

POINTING TO THE SOUTH

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For the last few years it has been considered the done thing to be found on, or rumoured to be interested in, any northward pointing Alpine face from the Triolet to the Cima Grande. Before mountaineering becomes in any way endangered by the prospect of polarisation I will reverse the charge and dwell on the delights of the south.

On this type of alpine fastness isolation and insulation can still be enjoyed simultaneously. There is time to enjoy the whole environment without being bothered by the inherent dangers of the north, and yet difficulty enough can be found if desired. It is true that little snow-craft is to be had, but this is the price to be paid by the sun-worshipper who is tired of soggy welsh bogs, queueing up on greasy rocks, and the view of an ever expanding Llyn Ogwen through the kitchen window at Glan Dena.

Last Summer, on a very successful alpine meet at Chamonix, several Stoats mustered up the energy to quit the parched grass of the Plage and climb two south ridges. One, little known, was that of the Aiguille Purtscheller (graded P.D.) and the other was the Arête Sud Integrale of the Aiguille du Moine (D.sup.), wrongly named the S.W. ridge in *Selected Climbs*.

The south ridge of the Aiguille Purtscheller makes an excellent first outing for an alpine season, being fairly short and unsustained. It is charmingly situated, being the pedestal for a panorama stretching from Mont Blanc and the Aiguille Verte, past the nearby Chardonnet, on to the rock necklace of the Aiguilles Dorées, and finally over the Trient Plateau to the distant Matterhorn.

As a first climb it takes a gentle path through the processes of acclimatisation to a new sort of rock and breathless movements at unusual altitudes. It gradually increases from moderate standard to a finale with a delightful choke-stone chimney with an airy back-and-foot struggle giving the final confidence boost to a new found faith in the frictional properties of granite. The minute summit is worthy of any aiguille, and a welcome place for any travel-worn mountaineer.

The Aiguille du Moine bears a much more serious atmosphere, and the Arête S. Integrale yields a full day of sustained interest. Although only climbed twice before 1948, it is now a very popular route judging by the Couvercle Hut Book, although apparently subject to the occasional unexpected thunderstorm. As it is completely on rock one can rise late enough to savour the sight of the rising sun gilding the north face of the Grandes Jorasses and arrive back in time for tea. The climbing is always interesting, with three pitches of V (the last one being long), about ten of IV, and many easier ones. It is slightly unfortunate that there is a break in the upper section where one can take off the rope.

The first difficulty is reached unexpectedly, in the form of a thrutchy crack characteristically protected by a peg useful enough to tempt the purist. Shortly after this a quaint *rappel pendule* attempts to send one shooting past a small ledge, but all goes fairly smoothly till a vicious looking overhanging chimney is reached. Being of the Snuffer type it is nigh on impossible for the second with the rucksack. A reminder that the route *is* fairly serious should conditions turn bad comes with an 85-foot rappel into a couloir on the Mer de Glace face in order to avoid some unclimbed gendarmes. Soon afterwards the long pitch of V is found, starting with a strenuous 15 feet to a niche below an overhang. A peg in place just above the lip then enables a sort of bridging movement to be made, and then a long reach for a hidden jug leads to the joy of a hard move successfully made. Steep jamming for another 80 feet finishes off a glorious pitch. Slabs and cracks, all very nice, followed by a scramble, lead to the top few pitches, with a little corner seemingly harder than anything else, and a delightful day is complete bar the loose trundle down the *voie normale* and a rapid slide down the névé patch to the Couvercle Hut.

These two days bore completely different characters yet both, because of their similar charming aspects, have become treasured memories of mine.

It isn't even necessary to go abroad to find and enjoy a mountain "riviera". My illusions about a "land of eternal sunshine" situated at Tremadoc were sorrowfully washed away in a week of wet camping, but nonetheless it does have some fairy-tale qualities. The roadside crags of Bwlch-y-Moch and Pant Ifan can no longer be called secluded, but there is still one cliff which is paradise for the lover of peace and silence. Craig-y-Gesail stands alone and dominant on the hillside behind Penmorfa, and on a warm spring afternoon it makes an ideal *festerplatz* with deliciously green grass below, Cardigan Bay lying dreamily in the haze, and the Moelwyn group slumbering beyond Portmadoc. All is still barring the constant chatter of bird life and the dancing of butterflies. The warm solid rocks smile at life, and the climber there ensconced finds himself content also. Tremadoc has been derided for being divorced from the mountains. Those who bear this grudge have yet to leave the roadside and wander upwards from Penmorfa.

'Princess', worthy of its royal name is to be found here, and gives a delightful excursion to anyone capable of severes. It takes the easy slabs in the centre of the cliff up to a short groove and a steep step breaching a line of overhangs. Above this is found the only tricky pitch. Although short, nearly every move on it demands thought and technique. The problems start with a mantleshelf, proceed via friction and a groove and find temporary respite at a

runner. From this point a five foot step right is indicated, and all that then remains is to follow the crack to where a peculiar sort of swing is made on to the belay ledge, there to await the antics of number two. Some more good pitches then lead to the top. The position of the cliff is ideal, combining the two great challenges in one vast aspect, namely the mountains and the sea. Such a place would surely have found a warm advocate in Conor O'Brien, a man who masterfully answered the twin challenges.





*Top: The South Ridge of the Aiguille Purtscheller
(the notch is clearly visible).*

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Bottom: L'Arête Sud Integrale, Aiguille du Moine.

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THE SOUTH RIDGE OF THE AIGUILLE PURTSCHELLER

This description is based on Guide Vallot Vol. III 498 (p. 369) with corrections, and is submitted by Tom Huckerby.

First ascent: R. Aubert, R. Dittert and F. Marullay, 16th May, 1943.

PD except for one pitch of IV.

Allow six or more hours to the top for a leisurely outing.

From the Refuge Albert lie, first gain the Col Superieur du Tour. Then *either* traverse the preliminary gendarmes, using loose gullies and avoiding pinnacles when necessary, finally traversing right for about 100 yards on the snow above the Trient Glacier to the conspicuous V notch, *or* (and this is the best plan) from the Col, traverse the Trient Plateau to below the notch, then cross the rimaye and climb direct to it.

From here climb the steep slab (II) for 25 feet, and over the chockstone into a horizontal cavern reminiscent of Lockwood's Chimney. Go along this awkwardly for 25 feet and up at the end to a cramped stance. Then traverse in the same direction behind a block, and climb the loose 40 foot gully on the right (II) to a gap in the ridge. From the gap climb the left side of the arête for ten feet (runner) and traverse delicately to the right for 10 feet (III) and up a short groove to a belay. (Instead of traversing one can climb the crack on the right of the edge, and then go right (IV Sup., peg runner)).

Climb round blocks on the left hand side of the ridge, then descend from a small gap below a vertical spire for 20 feet (II) to big ledges. Traverse right along these for about 50 feet to the foot of a narrow oblique chimney. Climb this for 40 feet (III inf.) to a cramped ledge below a jammed block. Or reach the same place by the crack on the right of the chimney (at least V).

Climb over the chock and into the wider chimney above. There is an immense wedged boulder overhead. Back and foot upwards facing left until a strenuous pull and mantleshelf can be made on to its sloping top (belay beyond, 40 feet, good V sup., especially for short leaders).

From here climb 30 feet into the open, then traverse below the wall on the left over and around blocks until a short sloping rake can be climbed to the foot of a crack on the left of a large square flake (50 feet). Climb the crack awkwardly to its top, then traverse right over a slab and blocks to the foot of a chimney (50 feet, III). Climb the loose chimney awkwardly to the summit (III, 50 feet).