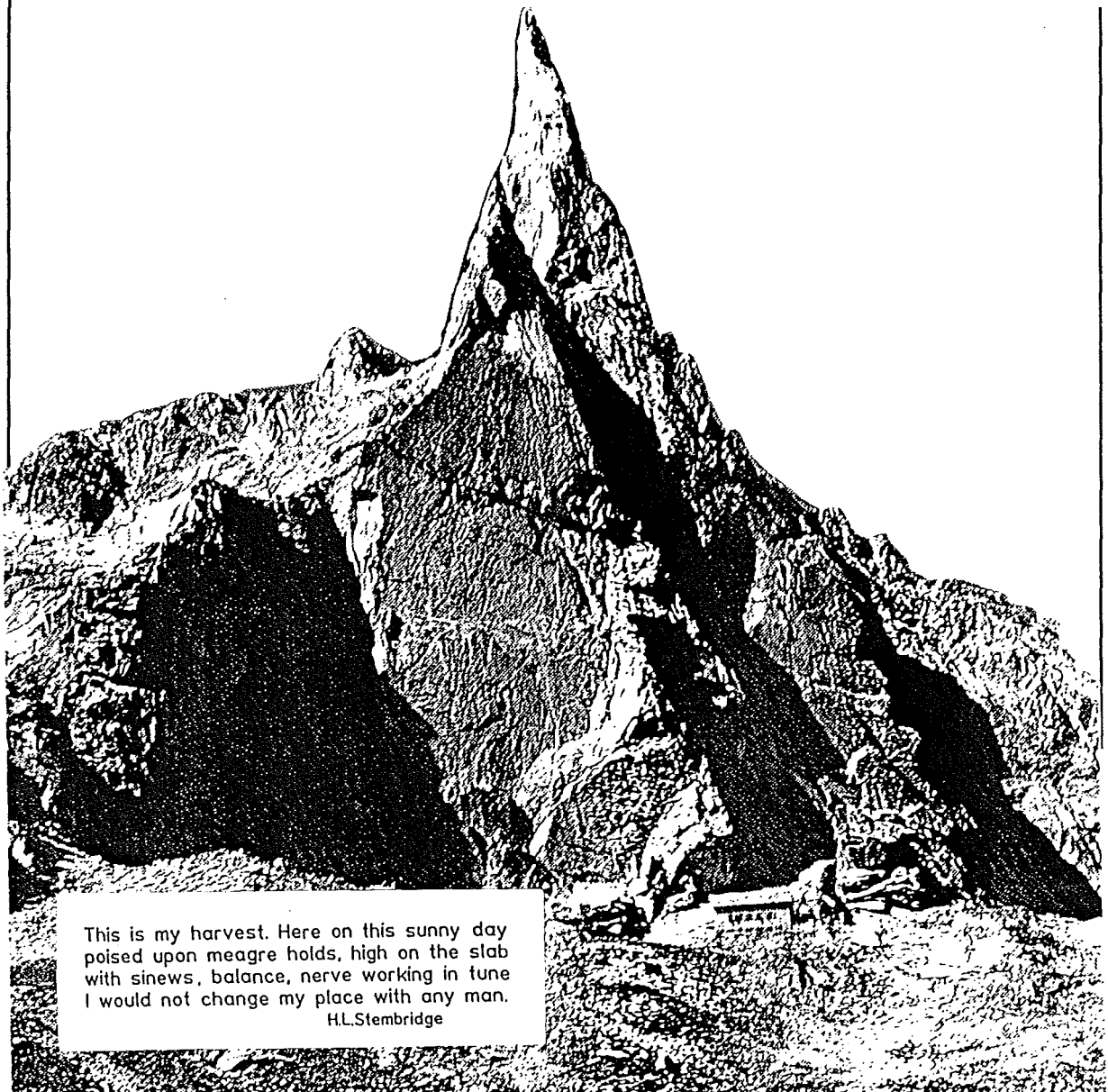


Yorkshire Ramblers' Club



ALPINE MEET Dauphine Alps

July - August 1991



This is my harvest. Here on this sunny day
poised upon meagre holds, high on the slab
with sinews, balance, nerve working in tune
I would not change my place with any man.
H.L. Stembridge

YORKSHIRE RAMBLERS' CLUB - ALPINE MEET 1991

THE MEET

As a change from the better known areas of the Alps, the Dauphine Alps were chosen for the 1991 meet. Numbers were down on previous years due to last minute cancellations for various reasons. On the plus side was the higher percentage of younger people attending, which can only be a good thing. Indeed the success of the meet can be measured best by the way the younger members effectively and competently took over the leadership of expeditions, auguring well for the future of these meets.

THE ATTENDEES

The following fifteen members and guests sampled the delights of this part of the the French Alps:

Michael Ackerley	Graham Salmon
Dennis Barker	Shirley Salmon
Philip Bruce	David Smith
John Devenport	Elsbeth Smith
Paul Glendenning	Bill Todd
Jonathan Riley	Andrew Wilkinson
Arthur Salmon	Frank Wilkinson
Barbara Salmon	

THE LOCATION

Ailfroide lies at the head of the Gyronde (Vallouise) Valley at a height of 1500 metres, This is at the south east of the Ecrlns National Park situated south of Grenoble and near to the ancient walled town of Brlancon. It can hardly be described as a village as it only has four hotels/bars, five small shops, a Bureau des Guides, a few old houses and a disused church. It is in fact a camping village covering about 500 hectares of beautifully wooded country, which can easily absorb the many campers. Alpine flowers and butterflies abound. The fast flowing river is a great attraction for the white water canoeists and rafters. The valley heads north to two glaciers, the Glacier Blanc and the Glacier Nolr, which attract a vast number of people of all ages and sizes. The seemingly impossible high level tracks wend their ways up and across the steep rocky walls of the valley giving the modest walker a real feel for the great mountains and revealing very impressive views of the area.

THE CAMPSITE

Perhaps this was the best site that we have used in recent visits to the Alps and it certainly warranted the club secretary's approbation. The series of small clearings in the woodlands provided a good degree of privacy, with each clearing accommodating six or so tents and cars. Groups such as ours were given larger sites for about twelve tents in the upper part of the valley. We enjoyed a prime site on the northern edge of the village. Another great attraction to many of us were the numerous rock climbs within five or ten minutes walk of the tents. The hundred or so routes at the "ecole d'escalade" have been bolted to give protection, enabling one to climb to a high standard in safety.

The campsite is completely enclosed by the steep sided mountains, which meant that the morning sun did not reach the tents until 10.30 am. The typical "gettngs together" in tent or caravan punctuated the meet, very much like a Spring Bank Holiday Meet in Scotland.

THE WEATHER

Once again we were blessed by remarkably good weather, with warm sunshine and clear blue skies for the most part. One dramatic thunderstorm during the night and a half day of drizzly rain split the meet, the second half being slightly cooler and fresher than the first. The snow conditions in the mountains were the best that anyone could remember. Each dawn at the huts was clear and starry, and during the first week a full moon in the early morning made head torches virtually redundant. A gentle breeze was present at times making the high temperatures extremely pleasant. However ascents to some of the huts in the searing heat of the afternoon sun were decidedly hot. hard work.

MAPS AND GUIDE BOOKS

The most useful map was Cartes IGN 3436ET "Meije and Pelvoux", which covered the whole of the Parc National Des Ecrtns at a scale of 1:25,000. Walking and skiing routes and the refuges were very clearly marked.

The Alpine Club Guide "Ecrms Massif - Selected Climbs", though not giving all of the routes, was more than adequate for our needs.

At the end of the meet, two members invested in the excellent book by Gaston Rebuffat "Le Massif Des Ecrtns - Les 100 Plus Belles Course", published by Denoel (Paris) for 240 FF. The superb photographs and route diagrams give a much clearer impression of the mountains and showed that there were many more excellent routes and mountains in the area, within the capabilities of those attending, just waiting to be attempted on future visits. The only slight drawback with the book is that it is in French! This book forms one of a series covering different parts of the Alps, and should be considered essential reading before visiting the areas.

The Bureau Des Guides in Ailfroide produced a very useful pamphlet guide to the rock climbs around the village.

The Michelin guide 914 "France - Atlas Autoroutier" is much easier to follow than the normal road maps when using the motorways. The "Aires" are all clearly marked and provide caravan sites en route at no charge.

THE COLLET DU RASCROUSET by Dennis Barker

For our first sortie, most of those attending the meet decided to drive round by the rough road from Ailfroide, via Vallouise to Entre les Aygues and from there we would walk back to the campsite over the Collet du Rascrouset. It would be enough to stretch our legs and take the air and give John and Graham a chance to study the southern side of Mont Pelvoux, which they had on the agenda for the next day.

We arrived at Entre les Aygues where the head of the valley is dominated by the forbidding grey rock walls of Les Bans and set off in brilliant sunshine. Only one member of the party

managed to find the recommended path and he was deemed to be lost by the others who digressed along a minor alternative track through the bushes! As we ascended le Rascrouset, we had marvellous views of the Pic de Bonvoisin in the south west.

By 3.00pm the eleven members assembled on the Collet, the sky had clouded over and since we were 1,175 metres higher it was decidedly cooler.

The descent of the Vallon de Clapouse provided some frolics in the snow and a glimpse of grazing chamois. From the Bosse de Clapouse we looked across the valley and studied the likely route up the massive form of Mont Pelvoux, finding it difficult at first to spot the location of the Refuge.

The last leg of the journey continued down through the pines to Ailfroide. At this point I slipped and hurt my hand rather badly. However, it was a pleasant, though in my case not entirely painless introduction to the Parc National des Écrins

MONT PELVOUX (3946m) by Arthur Salmon

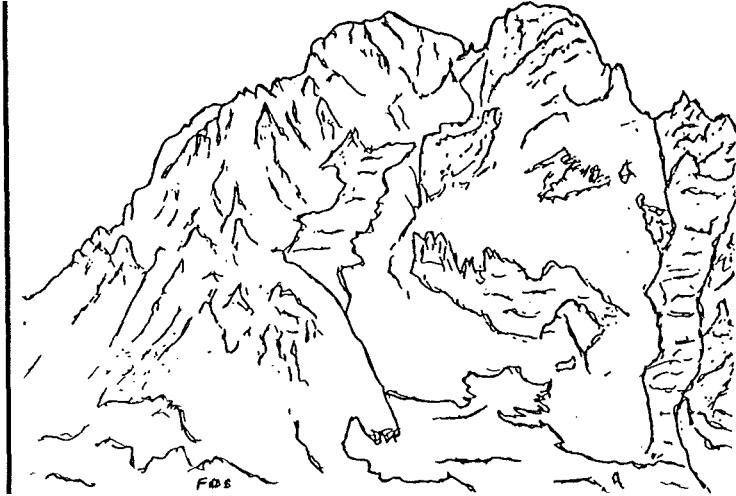
Michael Ackerley, John Devenport, Jonathan Riley, Arthur Salmon, Graham Salmon and David Smith made up the party that ascended the first peak of the Meet.

Following our walk over the Collet du Rascrouset we were all keen to keep up the momentum of the Meet and since on Monday morning the weather seemed set fair, plans were made to go up to the Refuge du Pelvoux with a view to climbing Mont Pelvoux by the Couloir Coolidge route.

Soon after lunch we were ready to set out for the hut and as usual were all weighed down with the assorted impedimenta needed for such a trip. When I said the weather was set fair, this was rather an understatement, in fact it turned out to be a scorcher. However, the guidebook time for the walk to the hut is given as only three-and-a-half hours so we set out without any concern for what lay ahead. Perhaps if we had remembered Whymper's description of the walk to Pelvoux from Ailfroide we wouldn't have been so nonchalant. To quote: "A more cheerless and desolate valley it is scarcely possible to imagine. It contains miles of boulders, debris, stones, sand, and mud; few trees and they are placed so high as to be almost out of sight". Well, this may be an overstatement, but the walk along the valley floor certainly took its toll. For what seems like miles, the path is made up of tennis-ball sized pebbles, which the sun beating upon had brought to a temperature suitable for frying eggs on. It really was a relief eventually to start climbing the steep zig-zags that took us out of this oven to the somewhat cooler slopes that lead to the hut.

The Refuge du Pelvoux is situated at 2704 m. Such is the effect of foreshortening that when, on our walk down from the Collet du Rascrouset, we had picked out the reflections from the roof of the hut we could scarcely imagine how it could be built on such a steep slope as the southern face of Mont Pelvoux. In reality, of course, the hut is ideally situated on a spacious rocky promontory with fine views across and up the valley.

The welcome at the hut was pleasant enough as one of the young attendants wished to practise his English, but we were slightly surprised that we were not allocated a space in the dortoir, but were told this would be done later. The guardian had the novel idea of waiting until after dinner and then calling each party in turn. This seemed to result in total disorganisation and seemed to go on for ever. However, somewhat after 9.0 pm Monsieur Smit (F.D.S.) was eventually called and three persons were allocated a space which would comfortably have taken one. The other three were taken off and allocated places in an otherwise empty dortoir. Thus is the inequity of life.



Mont Pelvoux

Reveille was called at 3.0 am. Breakfast of muesli mixed with powdered milk and warm water was as unappetising as ever. A new variant was slices of French bread and garlic pate. However, after the usual palaver the group assembled outside the hut and prepared for the mad scramble which seems to be the typical departure from an alpine hut. In this case scramble was the right description since within 20 yards of the hut door the route went up a 10 m crag. However above this the track eased off to a more modest slope that took us up about 250 m to where it became necessary to put on crampons to

cross the narrow, but rather steep, Glacier du Clot de l'Homme. After crossing the ice I opted to take off my crampons, which I think paid off since the next kilometre was over gently sloping slabs smoothed off by the receding Glacier du Sialouze. By now it was daylight and although we were just below Les Rochers Rouges we really could not pick out the other PD route which we knew went that way.

Soon we were in the basin of the Glacier du Sialouze and making good time up the neve which was in excellent condition. The Couloir Coolidge climbs from the glacier basin for about 400 m right to the upper snowfield that links the Pointe Durand and Pointe Puiseux. The gradient of the couloir never became excessive and the only real excitement was dodging stones sent down by other parties higher up the couloir as they took to the adjoining rocks for a short distance.

From the head of the couloir a short plod over the Glacier du Pelvoux soon brought us to Pointe Pulseux (3932 m), the highest summit of Mont Pelvoux. This was the point reached by Whymper in 1861 in the mistaken belief that he had made the first ascent. The weather throughout the climb had been perfect and the views from the summit were exceptional. Mont Blanc stood out clearly to the N.E., but even more surprisingly the unmistakable form of the Matterhorn could easily be seen way to the east across the intervening ridges of northern Italy. A very cold wind persuaded us not to linger too long and soon we commenced the descent by the same route as our ascent. In retrospect this was an error since more careful reading of the guidebook would have encouraged us to make the traverse of the mountain and the descent by the Glacier des Violettes directly back to Ailefroide. However, although the snow in the couloir had softened somewhat, it still seemed to be in a relatively safe condition and the descent was made without incident.

On returning to the hut we had a beer or two, relaxed in the sun and ate before starting the walk down to Ailefroide. During this period we were entertained by the antics of an extremely tame marmot which sported itself in the sun on the rocks by the hut door. Inside the hut, by way of an advertisement for Mars Bars, which are on sale, there is a picture of the marmot standing on its hind legs and eating a Mars Bar from someone's hand. The caption above the picture reads, if my French serves me correctly, "Notre Marmotte aime les Mars bars." One member confirmed that this was indeed true by sacrificing one from his emergency rations!

The walk down to Ailefroide proved almost as taxing as the walk up and seemed to take almost as long. However, back at the camp, we were all pleased that the first climb of the Meet had gone so smoothly and that we'd climbed Mont Pelvoux in not too far from guidebook time.

THE AIGUILLE DIBONA by Jonathan Riley

The first time I saw the Aiguille Dibona was on the back of Paul's guide book the night before we set off to the Alps. A magnificent sight, more like a church steeple than a mountain.

Searching through the list of ID and ED routes, I thought that climbing it was merely a dream, until I saw the route called Vole Boell, graded AD. Translating AD (Assez Difficile) into a "real" British climbing grade revealed that it was only severe. From then on it had to be done.

A few days later after some persistent persuasion, I had found three other "vtcttms", that is people silly enough to come with me, namely David Smith, Graham Salmon and John Devenport.

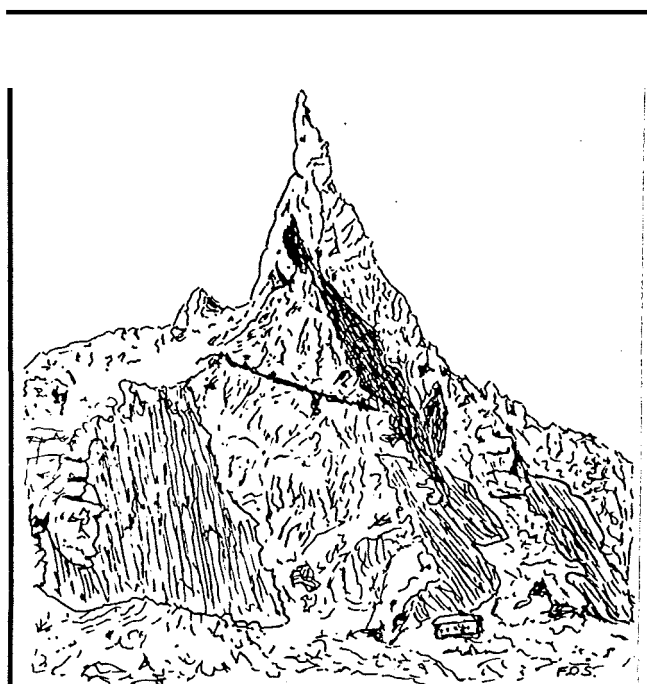
As always the approach to the hut was weighed down with big, overloaded rucksacks. We toiled upwards in the heat. The Dibona was hidden in mist, only tempting us with glimpses of her razor sharp summit.

The Refuge Soreiller was practically empty, the omelette was enjoyed by nearly all and a good night's sleep with no alpine start was sheer luxury. Looking out of the hut at 7am, expecting to find mist only to find that the sun was out and the sky was bright blue, left us with mixed feelings of excitement, concern and uncertainty. What had the Dibona in store for us?

We left the hut and after half an hour of scrambling over rocks and scree exchanged our big boots for rock boots at the foot of the east face. Leading off up the first corner I was shaking, though the climbing was easy. Only then did I understand how serious the mountain was. A first attempt at a real pitched alpine rock climb, warm rock, rough granite and clear blue skies, perfect.

I traversed leftwards delicately under an overhang. Round the corner I cast my eyes onto the south face to where the exposure was intense. Sweeping granite faces terminated at the hut a long way down, while all around jagged alpine summits looked on to us.

I perched on a huge flake, pondering if it was attached or not. As David climbed up to the flake, an alpine guide and his clients glided effortlessly past up an even



Aiguille Dibona

harder route. I attempted a confident smile; somehow I don't think the guide was convinced!

David did not seem worried at all; he never is. We couldn't see Graham and John, but continued by a wide ledge to the foot of a cold enclosed corner that offered respite from the exposure and provided easy climbing to a delicate and exposed traverse over a slab to another small chimney. Once up this we sat on the arete watching the guide and his clients negotiate the next pitch. From what I could make out this was where the real climbing started. I was right!

In a fantastically exposed position I climbed up shallow vertical finger cracks to a notch in an overhang. A bold bridging move over thin air led to a large ledge and a short rest. Thank God!

Graham and John arrived on the arete, closely followed by yet another guide and his clients. As we set about hauling our vast rucksacks up the pitch, the guide was heard to say "I just haven't time to wait" and with that he led up the pitch and emerged at the top. Grinning, he tapped his head and remarked about the stupidity of the English. This time I had to agree with him; the rucksacks were ridiculously large and heavy! David followed underneath the guide and did his bridging move facing outwards; it must be the classic method. He was followed by Graham who was impressed and John who was relieved!

We sorted the ropes and Graham set off on the next pitch. He was just above us when he exclaimed "It's delicate and there is a hole!". He was right, it was another bridging move from a friction foothold into a vertical vertical crack, again over thin air and with a distinct lack of handholds! (Nice lead Graham!) This led to a piece of artificial aid, a short rope sling used as an initial foothold to gain more vertical cracks on an apparently featureless slab which led to easier pitches and finally the summit at a comparatively modest 3130m.

All four of us were relieved and jubilant to be there at last. We drank, ate, posed for heroic photos and then abseiled for 150 feet down the North ridge to the Breche Gunneng to get off the top. We met our rescue party on the way down, who were under the impression that we must be having an epic because we had not exactly done it in guide book time. All was well but we were pleased to see them nevertheless.

My walk back down to the valley was spent thinking over the day, a climb that had tested nerve and concentration, but ended in triumph and jubilation, surely the essence of 'ol'tmbmg.

A truly beautiful mountain!

THE TETE DU ROUGET (3419M) by Paul Glendenning

Whilst David, John, Jon and Graham went to tackle the Aiguille Dibona, Arthur, Michael, Frank and Paul departed from the Soreiller Hut with the aim of climbing the Tete du Rouget (3419m) by the north ridge.

Once the base of the mountain was reached, the party started up a wide snow gully and then took to the rock on the left. As climbing continued, it became apparent that the rock was very loose and that the "Facile" grade given in the guide book may have been a slight understatement! Route finding provided some difficulty as a breche in the ridge was aimed for, from which the summit was to be attained.

On reaching the breche, a magnificent view of the valley beyond was obtained. However, some exploratory climbing by Arthur showed that a breche further to the right should in fact have been the objective. The climb had taken considerably longer than expected due to the difficulties encountered and descent now seemed essential if the other party was to be met at the hut in time for the long journey back to Ailfroide.

Reluctantly, the Tete du Rouget party descended to reach the hut at 3pm. The Dibona party had not yet returned and the rendezvous was finally made at 5.30pm. The intervening time was spent drinking well earned bottles of beer and hot chocolate. Overall, it was an entertaining climb with a good view, even though the summit had not been attained on this occasion.

THE TETE DE LA DRAYE by Bill Todd

It is truly said that all expeditions climb on the backs of their predecessors. That certainly applies to the Tete de la Draye, where Frank Wilkinson tackled this 2077m spur to the east of Ailfroide head-on by a scramble reminiscent of the hardest part of Jack's Rake.

The path to the Tete is well signposted from the bridge at the top end of the village, and it is only after you have passed under the crags which accommodate the ecole d'escalade that the doubt begins. The path divides into three and it is the least significant of these that you want. When I went on 24 July there were people instructing climbing and I asked one of them which was the correct way. He "thought" it was the left hand one of the three. So there are still rock gymnasts in the Dauphine!

One of the most exhilarating things about mountain walking is that you don't have to get all that high before you start feeling on top of the world. The steep path led up and then back across the top of the climbing crags with wonderful views across to the Vallon de Clapouse, which we had come down the previous Sunday and up the valley to the Glacier Blanc and the Agneaux Massif. Before long you come to a stream where a French family were lunching. I went past them then back on myself to the right, through the woods again until open country was reached on the spur.

According to the map, this is the Tete, Here you get better views of Clapouse, down the valley to Valloutse and a better perspective of the Pelvoux massif. But is it actually the Tete? Collomb's book says "after the stream take a track twisting up wooded slopes to open ground and the rounded rock ridge with a mound marking the viewpoint". Does he mean you have to climb the ridge until you find a mound? There are three cairns, but surely he would have used that word if that was what he meant.

In the event on the first foray, I climbed two or three hundred feet above the clearing to try to do the job properly. A friendly Frenchman on his way down told me that the summit was 200m above me. Where the ridge levelled out a bit I chatted with another affable type then came down.

The following Sunday, Barbara and Philip accompanied me on another trip. This time we had lunch by the stream and got quite a bit further up the ridge than my previous high point. Barbara's ambition to get to the proper top overcame my natural sloth and we got up the ridge partly by enjoyable scrambling until we came to the bottom of a considerable rock wall going up to the Cime du Paillon. Philip wanted to climb this but it was too late in the day. I would like to think that we reached the point 2264m marked on the map.

Altogether a worthwhile place to spend time on. Many tanks to Frank who showed the way and to Barbara and Philip who accompanied me.

THE BARRE DES ECRINS (4102m) by John Devenport

It was more like Blackpool than Blackpool! This thought entered my head as the party of seven set off from the car park at Pre de Madame Carle. I have never seen so many people walking in the mountains. and there was no chance of getting lost on the path up towards the Glacier Blanc; it was just a case of following the brightly attired queue of people up the gently zig-zagging path in the intense heat of the day. The impressive glacier snout, with its blue ice disgorging a violent torrent of meltwater, was obviously the destination for many of the trippers and the human chain thinned out somewhat as we ascended the slabby track towards the Refuge Glacier Blanc. Above the refuge the crowds thinned out even more as the track wound its way up along a moraine crest before dropping down with the glacier itself.

A cool wind chilled our sunburnt bodies so a brief stop was made at the end of the moraine to don extra clothes before setting off on the couple of miles trek along the edge of the glacier towards the Refuge des Ecrins. We didn't rope up but there were a few huge crevasses to negotiate. although the bridges seemed sound. It was somewhat surprising to note that nobody else roped up either!

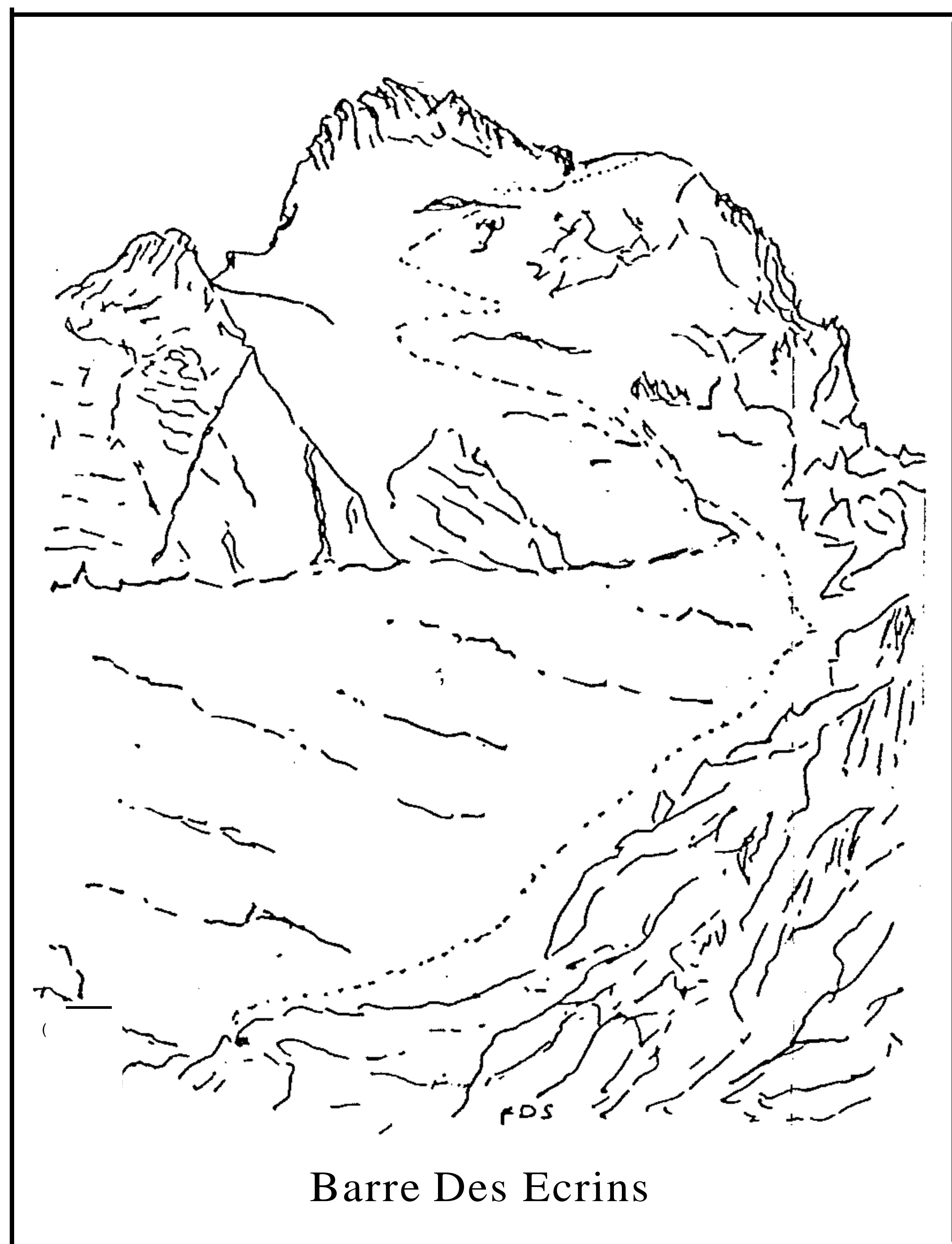
A final scramble up slabs at the side of glacier led us up to the Refuge des Ecrins, located on a rock promontory with a superb vantage point for examining the north face of the Barre des Écrins, our intended mountain for tomorrow. The hut became more and more crowded during the evening. and after a hearty hut meal and a last look of the warm evening glow over the mountains, we retired to the uncomfortably crowded dormitories. The bed space

allocated per person was such that it was impossible to stretch out or turn over without disturbing the person(s) next to you, and its amazing how uncomfortable it is trying to sleep in a straight posture!

After not much sleep, we were woken by the guardian at about 3.30am. and after breakfast, the seven of us descended onto the crisp snow on the glacier in an absolutely brilliant full moon that cast deep shadows and rendered head torches redundant.

For the first hour or so it was just a case of plodding up the almost flat glacier towards the north face of the Barre, following numerous other parties that had departed before us. As we approached the foot of the face, the first pink rays of the sun illuminated beautifully the spectacular seracs and crevasses on the face.

From then on it was a steep plod upwards, following the well worn trail



Barre Des Ecrins

of numerous feet before us. The track initially crossed an avalanche path beneath some huge seracs, then worked left towards the middle of the face. Despite there being some huge crevasses on the face, the track avoided nearly all of them, which meant that we could make good progress at a slow but steady pace. Even crossing a bergschrund (sorry, "rtmaye" - we're in France!) was disappointingly easy and uneventful!

Before long the track levelled out and traversed back across the face under the summit ridge of the Barre towards the Breche Lory, the distinct col between the western end of the summit ridge of the Barre and the rounded Dôme de Netge des Écrins. At this point we stopped for a short rest as we could see the summit of the Barre seemingly only a short distance away. I noticed that virtually all of the other parties were not ascending the Barre but making do with the rounded summit of the Dôme de Neige des Écrins, only a few metres away. I couldn't understand why they all didn't continue up the Barre; after all it is the highest summit in the area. I was about to find out!

From the breche I set off up a short chimney that looked as if it led to easy ground along the ridge. I soon realised that we were very short on gear for protection as I had to improvise belays with slings and real chockstones to bring Arthur and Graham up to my stance. We also soon realised that the ground didn't become any easier and in fact the long summit ridge soon became an uncomfortably awkward knife edge arete, what looked like a fairly level ridge from below now revealed itself as having several large pinnacles and gendarmes, which dramatically slowed our progress.

We were all still climbing in crampons but by now the snow and ice was behind us, so we stopped to remove them. At this point I was shocked to discover that both of the soles of my plastic boots were parting company with the uppers, with the heels flapping about limply! The crampons and the cords around my gaiters had literally been holding the boots. I don't think I have ever been so scared in the mountains as I was at that moment. All sort of thoughts flashed through my mind. Here I was perched on a very exposed knife edge arete at over 4000m with the prospect of having to descend with some decidedly dodgy footwear. At that moment I wanted to be somewhere else, safe and secure. I really didn't know what the next few hours had in store. I continued climbing in crampons, which helped hold the boots together, but the screeching of metal on rock was driving Arthur and several French guides crazy, so I stopped again to take them off.

With the help of an old bootlace and the drawcord out of Graham's cagoule (thanks Graham!), I managed to lash together my boots and soles so that hopefully they wouldn't deteriorate further. The other four had passed us by now and were almost on the summit some way ahead. Progress along the delicate but beautiful ridge was slow, but soon we joined the others basking in brilliant sunshine on the summit. Only then did they realise the extent of the problem I was having! I must admit that my mind was not on the extensive view from the top, but trying to figure out the safest way of getting out of this tricky situation.

The other rope of four led the way back down the ridge which is sustained in difficulty along its entire length, and although it is never excessively difficult, it did require care and three (or four) points of contact at virtually all times! It struck me that it was probably more difficult than the south ridge up the Dent Blanche that we'd ascended the previous year. The others had very kindly left their rope at the abseil point on the short vertical wall above the Breche Lory. A delicate traverse across an exposed ledge followed by an abseil and we were back down to join them on the snowy col.

By now we were parched by the blazing sunshine, which had started to turn the crisp snow of the morning into dangerously balling slush! We started descending the glacier in crampons and the other group soon got well ahead. The three of us removed our crampons

but even then it was slow progress down the steep face. I could also feel the cold of melted snow seeping into my boots - I just hoped that they would hold out until we got to the bottom.

At that point a thought came into my head that really put my footwear situation into its true perspective. I remembered some news report pictures that had recently been on the television depicting the Kurdish refugees fleeing through snow and mud covered mountains towards the Turkish border *in their barejeet*, and then realised that compared to them I was very fortunate to have such good footwear!

I must admit to being very relieved to reach the flat glacier at the foot of the north face! We had planned to stop at the Refuge des Ecrins for a second night to climb another peak next day, but I decided to return to the valley as I was not wanting to risk anything in my disintegrating boots. When we arrived back at the hut, I was somewhat surprised to find that the rest of the party had decided to descend as well. I think everybody needed a good rest after what had been a very tiring but very memorable day on a beautiful mountain. with a very definite sting in its tail

We had all climbed our first Alpine "North Face", but I couldn't help feeling that there can't be many other north faces in the alps that are subject to blazing sunshine all day!!

LOW LEVEL ROCK CLIMBING AROUND AILFROIDE **by Graham Salmon**

For those "off" days or when the elements were against mountaineering on the high peaks, the abundant steep rock walls of the valley provided plenty of amusement and was an ideal practice ground. The rock was all good solid granite forming both walls and slabs with many climbs of around one hundred feet. A number of harder and longer routes were also available (although none were attempted), and many of these would require a whole day to complete. An example of this is the "Fissure d'Ailfroide", a prominent feature splitting an enormous buttress at the south end of the village, which was a constant source of temptation.

Quite a few visits were made to a couple of the smaller climbing areas, particularly the "Ecole d'Escalade" situated next to the camping area. A guide booklet for all of these routes was produced and sold by the local Bureau des Guides. All of the routes have numbers neatly and discretely painted on the rock at their starts, which duly correspond to the route description listed in the guide. hence route finding was not a problem. In typical French style, a large number of the routes were up blank, featureless faces and almost all were amply bolted, therefore requiring a reasonable number of extenders. However, just to keep you interested. on the occasional route, the bolts stopped half way up the climb, leaving you wishing you had brought your conventional protection devices that were left in your rucksack at the bottom of the climb!

Numerous people from our group attempted many climbs on these outcrops, a few of them climbing, leading or abseiling for their first time, others pushing themselves that bit further, safe in the knowledge that bolts don't fall out easily! Some of the grading was rather dubious at times, but in general the French technical grades are about one grade higher than ours, e.g. English 4c is equivalent to a French Sa.

TWO SIXTEEN YEAR OLDS AND THE PIC DU GLACIER D'ARSINE **by Frank WUkinson**

My resolve to attend an Alpine meet after 3 years absence led to me taking Andrew, my youngest at 16, and his friend Philip. We had kit for both to try the Alpine experience at least modestly and the idea had been accepted. but with no great enthusiasm. A 700 mile drive across France to continuous taped "music" had left me in no doubt that there was to be a conflict of interests.

The boys joined the warm-up day to the Collet du Rascrouset and performed well, but when the 4000 feet and 6 hours were not played down but emphasised as easy compared to true Alpine days (often true). they seemed to lose interest totally. I surrendered. opted out of the first hut trip and Mont Pelvoux, but on discovering that huts had to be booked days in advance I committed myself to the Ecrtns trip without the boys and before that, went to the Soreiller hut leaving the boys with one night of freedom on their own. On my return, reports on them were excellent and I began seeding the idea of a trip to the Glacier Blanc hut followed perhaps by a mountain, and so it came to pass.

On the way up to the Ecrins hut we booked sufficient places at the Glacier Blanc hut for the last Thursday night. and even though the Ecrlns trip was cut short by one day we stuck to this schedule.

Bill, Dents. Paul and Jonathan departed on the Thursday morning and Barbara, who had been planning to join us. had to drop out with a stomach upset. This left the boys and myself, with Arthur, Graham, David, John and Mike for the trip.

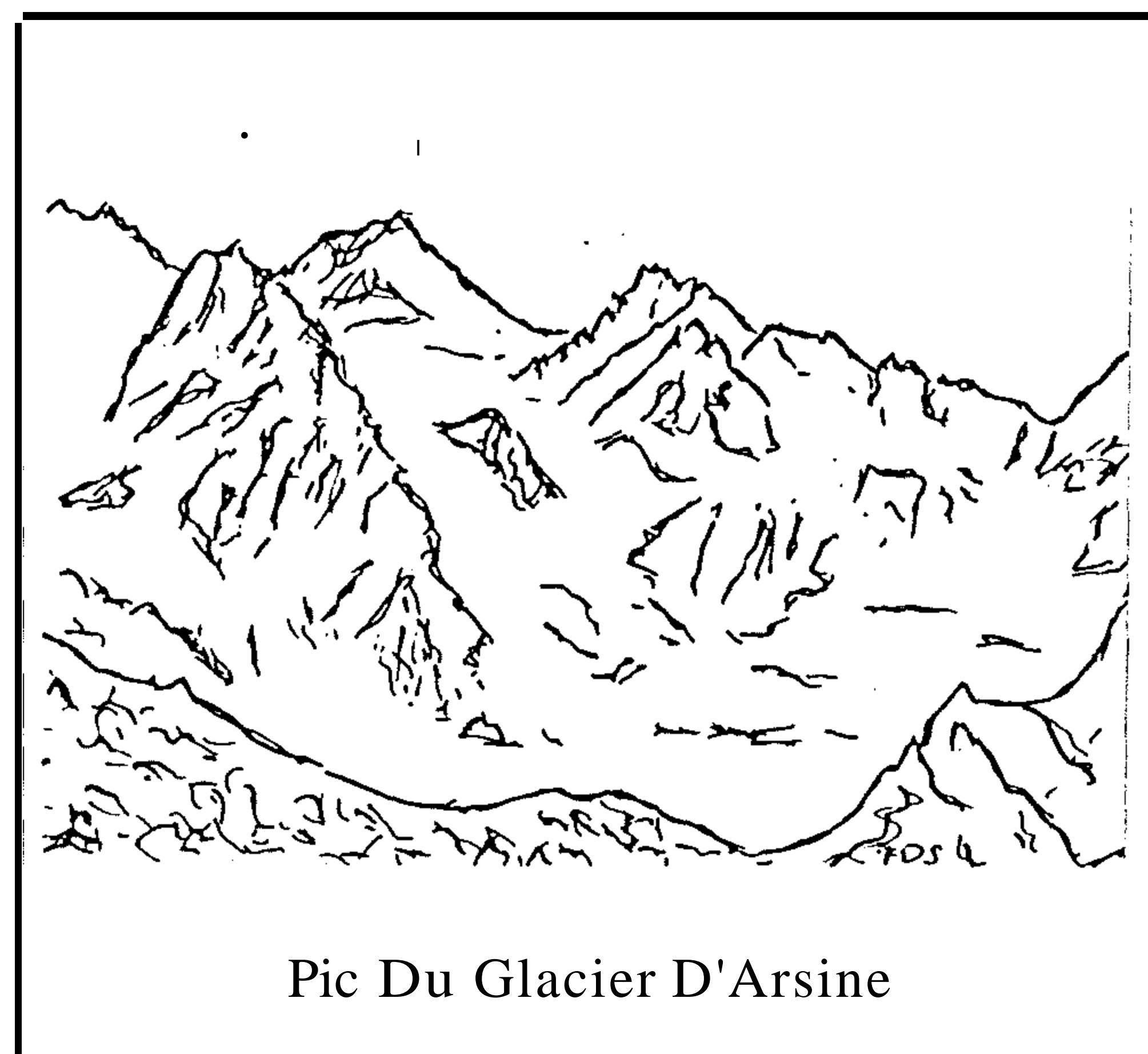
The walk up to the Glacier Blanc hut is a very popular tourist outing. The car park at the Pre de Madame Carle resembles a supermarket car park at the weekend, and one is lucky to cover 50 yards of the path without passing several people coming the other way. It was a perfect day and therefore hot, yet again.

The climb, unlike some hut climbs which present an unchanging view, climbs out of the glacial valley left by the retreating Glacier Noir into the hanging valley of the Glacier Blanc over the slabs responsible. across the basin at the glacier snout, across the river emerging from the tunnel in the snout, and up over more slabs with fixed ropes or iron staircases to another hanging valley (this time bare of glacier) from which the hut can be seen on its promontory of rock.

The hut is very touristy and the boot room inadequate. There wasn't a spare inch of floor or wall as the hut was full. French hut guardians do not cook climbers own food as the Swiss will, but provide a room. Philip chose to economise by carrying up a stove etc. but was amazed and somewhat cowed by the prison like concrete room with window bars. no glass, cold gale and only a sink and stone benches. The rest of us dined in luxury on rabbit plus the extras of soup. apples, cheese etc.

The evening views were perfect and promised a good day for the morrow.

Reveille was at 5 am although some



Pic Du Glacier D'Arsine

experienced the problem of finding the outside facilities in the middle of the night. Breakfast is also somewhat eerie, with slow moving, bleary eyed figures purposefully getting ready for off.

John woke unwell and decided to descend, so a secondary party for the Montagne des Agneaux was cancelled and we all set off for the Pic du Glacier d'Arsine. The guide book described it as the easiest peak in the valley. We plodded up the now familiar path towards the Ecrins hut, left it a little early as it was to prove, to cross slabs and rock to reach moderately steep hard neves (permanent snow fields) which led to the summit rocks. There was no need for crampons or rope but perhaps we should have given the boys the experience. We did use ice axes although a slip without one would only have meant a longish snow slide. It was commented that we could almost have been crossing a snow covered Hollowstones on a sunny February day heading for Mickledore. We made the summit by 9 am, a 3 hour ascent in book time and then spent some time admiring and photographing the view. There was the Pelvoux and the Ecrins. Somewhat bigger, but certainly not daunting, and in the distance to the north the massive bulk of Mont Blanc. The descent was incident free, we collected our belongings from the hut and reached the valley by early afternoon.

Only then did the boys start saying, "We could have done the Ecrins, and must come again to show you we could!"

THE VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDE by John Devenport

After two weeks on the meet at Ailfroide, I was fortunate to have another week walking and skiing in the Dauphine Alps, but in a different part of this large mountainous area. Setting off from Ailfroide on the Sunday morning, I got caught up in a huge time trial cycle race, with several thousand keen cyclists proceeding at various speeds, strung out along the road between Briançon and the Col du Lauteret, and then up to the Col du Galibier.

I found that it was possible to ski on the Glacier de la Girose on the western flank of La Meije, so set off very early one morning to Les Deux Alpes to hire skis and boots and buy a lift pass for the day. The telepherique whisked myself and several thousand Italians up to the gently sloping Glacier at about 3,500m, which was wonderfully icy at Barn, but by lunchtime had turned to slush, with water running down the pistes! It's the first time I've been water skiing!

The following day, I drove round to La Berarde, located at the far end of the Vallee du Veneon. As the crow flies it is only about eight or nine miles to the west of Ailfroide, but by car, it was probably about ninety miles! The village is situated at the junction of three valleys and is an excellent base for exploring the area. The facilities within the village are limited to say the least, with only about four cafe restaurants and a solitary tiny general store that can't be more than ten feet square! My advice to anybody going there is to take all of your supplies with you! Several places in the village provide dormitory accommodation, including the CAF Centre. The campsite on the western edge of the village is very well run and has excellent facilities, although it should be noted that it is unlikely that you could get a caravan up the tortuous narrow and exposed road up the upper part of the valley towards La Berarde. Like Ailfroide, there were several "ecole d'escalade" located around the village. Unlike Ailfroide, there were far fewer people around, although there signs in the village indicating that it was compulsory to reserve places in advance at some of the busier refuges.

While I was in the La Berade area the weather was very changeable, with thick low cloud appearing and disappearing very quickly, and rain on one day. Despite this the temperature remained hot for most of the time.

The walks up to the huts in the area were generally very pleasant. A walk up the valley to the north of the village led to the Refuge du Chatelleret, situated on a ridge bounded by some very impressive rock peaks and ridges that offered lots of possibilities for future trips. Dominating the view at the end of the valley above the hut was the south face of La Meije, with its huge rock walls and towers providing a stunning backdrop. I gazed for hours at the mountain trying to pick out the route up this awesome mountain from the Refuge du Promontoire, located part way up the Promontoire ridge.

On the walk up the valley to the south of La Berade, I had to put on my Gore-tex jacket for the first time as heavy rain fell during the walk up to the Refuge du Pilatte, located on a rocky promontory above the very crevassed glacier beneath the impressive north face of Les Bans. Some delicious potage and tarte de maison at the hut set me up well for the descent back to the village.

On my last full day in the area, I had a very gentle walk up to the Refuge du Lavey, located a few miles back down the main valley, and then along a side valley to the south. This Refuge was actually quite low down, but would provide an excellent base for some of the lesser known peaks in the area, although it did look as though access to these peaks would require a long walk in.

To summarise, this was another excellent area for basing a mountaineering trip to the Dauphine Alps, and there were far fewer people than at Ailfroide. The walks I undertook confirmed that there are many walking and mountaineering possibilities within the capabilities of those attending Alpine meets, and La Berade should be seriously considered as a possible future venue.

Compiled by JCD

Drawings By FDS

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