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NEWS OF THE P.A.T.C. MOUNTAINEERING SECTION

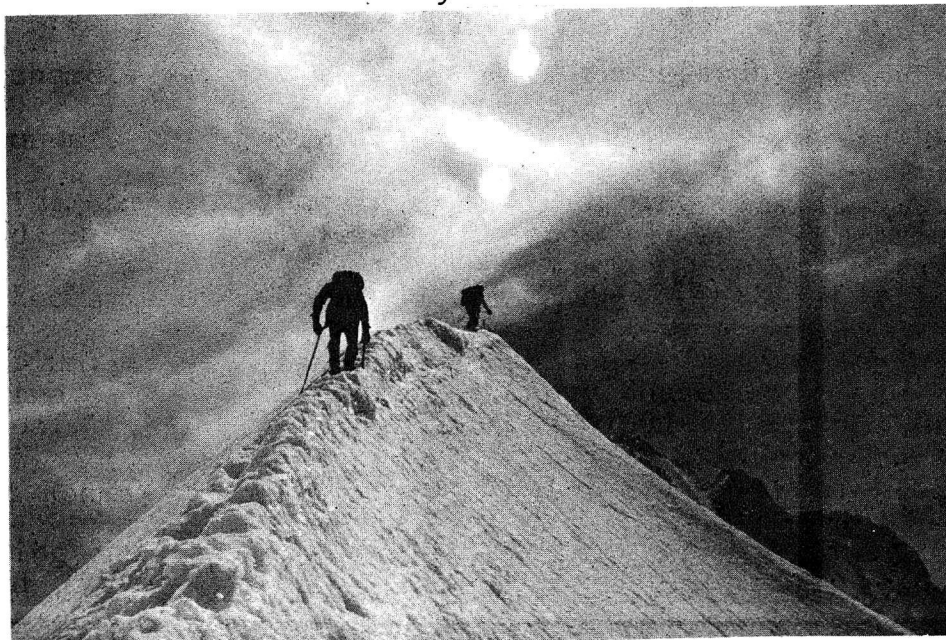
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AN ALPINE CONTRAST

by Ian Cruickshank



Arête Grise - Mont Blanc

Hans, Peter, Willi, and Carol were sorting gear and drying clothes in the sun-drenched front yard of the youth hostel. Nearby women and children were turning over newly cut hay, which smelled sweet and strong after yesterday's rain. All around us were post-card mountains dotted with slate roofed chalets. Piles of food, climbing apparatus, and wet clothes were strewn about. The trunks of the ancient Simca and battered MG were open - ready to be restuffed and obviously

not big enough. I lounged on the front steps reading a spy novel. We were regrouping after a somewhat cowardly retreat from a rock climb in the Val d'Herens in southwest Switzerland. We had met several days before at the Cabane de Trient near the French border, as I had arranged with Peter, my Alpine climbing partner of several years. After a short route near the Cabane, we had shifted to the Val d'Herens where stormy weather had just forced us off.

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AN ALPINE CONTRAST (continued)

The four Dutchmen were babbling in that funny-sounding mixture of German and English. I could only catch enough to tell that they were discussing our next objective, and that there was a difference of opinion. Then Peter approached me.

"You must make the decision, he said in his high-school English. "Hans and Willi want to do Mont Blanc, and Carol and I want to do the Bietschorn."

Thoughts raced through my mind. Despite four trips to the Alps, I had never climbed anything harder than Grade III. This was to be the season for some Grade IV routes, north faces, hard stuff. Yet I wanted to climb Mont Blanc (15,700'). I had never been over 13,500' in those four seasons and wanted to see how I reacted to altitude. Who knows-- maybe I was one of those rare individuals who is able to climb Everest without oxygen. Without asking what route, I decided, "Let's do Mont Blanc first and then the Bietschorn."

Mont Blanc is what keeps Chamonix going. From the time Jacques Balmat and Dr. Paccard first stood on its summit almost 200 years ago, generations of Chamouinards have been making their living from it. Without it, Chamonix would be just another mountain town. These days, a nice morning will dawn with hundreds of "alpinistes" plodding that last long mile to the top. We didn't want any of those hordes, and so elected to do the only easy route on the Italian side, the "Arête Grise," Grade I. Remote by comparison to the Chamonix side, it is the longest of the easier routes.

We drove to Chamonix, a spectacular drive that still excited me even though I'd seen it a dozen times, and then into Italy by the tunnel under Mont Blanc. From Courmayer a car-choked (it was Saturday) narrow road led up the Val Veni. Leaving the car by a wind-swept lake, we hiked up the Glacier de Miage, four miles long and one of the world's ugliest glaciers. Boulders of all sizes

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UPROPE

UPROPE is the monthly newsletter of the Mountaineering Section (MS) of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) of Washington, D.C. Editorial contributions, letters, and comments are welcome and should be addressed to either Lin Murphy, 2314 North Harrison Street, Arlington, Virginia 22205 or Bill De Lano, 1012 Ellison Square, Falls Church, Virginia 22046. Deadline is the 25th of each month. Subscriptions for MS members are included in the dues. The annual subscription for nonmembers is \$4.00. Current PATC members interested in receiving UPROPE may obtain a subscription at no charge. MS membership is restricted to PATC members. New applicants and current members of PATC can join the MS by obtaining sponsorship of a current member of MS. Send subscription and address changes to Secretary, UPROPE, 1718 N Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

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MOUNTAINEERING SECTION ACTIVITIES

The MS holds monthly meetings at PATC Headquarters (1718 N Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036) to conduct a brief business session and present a slide show, film, or other form of entertainment. Sunday trips to nearby climbing areas and/or weekend trips to more distant areas are sponsored every weekend. Check the schedule on the back page for details on planned trips. Beginning and intermediate training is offered once a month. Anyone is welcome to participate in MS activities, although some restrictions are placed on participation in club trips. The Sunday trips are usually to areas where there is a complete range of top-rope climbs, from easy to difficult. However, we ask that you have some instruction or experience prior to the trip. The weekend trips are usually for lead-climbers only and you are expected to find your own climbing partner. For more information on trips, call James Eakin, 598-6042, Chairman of the Trips Committee, or call the designated trip leader. For information on training, call Rick Todd, 431-2236.

AN ALPINE CONTRAST (continued)

completely cover it in places, making the walk tedious at best. The incredible views of the famous south side of Mont Blanc more than compensated, particularly the incredibly tough-looking Peuterey Ridge, probably the hardest ridge route in the Alps.

From the Glacier a trail led up steep, crumbling rock to the Refugio Gonella. Wire cables to safeguard the nastiest places were loose. The rock bolts dangled from the wire at 20' intervals. Such a condition is rare in France, not tolerated in Switzerland, but is sadly common in Italy.

The Refugio Gonella is perched on the cliffs above the right bank of the Glacier du Dome. It is old and rickety and not very popular - the very reason we had chosen it. Two Italian college students were serving as guardians. Beer was cheap (about .75 a can). Two was the sensible limit, since the front steps consisted of quarter-inch planks nailed over two-by-fours, and a slip meant a 500' fall to the Glacier.

We left the hut at 1:30am. It was a black night. A few stars struggled to outline the jagged ridges surrounding the Glacier du Dome. Sluggish and cold, I allowed myself to be tied in the middle of a three-man rope, Peter in the lead. We stumbled down the rocks a few meters, our lights barely picking out the tiny space in front of our feet. The only sound was the occasional rattle of a rock, the crunch of snow. After a traverse along the ridge, we donned crampons and worked our way onto the glacier, following a faint trace in the snow left by yesterday's climbers. The glacier, flat at first, gradually steepened.

Longer and longer detours were required to pass the crevasses safely. The silence was replaced by labored breathing. Our pace slowed. The slope steepened to about 40 degrees. Higher on the glacier we reached its last defence, the bergschrund. Now there was enough light to see faintly the ridge in front of us, capped by a thin edge of ice.

The last 20 meters were about 45 degrees, but the snow was firm, crampons sinking in to the sole, absolutely secure. We reached the ridge about 4am and took a short break, each climber delving into his supply of chocolate. The ridge was long and really easy going, not steep, and wide enough to move together in absolute security.

Thus far I was feeling strong and fresh, but as we approached the rounded Col Bionassay at 4000 meters, I began to feel just a bit "slow." There was no shortness of breath, no tiredness, just the inability to move very fast. A narrow ridge, alternating snow and rock, led to the Dome de Gouter, as the first rays of sun began to show off the surrounding peaks in tones of pink and gold. A welcome descent led to the Col du Dome, and for the first time we could see other climbers, below us and proceeding up the "normale route" from the Grands Mulets hut. Suddenly, like turning on the lights, the sun burst above the eastward peaks, showing the Grands Jorasses, the Vert, and the Dru.

The Vallot Hut is an ugly aluminum shell, out of place in a sea of snow. Several ropes from the normal route were ahead of us. It was 7am as we began the last slog up a series of bulges, "les Bosses," leading

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AN ALPINE CONTRAST (continued)

to the summit. I was feeling fine, but my body simply would not move faster than a dull rest step: one, pause, two, pause....

I kept telling myself how great the beer would taste on our return. Peter, ahead of me, better acclimatized, kept a steady strain on the rope and muttered occasionally about my speed. Several ropes passed us. The sun, stronger now, encouraged a steady stream of sweat, which dripped into my goggles and off my nose. Slower and slower I went. The summit appeared to recede with every upward step. Now parties were passing us on their way down. There was not a cloud in the bright blue sky, not a breath of wind. I began to wonder if it was all worth the effort. After all, the beer was there whether or not we made it to the top.

As I was lost in these thoughts, we topped the last bulge, and there was the summit. Summoning my last reserves, I succeeded in keeping a little slack in the rope as we finished the final crest to the summit. It was 9:30.

A bitter wind was blowing from the south, allowing only the traditional handshakes and a few photos. We dashed back to the Vallot, where we crashed for a half-hour rest. By this time there was a long file of climbers, probably at least a hundred, between the hut and the summit. But this did not spoil the glow of satisfaction I felt, nor my appreciation for the setting, from Chamonix itself, 12,000' below, all the way to the Matterhorn 30 miles away.

The beer tasted as good as I had expected, and so did the second, after we returned to the Gonella at 2pm. The treacherous route down from the hut proved

the most dangerous part of the day as fatigue took its toll. I was the first back at the car (there was a kiosk selling beer by the lake), but the first to bed in Chamonix that night.

We moved the next day to the Lotschental, an isolated valley in the Bernese Oberland in Switzerland, to try the Bietschorn. We stopped to eat at the Migros department store in Sierre. There is a Migros in every town of over 10,000 in the country, and it is the cheapest place to eat. For about \$6 you can eat like a king. Fortified, groggy actually, with food, we waddled up to the Bietschorn Hut, unfrequented and unattended, but comfortable and clean.

The Bietschorn, 3934 meters, is altogether different from Mont Blanc. Steep ice faces on all sides are separated by jagged ridges of broken rock. We proposed to traverse the mountain, up the north ridge and down the southwest ridge. The guidebook gave it a Grade III and a time of seven hours up, four hours down.

Having forgotten an alarm clock, we were not away until 4:30am. Evil-looking clouds topped the mountain; there was a damp feel to the air. As we ascended the steep snow and rock slopes behind the hut, I was apprehensive. The weather did not look promising. After traversing the glacier to the north of the mountain, we ascended to the north ridge, which was a mile long. Gendarmes, some of them nasty, stretched ahead. Peter took the lead on my rope. Carol and Hans were behind us. (Willi had departed for the Riveria.)

The first pitch was an awkward crack. Ice filled it in places, and the air was bitterly cold. Peter, a fairly good ice climber, thrashed awkwardly in his heavy boots, then offered me the lead. We had only three chocks between us, none of them,

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AN ALPINE CONTRAST (concluded)

of course, the right size. A 5.5 lead up about 50' of good rock left me trembling and scared. I had to haul Peter up the pitch. From this point on, I led. We belayed from slings around sharply broken chunks of granite. The Dutch used the European "munter hitch," which they call the "mast-warf" (mast knot). I used a sticht plate. The rock was loose. Security was non-existent. The only safe place was the top of the ridge, and this meant a lot of up and down. Ten, fifteen, twenty rope lengths, never a moment's relaxation. And when the sun came weakly through a high cloud layer over the top of the mountain at 11:00 we weren't half way up.

I was feeling better, though. Somehow confidence was seeping back, despite the insecurity and threatening weather. Peter, on the other hand, grew shakier and climbed slowly and awkwardly, his morale reflecting the darkening sky. Higher on the ridge, snow alternated with rock. Although the general trend was now steeper, we were able to move together more often and made better speed.

Occasionally, we could glimpse the summit, but for the most part ugly clouds covered it. There really was no question of retreating: the route was too long.

At 3pm we reached the summit. A damp wind had coated the steel cross cum Virgin Mary with rime ice. We had not paused to rest since leaving the hut. The trip down the southwest ridge was a nightmare: Peter, excruciatingly slow in front of me, as Hans and Carol soon disappeared below us. Every move, every step required utmost concentration. We repeatedly dislodged loose rocks. There was no secure place except the ridge, which consisted of piled rock perhaps one to three feet wide, all of it jagged granite. Frequently I had to reassure Peter, to give him directions on where to go. He was beat. At 8pm we stumbled into the hut too tired to eat.

I felt a warm glow inside when Peter apologized to me for grumbling on Mont Blanc about my slowness.

Equipment Notes

GALIBIER CONTACTS

I want to report my experience with three brands of technical rock shoes.

EBs deserve their popularity by doing many things well, but hurt my feet if worn all day. Fortunately, anything I can do in EBs I can do better in something more comfortable.

Vasque Ascender IIs have a hard, thin sole and a very stiff insole, giving them terrific edging power. They will stand on tiny (10mm) ledges. They are com-

fortable to wear all day, but their friction is not as good as EBs' or Contacts.

My newest shoe, the Galibier Contact, has quickly become my favorite. Its soft, flexible, thin sole transmits more feel of the rock. The soft leather uppers cover the ankle fairly high. Fitted not too tight, my Contacts are comfortable to wear all day, several days in a row. These shoes easily outperform EBs as a friction boot, but they won't stand on those 10mm ledges. I would expect the Galibier sole to wear out the fastest.

Don Barnett

Hanging Around

GUNKS - October 6, 7, 8

Washington area climbers revelled in cool autumn weather Columbus Day weekend at the Gunks. I confess incomplete reporting, but there were 16 area climbers who did 24 climbs.

We Babied Betty. Jeff Grove, Greg Lee, and Martha Haled Maria. We suffered Belly Roll, Double Chins, and Brats; Roddied Horseman; Alley Ooped Triangle; tried Blueberry Ledges with Bunnies; and blushed at 69 and Mme. Grunnebaum's Wulst. A cultured few Plied, Airyied Aria, while others Yellow Ridged and thought Directissima for Modern Times. Some caught Handy Andy at Easy Keyhole; found Easy Overhang and Son of a drain, but Three Pines not a bore.

Sallie Greenwood

GUNKS - October 20, 21

It's a long ride for a two-day weekend, but this trip (I've been rained out three times this fall) was worth it. It was sunny autumn weather, although an early morning mist kept the rocks damp until about 9:30. The carriage road was clogged with climbers and parading leaf-watchers. Bill De Lano did another one of his red-eye hauls, leaving Falls Church at 2am Saturday to meet Mike Warburton for Sente at lunch.

It may happen all the time these days, but I was impressed: barefoot climbing. We saw teenagers lead up Son of Easy O and Never, Never land. Then, close to sunset, as I followed Parker Hill up Farewell to Arms, someone (wearing EBs) soloed Birdland.

Lin Murphy

NELSON HOUSE - October 20, 21

Eight of us spent Saturday on two Nelson House projects: cutting firewood and repairing the outhouse. We decided that the proposed new outhouse site is unusable because the new hole is below water level and will always fill up. So we shored up the foundation of the present facility. It'll serve for a few years more. Dinner was good: chili, noodles alfredo, salad, wine, and pies.

Sunday people climbed. It was a beautiful fall weekend, probably the peak of leaf color. Trippers were Martha Hale, Rick Todd, Ryan Pierson, Ian Cruickshank, Stan Halpin, Don Barnett, and John Maymeux.

Vivian Mendenhall

AAC NEWS

The American Alpine Club's Board of Directors met the last weekend in September in Jefferson, N.H. Director Sallie Greenwood reports that the AAC will sponsor the American Women's Himalayan Expeditions 1980 Dhaulagiri I climb. This means that contributions to the expedition are tax deductible. The expedition leader is Vera Komarkova, who reached the summit of Annapurna I with Irene Miller last October.

The long-promised Shawan-gunks guide is, unfortunately, still only a promise. The new guide won't be out until next Spring -- at the earliest.

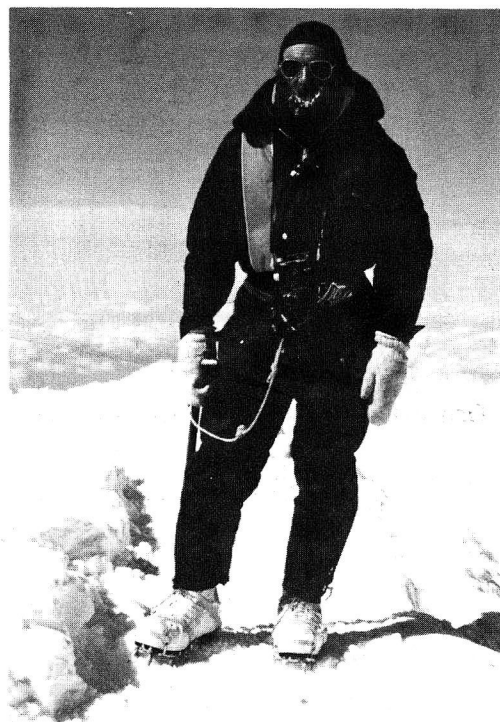
GENET DIES ON EVEREST

Ray Genet reached the summit of Everest on October 2, and died during the descent. The summit party — Genet, Hannelore Schmatz, and a Sherpa — descended to 8400 meters and bivouaced. Ms. Schmatz and the Sherpa awoke to find that Genet had frozen to death. An hour later, Schmatz, the fourth woman to climb Everest, also died.

The German Alpine Club trip was otherwise very successful, putting eight of its members and three Sherpas on the summit. The trip was led by Gerhard Schmatz, Hannelore's husband.

Ray Genet was the most experienced and best-known guide of Mt. McKinley expeditions. He said that his July 1979 expedition was his 31st trip to McKinley's summit. He also organized climbs of Mt. Foraker, Mt. Hunter, and Aconcagua. Genet was a member of the first party to climb McKinley in the winter.

Members of his July 1979 McKinley climb heard rumors that Genet would go to Nepal. Consistently inscrutable, he avoided



Genet on McKinley, July 1979

discussing the upcoming trip. Those who knew him find it hard to understand how this tough and experienced mountaineer died this way, apparently succumbing to exhaustion and exposure.

Lin Murphy

Meeting Report

October 10

Interested in buying rare mountaineering books or importing climbing equipment from Canada? Stan eased into the meeting by offering to share his book and equipment catalogs.

He then announced that Lou Reichardt has agreed to speak on November 7 and reminded that Phil Trimble, leader of the American Bicentennial Everest Expedition, is the speaker for PATC's annual dinner November 1.

Rick Todd of the Nominations

Committee reported that the following people are being considered as officers for 1980: Don McIntyre: Chairman; Martha Hale and Vivian Mendenhall: Vice Chairman; Charlie Dorian: Secretary; and Ian Cruickshank: Treasurer. The Committee is open for suggestions, but plans to present a formal slate at the November meeting.

A new mailing list of MS members was promised for next month's UP ROPE.

Stan showed slides of the MS-member trip to the Wind Rivers.

Coming Events

REICHARDT ON K2

Lou Reichardt, member of the first successful U.S. expedition to K2, will present a slide show and lecture on November 7. Reichardt and three other Americans reached the 28,250' summit of K2 early in September 1978. (See National Geographic, May 1979.) The show will be held at Reiss Hall, Georgetown University, at 8pm.

BLUM ON ANNAPURNA

Arlene Blum's slide/lecture on the 1978 Annapurna I climb will be held on November 19 at 8pm at the Ohr Kodesh Congregation, 8402 Freyman Dr., Chevy Chase, Md. (Ohr Kodesh is at the intersection of East-West Highway and Meadowbrook Lane, one block east of Beach Dr., two lights east of Conn.) Ave., three lights west of 16th St. (See National Geographic, March 1979.)

Admission is \$2 at the door.

Climber's Calendar

November 3	Great Falls	Bill De Lano(532-0650)
November 7	Lou Reichardt: K2	8pm-Reiss Hall, Georgetown University
November 10, 11, 12	Shawangunks	Lin Murphy(533-8412)
November 14	MS meeting 8pm PATC Hd	Howard Doyle: Climbing in Verdun, France
November 17, 18	Nelson Rocks	Hernando Vera (299-2347)
November 19	Arlene Blum: Annapurna	8pm-Ohr Kodesh Congregation, Chevy Chase
November 25	Sugar Loaf	Martha Hale(762-4769)
December 2	Crescent Rocks	Parker Hill(931-7487)
December 12	MS meeting 8pm PATC Hd	"Go for It"

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