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## Area Notes

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'Weisshorner', Hilda Hechle, 1927?, watercolour, 32cm x 54cm.  
Monte Rosa, Lyskamm, Breithorn, Klein Matterhorn, possibly from Solvay hut.  
*(Courtesy of Tony Astill/www.mountainpaintings.org)*

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LINDSAY GRIFFIN

## Alps & Dolomites 2020



The south-south-east face of the Grandes Jorasses. Not all routes are shown:  
1. *Gogna-Machetto* (1972, 1400m, probably ED2). 2. *Phantom Direct* (1985, 1400m but much more actual climbing, ED2/3). 3. *Plein Sud* (2010, stopping two pitches below the exit). 4. *Diamond Ridge* (2016, 1600m) leading to the upper Tronchey ridge. 5. *Tronchey Ridge* (1936). (*Sergio de Leo/Marcello Sanguineti*)

A combination of superb winter conditions at the start of the year, followed by Covid-19 restrictions keeping most European climbers' travels close to home, produced many fine ascents throughout 2020 in both the Alps and Dolomites. This report, whilst not definitive, documents a representative selection of the year's major adventures on rock and ice, many carried out in a suitably bold and committing style.

### Major Repeats

Arguably the most notable ascent in the Mont Blanc range, and indeed throughout the Western Alps, was not a new route at all but the second ascent of the legendary *Phantom Direct* on the **Grandes Jorasses**.

The south-south-east face, or Tronchey Wall rises 1,400m from the Pra Sec glacier to the summit of Pointe Walker (4208m), making it the tallest in the range. The lower section is characterised by steep, compact granite, while the upper sports a pronounced central pillar. Right of this pillar a huge



The Tronchey Wall of the Grandes Jorasses seen from the upper Pra Sec glacier. 1. *Original Route* (1972, Gogna-Machetto, 1400m, probably ED2 VI and A2). 2. *Phantom Direct* (1985, Grassi-Luzi-Rossi, 1400m but much more actual climbing, ED2/3, VI,5 or 6). 3. *Plein Sud* (2010, to two pitches below the exit, VI,5, M6+ R, repeated once). 4. Part of the *Diamond Ridge* (2016, Richardson-Rinn, 1600m, 5c A0) leading to the upper Tronchey ridge. (Marcello Sanguineti)

deep gully leads to a small gap above the third tower high on the Tronchey ridge. To the left of the Tronchey ridge, a more open couloir-depression rises toward the top of the Pra Sec ridge.

In August 1972 Italians Alessandro Gogna and Guido Machetto became the first people ever to cross the Pra Sec glacier, when they climbed the wet, steep lower wall of the south-south-east face, experiencing Eiger-like stone fall. They then proceeded up the more enjoyable central pillar to the summit of Pointe Walker. Their route has likely never been seriously attempted since and is probably ED2 in today's currency. Later, visionary ice climber Gian Carlo Grassi saw another possibility: ephemeral ice smears leading to the huge gully. Over many years (during which time the line was also attempted by others, including a British party) Grassi made six 'reconnaissance' attempts. Then in June 1985, following the snowiest winter for years and in unseasonal low temperatures, he found the Pra Sec glacier well covered in avalanche debris and the ice smears beautifully formed. With Renzo Luzi and Mauro Rossi, Grassi reached the base of the gully to find no ice. What to do? Instead, the three made a delicate and irreversible 200m rising traverse over snow-covered slabs to reach the hanging couloir-depression left of the central pillar. Grassi's intuition had paid off. It was in excellent

condition. With a storm closing, threatening to trap the climbers in a vast avalanche funnel, they unroped and climbed rapidly over technical ground to the summit. Since then, a repetition of the *Phantom Direct* (aka *Gianni Comino Memorial Route*, 1400m, ED3, VI/5 or 6) has been one of the most sought-after ascents, Grassi accurately predicting that his route, 'would not be repeated for a long time.'

In 2010 Grassi's projected line was almost climbed, when four Italians reached and then climbed the great gully to a highpoint a couple of pitches below the exit to the Tronchey ridge, where they met unclimbable blank rock. They descended, naming their almost completed route *Plein Sud* (VI/5, M6+R), repeated once.

In early 2020, ice routes in the Mont Blanc range were in splendid condition. On 21 January, Frenchman Yann Borgnet and Charles Dubouloz, after driving from their homes in Annecy, left the Val Ferret at 4am in a temperature of -12°C, and reached the start of *Phantom Direct* at 9.30am. High winds and poor visibility accompanied the difficult climbing in the upper section and they arrived on the summit 10 hours later, only two hours faster than the 1985 ascensionists. They had just repeated the longest ice climb in the Mont Blanc massif. The descent through the night was taxing and the Boccalatte hut only reached at 4am the following day.

One of the most impressive summer second ascents in the massif came on 18 July when Federica Mingolla, at 26 years old one of Italy's leading female alpinists, and Leonardo Gheza repeated *Incredyable* on the Red Pillar of Brouillard, **Mont Blanc**. By the end of the 1980s the smooth walls forming the crest of the Red Pillar, right of the classic *Bonatti-Oggioni*, had been crossed by three routes: *Via del Dilettanti* (1980), *Gabarrou-Long* (1983), and *Les Anneaux Magiques* (1989). Since that time most climbers assumed there could not be room for another; most that is bar Matteo Della Bordella. Over two days, 30 June and 1 July, and with new climbing partners, Francois Cazzanelli and Francesco Ratti, Bordella created *Incredyable* between *Anneaux Magiques* and the *Gabarrou-Long*, finishing the climb on the good ledges below the last top section of the pillar (also the finishing point of *Les Anneaux Magiques*). The eight pitches have one belay bolt each, and a total of 20 bolts for protection. However, the route was not climbed free; that had to wait until the 8 July when Bordella returned with Cazzanelli, Ratti, and Isaie Maquignaz, and led the crux at 8a. The others freed the remaining pitches before rappelling the *Gabarrou-Long*.

Given the location and altitude of the technical difficulties – the route has obligatory moves of 7b – one might have expected a healthy passage of time before the route was attempted again. Federica Mingolla was working on the evenings of 16 and 17 July, a Thursday and Friday, serving dinner at the Monzino hut. However, she decided there was time on the Friday to climb the *Ratti-Vitali* route on the west face of the Aiguille Noire de Peuterey with Lorenzo Pernigotti, make the 22-rappel descent, and be back in time for work before leaving early next morning with Gheza, with whom she had not climbed before. The plan worked. After a short night at the Monzino,



The east face of the Grandes Jorasses and the lines of: 1. *Mad Max* (2020); 2. *Il Giovane Guerriero* (2020); and 3. *Little Big Men* (2006). The approach from the right and a traverse down to the snow terraces is nowadays preferred to the original direct starts up the stone-swept rock walls below. (*Antonio Giani*)

the alarm rang at 3am on Saturday and the two reached the foot of the Red Pillar four and a half hours later. Mingolla led all the difficult pitches, the crux on her second attempt. By 4.30pm they were rappelling from the top of the route. It would be normal to climb on this pillar after a night at the Eccles bivouac hut, but both parties made their free ascents in a day from the Monzino.

The Mingolla-Gheza partnership was formed, and the pair followed *Incroyable* with another prestigious second ascent, also of a recent Della Bordella route: *Il Giovane Guerriero* on the remote east face of the Grandes Jorasses. Della Bordella had wanted to climb a new route on this face for almost a decade but after an ascent of *Groucho Marx* in 2019 he spotted the various crack systems that could be linked to produce a logical line – up the steep walls between the 1942 *Gervasutti* route and 2006's *Little Big Men*.

On 6 and 7 August, Della Bordella, Luca Moroni and Matteo Pasquetto

climbed 12 new pitches (350m) to reach easy terrain below the Tronchey ridge. Only three hand-placed bolts and a few pegs were left in-situ, and four pitches were 7a or above, with obligatory moves at this standard. The hardest moves, around a large roof on the 15m third pitch, are 7b+, but the crux is a thin slab pitch of 7a, which took three and a half hours to lead. The three bivouacked at the top of pitch nine and the following day gained the Tronchey ridge, which they followed to the summit. Tragically, during the descent of the Rocher de Reposoir to the Boccalatte hut, Pasquetto slipped and fell to his death.

Pasquetto – *il giovane guerrero* [the young warrior] – was a talented young alpinist with great potential and the route was named for him. He had made a new route on Aguja Standhardt in Patagonia, repeated *Divine Providence* on the Grand Pilier d'Angle, *Groucho Marx* on the Jorasses east face, and made the first solo ascent of *Delta Minox* on the Bregaglia's Cavalcorto, one of the most run out and technically difficult slab climbs in that range.

Gheza and Mingolla completed the second ascent in a day during mid August, finding the climb technical and committing: you would lose all your gear if you had to retreat from high on the route. In the short time span between completing *Incredible* and this line, the pair had also climbed *Manitua* on the north face of the Jorasses. Quite a season.

Widely reported as a first ascent, a line on the west face of the **Aiguille du Plan** was climbed on 21 and 22 February by Slovaks Ondrej Huserka and Evka Milovska, and named *Mystery* (600m, 15 pitches, M8, C1, 85°). They bivouacked at the top of pitch eight, and used aid on the final 20m: a loose, overhanging, vegetated crack. The route is in fact the unnamed shallow corner immediately right of *Grand West Couloir* (Gabarrou and Picard-Deyme, 1975, 700m, V/5 and aid), first climbed in summer 1977 by Gordon Smith (UK) and Tobin Sorenson (USA). This pair also found the crux to be the last pitch: an awkward slanting corner-crack choked with ice, followed by a large icicle-laden overhang turned on the left. They also made one bivouac, as they were 'training' for the Jorasses, but didn't start until midday, finishing the route in 13 hours climbing time.

In a remarkable 17 hours on 31 July, Filip Babicz made only the second known ascent of the *Complete Peuterey Ridge*. Climbed between 11-13 July 1973 by Germans Gottlieb Braun-Ewert and Rudi Kirmeier, this involves starting in the Val Veni, traversing Monte Rouge de Peuterey via the 1,200m south-south-west and north ridges, then across the col des Chasseurs to reach the south ridge of the Aiguille Noire. From here it follows the *Peuterey Integral* to the summit of Mont Blanc. While the statistics are staggering – 4,000m of ascent, 8,000m of climbing and around 900m of rappels, making it the longest ridge in the massif – it is well to remember that Jean-Marc Boivin's solo of the *Peuterey Integral* in 1983 took just 10 and a half hours, and since then complete re-equipping of the long rappel descent from the Noire has made this section faster and less scary. The brothers Hugo and Oscar Schmitt noted this when they completed the Integral 10 days earlier in a little over 12 hours.



The south-east flanks of the Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey and Peuterey ridge seen across the tormented Brenva glacier. A. Punta Gugliermina. B. Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey. C. Mont Blanc de Courmayeur. D. Grand Pilier d'Angle. E. Brenva Face. The routes are: 1. *North-east Couloir of Brèche des Dames Anglaises* (1913, D-). 2. *Vols Uncertains* (2020). 3. *East Face of the Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey* (1893, 1300m, graded AD+ but likely harder today). (Lindsay Griffin)

Babicz, a Pole now residing in the Aosta valley, spends some of his time making speed ascents. Exactly a month later, he returned to the Aiguille Noire and set a record time for an ascent of the classic *South Ridge*. The 1,200m arête, which has a guidebook time of 10-12 hours for a roped party, was climbed in just 1h 30m: a fixed rope was in place for the obligatory 25m rappel from Pointe Welzenbach. The previous fastest time was probably Boivin's 2h 45m. Babicz set off at 4pm in running gear with just rock shoes, harness, chalk, one sling and a descender. He was in time to make a casual descent of the east ridge in evening light.

When it comes to mixed outings with ephemeral ice, changing conditions can annihilate former reputations. So it was for *Sagzahn Verschneidung*, the great corner system between the 3,227m **Sagwand** and the 3,410m **Schrammacher** in the Valsertal of the Austrian Zillertal Alps. The late David Lama made four attempts before succeeding on the first ascent of this 800m line in February 2018 with Peter Mühlburger. The difficulties – up to M6 – were concentrated into six pitches, and some aid (A2) was needed around a roof. Lama had developed this little-known area as a winter playground and

rated this route as one of the hardest he had put up there. Several subsequent attempts to repeat it would fail, adding to its status.

In November 2020 a friend of David Bruder and Martin Feistl sent them a photo of the line, showing it was in excellent condition. On the 11 November this pair climbed detached ice with excellent rock protection to make the second ascent, free, at M6 WI4. They encountered none of the friable rock or outrageous technical climbing that Lama had experienced.

### New Routes

In the Vanoise, west of Mont Blanc, the less well-known **Epéna** (3421m) was one of the last 'big peaks' in the Alps to be climbed (1900). The north face, almost 3km in length and a maximum of around 750m high, is revered by the French mountaineering community due to its relative isolation, tranquillity and being arguably the highest limestone wall in the French Alps (as opposed to their Pre-Alps). The descent, on the south side of the mountain, is long and complex, and the rock on the north face is compact yet often friable, with characteristically small downward-sloping holds and poor protection, even if using pegs. Making the first winter ascent of this face has been a coveted, if not nearly impossible project for decades, but in February 2019 it finally fell to a French team that succeeded on the classic northwest spur of the Pointe Orientale (765m, TD 5c, *Rod-Schneider*, 1966).

Manu Pellissier made his first foray onto this face almost three decades ago, and each winter for the last 20 years has watched out for viable ice-mixed conditions; on one attempt he was forced to bail just 130m below the top of the *Rod-Schneider*. But in 12 hours on 27 November, with Luc Mongellaz and Jessy Pivier, he completed the first ascent of *The Fridge* (900m, 5c, M5, WI5) on the north face of the Brèche Perdreux, the col between the Pointe Orientale (3348m) and Pointe Centrale (3307m). The three started at the base of the 1966 *Rod-Schneider*, then worked up the depression to the right, arriving on the summit ridge with the feeling of having achieved something special. Three days previously, to create a descent on the north side, this team had climbed a west-facing 500m gully at M5 WI5, between Pointe Occidentale (3293m) and the 3,321m Petite Glière to the south-west, equipping it for an eight-rappel descent. From the top of *The Fridge* it took the trio three hours to traverse over the Centrale and Occidentale summits to reach the top of their equipped descent, crawling through the night along the sharp and difficult ridge. They regained their car 20 hours after leaving. The news of such remarkable conditions quickly became known and the route was repeated twice just three days later.

In February Sébastien Ibanez and Baptiste Obino made the first ascent of the east couloir of the **Brèche Punta Gugliermana** (the gap immediately north of the summit). Accessing this line requires a tortuous ascent of 1,800m from the Val Veni, or a traverse from the top of the Skyway téléphérique and complex navigation of the chaotic Brenva glacier. The two chose a third option, a double paraglider. With Ibanez in control during the flight, Obino held onto the equipment: two 15-litre bags full of gear in one

hand and a 45-litre bag in the other. The first half of the route is steep ice smears followed by two hard mixed pitches, while the second half is much more straightforward. *Vol Uncertains* gives around 940m of climbing at a grade of V/5 or 5+ and M5. The name comes not only for the means of approach, but also from an intense moment during the c20-rappel descent: while trying to pull a jammed rope both climbers suddenly found themselves dangling from a single peg. The route got a repeat in the autumn from an Italian party that approached in a long day from the valley and bivouacked one hour below the climb.

Surprisingly, *Il Giovane Guerriero* was not the only new line climbed on the east face of the **Grandes Jorasses**. A month before this route was opened, Jérémy Brauge, Victor Saucède, and Jérôme Sullivan put up *Mad Max* (800m, 7a+, 7a obl, a tribute to the late Max Bonniot, and the film of the same name) to the right of the *Gervasutti* route. Much of the climb is on steep cracks and slabs of excellent granite, which are difficult to protect. At the top of pitch seven it shares a belay with the *Gervasutti*, immediately below the latter's A2 pitch. From here the three moved right and climbed a bold 7a+, the crux pitch. The pitch above was led at 6b and A1 but would be 7b free. The team bivouacked at the top of pitch nine, reached the Tronchey ridge next day – 9 July – at the end of pitch 11, and continued over the summit. Natural pro was used throughout, except for a single hand-placed bolt on the second belay. The route is better protected from rock fall than some of those further right.

Demonstrating that it is still possible to discover new lines in full view of Chamonix, over two days in January the Spanish Bru Busom, Martin Elias and Marc Toralles filled the gap between the classic *Cordier Pillar* and, to its left, the *Ghilini-Giacomo* route on the west face of the **Grands Charmoz**. Named *Le Grand Charme*, the 650m route has sustained climbing at M6+ with the last three pitches, where the three had to remove crampons and progress in boots, giving pure rock climbing to 6b. On the first day they took the téléphérique to the Plan de l'Aiguille and climbed the initial pitches up to the snow patch, where they bivouacked. Next day, they threw off the bivouac gear and spent from 9am to 11pm reaching the summit, from where they rappelled the *Cordier* through the night.

Two interesting new rock routes were climbed at lesser-known venues. High up at the head of the Piantonetto valley in the Gran Paradiso range the remote 3,692m **Torre del Gran San Pietro** was first climbed by Douglas Freshfield. The steeper and rocky south face has several established lines but toward the left side rises a slim but highly conspicuous pillar, vertical to overhanging in its 250m of height. Remarkably, for such an evident feature, an obvious line of cracks and corners up the front face remained unclimbed until 18 August, when Hervé Barmasse and Stefano Perrone, completely alone in this corner of the range during one of the busiest summers on record, climbed it to create *Dall'Inferno al Paradiso*, from hell to heaven, marking the transition from the hell of Covid-19 to the heaven of returning to the freedom of the mountains. To maintain a spirit of adventure in this

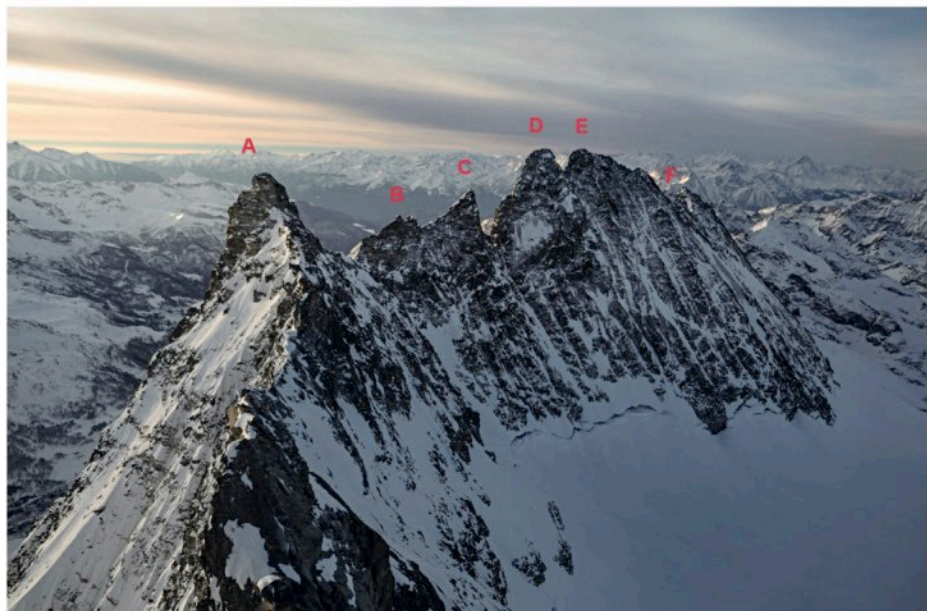


The west faces of Grands Charmoz and (right) Aiguille du Grépon with the new mixed line *Le Grand Charme* between the rock pillars of *Ghilini-Giacomo* (left) and *Cordier*. The first ascensionists bivouacked in the lower snowfield. (*Lindsay Griffin*)

relatively wild corner of the Alps, the pair have only released a photo of the line, and noted they climbed nothing harder than 7b, all on natural gear (though at least one bolt was placed during the rappel descent).

The mountains of Ticino, part of the Swiss Lepontine Alps, are relatively little known outside the local climbing and walking community. Within this range is the Poncione d'Alnasca (2301m), a sort of 'Matterhorn' of the area, an impressive summit pyramid with a vertical south face overlooking the deep Versaska valley that runs north from the tip of Lago Maggiore. This 500m granite face, perched high above the valley floor, has, over the decades, attracted the attentions of well-known 'local' climbers such as Emilio Comici, Walter Bonatti and Marco Pedrini. During forays with various partners in 2015 and 2016, the Italian Matteo Della Bordella, who grew up close to Lago Maggiore, completed a 16-pitch route up the left side of the wall but was unable to free it. In 2018 he managed on several occasions to free all but the eleventh pitch. Wondering whether this pitch was simply too hard for him, he asked Alessandro Zeni, a strong and extremely talented climber who has led 9b, to join him for another attempt. On the second visit to the wall at the end of November 2020, and working from a portaledge, Zeni, who had previously latched the huge dyno on the crux pitch 11 that gives the route its name, now solved the problem of the weird third-pitch dyno (7c) to complete the first free ascent of *Leap of Faith* (8a+ or 8b, 7b+ obl). Della Bordella then managed to free pitch 11 and celebrate the conclusion of a five-year odyssey.

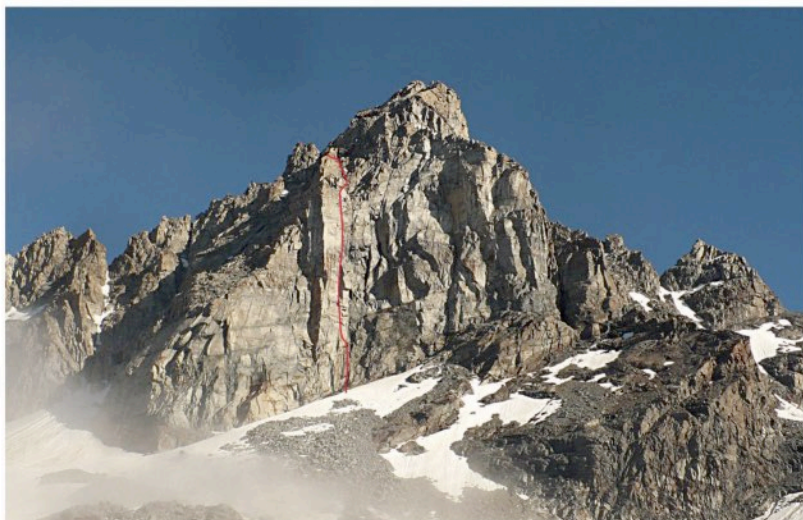
Late in the year, a long route of high technical difficulty was completed in



Looking south along the Grandes Murailles ridge with the Valtournenche to the left and upper Grandes Murailles glacier on the right. A. Punta del Cors. B. Punta Ester. C. Punta Liroy. D and E. Les Jumeaux, Puntas Giordano and Sella. F. Becca di Guin. (Francois Cazzanelli)

the Glarner (also Glarus) Alps of Switzerland, the region to the north-east of Andermatt, best known for its highest summit, Tödi (3614m), a popular and coveted ski tour. The **Gross Ruchen** (3137m) lies a little to the west of Tödi and has a classic route on the north face (1200m, AD). To the right of this Dani Arnold and Roger Schaeli, climbing together on a big mountain route for the first time, completed *Egidius*, a 1,300m mixed line climbed on 24, 25 and 28 November at WI6+ M7. Arnold had first tried this line in 2009 with Stephan Ruoss, but at that stage in his career was unable to climb the first section of major difficulty, above half-height. Arnold and Schaeli spent two days preparing the route before their final attack. To above the crux sections the belays are equipped with one bolt, allowing for an easier retreat. Some bolts protect the cruxes, but natural protection is essential. The line got a quick repeat on 23 December from Germans Lukas Hinterberger, Walter Hungerbühler and Michi Wohlleben, who found it impressive in size and 'very scary' in the upper section due to dangerous conditions.

A few days after his ascent of *Sagzahn Verschneidung*, Feistl, climbing with Sven Brand, created his own partial new route on the **Sagwand** with the obvious 300m *Direct Start* to the original route on the face, *Rampenfuhre*, at M6 WI4 X. They continued to the top to record a total of 950m of climbing. To complete a fine hat trick, Feistl re-united with Bruder in the **Karwendal**, and in a very long day on 20 December climbed the massive 1,000m corner



The south face of Torre del Gran San Pietro and the line of *Dall'Inferno al Paradiso* up the obvious pillar.

system between the Grubenkar Spitze and Plattenspitze to create the highly technical *Stalingrad* (WI7, M8, A1). Although the Karwendal is better known as a rock-climbing venue, this line has been attempted several times in the past, and as long ago as 1992, when the visionary Franz Prechtold fell, and was injured, from the crux pitch five.

### Enchainments

Long ridge traverses, or *enchainements* in the Alps can enable climbers to have a full, high-standard Himalayan experience without the altitude. There were several remarkable high-level journeys in 2020, but probably the most outstanding was a winter traverse around the northern rim of the Valtournerche completed by Cervinia guides François Cazzanelli and Francesco Ratti. The pair linked the **Furggen Chain**, the **Matterhorn**, and the **Grandes** and **Petites Murailles**, a total of 20 summits, 51km distance and 4,800m of ascent. They had attempted this project in the winter of 2019, only to fail near the end due to impossible cornices.

In 2020 the two Italians left the Theodul hut by the Theodul pass (3295m) at 7am on 20 January and had descended to the valley from the col des Dames, south-west of Mont Blanc du Creton (3406m) – the last peak of the Petites Murailles – by 1pm on 23 January. Their first night was spent in the Carrel hut having traversed the Matterhorn, and the second and third at the small Perelli and Paoluccio bivouac huts situated on the Murailles ridge. They climbed along the lengthy east ridge of the Dent d'Hérens but did not go to the summit, instead aiming directly for the col des Grandes Murailles and the Perelli. Minimum temperatures were -23°C.

The first continuous traverse of the sharp and technical rocky ridges of



Roger Schaeli heads towards steep ice pillars on *Egidius*, north face of Gross Ruchen. (Courtesy of Roger Schaeli)

Grandes and Petites Murailles was made over three days in the summer of 1940. Seven years later another Italian team linked the Matterhorn with a traverse of the Grandes Murailles, also with two bivouacs. In 1985 Cazzanelli's father, Valter, with Marco Barmasse (father of Hervé) made the first winter crossing of the Grandes and Petites. In August 2018 François Cazzanelli and Kilian Jornet traversed the Grandes and Petites Murailles in a fraction under 11 hours.

Cazzanelli would return in September 2020 and with Nadir Maguet traverse the Matterhorn via the Furggen and Italian ridges then continue to traverse the frontier ridge west over the Dent d'Hérens to the Valpelline: the whole c35km odyssey was completed in less than one day.

Another marathon effect took place in the Valais, where two Swiss, Nicolas Hojac and Adrian Zurbrügg, polished off all 20 peaks of the **Monte Rosa**



Dani Arnold squirms around a difficult chockstone on *Egidius*, north face of Gross Ruchen. (Roger Schaeli)

massif over 4,000m. They completed these in just over 13 and a half hours on 8 July. Conditions were excellent: their biggest fear had been daytime heat softening the snow, but this was not the case. By dawn they had already completed 10 of the summits. For those who fancy a repeat of this feat, the summits are: Nordend, Dufourspitze, Zumsteinspitze, Punta Gnifetti, Punta Parrot, Ludwigshorn, Corno Nero, Balmenhorn, Piramide Vincent, Punta Giordani, Lyskamm East, Lyskamm West, Felikhorn, Castor, Pollux, Rocca Nera, Breithorn Gendarme, Breithorn East, Breithorn Central, and Breithorn West. They reached the Klein Matterhorn cable car at 12.30pm, having covered 29km and made around 4,500m of altitude gain (starting from the Monte Rosa hut).

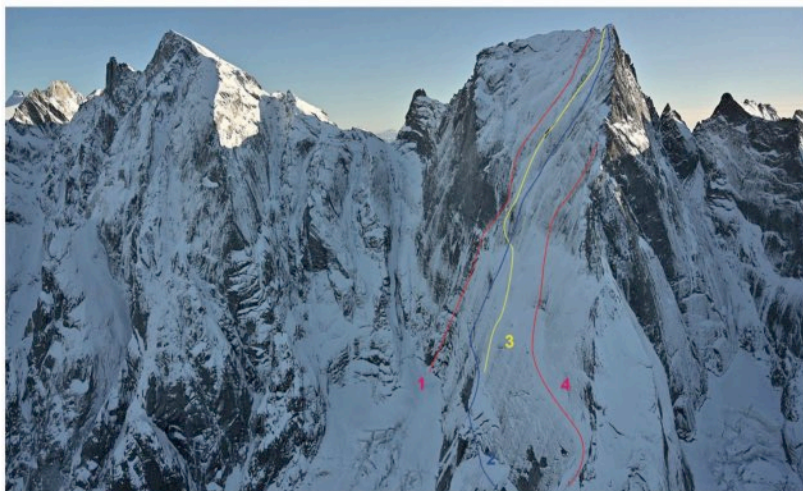
Covid-19 restrictions gave impetus to an idea proposed by Ines Papert to Caro North of a self-propelled journey from east to west across Switzerland, climbing routes that were new to both. The two women had no outside support, travelling by bike, pulling their equipment on trailers, and buying food locally. Eventual statistics were 18,000m of ascent, 600km travelled, and six routes up to 350m in height. Starting from the Austrian border on 10 August, the two climbed: *Intifada* (7a+) on the marvellous limestone of the **Rätikon**; *Peruvian Dust* (7a+) on the clean granite of the **Teufelstalschucht**



Silvan Schüpbach climbing the thinly iced *Linea Bianca* section of *Crossway of Friendship* on the Piz Badile. (Matteo Della Bordella)

above Andermatt; the ultra-classic *Excalibur* (6b) on the **Wendenstöcke**; *Deep Blue Sea* (7b+) on the right side of the **Eiger** north face; *La Fête des Pères* (7a) on the south face of the **Gastlosen**, and finally the traverse of the **Aiguilles Dorées**, Mont Blanc massif.

A far greater achievement, but in the same style, came from Belgians Sébastien Berthe and Nicolas Favresse. The idea came from Berthe, who wanted a summer project that would test his limits but would have much less environmental impact than an expedition involving many flights. His plan was to be the first to climb in a single summer season the so-called Alpine Trilogy, three now-legendary 8b+ multi-pitch climbs created in 1994 by three equally legendary climbers: Beat Kammerlander's *Silbergeier* on the **Rätikon**; Thomas Huber's *End of Silence* at **Berchtesgaden** and the Stefan Glowacz route *Des Kaisers Neue Kleider* at **Wilder Kaiser**, generally considered hardest of the three. At the time of their ascents, these routes represented the most difficult multi-pitch Alpine sport routes, and while not cutting edge by today's standards, will still prove a challenge to most of the world's top climbers. Berthe needed a partner, and at the last minute Favresse was forced to cancel his plans for Norway due to pandemic restrictions and was looking for an alternative. However, he had one condition: he had to bring his dog. This worked well for Berthe who has a dog of his own and from 2 to 28 August the two biked a distance of 650km with their trailers and two dogs to attempt the three routes, eventually redpointing each in a single day. With some reserves to spare they then headed over to the **Eiger** and made a one-day free ascent of *Odysee* (1400m, 8a+).



The north-east face of the Piz Badile and (left) the Cengalo in excellent 'winter' conditions. 1. *Memento Mori* (1980). 2. Cassin (1937). 3. *Amore di Vetro* (2016). 4. Crossway of Friendship (2020) to junction with north ridge. Combining the first section of *Amore di Vetro* with the upper half of *Memento Mori* produces *Amore Supercombo*. (Tom Bärfluss/David Hefti)

### The Ephemeral

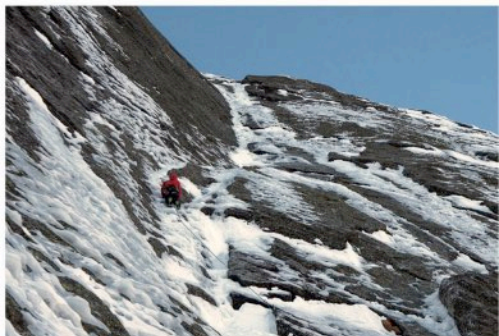
Good winter climbing conditions on the **Piz Badile** are an extremely rare and highly transient occurrence. Being in the right place at the right time is crucial, along with local knowledge. Towards the end of November, Matteo Della Bordella and Silvan Schüpbach heard from Marcel Schenk, the preeminent connoisseur of the mountain in winter, that conditions appeared to be perfect. They set out from the Sasc Fura hut on 26 November with no set plan, ploughing through deep snow to reach the start of the north ridge. From here a vague ledge system leads left across the north-east face and they followed it for around 400m up thin, poorly protected ice over slabby rock to below *Linea Bianca*, the visionary 1978 rock route by Igor Koller and Stanislav Šilhán that was the first to breach the steep



Marcel Schenk moving left from the Cassin snowfield towards the upper section of *Memento Mori* during the November ascent of *Amore Supercombo*. (David Hefti)



Marcel Schenk leading largely unprotected ice-covered slabs on the upper section of *Memento Mori* during the ascent of *Amore Supercombo*, north-east face, Piz Badile. (David Hefti)



Marcel Schenk on the ephemeral ice runnels of *Amore Supercombo*, north-east face of Piz Badile. (David Hefti)

and poorly protected slabs right of the *Cassin* route. The pair followed this 'white line', front-pointing delicate thin ice and climbing mixed to M6 to the north ridge, where they continued to the summit and spent the night in the Redaelli bivouac hut. The line was named *Crossway of Friendship*. This was not the first time *Linea Bianca* had been climbed in winter, as M Clerici had soloed it over four days in December 1986, but it was the first ascent as an ice-mixed route.

The following day it was the turn of Schenk himself, who with fellow Swiss David Hefti combined two of his own 2016 routes: *Amore di Vetro* (800m, M5 R 80°, a little right of the *Cassin* to cross it at the snowfield, then a beautiful sliver of ice between it and *Memento Mori* to the left), and *Nordest Supercombo* (800m, M7 R, 80°, the *Cassin* to the snowfield followed by *Memento Mori* to the summit). The two Swiss found conditions on *Amore Supercombo* 'unbelievable' and even managed to place a few ice screws. They reached the summit with plenty of time to spare to make the descent in daylight. Even so, the route was a serious proposition, with very long run-outs. But the word was out, and this new combination only had to wait three days before receiving a second ascent.

### Free Ascents

In the summer of 2006, Christophe Dumarest and Patrick Gabarrou added a second route to the Pilier Dérobé (Hidden pillar) of Frêne, high on the south face of **Mont Blanc**. The hard pitches of this line, situated to the right of the original route and named *Jean-Chri* after the renowned French alpinist Jean-Christophe Lafaille, who had died on Makalu earlier the same year, were led by Dumarest. He climbed free to 7a+ and used aid on everything harder, estimating it might all go free at 7c. He wasn't far wrong. Over a weekend during the summer of 2020, David Bacci and Matteo Della Bordella climbed the route at 7b+, finding excellent solid granite, sharp and

Alessandro Baù on pitch seven of *Space Vertigo*, Cima Ovest di Lavaredo. (Giovanni Danieli)

with an abundance of cracks for natural pro. The Hidden pillar was first climbed in August 1963 by Tom Frost and John Harlin at VI and A3, but later freed at 6b/c. It has arguably the longest approach to any route on Mont Blanc, and although short (the pillar itself is 300m) the difficulties occur above 4,400m.

The Torrone valley on the south side of the Bregaglia is home to a selection of highly impressive rock walls, not least the great barrel-shaped buttress forming the south face of **Punta Ferrario**. In 1959 the noted Italian activist Vasco Taldo (1932-2014), who made the second ascent of the Central Tower of Paine one day after Chris Bonington and Don Whillans, and a number of now classic new routes in the Bregaglia-Masino and Dolomites, pioneered the first route on the face (originally VI and A1 but around 7a free). In 1980 a very strong team of four Slovaks, Clernik, Hyzny, Marek and Piacek climbed a c450m direct route via the central diedre, finishing up the last four pitches of the Taldo at a somewhat undergraded VI and A2. In common with other routes on the face (there are around five in total), this *Slovak Direct* has only rarely been repeated and a free ascent has been very much a longstanding problem. The best effort came from Simone Pedferri, who tried it in both summer and winter, but failed to complete the exit to the diedre, which is invariably wet. In August 2020 the stars aligned. There was a flurry of activity, which resulted in ascents of various routes on the face including the first free ascent of the *Slovak Direct*. Paulo Marazzi and Giacomo Regallo reached the diedre quickly via the easier lower section but found the first hard pitch freed by Pedferri a bold and committing 7a layback. Higher, the exit over the capping roofs of the diedre was remarkably dry and Marazzi on-sighted it at 7b. The two reached the summit, and after an awkward rappel descent of the Taldo, were back at their bivouac the same day.





The north face of the Cima Ovest showing: 1. *Space Vertigo* and 2: *Pan Aroma*. (Giovanni Danieli)

### The Dolomites

There were many fine achievements in the Dolomites, often at high standard with minimal or no use of bolts. Three of the most active pioneers in this region, Martin Dejori, Titus Prinoth and Alex Walpoth from the Val Gardena, managed to solve the 'last great problem' of the **Pala di San Lucano** when they forced a direct route up the great, c1,150m south face of the Terza Pala. *Guardian of Dreams* was climbed between 1 and 4 November, is 1,400m or 34 pitches in length and has a crux pitch of VIII+ A0, which Prinoth climbed with just three pegs and Walpoth, coming second, freed

at IX. The whole route was protected with natural gear including around 35 pitons: no bolts were carried. The route, which has largely excellent rock and lies between the 1972 *Anghileri-Gogna-Lanfranchi-Rava* on the left, and the 2019 *Leduc-Vanhee*, was climbed ground up in a continuous push.

Other, highly active modern pioneers, particularly when it comes to creating big bold routes without recourse to bolts, are Alessandro Baù, and Nicola Tondini. Proving that independent exploration is still possible on the most famous rock faces in the world, in 2019, with Claudio Migliorini, they completed *Space Vertigo* up the wall right of the classic 1959 Desmairson-Mazeaud route, *Via Jean Couzy* (FFA Mauro Bolo, 1999, 8a+) on the north face of **Cima Ovest**. Rigorous in their approach of opening each pitch from below and not using aid, it took three years to finish their dream project, which requires 'strong arms, a very good head, and obligatory 7b climbing, often some distance above protection'. Due to the nature of the rock and portaledge camps, the belays were bolted, though no bolts were used on any of the pitches, resulting in run-out climbing and many long falls. However, the route was not completed free in a single push.

In September 2020 the three returned, hauled portaledges and provisions to a point at one-third height, and on 9 September began a free ascent. Due to slightly damp rock, they were only able to complete three pitches the first day, so returned to the ground for the night. Next day they jumared their ropes and spent the next two nights at the portaledge camp, freeing the remaining difficulties. On the fourth day they completed the 21-pitch route to the summit. The crux is 8a, five pitches are 7c or 7c+, and another eight

are 7a+ to 7b+. Each pitch was freed on lead by at least one member of the team and the route was judged the most demanding the climbers have created, making it in turn one of the hardest in the Dolomites.

Also from the Cima Ovest comes the story of a remarkable lone ascent, with Lukasz Dudek (Poland) making an audacious roped solo of Alex Huber's 2007 route *Pan Aroma* (550m, 8c) on the north face. With Jacek Matuszek he had in the past made free ascents of *Bellavista* (8b+) and *Project Fear* (8c) on the same face, and the *Spanish* route (8b+) on the Cima Grande. Dudek prepared by working two days on the route in 2019 with a friend, and in 2020 several dozen roped-solo ascents of sport routes up to 8c in Poland. Then in July he made further inspection of the route alone. On 7 August he completed every pitch clean on his first attempt and reached the summit at night after 17 hours on the face. While the roof pitches are spectacular, Dudek says it is the long 60m rightward traverse, the original pitch six, that provides the technical crux.

He timed his ascent to arrive at the most difficult section of the route around midday, when the temperature on this shadowed wall would approach maximum. This would keep his fingers warm and stop him getting pumped too quickly.

Finally, the Dolomites continue to see increased development of mixed and thin-ice potential on the big faces. The **Rochetta Alta di Bosconero**, best known for its classic north-west pillar or *Spigolo Strobel* (1964, 650m, VI+ A1), was in splendid conditions for ice-mixed climbing in January and February. The large depression on the north-west face, partially taken by a 1920s Grade III rock route, was climbed on 30 January at M6+ AI5+ (14 pitches, 730m of climbing) by Santiago Padròs and Diego Toigo. A week previously this pair, together with two friends, had bailed on the line after climbing four demanding pitches, which included the route's cruxes. Long run outs and a couple of falls made the day too exciting to continue at that time. Named *Madre Tierra*, the new line was repeated just three days later by Matteo Furlan and Mirco Grasso, who confirmed the grade and quality of climbing. However, Grasso realized there was another system of gullies out to the right that led all the way to the summit and knew he had to check them out. He returned on 16 February, this time with Alvaro Lafuente. The latter had just arrived in the area and was recommended to Grasso as a potential partner. Grasso proposed that Lafuente climb a mountain he'd never seen before with a complete stranger: Lafuente accepted with enthusiasm. The two climbed the first five pitches of *Madre Tierra*, finding them in much better condition than a couple of weeks earlier, and therefore easier, before moving right and climbing a logical ice gully to the top. The route was named *Apus* and graded M6+, AI5, UIAA V. On the same day other parties climbed *Madre Tierra*, almost turning a two-week old route into a modern classic.

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