

boulders interspersed with soft snow, to find it in complete chaos—fifty people and space for forty. The guardian offered us 18 square feet for six of us. We declined his offer and stretched our sleeping bags outside, preferring a night under the stars. These shone with unusual brilliance and I could see opposite the shadowy forms of the Verte and the Drus clad in a mantle of white and all the other Aiguilles spread out in a row with Mont Blanc standing behind, silent and aloof.

It was a fine ending to a good day—the best expedition by far that we had achieved. We had moved slowly, but with comparative novices in bad conditions one can afford to take no risks. They acquitted themselves well in a day of 15½ hours.

We descended to Chamonix in the morning to be entertained to a gala luncheon, with speeches in English and French, songs and many good stories. It was a magnificent send off.

I must add that half way through our course we were entertained by the members of the Chamonix Golf Club and fed right royally, each member taking two cadets away to dinner at his house.

Thus ended the Sandhurst meet of 1948. Considering the impossible weather and the equally impossible state of the mountains it was not entirely unsuccessful. We owe a great debt to our French friends of the École Haute Montagne.

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## FRANÇOIS PACCARD AND BOURRIT

By CLAIRE ELIANE ENGEL

**M**ONT Blanc has been climbed since the days when the ascent of a mountain was an expedition almost as long and as arduous as the discovery of a new continent. It was then an intensely personal venture, in which tastes, prejudices and temperaments were prominent features. Consequently, it is not surprising to find how frequently early climbers and would-be climbers quarrelled with one another and how such rows had their effects on subsequent mountain history. This does not mean that mountaineers are less temperamental nowadays, but they are more numerous and less inclined to show their feelings than were 18th-century people, who insisted on making a parade of their sentimentality, of their 'virtue,' or of their 'righteous indignation.'

One of the as yet not very well understood features of the first ascent of Mont Blanc in 1786 is a celebrated quarrel which flared up between Bourrit and François Paccard.

François Paccard's life reflected a many-sided, unusual and rather erratic temper. He was born in Chamonix in 1734 and, when he was 20, he acted as guide to the well-known highwayman Mandrin. After

a violent fight, Mandrin was cornered between the French troops which were looking for him and the Savoy frontier. Then François Paccard led him across passes into the duchy of Savoy, where he hid for a time in the castle of Beauregard. Early in 1755, Mandrin was betrayed to the French, captured, tried and broken on the wheel in Valence. Mandrin was not a common robber, there was something chivalrous in him, and many young peasants, François Paccard among them, had been attracted by his unusual personality. After Mandrin's arrest, Paccard was exiled by the Savoy government and had to leave Chamonix.

His family got him pardoned through a strange and rather complicated device. His elder brother, Michel, was a chamois hunter—so was François, and both acted as guides when there were people to guide. Michel caught a pair of chamois, brought them to Paris, and offered them to the Comte de Caylus to propitiate him and secure his protection for François. Caylus was then an elderly man with a haughty, fiery temper. Much is known about his great culture, his excellent artistic taste, his literary talent, and his magnificent collection of Greek and Roman statues and coins. He was a member of the French Academy and, in 1755, he had presented the Cabinet du Roi with a superb selection of Greek marbles which were the embryo of the Louvre collections. He was an important and rather terrifying personality. Much later, Michel Paccard told a German lady, whom he was taking up to Montenvers, that he had gone once to Paris with two chamois and had visited Versailles and Chantilly. He remembered both parks very well,<sup>1</sup> and it is quite possible that Caylus had introduced him to the King in Versailles or to the Prince de Condé in Chantilly. Anyhow, his journey was a success, something was done to contact the Savoy government and François Paccard was pardoned and allowed to come home.

After this violent entrance into history, the Paccard brothers were not heard of for 20 years—Chamonix was not much visited as yet and early travellers did not mention their guides' names. In 1775, a first, half-hearted attempt was made to ascend Mont Blanc: both the Paccard brothers were among the members of the party and François was 40 by that time. The next year, William Coxe, Archdeacon of Wilts, came to Chamonix and took 'three excellent guides,' François Paccard among them.<sup>2</sup> A few years later, François wrote to Jain, the secretary of the town of Morges, whom he was supplying with honey, that he had had the honour to guide Mrs. Campbell, Coxe and de Saussure.<sup>3</sup> He had become much interested in Mont Blanc and one must remember that his young cousin, Michel-Gabriel Paccard, had already made a first attempt to reconnoitre the mountain, in company with Thomas Blaikie in 1775. François Paccard kept records of some of the early attempts made on the mountain and here is a letter he sent to Jain about one of them—a rather fantastic one:

<sup>1</sup> Sophie von la Roche. *Tagebuch einer Reise durch die Schweiz*, 1787.

<sup>2</sup> William Coxe: *Sketches of . . . Swisserland*, 1779, Letter xxiii.

<sup>3</sup> Jain: *Papiers et documents de famille*, Morges, 1882.

23 septembre 1779.

Monsieur,

‘ Je vous ai fait tenir l’histoire du Français intrépide qui devait escalader le Mont Blanc, mais votre lettre du 1er septembre me fait soupçonner que vous n’avez reçu aucune de mes nouvelles : aussi je prends la liberté de vous abréger ce que je vous en ai dit. Le conseil général où les guides devaient délibérer de tous les moyens de parvenir sur le Mont Blanc n’a pas eu lieu, parce que les essais du Français sur la (?) l’avaient déconcerté et presque mis hors d’état de ne plus rien oser ; il n’a plus été question que de savoir comment on transporterait cette grosse et large voiture d’où il concevait à son aise de si hauts projets ; on a tant combiné qu’on a cependant pu le résoudre à être une fois prudent et à emballer sa voiture pour en faire le transport plus commodément ; je ne vous dépeins pas l’embarras et la gêne d’une telle charge ; il suffit que vous sachiez que jamais je n’avais vu un homme plus consterné et plus exanimé (*sic.*) après des essais périlleux que ne l’était ce Français après des projets et des voyages combinés dans les plaines de Paris ; nous rions tous les jours de lui et tant que nous nous imaginerons ses bizarreries, nous rions.

J’ai remis à l’adresse indiquée deux barils de miel pour vos dames. . .

Votre très humble serviteur et guide

François Paccard (4).

I have modernised the spelling but the original is much more correct than that of Jacques Balmat or even that of Dr. Paccard. François Paccard must have been a well—though self-taught—man with pleasant manners.

In 1785 Bourrit, in his *Nouvelle description des Glacières de Savoie*, wrote of François Paccard that he was ‘ a good guide.’ That was probably the first contact between the two men. Soon, the old adventurous aspect of Paccard’s temper was to come back up to the surface.

On June 8, 1786, three guides went up the Dôme du Goûter to try and find a route to the summit. François Paccard, though now 58, was one of them ; the two others were J. M. Tournier and J. Carrier. Jacques Balmat went up after them, overtook them to their obvious displeasure and was left behind when the party came down, so that he was benighted on the Jonction. Two months later, Dr. Michel-Gabriel Paccard, together with Jacques Balmat, made the first ascent of the mountain. It is most likely that Dr. Paccard got the information he was still lacking about the possible or impossible routes from his elderly cousin, with whom he was on very friendly terms, rather than from Jacques Balmat whom he merely took with him as ‘ ouvrier,’ a porter, and an incompetent one as it transpired from the subsequent history of the climb.

Balmat rushed down to Geneva to bring the news to Saussure and Bourrit. As he required a witness, he took François Paccard with him,

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

probably because the latter was well entitled to represent the leader of the party. Saussure made up his mind to go at once to Chamonix and François Paccard met him at Servoz on August 16 with his mule.<sup>5</sup>

The attempt was a failure, on account of bad weather. Saussure came down defeated. In his inn—and actually in his room—he met a young nobleman from Lorraine, François de Pange, with whom he left Chamonix for Martigny on August 22: ‘Je pars à 10h. 30 avec Monsieur le chevalier de Pange sur le mulet de François Paccard que je croyais très bon, mais qui s’est montré détestable.’<sup>6</sup> The weather was horrible and Paccard believed that snow had fallen as low as the Monteners.<sup>7</sup>

A few weeks later, things became suddenly hectic: Bourrit had gone into action. It is superfluous to relate again how he slandered Michel-Gabriel Paccard and eventually succeeded in having his book suppressed. The whole episode has been often dealt with. On September 20, 1786, he published his *Lettre sur le premier voyage fait au sommet du Mont Blanc le 8 août dernier* in which he started his campaign of abuse. The letter reached Chamonix quickly and people took sides, either for Dr. Paccard or, against him, for Jacques Balmat.

The Paccards were a clan and François Paccard reacted with violence towards the slanderer of his young cousin. He probably called Bourrit a liar or something worse. Bourrit who was in Chamonix at that time heard of it and was furious; he was also terrified, because the Paccards might prove dangerous, and he appealed to the Savoy police for redress. François Paccard was arrested and sentenced to three days’ imprisonment in Bonneville. On October 11, Bourrit wrote to Saussure:

‘... En revenant à Bonneville j’ai eu dans mon auberge la visite de l’intendant M. le baron de Garnier d’Alonzier, qui m’a invité à dîner chez lui. Il m’a montré un ordre de M. le chevalier de Tarin gouverneur de la Savoie, par lequel le guide de Chamonix François Paccard est condamné à subir une peine de trois jours à la Bonneville pour l’insulte qu’il m’a faite par la calomnie qu’il a répandue contre moi. Ayant su que les archers étaient montés pour le prendre, j’ai sollicité sa grâce et obtenu qu’il n’aurait qu’une détention au corps de garde de 24h. Il a dû arriver à Bonneville lundi soir.’<sup>8</sup>

Saussure was indignant and he wrote back to suggest that Bourrit had not behaved well. Two days later, Bourrit replied in a long confused letter, summing up his quarrels with the Paccard clan and showing clearly that he had been so furious against François Paccard mainly because the latter was Michel-Gabriel’s cousin:

‘... Pulsque je suis en train de tout dire, j’ajouterai que lorsque Balmat fut à Genève, je remarquai très bien qu’il était surveillé dans

<sup>5</sup> *Journal mis au net des Voyages à Chamonix et au Valais: Août 1786*, Saussure Archives, Geneva Library.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Notes pour les T. III et IV*. Saussure archives, Geneva. Quoted by D. W. Freshfield, with a wrong date.

son récit par François Paccard et ce qui est sans réplique, c'est l'aveu que m'en a fait Balmat lui-même dans mon dernier voyage à. . . Chamonix.

' Je vous remercie encore de la manière dont vous réprimez à Chamonix le bruit injurieux répandu contre moi. L'on vous en parlait dans votre chambre chez la Couteran comme d'une chose certaine mais pas encore au gré de François Paccard à qui vous imposâtes silence en disant : " Je sais tout et ne veux plus rien savoir, vous n'êtes tous que des babillards." <sup>9</sup>

Soon after that, Bourrit's anger concentrated on Dr. Paccard—he had already secured a revenge on the other important man of the clan. Yet François Paccard did not disappear from history altogether. In 1788, the Chevalier de Florian, a well-known, though minor, poet and novelist, who had been Voltaire's godson, came to Chamonix and concocted there an extremely sentimental short story, *Claudine*. It begins with the description of a walk from the Montenvers :

' Je descendais le Montenvers en revenant de la Mer de Glace. Après deux heures d'une marche pénible, j'arrivais près de la fontaine (Caillet) où je m'étais reposé le matin. . . Je priais mon brave et honnête guide François Paccard de s'asseoir à côté de moi, et nous commençâmes alors une fort bonne conversation sur les moeurs, sur le caractère, sur la manière de vivre des habitants de Chamonix. Le bon Paccard m'intéressait par le récit de ces moeurs si simples, dont on aime à s'entretenir, quand ce ne serait que pour les regretter . . . Paccard me dit en riant : . . . Il faut que vous sachiez, Monsieur, que notre vallée de Chamonix n'était pas il y a dix ans aussi célèbre qu'elle l'est aujourd'hui. Les voyageurs ne venaient pas nous apporter leurs louis d'or, pour voir notre neige glacée et pour ramasser nos petits cailloux. . . Nous étions pauvres, ignorants du mal. . . '

It is rather amusing to see the fiery François Paccard cast for such a part, posing as a witness of the idyllic, innocent times of long ago. And yet it is quite possible he actually made such a speech or a similar one, in very good French, to Florian : travellers were becoming more and more sentimental and Paccard knew how to keep in touch with current taste. In 1795, the Danish poetess, Frederika Brun, came to Chamonix and took him at once as her guide " just on account of his kind friendly eyes and white hair." <sup>10</sup> It matches the impression Florian tried to convey in his story.

By 1808, Bourrit had completely forgotten the row of 1786, as he listed François Paccard among the best guides of the former generation in his *Itinéraire de Genève, de Chamonix et du Canton de Vaud*. There is no mention of further contacts between the two men. Paccard died on May 10, 1818 <sup>11</sup> ; he was 84.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Reise von Genf nach Chamonix*, Zurich, 1795.

<sup>11</sup> Gaillard and Montagnier, in their *Journal d'un voyage à Chamouni et à la cime du Mont-Blanc* [H. B. de Saussure, 1787], 1926, p. ii, note 1, give the year as 1819.—*Editor*.