

## THE CIMA PICCOLA (THE KLEINE ZINNE)

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The Cima Piccola, the easternmost of the Tre Cime di Lavaredo, has to be seen to be believed, and even then it is hard to believe. Rock towers and pinnacles are found in many mountainous areas, especially in the Dolomites, but a pinnacle which is a full-sized and independent mountain, rising to a height of about 9,700 feet, as sheer and every bit as vertical as a factory chimney, shakes the imagination. Even when one knows the route it is hard to realise, as one looks up at the apparently smooth and holdless walls rising to the heavens, that there are ledges and chimneys, too small to be seen at that distance.

Most people know the Tre Cime (the Drei Zinnen) from photographs taken from the eastern end, when the Cima Piccola only shows its head above the prow of peaklets, but seen from the track which traverses its southern scree it rises sheer on all sides, except for the great south-west buttress which provides an easy start for the ordinary route. The mountain has two peaks joined by a narrow shoulder, the northern peak, with its famous chimneys, being the summit. These mountains are on the boundary of the Italian and the German speaking areas ; hence their double names.

The Refugio Auronzo (7,595 ft.), built on the site of the Longeres Hut, was burnt down in 1955, and is beyond hope. Cars can now reach it (with care) and the car park was filled with expensive cars and equally expensive blondes when I arrived. However, a track across the southern scree, with its rewarding first view of the Piccola, leads in 25 minutes to the Refugio Lavaredo. This hut is unusual in that it was built and is owned and run by a guide, but otherwise it keeps to the tradition of the best Austrian huts. Here Lawrence Middleton and I spent the night of the 30th July, 1958.

At seven o'clock next morning, my friend Fritz Rapold, a Tyrolean climber from Toblach (Dobbiaco) and a splendid mountaineer, joined us and we set off at once, walking up the white scree into the Forcella della Piccola, the narrow ravine between the walls of the Piccola and the Cima Grande (Grosse Zinne). On the way up we stopped to watch two parties on the Yellow-Edge route of the Piccola (Grade 6). The second party, who came from Birmingham, were just starting the climb.

The ravine becomes an ice gully and then, just before the start of the Ordinary Route on the Grande is reached, there is a break in the wall of the Piccola. This is the start of the climb and we commenced it at 7.30 a.m.

The break is the end of a rake which strikes diagonally up to the right across the face of the buttress and up this rake we scrambled to the ridge of the buttress. From here we ascended diagonally to the left, still on easy rock, until we were looking down into the ravine. Here we roped with Fritz leading. As I had done the climb to the shoulder in the previous year (when we were forced to abandon the final chimney owing to the rapidly deteriorating weather) I came second, with Lawrence third.

A series of small but lengthy chimneys, followed by a series of "steps," lead us to "The Terrace." So far the climbing had not been above M.D. standard but we were now on the great vertical wall of the Piccola.

The vertical ascents on the wall are mostly by chimneys and, as these chimneys are all very similar, one description will suffice. At the bottom they overhang and are practically holdless, the "holds" being technical, in the middle they are vertical with just adequate holds, and the upper parts are stepped and easy. They are nice to ascend but not so nice to descend, especially the overhanging holdless finish. Two of these chimneys brought us to the "Niche"—a shallow recess which provides a valuable shelter in storms, especially in thunderstorms. The Piccola is a natural lightning conductor, and from the Gross Zinne I have seen lightning striking it like bursting shells, sending showers of rock down the wall. I was struck by lightning on the Grosse Zinne, but that is another story.

From the "Niche," an exposed traverse up and to the left brought us to the beginning of the sensational traverse across the wall. First comes the "Creeping Ledge"—a ledge some two feet wide with the wall at its back projecting at an angle of 60 degrees. The traditional method is to do this on hands and knees but the modern technique is to treat it as a "mantelpiece," with the body hanging backward over space and hands grasping the good holds above the overhang. The rest of the traverse is on small holds across the exposed and vertical wall with 900 feet of air beneath one's feet.

Then followed more exposed chimneys, with short traverses between them, to "The Pulpit," a large bollard. This marks the base of another chimney which leads to a few yards of easier rock and then to a very steep and exposed wall. Finally a move to the right for a few yards brought us to the "shoulder"—the platform between the two summits of the Piccola, the "Cima" and the "Anti-cima." It was now 9.30 a.m.

Here we enjoyed the traditional rest. Fritz cheerfully informed us that the most difficult part of the climb was ahead of us. We

looked up at the wall towering above us and agreed, not so cheerfully. A few yards of broken rock was followed by an exposed and delicate traverse to the left. This brought us out on the wall again, but the air under our feet was now 1,300 feet high (or deep). A short and easy pitch leads to the foot of the Zsigmondy Chimney.

This famous chimney is vertical and very exposed. For nearly 80 years it has been the main route up the Cima and the holds have been worn smooth by countless boots. The holds therefore are obtained by "wedgery," which is not difficult until the overhang is reached, which in this chimney was about half-way up. Under the overhang is a piton with a badly rusted link, and the rope was passed through two snaplinks attached to this. With the wedging of only one leg I struggled with both hands to remove these links. Then, easing up another foot in height I reached over the overhang for a handhold. There wasn't one, but there was a small projecting foothold, high up, very worn and rounded. Was it possible, I thought, to come out of the chimney, except for one leg, and without a handhold, bring one's left foot up and on to this hold, without dropping out of the chimney? The exposure—now a quarter of a mile—is not encouraging but somehow it was done. The rest of the chimney, by comparison, seemed easy.

Above the chimney, 20 feet of vertical wall led to the abseiling piton and a further 20 feet of easier rock brought us to the summit at 10.30 a.m.

The summit consists of a short row of flat-topped blocks, averaging about a foot wide, all alarmingly cracked and apparently liable to drop down the sheer walls which surrounded us. Fortunately a kindly mist created an illusion of no exposure. However, by the time we started the descent from "The Shoulder" the mist had cleared and the full extent of our exposure was apparent.

Julius Kugy relates how, in August, 1879, he, with the two Zsigmondys and Michel Innerkofler, were climbing the Grosse Zinne. From the first pitches, they looked up to the precipitous Kleine Zinne, then unclimbed. Michel said it was inaccessible, but Emil Zsigmondy contradicted him and received the historic answer: "Ja, wannst Flügel hätt'st." The man who first went over that overhang in Zsigmondy's chimney certainly had wings of faith.