The Evolution of a Modern *Grande Course.*

The N. Face of the Dent d'Hérens.

By GEORGE FINCH.

[This ascent is not likely to find much favour. It is a traverse right across the N. face from one bounding arête to the other, a class of route not to be recommended. The somewhat detailed paper is printed mainly as a very instructive object-lesson—not least to the aspirant to Everest honours—of the meticulous preparatory observation and study which a master in mountaineering, of equal experience in rock and ice, considers necessary to give to the safe solution of an alpine problem of difficulty involving, otherwise, considerable danger. So long as a problem is approached with equal care, capacity, and knowledge, it is as legitimate a mountaineering undertaking as other great expeditions—but not otherwise.

The main title of this paper is inserted by myself.

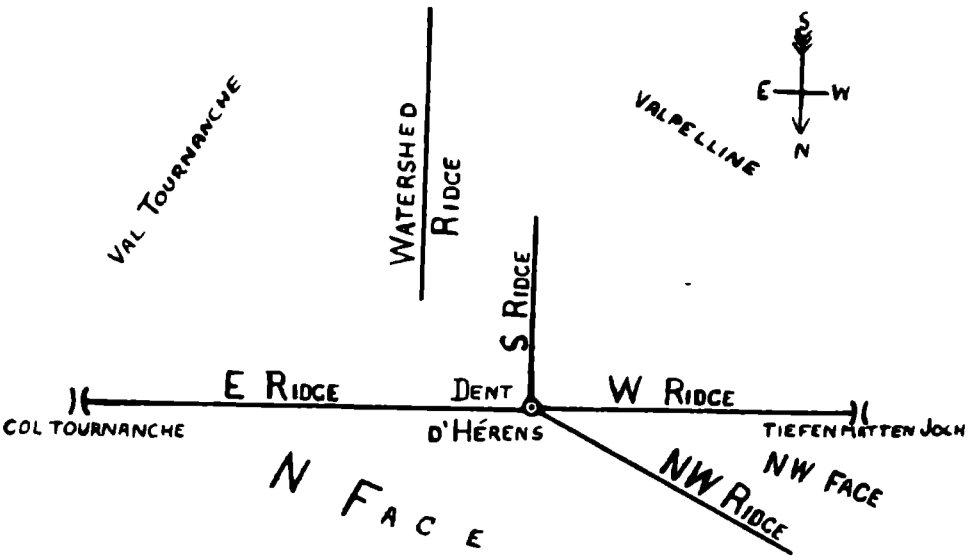
J. P. Farrar.]

ONE of the younger generation of mountain climbers once complained bitterly to me that there were no new climbs to be done in the Alps, the pioneers having, in his opinion, with extraordinary thoroughness and selfish disregard for their posterity, climbed every virgin pinnacle and explored all climbable ridges and faces. To his surprise I replied that our thanks were due to the pioneers, for, though some had no doubt digested much of the grain, the fattest and best grains remained for the man of to-day who knew where to look. The good grain that is left can no longer be picked up without trouble. We all know what faces and ridges of mountains have not been explored, but the successful climbing of these must be preceded by careful and patient investigation.

In August 1911 I enjoyed a happy day of perfect laziness on the Stockje. My main purpose was to examine the Zmutt ridge, with the intention of climbing it on the following day. But ever and again my gaze was irresistibly drawn, as if for relief, from the solemn, dark magnificence of the Matterhorn to the white purity and graceful curves of the hanging glaciers of the N. face of the Dent d'Hérens; and I found myself seeking in vain to trace the way by which it had been climbed. That winter, on searching Alpine literature, I discovered, with no little astonishment, that the whole vast N. face of the mountain, from the Col Tournanche right round to the N.W. ridge, was every inch of it virgin ground. Here truly was a

grain fat enough to satisfy the greediest appetite, and I made up my mind to secure it.

It was not until 1913 that I had an opportunity of returning to the Schönbühl hut. From there I set out on a prospecting trip and, traversing the Wandfluh from the foot of the Dent Blanche down to the Col d'Hérens, not only succeeded in spying out a feasible way of conquering the N. face of the Dent d'Hérens, but also gained some insight into the geography of the mountain itself. The peak is a curiously complicated one, and the errors into which even surveyors, especially on the Italian side, have fallen are well known. The summit is supported by four ridges—the S. ridge which leads down



to the lower Za-de-Zan glacier, the W. ridge to the Tiefenmattenjoch, the N.W. ridge to the Tiefenmatten glacier, and the E. ridge to the Col Tournanche. The W. and N.W. ridges meet at a point less than 100 ft. W. of the summit. The N.W. ridge, when seen from the Schönbühl hut, is usually confused with the W. ridge, from which it is actually separated by the steep, glaciated slopes of the N.W. face. The fact that the ice cliffs of this face seem to be perched on the N.W. ridge has probably given rise to the impression that this ridge can no longer be climbed owing to the formation thereon of a hanging glacier.[1] In reality the ridge is entirely free from such encumbrances. Between the N.W. and E. ridges lies

[1] Dübi, *Guide des Alpes Valaisannes*, II. p. 238; and Illustration, *A.J.* xxvi. opp. p. 410.

the N. face. The watershed ridge between the Val Tournanche and the Valpelline does not reach up to the Dent d'Hérens; shortly above the Col des Grandes Murailles it loses itself in the southern slopes of the E. ridge.

From my point of vantage on the Wandfluh, I saw that the N. face of the Dent d'Hérens carries a huge glacier terrace, or corridor, which, beginning low down near the foot of the N.W. ridge, rises diagonally upwards across the face and reaches the E. ridge just below the great final gendarme E. of the summit. It was perfectly clear that, could this terrace be gained at its lower end and left at its upper, the problem of climbing the face would be solved. Despite my conviction that the climb was feasible, however, the objective dangers—that is, unavoidable dangers from falling ice and stones—appeared so great that for the time being I gave up all idea of making the attempt.

During the war a handful of mountain photographs beguiled many a weary hour, and among them was one of the Dent d'Hérens as seen from the Wandfluh. I studied this picture intently, and finally promised myself another look at the mountain as soon as possible after the war. In 1919, therefore, the Schönbühl hut became once more my base of operations. I again traversed the Wandfluh, and later, by climbing the Tiefenmattenjoch from the N., was able to inspect more closely the possible approaches to the lower end of the great ice corridor. Eventually, in order to obtain a more comprehensive view of the upper reaches of the corridor, I climbed the Matterhorn. At last, believing that nothing else would furnish the required information, accompanied by Mr. Hafers, I made the ascent of the N.W. ridge. This climb showed me that the dangers of the N. face were by no means to be underrated. The whole terrace gathered up much of the rock that crumbled away from the uppermost slopes of the mountain, and the approaches to its lower end were not only swept by stones from sunrise to sunset, but were also defended by frequent falls of ice. Indeed, real safety there appeared to be none until the E. ridge had been gained at the foot of the great gendarme before mentioned. I retired discomfited. But the magnet was strong, and in 1921, having meanwhile somewhat modified my views as to what precisely constitutes objective dangers, I returned to the Schönbühl hut, whence a series of visits to the Pointe de Zinal, the Stockje, and the Tête de Valpelline at length convinced me that what, in ordinary circumstances, would be a dangerous climb could, if tackled properly, be converted into a safe and justifiable undertaking.

The lateness of the season, however, prohibited my putting any theories into practice, but plans were maturing favourably. By gaining the lowest rocks of the N.W. ridge and climbing up either these or the rocks and ice of its N. flank to the level of the terrace, a short traverse over steep ice would give access to the terrace itself. On account of the frequent stonefalls which ricochet across the barely emerging rocks of the N.W. ridge when the sun is shining on the highest slopes of the mountain, this part of the climb would have to be completed during a cold night before sunrise. As the ground was obviously difficult, a moon would be of advantage. Two-thirds of the way along the terrace a large bergschrund threatened trouble, but, this overcome, there seemed to be nothing to prevent one's gaining the E. ridge at the foot of the great gendarme. The whole of the route along the terrace itself appeared to be swept by falling stones and, in its lower end, by falling ice ; but, owing to the comparatively gentle angle of the terrace, I believed that stones would be held up in the snow. In 1921 I also crossed the Col Tournanche, and from there received confirmation of the fact that no insurmountable obstacle barred the exit from the upper end of the terrace to the E. ridge.

Unfortunately, in 1922, being busy elsewhere, I was unable to return to the fray, but this year the long-wished-for opportunity arrived. Towards the end of July I set out on a final series of investigations, determined that they should lead to the conquest of this great N. face. My friend Raymond Peto and I climbed the Dent Blanche, returning by the 1862 original route of Kennedy, leaving the gendarmes above us, while we traversed back along the snow and ice-plastered slabs of the S.W. face. The ascent was made with a twofold object : firstly, to get one more thorough insight into the great terrace of the Dent d'Hérens, and secondly to give Peto, whose maiden climb this was, a chance of finding his mountain legs, it being my intention that he should be one of my companions on the new venture. And here I may be permitted a slight digression. I have more than once been criticised for taking inexperienced people on difficult, and what my critics, too readily, refer to as hazardous, climbs. In reply I would point out that a difficult enterprise is not necessarily a rash one, though it may well be made so if one embarks upon it without thorough investigation and detailed planning. If, by the simple inclusion of a beginner in the party, the difficult be transformed into the hazardous, the reflection is on the capabilities of the leader.

Also, fifteen years of guideless climbing have taught me, *inter alia*, that in the mountains one must not take one's responsibilities lightly. Furthermore, the inexperience of the beginner who is physically sound and no coward is a much less dangerous drawback to the leader of a party than the argumentative embryo-mountaineer who, after three or even fewer brief summer seasons spent in climbing, often only in a secondary capacity, imagines that the mountains hold no more secrets for him. To the experienced climber who feels that there is still something new for him to learn, I would commend the tyro as a companion—for his puzzled, but often fundamental, questionings may suggest a new train of thought or throw fresh light upon what seemed but the obvious and commonplace.

To return to our problem. From the Dent Blanche I could see that both the bergschrund at the foot of the N.W. ridge and the one intersecting the snows of the great terrace were of formidable proportions and likely to give a great deal of trouble. Next day, by going up the Tête Blanche, I was able to get a better idea of the ground from the foot of the N.W. ridge up to the terrace.

On the strength of the knowledge now possessed, I drew up a provisional time-table. At midnight we would leave the Schönbühl hut. Going round the Stockje and passing through the two icefalls of the Tiefenmatten glacier, we would reach the bergschrund at the foot of the N.W. ridge not later than 3 A.M. The bergschrund and the difficult ground above, consisting of ice interspersed with rock, would have to be tackled in the moonlight, and this would give us time to gain the lower end of the terrace about six o'clock, before the sun's rays had become powerful enough to start stones falling. All would then be plain sailing until about two-thirds of the way across the terrace, where the formidable bergschrund would have to be negotiated. Should this obstacle prove impassable, we could return in all haste to near the end of the terrace where, in the shelter of a great ice-cliff, it would be possible to bivouac. In the earliest hours of the following day the retreat would be completed *via* the N.W. ridge and the summit. Should the bergschrund go, however, there would be nothing to prevent our gaining the E. ridge.

These studies of the N. face of the Dent d'Hérens had entailed in all eight visits to the Schönbühl hut of a total duration of nearly six weeks. Was it time thrown away, or is not mountaineering worth the endeavour to make it a

justified source of intellectual and physical training invaluable in every phase of one's daily life?

On returning to Zermatt we were joined by Guy Forster, an old and tried companion on many difficult ascents, more than one novel. The functions of the various members of the party were easily arranged. Forster and I were to act as guides and Peto as porter. On July 29 Peto, bent on sketching, set off once more for the Schönbühl hut, and on the 30th Forster and I followed with the necessary provisions, climbing-irons, 100-ft. A.C. rope, and 200 ft. of cotton sash-line. The latter might prove useful in the event of a forced retreat back to the N.W. ridge and perhaps also on the terrace. At a few minutes past midnight we left the hut, telling the caretaker of our intentions. We crossed the glacier to the Stockje in the light of a strong moon. Just beyond the ruins of the old Stockje hut we put on climbing-irons and roped. The first ice-fall of the Tiefenmatten glacier was easily overcome near the left bank. But the second, which experience had told me was most vulnerable on the extreme right bank, gave more trouble. Here, close under the Dent d'Hérens, we were in the shadow of the moon, and had to make use of our lantern. For perhaps a quarter of an hour, while making our way as fast as possible up through a series of steep ice gullies and crevasses, we were in danger from the séracs perched on the great cliffs above. Once in the upper basin of the glacier, we ascended the slopes, bearing to our left round towards the foot of the N.W. ridge, and eventually arrived on the lower lip of the bergschrund which defends the foot of the ridge. The spot was strange, forbidding. In the gloom, a hundred feet above us, towered the upper lip—inaccessible. In dark, shining patches the rocks of the N.W. ridge showed through, pitilessly smooth, and glazed with a thin covering of treacherous ice. To cross here was impossible, but, by working out into the N.W. face and following the bergschrund to where it curves upwards almost parallel with the N.W. ridge, we found a likely place. The first attempt to get over the bergschrund met with failure. The bridge selected afforded, it is true, a means of access to the slopes above, but I quickly discovered that it was too delicate a structure, and preferred to go back to where we could descend a few feet on to some snowed-up blocks in the steeply rising schrund whence we could cut up the vertical other side. I gained the upper lip, but the work involved was far from easy, and before its completion I had to retire for a rest while Forster

improved my sketchy foot- and hand-holds. It was then that I took stock of the time : it was four o'clock ; we were an hour too late, and there was nothing for it but to go back. On Forster's return I recommenced work on the ice-steps, converting them into great holes which would be certain to hold out until the following day. This done, I informed the others of my decision and, without a murmur of dissent on their part, we turned back. Instead of going straight down on to the glacier, however, we worked down along the lower lip of the bergschrund to some distance beyond the foot of the N.W. ridge, in an endeavour to find another way across which would give more direct access either to the N.W. ridge or to the slopes leading up to the lower end of the terrace. The search was vain, and, just as the first red rays of the morning sun touched the summit of the Dent d'Hérens, we fled towards the Tiefenmatten glacier from the stones that were soon falling. No time was lost in hurrying through the upper ice-fall—for here safety lay in speed. That morning, in time for a belated eight o'clock breakfast, three dejected climbers arrived back at the Schönbühl hut to a welcoming chorus of ' We told you so.' The one crumb of comfort was the word ' Unmöglich,' freely applied by all and sundry to the N. face of the Dent d'Hérens !

In the afternoon the weather changed for the worse. At 11.30 P.M. we looked out to find rain falling heavily ; towards morning it actually snowed in the vicinity of the hut. It was not until after midday on August 1 that a strong N.W. wind set in and swept away the clouds—all but the gossamer-like streamers which clung tenaciously to the Dent d'Hérens and the Matterhorn, and the thick banks of mist that sought and found refuge from the gale in the grim recesses of the Tiefenmatten basin. Heavy, new snow had fallen on our mountain, and great wisps of it were being torn up over the ridges and the slopes of the N. face and borne away on the wind. But the weather was good ; and the new snow, though it would undoubtedly impede us in some places, would hold loose stones firmly in their beds for longer after sunrise and thus actually render our climb more safe. That night was the coldest I have known in the course of this wonderful summer of 1923.

At a quarter to midnight, on August 1–2, we left the Schönbühl hut. The moon was hidden behind the Matterhorn, which was silhouetted against its light with almost startling clearness, and it was not until we had gained the moraine of the Stockje

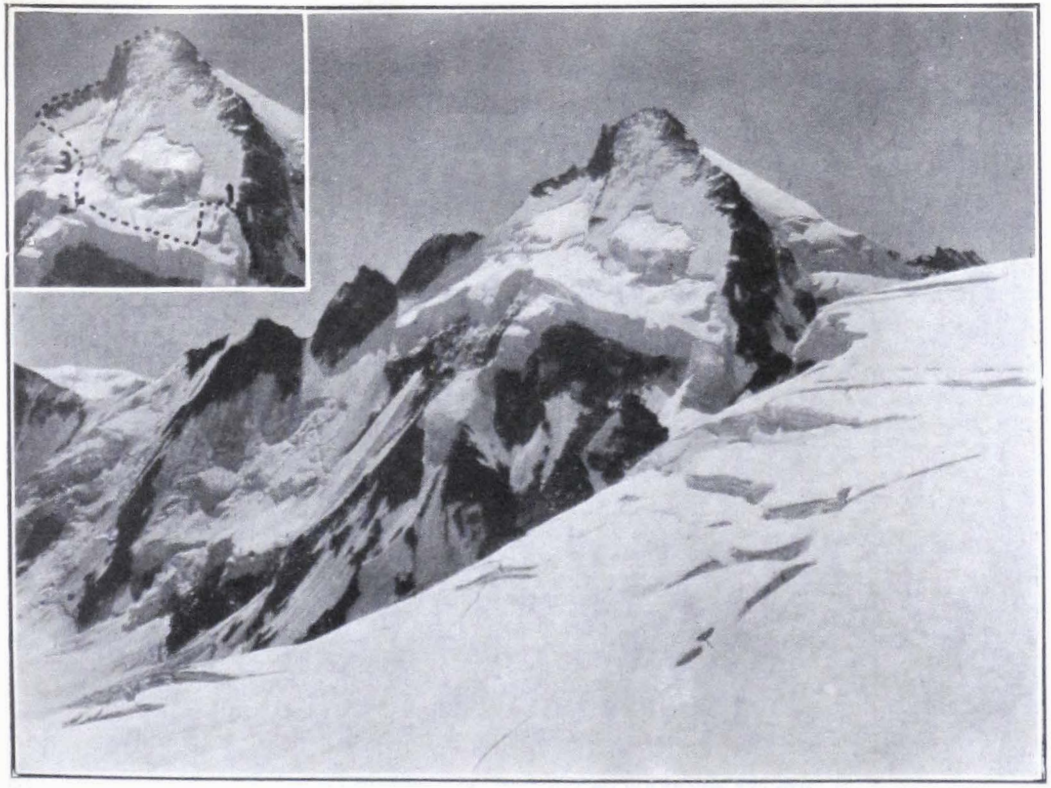


Photo G. I Finch

N. FACE OF DENT D'HÉRENS

From near Col d'Hérens.

1. "Immense gully," p 219. 2. Breakfast place, p. 220.
3. Bergschrund, p. 221.

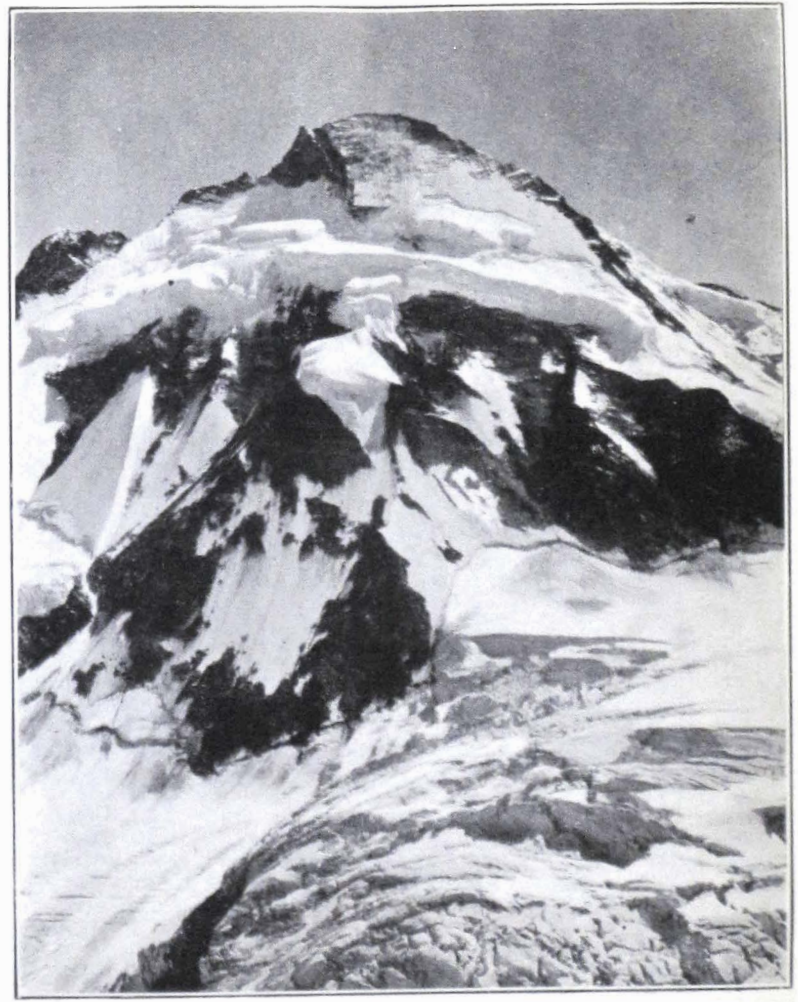


Photo G. I. Finch.

DENT D'HÉRENS

From Stockje.

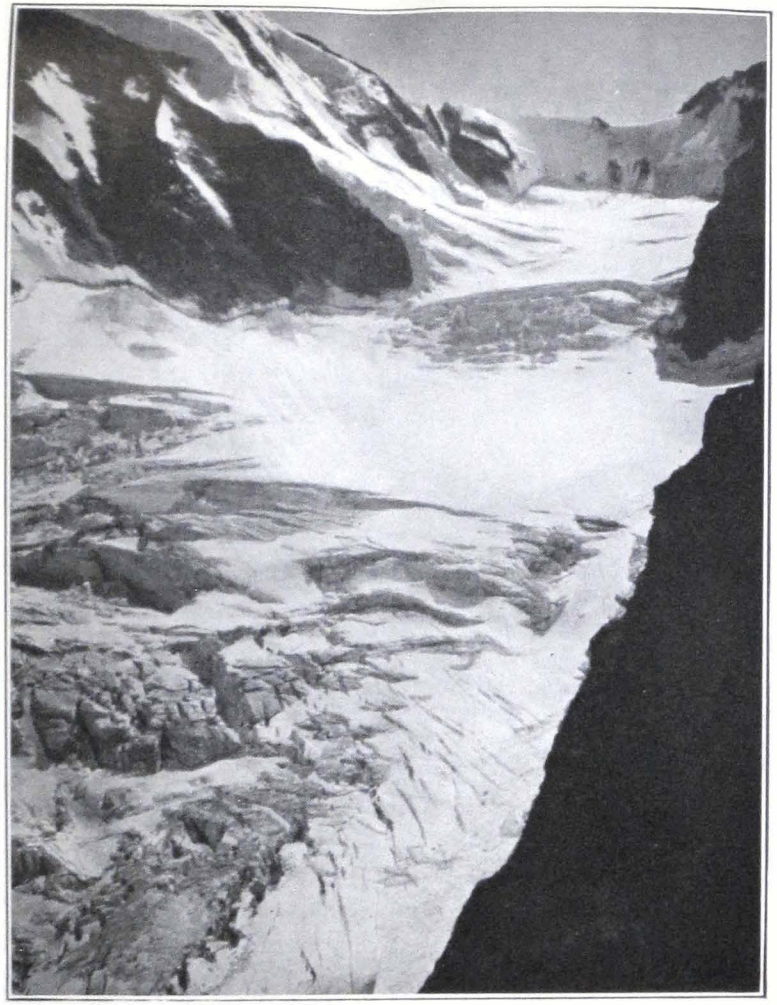


Photo G. I. Finch.

TIEFENMATTENJOCH AND ICEFALLS, ALSO END OF "TERRACE" OF DENT D'HÉRENS.

From Stockje.

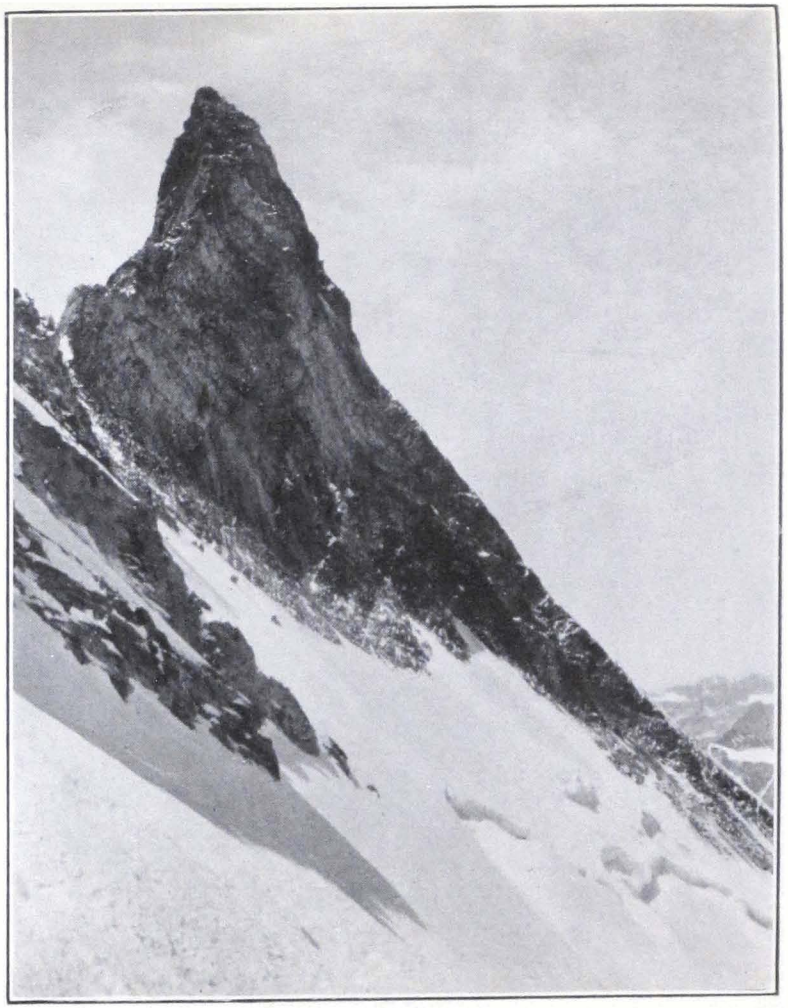


Photo G. I. Finch.

GREAT GENDARME ON E. RIDGE.

that we were able to dispense with the lantern. Walking rapidly, and finding our way through the ice-falls without hesitation, we arrived in the upper basin of the Tiefenmatten glacier at a point below the N.W. ridge just where the slopes steepen up towards the bergschrund. Here, sheltered from the cold wind behind a huge block of fallen ice, we halted (2.30 to 3 A.M., August 2) to adjust climbing-irons, breakfast, and rearrange knapsacks. I had the pleasure of handing mine over to Peto. We re-lighted the lantern and climbed up to the bergschrund, to find the steps cut two days before quite usable. Once over the bergschrund a steep ice-slope lay between us and the nearest rocks of the N.W. ridge, now about 200 yards away. Alpine literature contains many examples of that looseness of description which permits the raconteur to describe, as ice, a slope covered with inches of good firm snow. But here in front of us was the real thing. On warm days water from the ice-cliffs perched on the rocks above flows down over this slope, not in well-defined channels, but fanwise, so as to leave bare ice. What the angle of the slope is I cannot say, as I had no clinometer, but where we cut across, always keeping about 100 to 150 ft. above the upper lip of the bergschrund, it was very steep. Higher up, the inclination was somewhat more gentle; but for two reasons we chose to cross the slope at its steepest—in the first place, fewer steps would bring us to the ridge, and in the second, should stray stones or odd blocks of ice fall in spite of the early hour and the intense cold, there would be much more chance of such missiles going over us than if we were standing on the less steep slopes higher up. The order of the party was as follows. I led, untrammelled by a knapsack, Forster came in the middle, and Peto brought up the rear. How Peto would manage was rather uncertain, as this was his first serious essay with climbing-irons. Forster was to look after both my rope and Peto's, and would, in the event of a slip on the part of the latter, have to hold him—a task of which I knew he was fully capable if only the steps were well cut and reasonably large. Just as we began to cut our way across the slope a fierce gust of wind blew out the candle; and henceforth, though it was still rather dark, as the light of the moon did not reach the secluded spot directly, we decided to dispense with artificial light. I cut the steps as quickly as possible without wastage of blows, but very carefully. Always the same method—left-handed cutting, for we were traversing from right to left; six or seven medium blows

marking out the base, twice as many heavy blows to break down the roof of each step, half a dozen dragging hits to make floor and wall meet well inside, a scrape or two with the adze to make sure that the floor was clean and slanting into the slope, and another of the many steps was ready. But while I was steadily cutting out my first rope's length from Forster, he and Peto were getting the worst of it in a heated difference of opinion with the lantern. Now a lantern which is not burning should be folded up and put away. But this particular sample proved stubborn. Peto's struggles to make it behave being unavailing, he very considerately passed it on to Forster, by which time I was already straining at the rope to cut a next step. Having only two hands, both of which were wanted on more important business, Forster thrust the lantern between his teeth, came up a few steps, and so gave me sufficient rope to proceed. After a further desperate but vain effort to fold the lantern up—with the candle still in it !—and handicapped by his limited number of hands, he at last solved the difficulty by biting the candle in two, and eventually succeeded in stowing away the very refractory and useless article in his pocket. From then onwards we really got into our stride. I worked away in a perfectly straight, almost horizontal, line towards the rocks of the N.W. ridge ; my comrades moved one at a time, Peto evidently enjoying the slope in spite of its appearance—particularly formidable with darkness surrounding us and the ever-increasing drop beneath.

It was very cold, and from time to time the fierce gusts of a fresh wind made us pause in our labours and crouch well down on to the slope to retain our balance. At a quarter past four the last step had been cut and the rocks of the N.W. ridge gained at a point a little above the bergschrund. We immediately crossed over to the N. face, where the rocks were more broken. They were well plastered up with ice and snow, but nevertheless we all tucked our axes into the rope at our waists and, with both hands free, moved upwards at a good pace. Our mode of advance consisted in my going out the full 60-ft. length of rope between myself and Forster and finding good standing-ground or reliable belay ; whereupon the other two, moving together with a taut rope between them, would climb up to me. There was much verglas on the rocks, and everything was buried in fresh snow ; but I steadfastly refrained from using the axe, utilising hands and fists to clear doubtful places and relying as much as possible on the climbing-irons. To use the axe on this kind of ground

before it is absolutely necessary invariably results in the loss of valuable time. We kept to the N. side of the ridge, only twice touching the crest, and, after one and a half hour's climbing at full pressure, arrived at a point high up above the lower end of the great terrace where a feasible way of gaining it at last appeared. Between the terrace and the rocks of the northern flank of the N.W. ridge lies an immense gully, at the narrowest point of which we now stood. It was extremely steep, as the ice had run and formed a sort of bulge. Forster and Peto having stowed themselves firmly away on the last little island of rock, I started to cut across it. After some heavy step-cutting in extraordinarily steep ice, I arrived in the middle of the gully, only to see about 100 ft. lower down a better means of gaining the terrace. So I returned and, joining the others, descended these hundred feet and once more set out to cross the gully. It was not very wide, being only some 80 ft. from the last of the rocks to the terrace itself, but the work was certainly hard. After about twenty minutes' step-cutting, I found myself standing in the bergschrund formed by the terrace and the ice-slopes above, and there Forster and Peto soon joined me. By following the lower lip of the bergschrund for a short distance and leaving it at a point where it curved abruptly upwards, it would have been possible to make a horizontal traverse of about 300 ft. across a steep snow-slope to where the terrace was more gently inclined. Unfortunately, owing to the state of the snow, such tactics could not be indulged in. The slope was heavily covered with an accumulation of new snow, much of which had fallen down from the steeper slopes above. The old snow underneath had a smooth surface and was hard frozen, and the fresh snow was of that powdery, non-cohesive quality which already possessed the thin, dangerous, wind-formed crust so respected by the winter mountaineer. To traverse such a slope would be simply asking for trouble: there was almost certain danger of our treading loose a snow shield and being swept down by it across the terrace and over the cliffs below. The only alternative lay in descending for a distance of about 200 ft. and then crossing the slope at its very foot, where it was no longer steep, hard up against the lower edge of the corridor where it breaks away in the vast ice-cliffs overhanging the Tiefenmatten glacier. It was here that our spare rope proved most valuable. We cut out a large block of snow in the lower lip of the bergschrund and laid our doubled spare rope over the improvised belay. With Peto going first, we then went

straight down the dangerous slope towards another suitable belay lying about 100 ft. below and consisting of a large stone which had fallen from the Dent d'Hérens and was now firmly embedded in the old snow. By means of this second belay we descended another hundred feet, and then arrived at the very foot of the slope, where its angle eased off so rapidly that in spite of the great masses of powdery snow, it was at last possible to cross, in safety and without fear of loosening a snow shield, over to the great terrace.

The angle of the ground where we now found ourselves was gentle—sometimes no more than 20°; but, under the threat of ice falling from the hanging glacier above, Forster and I urged Peto, who still led, to move forward with all haste until clear of the danger zone. At one place our way passed through an extensive field of ice-blocks—débris from the cliffs above. That practically the whole of this particular fall of ice had been arrested on the terrace will indicate how easy is the gradient at this point. 7.30 A.M. saw us more than halfway along the terrace at a point where it appears almost level. We were more or less directly below the summit. Close to the edge of the ice-cliff in which the terrace breaks away, we were at last in perfect safety. Nothing falling from above could reach us now; for the gentle slopes of the terrace between us and the final wall of the mountain provided an efficient trap for all stones tumbling down from the summit rocks.

It was with a sense of complete security that we sat down to another breakfast and to enjoy a well-earned rest; for, since crossing the bergschrund four and a half hours ago, we had been working at high pressure. The spot must be one of the wildest and most solitary in the Alps: behind us a rampart of precipitous cliffs, before us at our feet a few yards of gently sloping snow, then nothing until the eye rested on the Stockje, a mile and a half distant and nearly 3000 ft. below. Several parties were toiling up the Tête Blanche, but halted upon hearing our exuberant yells of delight as we settled down to our meal. It was cold; the wind was still strong and blowing snow-dust about, and, though all wore extra clothing and windproof overalls, we were by no means overburdened with warmth.

Shortly after eight o'clock we again set off. The slopes of the terrace now steepened up rapidly, and soon we were once more cutting steps—this time in good hard snow—up to the bergschrund separating us from the upper end of the terrace.

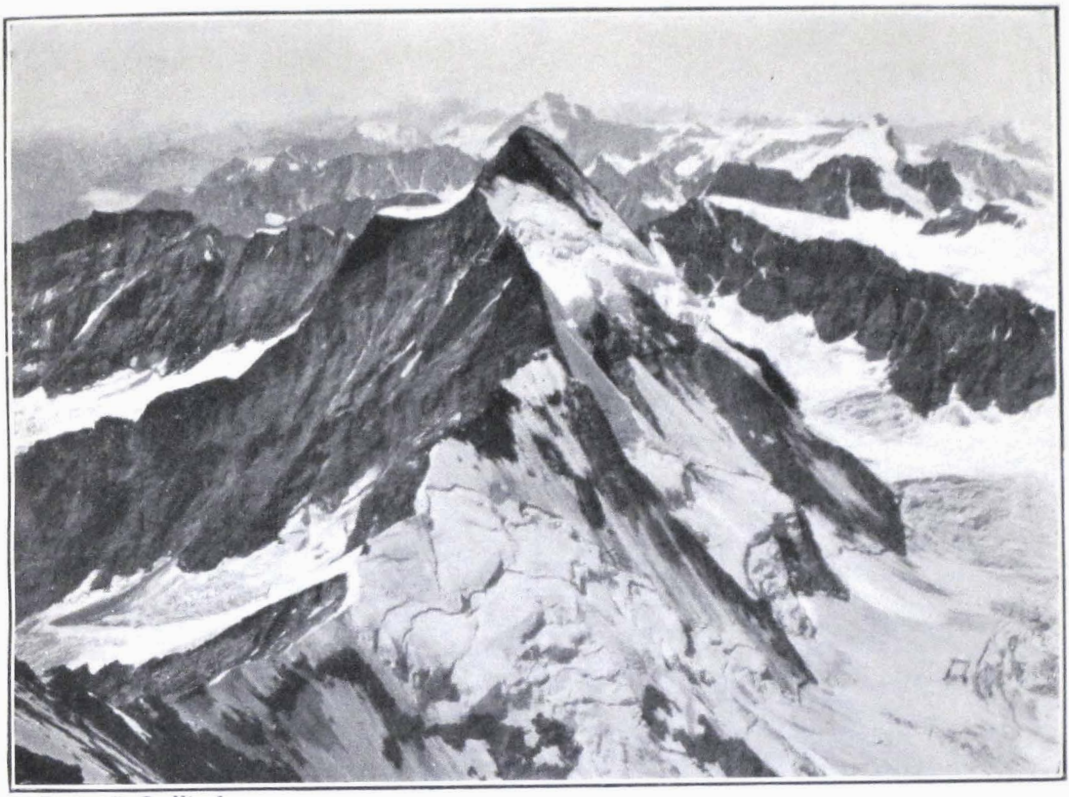


Photo G. I. Finch.

DENT D'HÉRENS.
From Matterhorn.

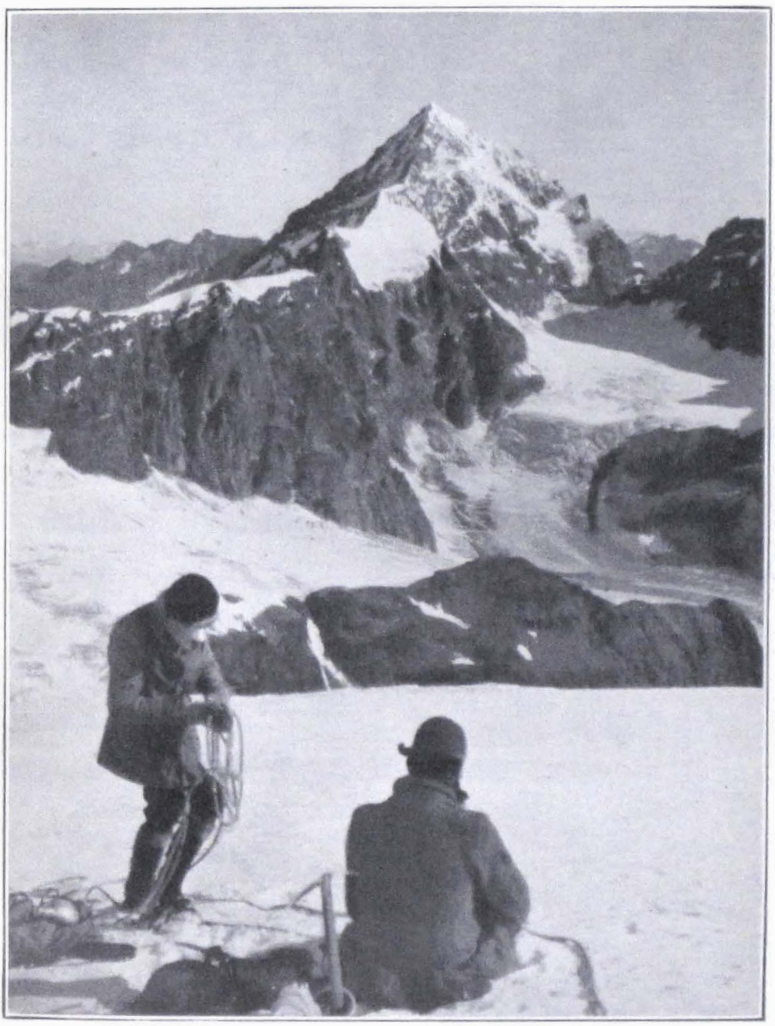


Photo G. I. Finch.

DENT BLANCHE.
From "Terrace" of Dent d'Hérens.

Just before gaining the lower lip we heard the rattle of falling stones, and a generous avalanche from the gully between the great gendarme on the E. arête and the summit crashed down straight towards us. During one of my reconnaissance trips I had watched through the telescope stones falling down this gully, and had observed that they were all caught by the lower lip of the schrund. Indeed, it was precisely this fact that had led me to the conclusion that the lower lip must protrude very much beyond the upper, which would therefore form a serious barrier in our path. On this occasion again every stone of the avalanche was swallowed up by the bergschrund, without the slightest danger to us. As soon as all was quiet we resumed work and, on gaining the lower lip, moved down along it to the left, where it approached more under the upper lip. The obstacle we now faced was assuredly a difficult one. It appeared to me that the upper lip could be attacked, with fair prospects of success, at its lowest part by cutting steps up about twelve feet of very steep ice and then drilling one's way through a cornice formed of hard frozen snow, some three feet thick, extending from the edge of the upper lip. An alternative way lay in making a difficult traverse still further to the left across the ice-face leading to a fault or notch in the cornice, affording access to the slopes above. At first I chose the former way. Forster anchored himself well and, holding both my rope and Peto's, let us across the débris-choked floor of the bergschrund to the foot of the steep pitch. I was soon cutting my way up this, while Peto held me steady, so as to avoid the necessity of making handholds. Now out of arm's reach, but jammed against the ice by his axe, I began to drill through the cornice. I succeeded in driving my axe through into daylight, but only after a great effort, and was forced to return for a rest. Forster then followed up in my steps, but, not liking the idea of laboriously enlarging the hole in the cornice, returned to investigate the possibilities of the alternative traverse to the left. For some distance Peto was able to support him with his axe, but for the last ten or twelve feet Forster had to cut with his left hand, relying on his right to help him retain his balance. By a brilliant piece of ice-work he wormed his way through the fault in the cornice out on to the slopes above. As soon as he had obtained good standing-ground and driven his axe to the head into the snow, I followed quickly, and together we gave Peto the necessary aid to enable him to join us.

Once more I took the lead. We were now aiming straight

for the eastern extremity of the level section of ridge lying immediately to the E. of the great gendarme. Everywhere the ground was so steep that steps had to be cut, but four or five blows with the axe were always sufficient, as the snow was hard and of good quality. To gain the foot of the gendarme over the slopes directly above us was out of the question on account of the impassability of an intervening bergschrund. Further to the E., however, this schrund was well bridged, and we crossed without difficulty. Here the snow changed. It was still good, but no longer so hard. Roped on to our 200-ft. length of sash-line, Forster now took the lead and kicked his way right up on to the ridge, while Peto and I enjoyed a welcome, if brief, respite from our activities. At eleven o'clock we were all sitting together on a great flat slab on the E. ridge overlooking the Val Tournanche, protected from the wind and revelling in the warm sunshine. We had won. From here to the top was merely a question of time and patience. The great N. face of the Dent d'Hérens, which had so long been spoken of as 'unmöglich,' had this day at last suffered defeat, and many were the shouts of triumph hurled down at its hitherto hidden recesses. In the simple amusements so dear to the mountaineer, a whole hour was spent at this delightful spot. We ate, we sunned ourselves, and drank in the beauties of the marvellous view. I will not expatiate thereon, but will content myself with paying tribute to the Matterhorn, which, seen as we saw it that morning, must surely be the most strikingly wonderful mountain in the world.

At noon, having discarded our climbing-irons, we again roped, Forster leading, I coming as second man, and Peto, as before, bringing up the rear. Making our way up a steep snow-ridge, followed by a vertical chimney—which, thanks to liberal handholds, was not difficult, though somewhat strenuous—we had soon covered the distance of about 80 ft. that had separated us from the E. end of the horizontal stretch of ridge and now overlooked the uppermost snows of the Za-de-Zan glacier, from which we were divided by less than 200 ft. of easy scree-slopes. Early in the day we had noticed the formation of fish clouds, and from up here saw that Mont Blanc was 'smoking a pipe.' The weather was obviously breaking; but, provided no time was wasted, we counted on its holding out long enough to enable us to finish the ascent. The horizontal stretch of ridge, despite the fresh snow that was lying about, gave no serious trouble, and soon we were at the foot of the great gendarme. It was plain that the latter, even

in the best of circumstances, would prove a stubborn customer if tackled directly over the ridge. For the sake of economising time, therefore, we moved out on to the S. side, and for more than two hours were kept fully occupied on slabby rocks where the handholds tended to slope downwards. Had the ground been dry, the climbing would probably have been fairly easy ; but to-day verglas and new snow were everywhere. Forster, free from the burden of his knapsack, which now graced my shoulders, was in his element. Our pace was not rapid, because the conditions rendered it advisable to move only one at a time, and the rock, apart from being glazed, was so unreliable that great care was necessary. At last, shortly before drawing level with the summit of the gendarme, a scramble up some particularly nasty slabs brought us on to a buttress of blocks where we were able to climb together. Forster dashed away in great style. We regained the ridge at the lowest point in the slight depression that lies between the summit of the great gendarme and that of the mountain itself. From there the climb along the final ridge was pure joy. Nowhere did we meet with the least difficulty. The rock was extremely good and wind-swept free from snow. The ridge was very narrow—in places even sensational. Sometimes it hung over to one side, sometimes to the other, and once it actually assumed a mushroom-like appearance and overhung on both. Our pace was furious, and Forster's exclamations of delight at the splendid climbing quite invigorating.

At 3.15 P.M., fifteen and a half hours after leaving the Schönbühl hut, we passed over the little snow-crest which forms the summit of the Dent d'Hérens. We did not halt : the weather was too menacing, and it behoved us to get off the mountain as quickly as possible. Just beyond the summit we again altered the order of the rope—Forster retained the lead, Peto came next, and I brought up the rear. After a short, easy climb down the steep but firm rocks of the little summit cliff overlooking the N.W. face, we struck a well-trodden track in the scree-slopes, and passing down these and two ice-slopes—the first a short one, the second long enough to induce us to put on climbing-irons—we reached a point on the W. ridge whence a convenient descent could be made over broken rocks towards the Za-de-Zan glacier. With the exception of one chimney, which might well have been avoided, all was easy going until, at the foot of the rocks, we had to descend a little ice-slope and cross the bergschrund below it. The deep snow covering the ice-slope was in a parlous condition,

and Forster had to cut well into the ice beneath in order to obtain secure footing. As luck would have it, we chanced to strike the best place to cross the bergschrund; for the misty haze now obscuring the sun also hid detail to such an extent that, until we were actually on the bergschrund, it was at times hard even to detect its presence. The usual sort of little zigzag manœuvre by means of which the weak points in the bergschrund's defences were connected up, saw us safely over on to the soft snow-slopes below. We had no difficulty in getting through the first small ice-fall of the Za-de-Zan glacier, though at one place we had to descend into a crevasse and make our way up the other side in order to effect a crossing. Passing close under the Tiefenmattenjoch, a long tramp in soft, wet snow brought us to the edge of the lower ice-fall. Having been through this fall in 1919, I now went ahead. But, failing to keep sufficiently far to the left, I did not succeed in finding the quickest way through, with the result that, to escape from its clutches, we finally had to resort to the spare rope to descend a bergschrund which must have been nearly 50 ft. high. From there onwards all was plain sailing. A glissade and a gentle walk over the nearly level basin of the glacier led to the top of the moraine, whence, free from the sodden rope, we plunged down towards the corner of the W. ridge of the Tête de Valpelline, at the foot of which stands the Cabane d'Aosta. The ten minutes' uphill walk to the hut was, for three weary mountaineers, as hard a pitch as any they had tackled that day. The hut was none too tidy, but we had food and, some kindly climbers having provided us with sufficient wood, we were able to cook quite a passable meal. The weather did not actually break that evening, but the whole sky was filled with dense masses of cloud driven up by the S. wind, and we went to sleep expecting to have a lively time in crossing the Col de Valpelline on the following day.

Next morning we were under way at 6 A.M., and in less than three hours had gained the Col de Valpelline. The sky was completely overcast and all major summits were hidden in cloud, but we suffered no inconvenience from mist and, in under four and a half hours after leaving the Cabane d'Aosta, were receiving the warm congratulations of the Schönbühl hut-keeper, who had watched our ascent through his telescope with such assiduity that he had strained his right eye and was now in a state of perpetual wink!