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Alps & Dolomites 2018



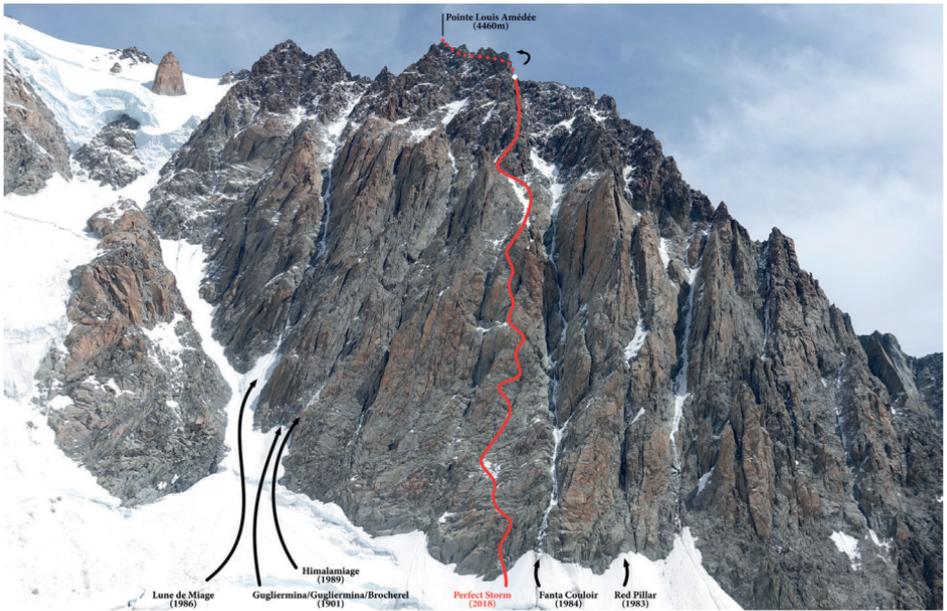
Micha Rinn starting up the upper schist prow of *Perfect Storm*.
(Simon Richardson)

As the years pass and climate change takes an increasing toll on the mountains of the Alps, there are fewer truly significant new routes to report outside the winter season. Are the Alps worked out when it comes to major lines? Certainly not: in the summary below we find the first ascent

of a completely virgin face on a major 4,000m peak. We also find new routes on some of the most popular (and famous) peaks in the chain. This report attempts to give a snapshot of achievements in 2018, representative of the current activity in modern Alpine climbing. We start with the Mecca, the Mont Blanc range, and then progress eastward.

Looking for aesthetic new lines in the Mont Blanc massif? Go remote. There can be fewer places more remote in this range than the Miage face of **Mont Blanc** (4808m), high above the Mont Blanc glacier and approached from the Quintino Sella hut. Arguably the most prominent feature is the Red Pillar leading to the Brouillard ridge a little distance below Picco Luigi Amedeo (4460m). This was climbed by the legendary Giancarlo Grassi, with Jean-Noel Roche, in July 1983 (650m to the ridge, D+/TD-, V-). During this ascent Grassi noticed a narrow hidden ice couloir to the left (north) of the pillar, and returned in April 1984 to climb it with Enrico Tessera (650m, TD+, 90°). However, it is not clear if either climb continued to the summit of Luigi Amedeo. Immediately left of this couloir another pillar rises to the Brouillard ridge. This remained untouched until August, when over two days Micha Rinn (Germany) and Simon Richardson (UK) climbed a zigzag line up ramps and corners on the right side of the pillar (pitch grades from 4 to 6a+) to the point at around two-thirds height where the rock on the face transitions to black schist. The pair climbed this surprisingly solid and steep schist for six pitches to a tower, where they bivouacked. Next day they made a rappel and climbed an overhanging corner (5c) to easier ground, which led in 100m to the top of Picco Luigi Amedeo. It had now begun to snow, and the pair continued up the Brouillard ridge and over the summit in a ferocious storm, navigating in a white out to the Vallot hut amidst avalanching slopes. Both climbers felt this was the worst weather they had ever experienced in the Alps. They spent two nights in the hut, then in less than perfect weather traversed over the Aiguille de Bionnassay to the Durier hut, passed the night there, and continued next day over the Domes de Miage to the Tré-la-Tête hut. On the final day they descended to Les Contamines and returned through the tunnel to collect their car left in the Val Veni. The 700m new route to Picco Luigi Amedeo has been named *Perfect Storm* (ED1, 6a+) and is probably the first new route on this part of the Miage face since 1989.

Although there were no outstanding first ascents by female alpinists, the young Italian Federica Mingolla continues to establish hard routes in the high mountains. The 24-year old from Torino paired with Gabriele Carrara to put up a new line, *L'Isola Che Non C'è* (Neverland) on the east face of the **Aiguille Croux** (3256m), on the Italian side of Mont Blanc not far from the Monzino hut. The pair spent five days in early September working the route, ground up, in as clean a style as they felt possible: bolted belays, very few protection bolts, a handful of pegs, and the majority of the protection from small Friends. At first they returned to the Monzino hut each night, until they reached the top of pitch seven, where a quasi-horizontal 6a+ traverse leads right for 40m to a corner. From this point retreat down the route



A photodiagram of *Perfect Storm*. (Simon Richardson)

becomes highly problematic, if not impossible, and the two spent a night on the wall before reaching the summit. They came back on 12 September climbing the route all free at 7b+, 7a obl. Repeat ascensionists will need to be confident at the grade, as the climbing is often run out. While pitch seven provides the technical crux, the twelfth and last pitch follows a 7b crack through an exposed overhanging headwall high above the chaotic Frêne glacier. This ascent provides a good example of accomplished sport climbers transitioning their skills to the high mountains, and Mingolla seems to be at the forefront of female activity.

On 12 June, Max Bonniot, Pierre Labbre, and Manu Romain (France) solved a longstanding problem: the first free ascent of *Groucho Marx* (700m, ED3, 6b, A3, now 7b) on the east face of the **Grandes Jorasses** (4208m). The three climbed the 400m central section, which is a more or less vertical rock wall where the major difficulties are located, in nine pitches.

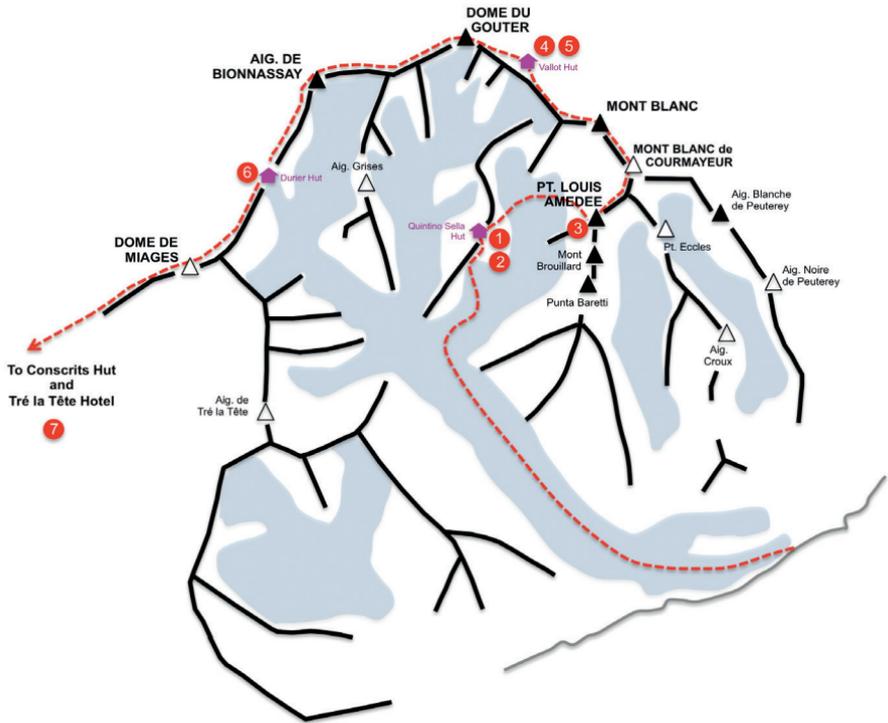
Groucho Marx follows the prominent central dièdre slanting left to a large roof, and until 2006 and the birth of *Little Big Men* (Batoux-Daudet, 2006: 700m, ED4, A3, 6a, M6) was the only route to breach the central rock wall. The line was certainly on the radar of French icon Jean-Marc Boivin in 1981, when he and François Diaferia climbed to the Great Terrace below the steep section of the face, whereupon they realized the dièdre was a much bigger undertaking than they had anticipated. They traversed right and climbed a new line close to the right edge of the wall. Two young guides and brothers from Rome, Cristiano and Fabio Delisi finally climbed the route on 13-15 August 1983. Above the Great Terrace

they climbed 11 pitches up to 6b and A3 (copperheads) on excellent granite to reach the mixed ground leading to the upper Tronchey, which they followed to the top. This was by far their most significant route in the Alps. Fabio gave up climbing and became a travel agent in Kuala Lumpur, while Cristiano, who had led most of the hard pitches on the route, continued his guiding career and was the founder of a principal Italian trekking agency. He sadly died of cancer in 2005. In March 2012 Sébastien Bohin, Dimitry Munoz and Sébastien Ratel, made the first winter ascent, and later Ratel, noting that it might go free, returned with Max Bonniot. The dièdre was wet, so instead the two created a new route to the right at 7b. Not surprisingly, on *Groucho Marx* it was pitch three, the A3 roof that provided the 7b free crux, but there is a pitch of 7a high on the route.

Whilst it might have been climbed before, until 2018 the south-west ridge of the popular **Tour Noir** (3837m) in the Argentière glacier basin did not appear to have a recorded ascent. A more detailed inspection reveals a possible reason: the rock on the lower section of the ridge is steep and unstable. This section can be avoided on the left by a ramp on the south-west face, but until recently this ramp has been threatened by a large serac barrier. Climate change has largely eliminated the serac and the entry pitches are now safe. On August 5, Micha Rinn (Germany) and Simon Richardson (UK) made the 400m ascent, joining the route up the south-east flank at 3,760m, and finishing up the exposed but excellent rock of the south ridge integral. The route was graded AD (IV+), is objectively safe, but best climbed early in the season when snow and ice bind the loose terrain together.

In 1983 the Valtournenche guides Marco Barmasse and Walter Cazzanelli climbed the *South Face Direttissima* (ED1) on the **Matterhorn**. The first solo ascent was made in 2007 by Hervé Barmasse, Marco's son and also a Valtournenche guide. Seven years before his solo ascent, Hervé had put up *Per Nio* with Patrick Poletto, a difficult rock route that climbs the 'Scudo', the shield of rock below Pic Tyndall and one of the steepest sections of the south face of the mountain. In September it was the turn of 28-year-old François Cazzanelli, a Cervinia guide and son of Walter, to make his own mark on the Matterhorn. With Marco Farina, Emrik Favre, Roberto Ferraris and Francesco Ratti, he completed *Diretta allo Scudo*, a 350m climb that finishes at the top of the shield, passing through the steepest and most difficult section via complex route finding. This had been a prolonged effort: Cazzanelli had made an initial attempt in 2012, and a further five before completing the route in 2018. Well, not quite completing. Several of the top pitches used aid and the team want to return to free climb the route, which they estimate will be 7a/7a+, 6b+ obl. Bolts were placed for protection and belays, though trad gear used where possible.

In the Bernese Oberland Dani Arnold and Stephen Ruoss (Switzerland) made the first ascent of the north-east face of the **Gross Grünhorn** (4044m). This face, which rises from the upper Fiescher glacier, features in Dumler and Burkhardt's classic coffee-table book, *The High Mountains of the Alps*. Yet it may be the only face on a major 4,000m peak to have remained



Topo of west face of Pointe Louis Amédée showing line of *Perfect Storm*.
(Micha Rinn)

completely unclimbed until 2018. In 1967 Swiss guidebook writer and pioneer Christoph Blum climbed the left bounding ridge, the *East Pillar*, at D/TD, a classic outing on sound granite (at V-); it was Blum that pointed Arnold towards a potential first ascent. The two Swiss climbed the 600m face on 12 May from the Finsteraarhorn hut, negotiating steep snowy mixed ground up to M7 and steeper pure rock (in rock shoes) at 6b+. They used trad gear, leaving three pitons in place, on the individual pitches, but bolted all the belays for a convenient rappel descent.

On 11 January, Luka Lindič (Slovenia) and Ines Papert (Germany) completed what is thought to be the first winter traverse of the **Watzmann Group** (2173m). This famous peak of the Berchtesgaden lies close to their house, and while seeing much traffic in summer has little to no activity in winter. During early season ski touring in the region the two realized the most logical line would be to follow the skyline from east to west, ending on the highest summit. The pair started with the north-east ridge of the Kleine Watzmann, then traversed over all five Watzmann 'children', before climbing direct up the east face of the highest summit at M5 80°. The *Watzmann Family Traverse* had 3,450m of ascent and was completed in 19½ hours car to car.

Arguably the most significant if non-calendar winter ascent in the Dolomites during 2018 took place on the east face of **Cima Brenta** (3,150m) over two days in mid December. The protagonists were two great local activists and mountain guides, Alexander Beber and Matteo Faletti. Beber had made an attempt on this ephemeral line in 2014 and then returned at least once a year to see if it was in condition. In late 2018, while on a family holiday in southern Arizona, Beber noticed that a friend had published a photo on social media, a selfie of herself on top Croz dell' Altissimo, and in the background the east face of Cima Brenta, plastered and gleaming in white snow and ice. On returning home he enlisted Faletti and after a six-hour approach the two started up the line with full bivouac equipment. The face proved drier, and hence harder, than anticipated and the pair needed their warm equipment at the top of pitch seven. Next day, after a night of -20°C , the two climbed another seven pitches to a ledge at the end of the difficulties, where with impending darkness, they decided to walk off. The 550m route has been named *CRAM* (Circolo Recreativo Aziendale Mountime), and above the entry slopes (150m, 65°) gives relatively sustained climbing up to AI5, M6, 90° . The east face is complex formation characterised in part by a sheer orange wall set above a long scree-snow slope. *CRAM* follows a series of very steep grooves on the more broken face immediately right of this wall, and was repeated in a single day on 23 December.

The 550m south-west face of the **Cima Scotoni** (2874m) has been the scene of several milestone ascents in the history of Dolomite climbing. Indeed, the first ascent, by K2 summiteer Lino Lacedelli, was for years considered by many to be the hardest route in the Dolomites. Much later, in 1990 Christoph Hainz created the 23-pitch *Zauberlehrling*. Considered a masterpiece of modern climbing at the time, Hainz used no bolts and overcame difficulties up to 7c. The rejection of bolts, combined with the friable rock for which the Scotoni is infamous, led to obligatory difficulties of 7b.

Two events of note took place on this face during 2018. In June, after eight days work spread over two years, the Italian Simon Gietl, who in 2006 achieved the third ascent of *Zauberlehrling* and returned in 2009 to make the first winter ascent, completed *Can You Hear Me?* (VIII+, A2). Gietl climbed roped solo, and in keeping with Hainz's ethic used no bolts on any of the 27 pitches. The route was dedicated to Gerhard Fiegl who died in 2015 on the descent from Nilgiri South (6839m) after making the first ascent of the south face. Fiegl, a regular climbing partner of Gietl, had scoped the line of *Can You Hear Me?*, and asked Gietl if they could attempt it together in traditional style. Gietl promised that he wouldn't climb it with anyone else, and with Fiegl now gone the only option was to climb it solo.

The Scotoni also saw one of the most significant ascents in the Dolomites during 2018. Over two days in September, climbing with fellow Italian Lorenzo d'Addario, Nicola Tondini made the first single push free ascent of his own route *Non Abbiate Paura di Sognare* (700m, 8b, 7b+ obl). Tondini had established the 24-pitch line over seven years, always climbing ground up and not using aid for progress: he used skyhook rests only to place

protection pitons. Bolts were limited to nine belay stations. In 2017 he eventually freed every pitch but was missing the continuous free ascent. *Non Abbiate Paura di Sognare*, meaning 'don't be afraid to dream', is very much a 'direttissima' up the steepest (meaning 'overhanging') part of the south-west face, to the right of *Zauberlehring*. There are three pitches of 7c+/8a and above, and four pitches of around 7b+ that are quite run out.

Over on Austria's highest mountain, the **Grossglockner** (3798m), Austrians Ulrich Muhlburger and Hans Zlobl, climbed a new route on the rocky south-south-east face to give the 750m *Power of Love* (VII, A1). They describe it as the 'first modern alpine sport climb' on the mountain, and in order to meet 'modern safety standards' bolted all the belays. However, most protection is from trad gear, with only a few bolts and pegs placed on the 11 pitches. The climb is also serious: stone fall is ever present and the rock somewhat friable. The route tops out on the *Stuedlgrat* (AD+) at 3,600m, some distance from the summit, and was climbed over two non-consecutive days in September. This was one of three new routes climbed by Zlobl on the Grossglockner during 2018.

Less well known is the Austrian Valsertal in the Zillertal Alps, home to the **Sagwand** (3227m). This area had been something of a playground for the late David Lama over the last five years. On 15 February, Lama and fellow Austrian Peter Muhlburger made the first ascent of the *Sagzahn Verschneidung* (800m, M6 A2), a prominent dihedral between the Sagwand and Schrammacher. Lama had attempted this line in winter on three occasions previously, realizing that he had severely underestimated the difficulties. The route has around half a dozen difficult mixed pitches before less taxing snow gullies in a big corner system lead to the top.