



Alfred Williams

1. Ascended by Mr Mummery 1880.
 2. do " " do Aug 3rd 1881.
 3. do " " do Aug 5th 1881.
 4. do " Messrs Balfour July 1881.
- From a to b & from c to d the route followed
was below the arête on the other side.
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AIGUILLE DES CHARMOZ FROM CHAMONIX.

Fred & Dangerfield Photo Lith. Lon.

ATTEMPT ON THE AIGUILLE DES CHARMOZ. BY F. M.
AND G. W. BALFOUR.

THE Aiguille des Charmoz consists of a long ridge of rocky points, the relative height of which, as seen from Chamonix, it is not very easy to determine. Thus the axe left on one of these points last year, by Mr. Mummery, appears from the valley to be planted close to the summit, whereas in reality the whole ridge is composed of two divisions of unequal height, and Mr. Mummery's axe is placed on the highest pinnacle of the lower division. The true summit is in the further or southern division, the highest points of which are at least 100 ft. above any in the northern, although it is difficult, even from the glacier, to ascertain which of these points has the pre-eminence, the mountain forming, as we have said, a ridge or *arête*, rather than an *aiguille* proper. On July 19, 1881, we attempted the ascent of this southern portion of the ridge, and were so far successful as to attain what we believed to be the highest point, though on reaching it we found the next point on the northern side to be about eight to ten feet higher. Our guides were Johann Petrus, of Stalden, and Peter Knubel, of S. Niklaus. Starting at two o'clock from the upper châteaux of Blaitières, amply provided with extra rope, we reached the glacier about daybreak, and having ascended it to a point opposite the cleft between the two main divisions of the ridge, halted in order to make up our minds what route to adopt. The three most obvious ways were (1) up the northern *arête* from the bottom of the cleft between the two divisions; (2) up the southern *arête*; (3) along a kind of ledge running obliquely upwards from north to south. Of these the two latter appeared the most feasible. We ourselves were in favour of trying the ledge, but finding our guides united in recommending the southern *arête*, we gave way. We then continued our ascent of the glacier until we reached the col, and from there, turning to the left, made our way, partly by an ice couloir, partly by the rocks, to a point about half-way up the *arête*. Here, turning again to the left, we traversed some easy rocks until we once more joined the *arête* at a platform about 150 ft. from the summit. On this platform were painted, in large red letters, the initials C. P., which we understood to be those of a well-known Chamonix guide. The prospect was, indeed, not inviting. Immediately at our feet a cleft, some 15 ft. deep, with perpendicular sides, separated us from that part of the mountain which yet remained to be scaled. On the other side of this, the smooth face of rock, save for a small landing-place about half-way up, seemed for a height of some 50 feet to offer no foothold for the climber. For some minutes we all sat down and contemplated it in silence—the guides sensible of the difficulty of the enterprise, and we ourselves reluctant to take the responsibility of urging them to it. At last Petrus announced his willingness to proceed, and took a pull at the brandy bottle to confirm his resolution. We accordingly lowered him by means of the rope into the cleft. It was thought best he should ascend alone the whole of the 50 ft., since there was no foothold, except, perhaps, at the little landing-place already

mentioned, and a slip must have been, in any case, fatal. It was nervous work watching him from the other side of the cleft, as he slowly and painfully made his way up, clinging, not merely with hands and feet, but with his whole body, to the rock. Great was the relief when at length, after many rests, he reached a safe platform above. It was now our turn. One by one we lowered ourselves into the cleft by means of a rope attached to a rock above, and separately ascended the opposite face as far as the landing-place, receiving what assistance we could from the rope, the upper end of which was held by Petrus. The scene at the bottom of the cleft was curiously striking. The place to which we had lowered ourselves afforded standing room for hardly more than one person, and formed in fact a tiny saddle, the walls on each side of which approached so closely that in one place near above our heads a natural arch of rock was left bridging over the interval. This arch might indeed have offered a possible pathway from our platform to the other side. On the right, we looked down an abrupt descent of several thousand feet to the Mer de Glace, while on the left a scarcely less abrupt descent led to the glacier we had been lately traversing.

Arrived at the landing-place, each unroped himself in turn to allow the next man to ascend, until we all stood huddled together in one little corner, where we should have been more at ease had not the floor sloped unpleasantly towards the precipice. The next part of the ascent was even more difficult than that which we had just accomplished. It would, in fact, have been quite impossible but for a great slab of rock, partly detached from the face, and leaving a crevice into which one foot could often be securely fixed. Short as was the space to be ascended in this way, progress was very slow, owing to the great exertion required, and the consequent necessity of pausing to take breath at frequent intervals. Here, moreover, as before, we adopted the precaution of ascending one by one. At length we all reached the platform on which Petrus stood. From this point there was a good view of the ledge which we had given up in deference to our guides' opinion, and though a small part of it was concealed, it would have afforded an easier route, so far as could be seen, than the one we had taken.

Our route now turned to the left, and led up to the cleft between the two highest points. This part of the ascent presented no special difficulty. On reaching the bottom of the cleft we hesitated a little how to proceed. Looking from the glacier below, we had come to the conclusion that the southernmost of the two points was the highest. From where we now stood we felt a little more doubtful, though still inclining to the same view; the pinnacles rose so perpendicularly that it was impossible to see their actual summits. It was clear that the ascent of either pinnacle would be no easy matter; but of the two the southern appeared certainly the more feasible, and, indeed, we saw no way by which the other was possible from the side on which we were. About half-way up the face of the southern pinnacle there ran a narrow ledge, sloping somewhat downwards, but still quite practicable. The difficulty was how to get to it. The ledge was formed by a slab of granite about a foot thick, which presented to us a vertical edge rising above

the level of the horizontal part, so as to form a kind of boss or prominence. The slab was similar to that described before, that is to say, it was partially detached from the parent rock, but in this instance not sufficiently to give any hold for the foot in the crevice. After an abortive attempt to scale the vertical edge by ordinary means, it became obvious that our only chance was to attach a stone to a rope, and throw it over the raised part, in such a way that while the rope passed into the crevice, the stone, owing to its larger size, should remain fixed like a grappling iron on the further side. This, after some efforts, we succeeded in doing. Even so the ascent was trying and difficult. There now remained only about 10 ft. between us and the top, and we were still uncertain which pinnacle was the highest. The rock we had yet to climb was slightly overhanging, but by dint of assistance from below this last obstacle was also overcome. Petrus stood upon the summit, and we were mortified to learn that the other pinnacle was, after all, some 8 or 10 ft. higher.* We all followed, and found it only too true. There stood the other pinnacle a little above our heads, and though not more than 10 or 12 yds. distant, separated from us by an impassable cleft. We first proposed to alter the relative heights by erecting a stone man that should overtop the rival summit, but, in default of fragments enough for this purpose, we hurled a stone over it, and were obliged to rest content with this token of limited victory. Though, as measured by our aneroids, the difficult part of the ascent had only been 150 ft., it had taken us $2\frac{1}{2}$ hrs. to accomplish.

The rest is shortly told. We remained about three-quarters of an hour on the top, and then commenced the descent, during which we were greatly aided by the extra rope we had brought. In two hours' time we reached the platform below, and thence descended to Chamonix without further incident, save a narrow escape from a falling boulder, which careered past us down the glacier, and buried itself with a terrific thud in the snow beneath.

The following are the exact times:—

Left the châteaux	2.0	A.M.	Reached the top	9.0	A.M.
Reached the col	5.15	"	Left the top	9.45	"
Reached the platform	6.0	"	Reached the platform	11.45	"
Left the platform	6.30	"	Reached the châteaux	2.30	P.M.

Note by the Editor.

Numerous attempts had been made before August 1881 to reach the summit of the Charmoz. Of these by far the greater number had been by way of the south-eastern ridge, on which between the years 1871 and 1876 a very considerable height (the spot where the letters 'C. P.' are painted) was attained by Messrs. Stephen (?), Dent, Maund, and other members of the Club.

The first attempt direct from the Mer de Glace was made (we believe) by Mr. Wallroth in 1873, but his experiences and those of subsequent explorers in this direction have shown the great improbability of success from this side.

In 1878 Messrs. J. W. Hartley and W. E. Davidson first attained, by the

* [This was the point which was reached by Mr. Mummery on August 5, 1881, by way of the N. arête. See *A. J.* x. 357.—EDITOR.]

route afterwards followed by Mr. Mummery in his successful ascent, a point about half-way between the depression separating the two divisions of the ridge, and the point 2 of Mr. Williams' sketch; and subsequently in 1880 Messrs. F. C. Hartley, J. Eccles, and W. E. Davidson reached a still higher point on the north-western ridge, probably some 30 or 40 feet lower than the peak ascended by Mr. Mummery on August 3, 1881.

NOTES ON OLD TRACKS. BY DOUGLAS W. FRESHFIELD.

IV. *The Mountains of Dante.*

A RECENT reference to Dante in one of Mr. Ruskin's articles on 'Fiction,' in the 'Nineteenth Century,'* has led me to look back to a well-known chapter in 'Modern Painters.† I rise from its perusal with a strong sense that Dante's feeling for Alpine scenery—in the broad and proper sense of the word Alpine—has been done injustice to. Without being tempted into one of those extravagances which employ and entertain bookworms; without endeavouring to prove—as some would endeavour to prove Shakespeare to have been an attorney's clerk or an apothecary's boy—that Dante was what his countrymen now call an 'alpinista,' it may be shown from his works that he knew and liked mountains better than Mr. Ruskin was at one time disposed to allow.‡ We find that when Dante wanted a beautiful background for stately figures, a place of sojourn worthy of poets or princes, he chose, not with the *bourgeois* Boccaccio the likeness of a Florentine garden, or a Val d'Arno olive-yard, but high ground, a mountain valley or meadow; that his references to mountains are by no means of a depreciatory nature; and, further, that, while few poets have talked of climbing so much as Dante has, none has shown so thorough a practical knowledge of the right way to set about it.

The broad assertion that Dante 'never alludes to the Alps except in bad weather or snow,' may be contradicted without going beyond Mr. Ruskin's own quotations, put before us to prove the contrary. The point of the comparison between the fogs of Purgatory and an Alpine mist, is surely not only the ugliness of the mists, but also the glorious effect of the sun bursting through them about sunset, when the plains below are already dead, and the light falls only on the mountain sides.§

* Vol. viii. p. 407.

† Vol. iii. ch. xiv. and xv.

‡ No adequate materials exist for fixing exactly the time and place of Dante's travels or sojourns in mountain districts. It is probable that he must have crossed the Alps in going or returning from Paris; he is said to have visited Germany; tradition and the commentators take him to the Castle of Paratico, near Brescia, Val Lagarina in the Trentino, where he is said to have written part of the *Commedia*, Udine, and Tolmino in Friuli. In the Apennines he spent some time in a castle among the hills of the Lunigiana behind Spezzia, a visit of which many traces may be found in the *Commedia*, and he also resided near Gubbio, in the heart of the Peninsula.

§ *Pury.* c. xvii. l. 1. 'From the Alps,' says Cary, quoting Landino, 'all high mountains are in the Tuscan language called Alps.' 'Alpe' and 'Alpone,' on the contrary, as anyone in the habit of consulting ordnance maps is aware, are common country names for the upper portions of the Tuscan Apennines,