

CLIMBS AND NOTES 1969

Perusal of entries in the Glan Dena and Low House log books for 1969 will quickly show that the recent high standards set in the rockclimbing field have been more than maintained, mainly, with some notable exceptions, by members who have joined via the Stoats, whose close-knit, informal atmosphere carries forward into the M.A.M. and seems a much better breeding ground for talent.

During the late summer three of the most active of the clubs rock climbers left for foreign parts (temporarily, we hope), their impending departure seeming to spur each to peak activity. John Harwood, now in California, managed to snatch a few last minute new routes, including a girdle traverse of Dove Crag, Dovedale, a much attempted line and scene of a notable fall a few years ago. Some other climbs he did in the Lake District are mentioned elsewhere in this Journal, and, with Roger High he also did Gimmer String and Intern, with a new finish. Also in the Lakes, various combinations of Vic Slator, Chris Perry, Bob Burns and Dick Vernon accounted for such routes as Gormenghast, Isengard, Do Not, Kipling Groove and Gimmer String.

Before his departure to Johannesburg, Dave Hughes finished his guidebook to Heighleigh Quarry near Keele (I have a copy if anyone is interested), a sandstone quarry which poses some unusual problems e.g., climbing on bolts which can be plucked out by hand, and managed to settle a few old scores. Dick Vernon's departure for Toronto interrupted his partnership with Vic Slator, but they did some good routes e.g., White Slab, Llithrig and Tensor.

Glan Dena still seems a more popular base for rockclimbing on the whole than Low House, though the latter has, overall, noticeably taken a lot of the pressure off Glan Dena. In Wales, Anglesey has again been popular and probably always will be. Harwood and Perry did Ufo and the Strand, while Slator led Dream of White Horses and Quartz Icicle, two routes very much in the modern idiom. The popularity of Anglesey seems to have resulted in less attention being paid to Tremadoc, but the better routes there are still led or failed on often. Dave Roberts did Pincushion with two pegs and a coathanger while Graham Willison, on his annual pilgrimage from Cumberland did it with just two pegs. In the Llanberis Pass, ascents of routes like Cenotaph Corner and Cemetery Gates are now fairly commonplace. Across the road on Dinas Mot Beorn and Plexus were ascended, as also many routes on Cloggy, Shrike and Diglyph being notable.

Not so much appears to have been done in slightly more outlying areas eg., the Carneddau, Craig Cowarch and the newly discovered cliffs of the Lleyrn Peninsula, though Vic Slator did The Crucible in Cwm Silyn.

In the South-West a number of parties have been attracted to the superb rough rock of Cornwall, with perhaps less being done in the Avon Gorge. The London Section paid their regular visits to the Kent Sandstone while Peak District gritstone and limestone were not ignored.

Any such round up of domestic news is bound to be incomplete and even inaccurate, sources being mainly gossip in huts and pubs! Any news of climbs etc. both at home and abroad will be gratefully received by the Editor — have we no demon walkers?

A B R O A D

The well attended official meet in Switzerland is described elsewhere in the Journal. There were a number of other parties in other parts of Switzerland and in the Chamonix area, where the Frendo Spur of the Aiguille du Midi was done among others, a route that looks like becoming an M.A.M. standard. Paul Fatti, on his first Alpine visit did the North-East face of the Piz Badile (as the Journal goes to press news has just come in of his ascent in July 1970 of the Rimmon Route on the Trolltind Wall in Norway, with his brother. They had three bivouacs on the face and were apparently without water for two days).

Ray Colledge has described his fortnight in the Alps in this Journal. Members who have read Ray's accounts of his various Alpine Seasons in previous Journals will be able to appreciate what a thorough and efficient Alpine training he has had in order to make such a successful ascent of the North Face of the Eiger in far from ideal conditions.

A NOTE ON THE FREND SPUR OF THE AIGIULLE du MIDI

Vic Slator and Ted Laidlar

Ref : SELECTED CLIMBS ON THE MONT BLANC RANGE,
Volume I, pg. 157.

As an indication of the variability of conditions on Alpine routes, it may be instructive to compare Rog. High's article "Five go to the Frendo" in last year's Journal with what we did in 1969. The line we took up the final rognon was by no means extreme; it appears to be totally different again from what Rog. did. For those interested in the Frendo, then, here is our version :—

Climb the snow arete, which gets steeper and more icy. Continue straight up, over one or two small bergschrunds, past some boulders

in the snow (these may not be exposed some years), and gain the rognon by an obvious crack in the slabs at the bottom left-hand corner of the rognon (40-ft., V, ice tube "piton" in crack). From the ledge at the top of the crack ascend, veering slightly leftwards, via a finger crack to a platform (30-ft., IV). Take the easy chimney rising to the right (80-ft., III), then go straight up the snow slope to the foot of a wall (70-ft.). Traverse right, keeping to the snow/ice, to some unstable looking flakes. Climb these, and continue up the rising traverse to the right (110-ft., IV sup., care needed). Continue traversing right to the obvious central couloir (II, 40-ft.). Climb a system of zig-zag cracks in the true right wall of the couloir, passing a loose inset block and several pegs, to the top of the rognon (V, 120-ft., well protected) and up the easy snow slope above (150-ft.) to join the Plan-Midi traverse. Time from the foot of the snow arete:—about 4½ hours, in good conditions.

Route 144—Aig. de Peigne, Ordinary route (S. Face)

The term "fixed rope" in line 7 ("DO NOT go up the line of chimneys on the L, but use a fixed rope to descend 12-ft. to the R into the bed of the couloir") is misleading to say the least. A better description would be ". . . use a fixed abseil point to descend . . ."

DAVE HUGHES WRITES FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Much of the climbing round Johannesburg is concentrated in the Magaliesberg. This is a range of hills about 40 miles north of Johannesburg running in an east-west direction. The southern escarpment presents a continuous line of cliffs for about 30 miles varying in height from 150 to 300 feet while the northern slopes are more gentle although they are criss-crossed by gorges (or kloofs) cut by the northward flowing rivers. It was through an intimate knowledge of the passes and kloofs in the Magaliesberg that the Boer commandos managed successfully to elude the British in the Anglo-Boer war. One can still find relics in the form of ammunition, old British block-houses and even occasionally old tins of bully beef. There used to be a number of graves of British soldiers but these have been transferred recently to Rustenburg.

By British standards the scope for new routes is enormous, only the most accessible places being developed to any extent. The Barley brothers, Tony and Robin, made a big impact during their stay putting up a vast number of routes of a very high standard. Unfortunately, the modern hard man approach grated on some of the local climbers and relations got a bit strained. Matters were not helped when Tony Barley published a "pirate" guide, as the Mountain Club jealously pre-

serves its rights in this area. It would appear that the Fell & Rock and the Climbers' Club are not the only organisations to experience this kind of trouble.

Climbing takes place both on the southern faces and in the kloofs, although the kloofs tend to be more pleasant, there being running water, pools for bathing and some shade from the sun. The weather is magnificent and in six months I have only been rained off once. By British standards the biggest drawback is the walk from the car, which usually takes about 40 minutes and carrying the full complement of modern gear one gets very hot indeed.

The grading of climbs is by pitches, the system A—G being used with sub-divisions of 1, 2 and 3 for greater precision. Thus F1 corresponds approximately to a British pitch grading of 4b or what used to be known as mildish V.S. in the days of my youth. The rock is quartzite and generally of good quality, although large blocks of doubtful stability are not infrequent. The rock is very compact and once you get out on a face there is not too much scope for runners. Also the square cut nature of the holds tends to make technique more important than strength. In addition, flat holds do not feel very accomodating to the palm sweating under the African sun.

An interesting comparison with Britain is that the guide book is much more vaguely written and only a general indication of the line is given. There is none of the classic Harding style "reach round the rib for an invisible handhold to gain access to an invisible ledge". Also as there are far fewer climbers, especially doing the harder climbs, it is more difficult to obtain a personal description of the problems likely to be encountered. Consequently the leader is thrown more on his own resources and this increases the feeling of seriousness.

Wild life is a hazard. If Paul Dean likens sea-gulls to vultures, wait till he meets the real thing. Baboons also can be frightening but as far as I am concerned the worst danger is from snakes. Fortunately mambas do not frequent the High Veld but puff adders kill one fast enough to cause me to wet my pants everytime I hear a rustle in the grass.

While on the subject of wild-life, I had an interesting experience last week-end. I was just about to start a climb when I came across a very sexy black bra of ample cup size. Now I have seen Alan Hunter in some compromising situations at stances but this was something new. Fortunately my companions, older in the ways of Africa, put my mind at rest by pointing out that it had been probably stolen by a monkey from the camp-site of some Pretoria University students. The rest of the day was spent trying to discover which girl had lost a bra. It was much more diverting than climbing.