

TWO CLIMBS ON THE GREPON.

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I find it difficult to write an account of the two climbs I did on the Grépon last summer. Nothing out of the ordinary happened on either. No accident occurred to any member of our party; there was not even a thunderstorm, which is generally good for at least half-an-article. There is also the added difficulty that I cannot remember many details of the actual climbing; I am not one of those remarkable people who can recall each pitch of each climb and each handhold of each pitch. For such details I must refer my readers to the Guide Book and will confine my account to a few memories of this Aiguille.

The first climb I did on the Grépon was the East or Mer de Glâce face. Most climbing articles start with "We left the Hut, etc, etc.," but the crux of the East Face is the gaining of the Hut, which is perched beside the Tour Rouge some way up the face, above the Trélaporte glacier. I remember climbing up glacier-worn rocks, smooth and holdless, struggling up smooth severe chimneys, and finally emerging at the very tiny Hut. It sits on a flat piece of rock and is held to the main face by thin steel cables. It is supposed to hold eight people; we found that the mattress would only accommodate five. The blankets were very thin and full of holes, most of the holes being large and in the middle. Light and ventilation came from the door and through cracks in the walls; we discovered during the night that the ventilation was more than adequate, and were relieved when the alarm-clock announced the end of our endeavours to find a square inch of blanket. My memories of the climbing on the East Face are not very clear. Six hours of grooves, laybacks, and jamming cracks, are enough to reduce anybody to a state of semi-consciousness. I did not really awaken until we had reached the famous top pitch — the Knubel Crack. By then I had begun to doubt whether I had any muscles left in my arms and I felt quite certain that I was far too tired to be able to climb the Knubel. This was rather a pity, because I knew how to do it; I had studied the description in the Guide Book most carefully and I knew the actual movements off by heart. When, however, I began to carry out these movements, the exact correspondence between the picture in the book and the rock in front of me was not immediately obvious. For instance, the crack which, in the Guide Book, gave the opportunity for a mighty finger-pull turned

out to be the merest shadow on the rock. Such discrepancies did not disturb me, for I was securely fastened, by two ropes, to the stalwarts above, who kindly assisted me to the summit.

Now, I suppose, I should describe with suitable adjectives and metaphors the view from the summit. I am afraid I hardly noticed the view at all — I was far too concerned with plans for 'rapelling' down from the summit without disgracing myself by doing something wrong. Since I cannot remember the rappel, I assume that I performed satisfactorily. We descended to the Nantillons glacier without incident and were soon back in Chamonix feeling rather pleased with ourselves at having done the great East Face. I had, however, one regret: I felt I had not really 'done' the Grépon, because I had not followed the classic route. This deficiency was remedied a fortnight later when I set off from the Montenvers to do the Charmoz-Grépon traverse.

My chief memory of this climb is of the large number of people who were on the mountain, and of their associated noise. A numerous party of French climbers were filming the ascent of the Knubel and the Grande Gendarme; there were other parties of Italians, French, and English; and immediately ahead of us on the Charmoz was a Chamonix guide with an incompetent Monsieur and an even more incompetent Madame. The guide argued with his Monsieur and Monsieur argued with Madame. The climax for them was reached on the Mummery Crack, where the poor lady was played into the Crack upside down while the accompaniment of shouting swelled to a crescendo. We waited two hours at the Brèche Mummery while one nationality after another struggled up or fell out of the Crack emitting their characteristic national cries. It was pleasant waiting, however. We basked in the sun on the Mer de Glâce face, idly watching the camera-men and the 'film-stars' festooned, like flies on a thread of spider-web, over the Knubel. Some friends of ours were coming up the Mer de Glâce face; they were a long way down when we first sighted them, but they reached the summit before us.

At last it was our turn for the Mummery, and up we went. It was not as difficult as I had been led to expect by the shrieks of the past two hours. Our progress was once again halted at the Grande Gendarme, this time by the filming party. We had to wait, lying flat on the rock out of range of the camera, while the 'stars' climbed the Gendarme. However, friendly relations were established on the descent to the Voie aux Bicyclettes, for the film technicians had run out of matches which we were able to supply in exchange for prunes. I enjoyed the Voie aux

Bicyclettes; it did not disappoint me, and was quite as good as I had imagined it to be. Soon I was on the top of the Grépon again, and for a moment or so we had it to ourselves. But the weather seemed to be deteriorating and we descended to the Nantillons as quickly as possible — not quite quickly enough, for we got slightly damp. As we went down the glacier we watched our filming friends scrambling down from the summit. They moved faster than we had done, for they appeared to dispense with ropes and came gambolling down quite happily in ones and twos to join us on the Rognon.

We were feeling somewhat jaded when we got back to the Monteners; most of the sixteen hours we had taken on the traverse had been spent standing in queues. Nevertheless it had been an amusing day, and we had all thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

The Grépon's chief defence—the sense of fear with which, till lately, it inspired the guides—has gone, and a few of them have actually screwed their courage to the sticking point and reached the summit. Last season another lady, well-known in climbing circles, traversed the mountain....and it bids fair before very long to become a popular climb.

—A. F. Mummery, 1894.