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# ORDEAL

*on the*

# Finsterwald

Norm Wallach

Hermann Eusterfork and I had been climbing the north face of the Finsterwald when the accident occurred. Hermann, out on a long lead without protection, made a damn good try at passing a terrible, brooding overhang about 75 feet above me. I was giving a token belay, standing in stirrups hanging from one of Dolt's incredible Cobras. Suddenly, I heard Hermann shrieking in terror. Looking up, I saw his hands scrabbling frantically at the rock. Then, with horrified fascination, I watched his body curve out from the rock in a long, graceful arc. Next moment, I felt the shock as his weight came on the rope. With a loud ping, the Cobra came away from its flake. Our two bodies, joined by the silken cord like a spider and his prey, hurtled through space in that terrible comradeship of the doomed. I saw the peaks, the valley of the Feca River, the sun, with remarkable clarity as they spun in and out of my range of vision. A terrible jarring impact was followed by darkness.

The black fog cleared slowly and I became conscious of a terrible pain in my back, right side, and head. The rope cut deeply into my flesh, although the severed end told me that there could be no tension there.

"Hermann!", I called out weakly, but there was no reply. To the best of my knowledge, I was alone, miraculously spared, but lying unable to move on a tiny ledge 3,000 feet above the valley.

I first formed the idea of climbing the Finsterwald in October of 1967. I had come over from Chamonix with Hermann Eusterfork, my perennial climbing companion, to the beautiful Feca River Valley. Our objective that day was the Brüderhorn, that majestic spike rising over the town of Feca which, due to its similarity to the famous Mountain of Zermatt, was known popularly as the Fecal Matterhorn. We paused for lunch on the supraorbital ridge, overlooking the Lacunae and the beautiful islands of Langerhans, when the mists cleared suddenly to the North to reveal the Finsterwald in all its stark glory.

"Hermann!" I exclaimed.

"I see it!" came his answer, and as we looked into each

others eyes we realized that our destiny was to climb that pillar of rock together.

We scouted the peak that fall, returning in the Spring and Summer of '68 to choose a route. Three weeks of waiting for the good weather that never came, then back to Paris for me and the Jungfrau weather station for Hermann.

Finally, in late October of '69, the weather we needed came in, and we met again in Feca. I was exhausted after my long flight in. My exhaustion was quickly relieved by sight of the Finsterwald in full sun.

Next morning Hermann and I started up the valley toward our mountain. Three hours of walking brought us to the ice fall of the glacier, which we quickly overcame, then 2 hours on the ice glacier and we crossed the bergschrund. It was now 7 am. We roped hastily, then, after a silent handshake, Hermann took the first lead up a sloping flake to an overhanging buttress where we tied in. I followed, then nailed the overhang and found myself in a "duck soup" gully. After Hermann came up, then the two of us scrambled up the gully for about 300 feet when we again encountered Class V rock. Hermann again led, and I caught my breath as he danced out on a thin ledge, then did a 30-foot hand traverse ending in a retable to another ledge. With damp hands, I followed his "aerobatics" but it was only with dudicial tension on the rope that I could manage the retable. The next few hundred feet were brutal, then slab work with no piton cracks and precious little to stop on for driving pins. This brought us out onto sloping slabs, easy climbing, with 5.9 bands every few hundred feet.

By evening, we had reached a small ledge where we were able to tie in and set up a reasonably comfortable bivouac. The route ahead was very thin, no ledges for about 200 feet after which the route was blocked by a dark shadow marking overhanging rock.

"What do you think?" My heart seemed to block my throat -- I knew Hermann, always the daring climber, would find the way if way there were.

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