

BONNEVAL SUR ARC.

By F. G. BRETTELL.

The Editor commands my views of the Alpine district of the Haute Maurienne around the village of Bonneval. There are many reasons why others should contribute these notes and not I; there is my small knowledge of the district—I was there two years ago for about twelve days as an introduction to a holiday meet with Peaker in Chamonix later—and the small number of the climbs of which I can speak with actual experience. It was a very jolly family holiday and we were not forcing the pace, or looking for the most difficult routes, otherwise there might be more justification for rushing into print. If I had only done as much as I have *planned* to do in twelve days on some earlier holidays none should need to stay my hand. Be that as it may, we went to Modane and in due course, by one of the most remarkable 'bus journeys, and a continuation on a country "auto" with our luggage hung all over its bonnet, including one suitcase in front of the radiator which soon brought us to a halt blowing off steam in great style, we arrived at the village of Bonneval.

The only "hotel" then was the Chalet of the Club Alpin Francais. Its whitened stone walls had that bare, barrack-wall look, and yet with a certain claim to the picturesque, of so many French country buildings which are not merely private dwellings. Its bedrooms were small and innocent of most of the luxuries to which Zermatt climbers have grown accustomed; but there were comfortable beds, and though running water in the rooms, and baths in the hotel, were not to be found, there was good hot water always on tap on the landing and there were plenty of glacier streams close by. The food, if one were not mainly carnivorous, was simple and edible, at any rate after a mountain day; but the meat I thought should be left to the people of the country. It may be that in course of generations, faced with these circumstances, nature would evolve jaws and a stomach for these things, but

While I think one must say, therefore, that the visitor should be content with simple accommodation and fare (and which of us who claims to be a mountain lover is not?), there is ample reward in the surrounding alps and peaks.

The valley of the Arc immediately above Bonneval has suffered from heavy stone falls, but improves once one has proceeded as far as L'Ecot, one of the highest villages in the

Alps, a quaint collection of closely built houses and a chapel huddled along a path which has now become a tiny street paved with tremendous slabs, where the living rock is not both its foundation and surface. I remember, on our way to the Carro hut, looking back from the top of the village on a wet afternoon, when a few shafts of light caught the wet stone tiles of the roofs and made a brave show of the rusts and yellows of the infinite variety of their lichens.

The Carro hut, as a building, is a dark, square blot on a rather pleasing prospect of stone-strewn, green alp, lakelet, glacier and rocky surrounding wall. But as a hut to the climber coming out of a heavy shower and seeking a dry spot, out of the wind, with good food and a comfortable bed, the Carro was in every way satisfactory. The Western Levanna was a pleasing climb on an unexpectedly lovely morning. Starting just before five, I seem to remember we were lunching about one in the Carro again after very gentle progress. That Levanna has a steep side toward Italy and from its airy summit slab sticking out cantilever fashion over that steep face, we had a most delightful peep into an Italian hamlet—Ceresole by name—set by a lake or reservoir, in a green, narrow valley far below us, with the Grand Paradis beyond.

Our first "training" walk was on to an alp on the Pte. d'Andagne whose foothill slope constricts the Arc valley on its true left side just opposite the Bonneval Hotel. Whilst most of us pushed on up a rocky walk to an apparent summit which enabled us to satisfy our youngest and most ambitious member that we *may* have reached the Pointe, an important part of the family stayed by the Lac d'Andagne on a most delightful alp, where the flowers were as many and as lovely as on any alp I have yet seen. We found a ptarmigan's nest and eggs there.

Bonneval probably had never more than thirty or forty visitors at any one time. Of these, a number were at the end of an exciting motor journey and resting before running back—the Col d'Iseran road was then far from finished—and some stayed around the Hotel where food and wine were within call, so that the condition of the wide circle of peaks was never crowded. Above the huts we did not meet a single person on any of our climbs. This may have its effect on the flowery alps.

The walk to the Evettes hut is not long and is pleasant, with the only pull coming rather early. The surroundings of the hut on the Glacier des Evettes I thought very fine. Geoff's photograph of the Albaron is taken from immediately in front of the

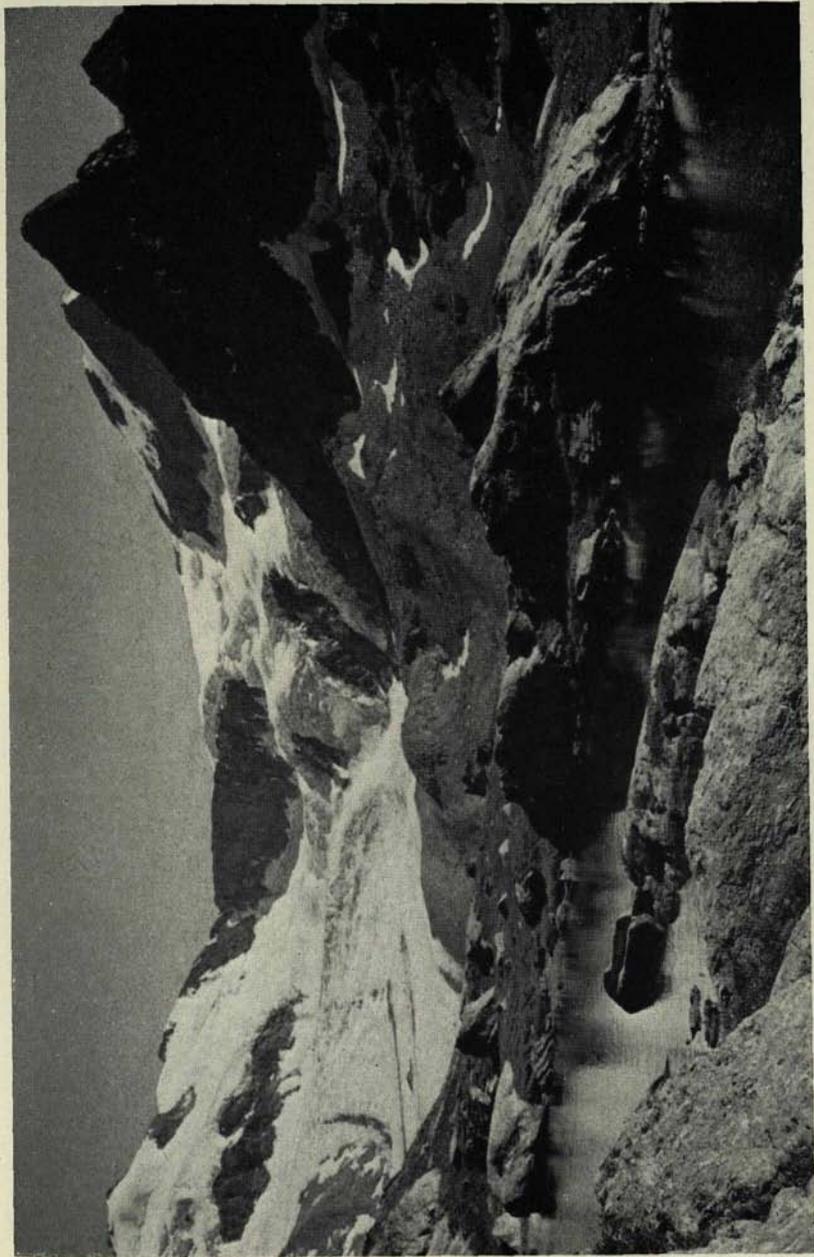
hut. As we knew little of the route for the Albaron, the whole family were enticed on a fine afternoon, following a walk to the hut, into a complete tour of the glacier and the rocks of the Pic Regaud, the peak in the foreground, in the effort to avoid loss of time in the wee small hours of the morrow. The descent of the glacier, and the discovery by trial and error of the best route through the crumbling snow and mud bridging the furious glacier torrent at the snout, proved distinctly trying to the loyalty of a trusting, but fast tiring family!!

The pleasant girl who was managing the Evettes hut at that time was able to obtain the information for us before bed time, that the start for the Albaron was over the left shoulder of the dark and rocky Pic Regaud. We found the Albaron a delightful climb with a good glacier and snow firn and a little snow ridge. Geoff led throughout and John and I offered destructive criticism when the conditions were not to our taste. It was a varied climb and on a fine day gave us exercise enough. Unfortunately a cloud sea below us hid the view over Italy. We climbed the Signal de Méan Martin, passing over a rickety snow cornice on a col, highly dangerous to those behind the struggling leader, to reach its rotten rock ridge, under the mistaken notion that it was the Aiguille of that name. But the blue-grey, solid granite walls of the Aiguille shone contemptuously about a mile to our right, when we were on our summit!

The reader will not make this mistake, however, if, *before* he visits Bonneval, he obtains from Chambéry the new French Army map, scale 1 to 50,000, district Tignes. No maps can be bought in Bonneval. We had perforce to use an older and smaller scale map, and what we could read in Ball, but he, or his editors, appeared to have confused the names of the two peaks; or might I have missed the . . . No! Impossible!

A climb from the Col d'Iseran over two small Aiguilles closed our excursions. We did not do the Ciamarella which rivals its neighbour, the Albaron, and looks a more difficult climb; neither did we visit the various Rocs and Domes of the Mulinet, where I believe is some good rock climbing. Finally, then, Mr. Editor, I should say that for the climber who enjoys quietude, and moderate, but shapely mountains, with flowery alps and fine views, Bonneval is not to be despised.

The new Motor Road may make a difference to the "crowd" in the village and its hotel, or should it now be hotels? But not, I venture to think, to the peaks which ring the head and wall the left bank of its upper valley.



THE ALBARON from Les Evettes Hut.

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