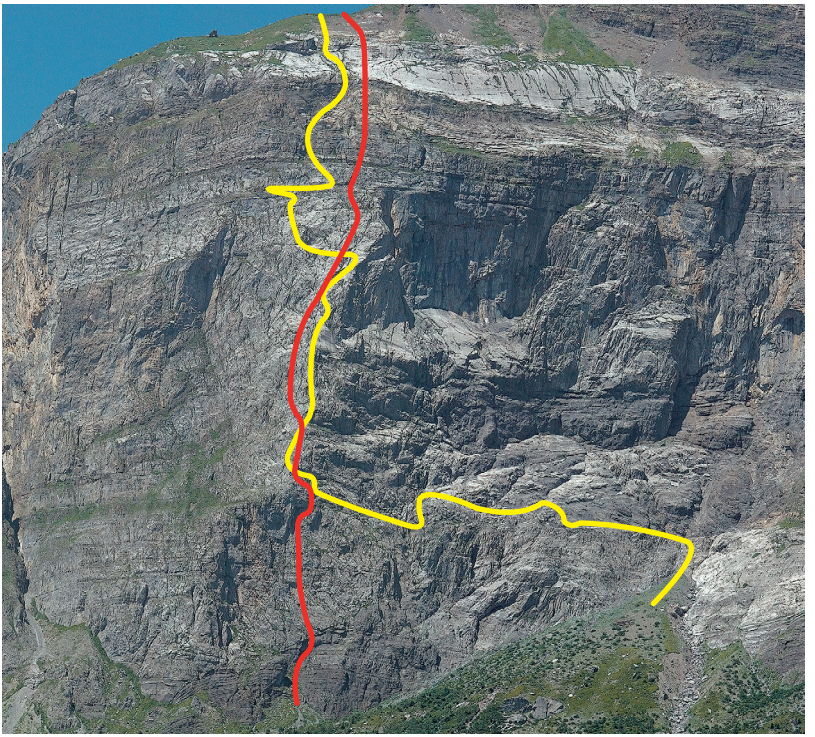
Area Notes



Capt G T Ewen (1879-1917), 3rd Manchester Regiment, who joked his climbing experience allowed him to get out of his trench quicker, died during the relief of Kut, Mesopotamia.

LINDSAY GRIFFIN

Alps & Dolomites 2017



The south pillar of the Pointe de Platé, one of the biggest limestone walls in France. The red line is *Le Royaume de Noir* (2017) and the yellow is the *Original Route* (1958). *(Emmanuel Ratouis)*

Although 2017 was a remarkable year for significant new ascents in the greater ranges, notably in the Himalaya, very little important pioneering appears to have taken place in the Alps, certainly in the 'upwards' direction. Much of the Alpine news these days centres on the burgeoning number of remarkable first ski descents of seemingly horrifying objectives throughout the range. In some cases these may have travelled over previously untouched ground, a good example being a series of ascents and ski descents opened recently by Vivian Bruchez and friends on the south-west face of the Aiguilles Rouges du Dolent in the Argentière basin. Summer in the Alps was particularly difficult for anything but objectively safe rock routes, with the peaks so dry that even seasoned visitors often found them unrecognisable.



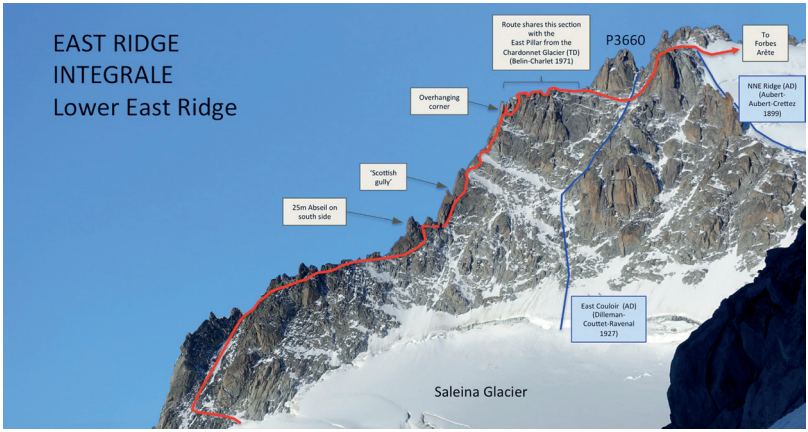
Rick Allen on the lower east ridge of the Aiguille du Chardonnet during the first ascent. Behind is the Grande Fourche, on which the pair had recently completed a new route: on the face in profile to the right. *(Simon Richardson)*



Rick Allen on a pitch of thin ice (Scottish IV) under a chockstone on the lower east ridge of the Aiguille du Chardonnet. *(Simon Richardson)*

Let us begin with the new routes. Twenty years after establishing the famous *Voie Petit* on the Grand Capucin with Stéphanie Bodet, Arnaud Petit was back to create a new route called *L'Or du Temps* (470m, 12 pitches, 7c+). Put up over four days in August with Nina Caprez, the route starts up the first two pitches of the classic *Bonatti* before breaking out left and climbing independent ground until joining the *Ragni* near the top. The new route was not climbed ground up, but the French-Swiss pair only bolted where necessary: 27 protection bolts. Two weeks later, it was climbed ground-up, free, and in 13 hours, the first continuous free ascent, by Slovakians Martin Krasnansky, Pavel Kratochvil, who is 16 years old and led the crux, and Robert Luby. This team felt the fifth pitch crux to be 7c+ rather than the original grade of 8a. After their ascent the Slovaks discussed the grade with the authors, and both parties settled on 7c+.

Also in the Mont Blanc massif, but earlier in the season, Rick Allen and Simon Richardson climbed virgin ground when they made unusual ascents of the Grande Forche and Aiguille du Chardonnet from the Albert Premier hut. On 24 June the pair left the hut, crossed the Fenêtre de Saleina, and



The lower east ridge of the Aiguille du Chardonnet to the junction with the north-north-east ridge. *(Simon Richardson)*

reached the south-east face of the Grande Fourche (3610m). This face is split by an east-facing couloir (AD) that rises to a point right of the summit. The *Adam-Crettex* (AD) slants from right to left up the spur to the right of this couloir, before crossing it and finishing up the central spur directly to the summit. The objective for Allen and Richardson was a complete ascent of the 500m central spur. This was achieved in 19 pitches, generally at 5a-5b but with several harder, including the first pitch crux (6a). The *Scottish Route* (TD) was harder and took longer than expected, forcing an unplanned bivouac with no gear near the summit. Fortunately, the night was warm: unfortunately, it rained. The two were relieved when morning arrived.

Poor weather then intervened, but when the forecast improved the pair returned to the Albert Premier for one of Richardson's characteristically well researched, long-term projects: a complete east to west traverse of the Aiguille du Chardonnet (3842m). Beginning from the Saleina glacier, the lower east ridge rises steeply to a crenelated arête leading to Pte 3660m, aka Pointe Alphonse Couttet, the south pillar of which was climbed in 2013 by Richardson and Tom Prentice. Above this point the ridge eventually meets the north-north-east ridge (*Aubert-Aubert-Crettez*, 1899), from where easy snow leads to the start of the Forbes Arête. In 1971 Belin and Charlet climbed a south-east-facing rock pillar from the Chardonnet glacier to reach the crenelated ridge, descending to the same glacier from below Pte 3660m. In 1929 Dilleman, Couttet and Ravenal had climbed the couloir on the north flank of the east ridge to the gap beyond 3,660m. However, there is no record of a complete ascent of the lower east ridge to the junction with the north-north-east ridge.

Allen and Richardson made their expedition from 4-6 July. They found a very old cairn low down on the easy introductory section of the ridge, which they feel was most likely constructed by crystal hunters. Higher, they passed an old rappel sling, after which the terrain became significantly



Looking back along the crenellated section of the east ridge of the Aiguille du Chardonnet, with the north face of the Aiguille d'Argentière behind. *(Simon Richardson)*

more difficult. The rock was rotten but fortunately the two were on the mountain just after a major storm, and a ribbon of thin ice through almost vertical gravel led under a chockstone (Scottish IV) to a steep corner (UIAA V+), and eventually the start of the crenelated ridge, where they bivouacked. At this point they had joined the *Belin-Charlet*. The following morning the pair climbed an overhanging corner (A1 and V) and continued over towers



A photo-diagram of the new route the *West Pillar Direct* (TD+, VII, 500m), Aiguille du Jardin. *(Ben Tibbetts)*

on delicate and exposed terrain until below 3,660m. Belin and Charlet avoided these towers. Here, they traversed below Pte 3660m on the north flank to reach a notch in the north-north-east ridge, where they made their second bivouac. Day three along the Forbes Arête was fun, though time-consuming due to lean conditions, and the descent to the west was particularly testing, with black ice, rubble and two enormous bergschrunds cutting the glacier below Col Adams Reilly. Needless to say, the Chardonnet had few ascents during the 2017 summer.

The pair regained the Albert Premier at 8pm after three full days' climbing, but Richardson had an airport transfer at 9am the following day, so after a meal they walked down to the valley, arriving just after midnight. The *East Ridge Integral* has a vertical height gain of 800m and an overall grade of TD.

On the Aiguille du Jardin, Will Sim and Ben Tibbetts have climbed a direct route up the west pillar (TD+, 6b, 500m). This is the pillar immediately right of the couloir leading to the Col Armand Charlet. Their climb is described in more detail in this edition of the *Alpine Journal*.

In cold stable weather over 15-16 March, Dani Arnold, Thomas Senf (Switzerland) and Alex Huber (Germany) added a new line to the north face of the Matterhorn by climbing directly through the long overhanging section of the Zmutt Nose to the left of the *Gogna* (Cerruti-Gogna, 1969). The three climbed approximately the first two-fifths of the *Gogna* to a small ledge below the start of enormous overhangs where the *Gogna* moves right. They bivouacked on the ledge after fixing a pitch above. The next day was 'Huber terrain', the German using sophisticated aid techniques to climb two pitches through a section as overhanging as the huge roofs on the Cima Ovest di Lavaredo. Bolts were placed at belays, and two bolts used to start the first pitch. After another steep pitch – 'there aren't many places in the Alps as steep and exposed as this' – the three continued up easier, mixed terrain for a further five hours to reach the summit. The route has been named *Schweizernase* (VII+, A4, 1000m).

On the north-west face of the Breitwangflue (2200m), north-east of Kandersteg at the western end of the Bernese Oberland, Dani Arnold made the first on-sight free solo ascent of *Beta Block Super*, (WI7, 300m), a steep ice route put up in 1998 by Daniela and Robert Jasper. Arnold took only one hour and three minutes to complete the ascent. It is the first time an ice route of this length and standard has been free soloed: there have been solo ascents of WI7 in the past, but of far shorter routes. The ascent was well filmed and can be viewed on the planetmountain website.

On the famous Konigspitze (3851m) in the Ortler Group, Daniel Ladurner and Johannes Lemayer (Italy) climbed a new route on the north-east face. *Schattenspiel* (M6, WI5, 900m) follows the prominent line of thin ice gullies and smears 100m right of the classic *North-east Couloir*, a popular winter ascent and often skied, before joining the latter for its last straightforward 200m to the summit. The rock left much to be desired and the climbing was poorly protected. The route was climbed on 7 October and although an obvious line, it seems that it remained untouched in the past due to lack of ice build-up. Despite the 'good' conditions for the ascent, this is a serious route, which should only be attempted in autumn during very cold temperatures.

Over in the Dolomites, in just 9h 15m on 17 March, Simon Gietl and Michi Wohlleben made the first winter crossing of the 'Lavaredo Skyline', a west-to-east traverse of all the peaks in the Cime di Lavaredo group. This involved climbing the *Squirrels' Ridge* on the Cima Ovest then down-climbing the normal route, the *Dulfer* on the Cima Grande and descent of its normal route, the normal route up the Cima Piccolo and descent via the *Innerkofler*, a west-to-east traverse of Punta Frida, and finally the normal route on the Cima Piccolissima and descent of the *Preuss*.

There were two notable achievements in what could be termed pre-Alp terrain. Over five days during the autumn Christophe Bressard and Emmanuel Ratouis opened one of the longest routes on French limestone when they completed *Le Royaume de Noir*, 750m high, 19 long and equipped pitches, with difficulties of 7a+, 6b obl. The route is situated on the south pillar of the 2,554m Pointe de Platé in the Haut Giffre or Fiz Range north-west



A fine 5c pitch on *Le Royaume de Noir*, south pillar of the Pointe de Platé. *(Emmanuel Ratouis)*

of the Mont Blanc Range. It is basically a direct version of the classic, but little climbed, 1958 *Lenoir Wohlschlag* route (TD-, 5c, 5a obl). The new route took a lot of work, both cleaning and equipping, is sustained at 5c-6c, and has generally very good rock and some amazing pitches, particularly in the upper part. However, the limestone on the first two or three pitches, which include the crux, is a little friable, but can be avoided by an easier variant. This peak offers superb views of Mont Blanc and the approach, from the top of a ski station, is only one hour. Allow eight to 11 hours for the ascent, and two and a half for the scenic walk off the back.

Just west of the Mont Blanc range, a notable speed solo took place in the Massif des Aravis, when in September Paul Bonhomme took just 37h 20m to make a north-east to south-west crossing of this jagged limestone chain. This is a total of 76km, of which 35km are over relatively sharp, rocky (and grassy!) arêtes. The traverse involved a total vertical ascent of 7,230m. The main difficulties lie in the crossing of long sections of narrow, delicate and exposed ridge where the rock can be generously described as far from perfect. Maximum difficulties are 5+/6a on Pointe Percée's classic *Arête du Doigt*, though here the limestone is solid. Bonhomme, who travelled unsupported, stopped for the night on the Col des Aravis. This is the first solo traverse of the Aravis in this direction and the first completed in less than two days.

Patrick Bérhault and Christophe Frendo made the first known traverse in this direction over five days in winter. However, this pair understandably had logistical backup and descended each night to a hut. It should be noted that both the winter team, and Bonhomme, missed out a few sections of the ridge, but back in September 2013 Matthieu Gilbon had made the first (and only) integral crossing but from the other direction, from south-west to north-east. Gilbon, who took five days for the traverse, had made two attempts with partners the previous year and left certain sections equipped. His odyssey involved pioneering new ground on the ridge, both in ascent and descent. A successful unsupported integral traverse from north-east to south-west as well as complete winter traverses in both directions await ambitious future parties.



Looking south-east from high on the Arête des Bouquetins. The main chain of the Aravis is visible in middle distance, with the highest summit, Pointe Percée, on the left. Directly behind this peak is Mont Blanc. *(Lindsay Griffin)*

There were other worthy ascents of typically demanding and rarely climbed routes. On the Grandes Jorasses there were several notable successes on the harder coveted mixed lines. On 20-22 February Luka Lindič (Slovenia) and Ines Papert (Germany) climbed the Whymper Spur in quite dry conditions, using a combination of *No Siesta* and the middle section of the *Bonatti-Vaucher*. They made two bivouacs and estimate the difficulties at M7. This was the first time Papert had climbed a route on the north face, though Lindič had been there in 2014, completing the first free ascent of *Rolling Stones*.

A month later Leo Billon, Max Bonniot and Pierre Labbre made an almost free ascent of *Rolling Stones* (ED3, M8, 1200m). Beginning on 13 March, the trio made two bivouacs and climbed all pitches free, including the crux on pitch 23, apart from pitches 24 (M7+) and 25 (M7).

From 11-14 October Damian Granowski and Tomasz Klimczak (Poland) climbed the *Serge Gousseault* (aka *Desmaison*) on the north-east flank of the *Walker Spur* (ED3, M6+ WI4 A1, 1200m). Julien Desécures' 2012 topo guide recorded about 15 ascents of this route at the time of publication.

Another historic tour de force to receive attention was the *Guides Route* on the north face of the Petit Dru. Put up over eight days in February 1967 by the crack French team of Michel Feuillarde, Claude Jager, Jean-Paul Paris and Yannick Seigneur, this 850m route has rarely been repeated. It follows

the left rim of the niche and required copious aid on the first ascent, though this was halved on the first British and third overall ascent in August 1975 by Bob Milward and Steve Parr. Jérome Para and Sébastien Ratel climbed the route in two days during March 2017, likely to be only the second ascent in winter. An outstanding challenge would be an all-free ascent of this route. Many ancient pegs remain in place and the French pair considered dry tooling to be the most logical way to climb this route without aid.

A month previously, in February, Max Bonniot, Sébastien Ratal and Pierre Sancier made the second free ascent of the 1992 *Rhem-Vimal* on the north face of the west summit of Les Droites, but were the first to complete the route free in one day. The climb had originally been rated 6b and A2 but when climbed free over two days in March 2009 by Eric Doiseau, who led the crux, Benjamin Guigonnet and Damien Tomasi, it was modified to M7/M8. Shortly after the ascent by Bonniot et al, the route was climbed again, free and in a day, by Mathieu Maynadier and Mathieu Détrie, who were full of praise for Doiseau's 2009 lead.

The young Italian Federica Mingolla continues to dominate female Alpine rock climbing. During August in the Dolomites she repeated three long, difficult free climbs. At the start of the month, with aspirant guide Francesco Rigon, Mingolla climbed the 600m *Chimera Verticale* (7c), established by Alessandro Bau and partners over the summers of 2007 and 2009. The route takes the big compact wall between the classic *Aste* and *Andrich* routes on the north-west face of the Civetta. Rigon led the lower pitches but then Mingolla took over and led through to the top, with no falls including the crux pitches. Four days later she was on the south face of Marmolada di Ombretta completing a successful ascent with Enrico Fedolfi of the 1988 Maurizio Giordani masterpiece *Specchio di Sara* (7c). This line offers vertical climbing on superb compact rock, sometimes run out, and with route-finding problems.

Next was the south face of Punta Rocca on the Marmolada and the *Via delle Cattedrale*, a 800m route originally climbed in 1983 by the great Italian activist, Graziano Maffei, and friends at VI+ and A4. Petro dal Pra managed to free climb it in 2004 at 8a+, and the route has since become a sought-after free test-piece, though few have climbed it as such. Partnered by Nicolo Geremia, Mingolla took a preliminary look at the first six pitches on day one, bailing when it started to hail. On day two she took the lead and led most of the pitches, on-sighting 7c, but not able to on-sight the crux. After a two-day ascent the pair rappelled the route and during the descent Mingolla led the crux pitch first go. It was probably the Marmolada that brought this Italian to prominence, when in 2016 she became the first woman to free climb *Fish*.

Another woman climbing hard free routes in the Dolomites is Austrian Lisi Steurer. With partner Hannes Pfeifhofer, and climbing ground-up over seven days, she put up *Hakuna Matata* (8a, 7b obl, 400m) on the right side of the south face of Tae in the Fanes region. Protection was a mixture of pegs, bolts and natural gear, and the rock was considered some of the best in the Dolomites. Both climbers returned at different times during the summer and climbed the route free in a day.