

## AROUND ARGENTIÈRE.

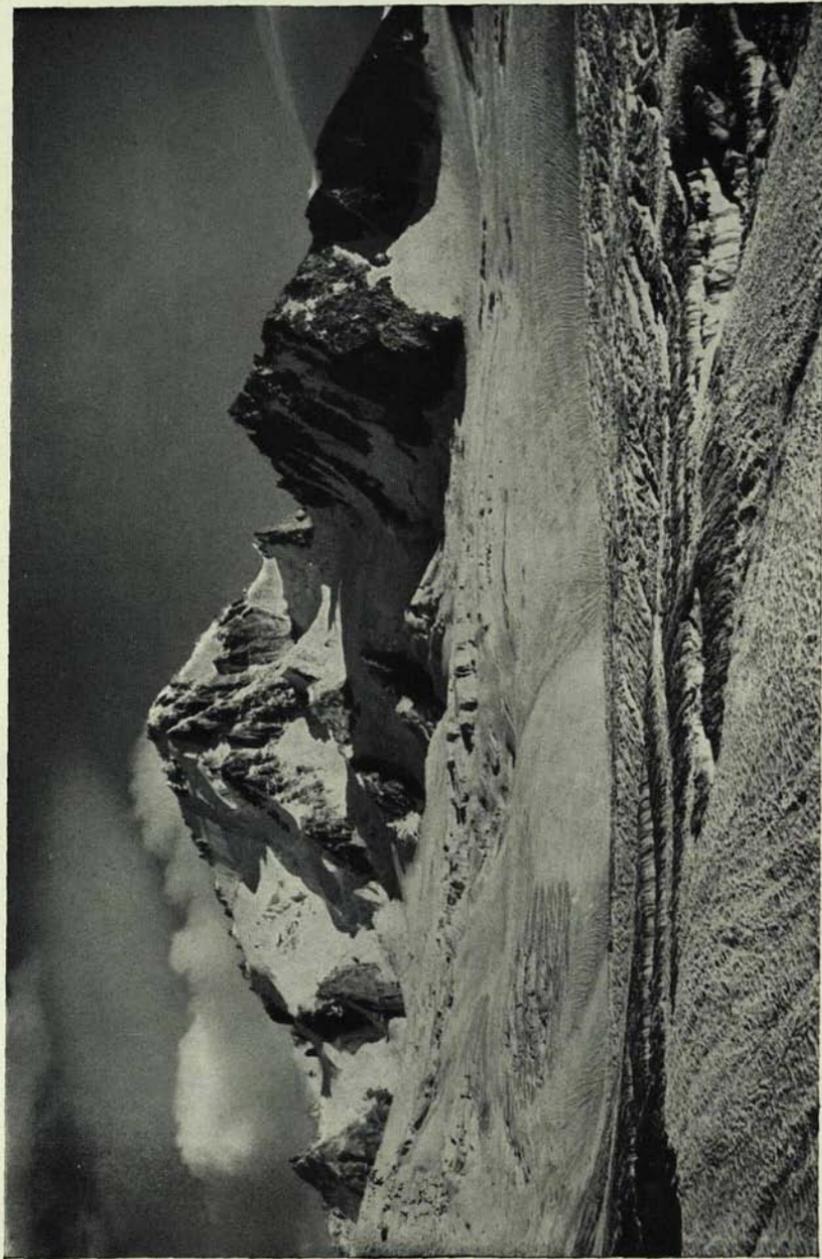
BY F. G. BRETTELL.

What a pleasant land is the Haute Savoie of France. It is well wooded with hills of pleasant shapes varied occasionally by jagged and deeply coloured rocks; the villages contain well built houses with wide, overhanging eaves and steeply tilted roofs, and garden flowers abound. Neither showery weather nor the annoyance of railway changes and dilatory trains could mar our enjoyment of the hours we spent on the few miles of approach to the Chamonix Valley on the morning of August 15th, 1933.

To non-climbers, glaciers are often disappointing. For the most part only those shrunken shadows, the snouts, are seen and these are dirty grey in place of the expected sparkling white. Surely those of the Chamonix Valley must be the exception: the Bossons; the Taconnaz, hang clean and glorious from a white heaven to a green and brown earth.

Half an hour's easy walking from one's hotel in Argentière (and from our experience let it be the "Grand") will yield delightful peeps through woods at the Chamonix Aiguilles from the Charmoz to Mont Blanc; while within two hours, the pleasant alp below La Flégère gives what has long been recognised as one of the finest lower view points in the Alps. Can one's memory summon a better scene than that which has the Mer de Glace as its centre; the Verte and Dru and the Chamonix Aiguilles as its left and right supporters; the Tacul in its middle distance, and the Grandes Jorasses and Géant as a background?

But our object is to call to mind higher levels than those of La Flégère. An interesting article by Douglas L. Busk in the *Alpine Journal* of 1932 on the Tour and Trient glaciers set our hearts this year on the Aiguille du Chardonnet and the Aiguilles Dorées. The former, alas, escaped us. Some bad weather in the first week of a short holiday following a fine summer, made conditions—new snow on ice, it was the period of the Piz Roseg and Mont Blanc accidents—appear rather hazardous to a guideless party having no previous knowledge of the mountain.



THE CHARDONNET : most divinely fair.

The Dorées, however, provided cause for the most strenuous endeavour and gave in return great reward and also deep disappointment! But first let us get to the Albert Premier, the new hut on the Glacier du Tour, not forgetting one glorious moment on the way where, about forty minutes above the red Charamillon chalets on the Col de Balme path, one turns a corner and stands breathless above the lower ice fall of the Tour gazing up the névé to the Chardonnet, "most divinely fair." Mr. Busk said in 1932 "it is still true to say that the Glacier du Tour is the least known on the north side of the Chain of Mont Blanc." It is also true to say that he did not choose for his visits the first fine day after a bad weather spell and a Friday to boot. We did! Of a tiresome and uncomfortable night we shall recall with pleasure a lady who whistled to wake her spouse when his snores reached the borderline of human endurance. What an example of wifely resource to transmute the murderous thoughts of fifty enraged climbers into merriment by her elementary flutings!

Needing an easy day, we tried the Aiguilles du Tour via the Col du Tour and enjoyed for more than an hour the glorious view from the summit. Mr. Busk certainly did not overpraise the view down the Plateau du Trient and through the Fenêtre de Saleinaz; or over the Dorées to the flanks of the Grand Combin and around the Vallais giants, the Matterhorn a hump-backed one from this angle, to the Oberland peaks on the north-eastern skyline. A chance meeting with Dr. Williamson, A.C., on the summit and some hints from him on the route gave us a more ambitious descent than returning by the Col as we had contemplated. The West Arête presented an interesting and bristly rock ridge; a traverse over slabs requiring care, and an exciting moment in a steepish and narrow snow couloir. We treated the couloir with great respect, taking what appeared a tremendous time and feeling that notwithstanding it was afternoon, a guide would probably kick his way down it in a few minutes. A huge boulder several feet in diameter careering down the narrow couloir, fortunately choosing a slightly different line to our own as it approached our level, caused us to accelerate our pace in the lower part in case another might not be equally considerate.

The first day of a later visit to the Albert Premier saw us through the Fenêtre de Saleinaz at an early hour in order

to essay the Varappe at the West end of the Dorées by a snow couloir. We purposely avoided the usual route on the North face as it was sheeted with ice, but alas! in following what seemed the upper part of the couloir instead of bending round into a tributary, we came out high upon the North face. Much valuable time was spent in cutting across ice to promising looking rocks which developed into some villainous slabs; our leader for the day, the writer, thought it was possible to climb to a ridge leading to the summit, only to find when the ridge was followed that a "brèche" some fifty or sixty feet wide and hundreds deep divided the ridge from the appalling north wall of the summit. A late lunch was silently eaten and a cautious retreat was made.

A vision of golden rocks of fine quality on the south side of the Dorées glowing in the morning sun, which we had obtained in going too far down the Saleinaz Glacier before deciding on the particular snow couloir we sought, tantalised our somewhat dispirited party that night. The climbing under almost ideal conditions was there; but how to get at it with the whole of our side of the mountain obviously in almost impossible condition and our turning movement a failure?

Fortunately, Monsieur Simond, the pleasant guardian of the hut, was prepared to suggest a solution when tactfully approached by C.E.A.A. that night. At the east end of the rocky line of the Dorées, where the height of the ridge above the Plateau du Trient is least, a short snow and ice couloir with a convenient wall of rock on its eastern side falls to a gap, through which a distant view is obtainable from the edge of the plateau.

Next morning, passing from the Col du Tour right along the foot of the north face, we were piloted by C.E.A.A. up the little couloir at the extreme east end; a second breakfast was joyfully taken in the sun on the south side, and we set out along the traverse on beautiful granite. We found and climbed the Crettex, but found on descending again that the famous chimney leading to the Javelle was occupied by a Swiss party. We proceeded to the Trident and enjoyed immensely the final rock problems on its summit blocks. A very sensational step round a corner on one small foothold

with a right hand on the smooth edge of the block, leading on to the sheer north face sent the leader into rubbers; but, when done, was alone worth the journey.

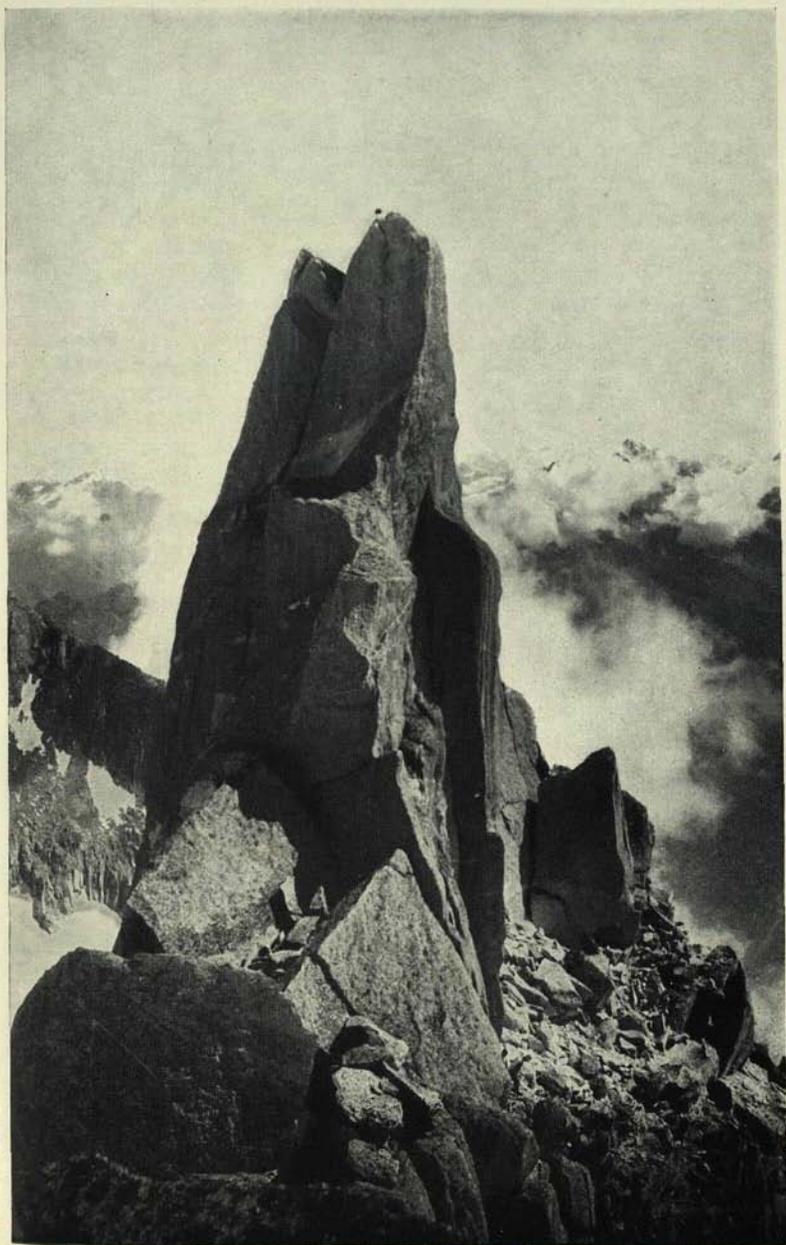
A pleasant rock traverse led us back to the Javelle, somewhat late, as it proved, for so arduous a task. An ascent of the chimney satisfied us that it ranks as high as any British chimney within our ken. A form of cave pitch and the final, exacting ten foot climb on to the summit block, usually done by throwing a knotted rope into a notch, we had to leave for some future year. As it was, we made the hut in time to collect our belongings and descend the more awkward part of the few hours walk to our hotel before dark. A happy day!

The new Jardin d'Argentière hut, just opened on the long Argentière Glacier, was our next home and a very clean and comfortable one it proved. This is not the place to tell of its delights, however. The best route on the glacier proved to be close along its true left bank until the flat upper part short of point 2625 on the Albert Barbey "Chaine du Mont Blanc" map was reached, and then rather nearer the middle of the glacier than is indicated by the track on the map or suggested in the guide. This at any rate gave a dry walk. A line of three or four large boulders last summer formed good direction marks. On the second afternoon, returning from Lognan Inn after a day with ladies on a little snowpeak, the Aiguille des Grandes Montets, we found a course near the left bank beyond point 2625 was very wet and unpleasant.

The Tour Noir gave a delightful day. The glacier of that name lies at a nice angle; the Col d'Argentière at its head is a good view point; a traverse along a rock face to a ridge falling to the Neuvaz Glacier has a sunny aspect, just when it is needed if there is a wind at the Col, and finally the ridge to the summit gives interesting climbing on sound rock. A really magnificent view is obtained from the summit. Our friends the Aiguilles Dorées face one looking north across the picturesque Saleinaz Glacier, and that very fine ice and rock peak Mt. Dolent is the near and striking object of the opposite view, while just across the Argentière Glacier looking west is that "amazing crescendo" of the Courtes, the Droites and the Verte.

From the hut they may be thought too over-powering. A hut view should have on the west a gradual fall to a valley to enable the full glory of the setting sun and its afterglow to be realised. In this respect, the Albert Premier on the Tour Glacier is near perfection.

An altogether pleasant district! was the unanimous opinion of our party; offering happy reminders of old Chamonix friends without, as a rule, quite such a cloud of witnesses to one's unguided mistakes and sharers of one's restless night hours.



AIGUILLES DORÉES : The Javelle.

*G. S. Brettell*