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Grand Cornier and Dent Blanche from Col de Zarmine.
by A. W. Andrews.

THE GRAND CORNIER ON CRAMPONS.

THE Grand Cornier is so overshadowed by its near neighbour the Dent Blanche that it has hardly received the attention it deserves, although there are many recorded routes up it. Last August a party of us were staying at the singularly simple little inn at Ferpèche, a delightful centre for climbing, and well out of the usual crowd; so quiet indeed is it in the Combe de Ferpèche that whilst the Arolla hotels in the next valley were shockingly overcrowded the Hotel Col d'Hérens was never even full. On August 14th we went up the Pointe de Bricolla (12,018 ft.), the ladies of the party protesting against the length and stoniness of the way, and from the moraine and again higher up Maurice Bruchez and I studied the west face of the Grand Cornier (13,022 ft.) with close attention. The ordinary routes, either by the great west buttress between the Bricolla and Dent Blanche glaciers, or from the Col de Grand Cornier, evidently included an indefinitely long climb over easy but disintegrated rocks, and the climbs up the west face involved so much danger from falling stones that we gave them up at once.

We saw, however, that from the highest point of the Bricolla Glacier an ice slope ran up clear to the arête, joining it at the point where the final rocks rise steeply. It was obviously easy to reach the foot of this ice slope, to cut up the estimated 700 to 1000 feet would involve far more time and labour than we desired, but if conditions were good, and the angle not too great for our crampons, there would be no difficulty in reaching the arête and the summit; at any rate it was worth a trial. On August 16th, Bruchez and I left Ferpèche at 5 o'clock, and reached the snout of the Bricolla

Glacier at 7:10; here we put on our crampons, and going leisurely up the Glacier, and through the two ice falls, reached the bergschrund at the foot of our ice slope at 10 o'clock; from this point the slope certainly looked formidable (it was actually very little over 45° measured by a clinometer), but the ice was in perfect condition, entirely free from snow, not too hard, but sound and good; we easily crossed the bergschrund, and going steadily up, waiting now and then for a breather, reached the arête at 10:30. One of the most serious objections to crampons on a long slope is that there is none of that restful waiting whilst the guide cuts steps; but against this in times of emergency, it is possible to make astonishingly rapid progress over the steepest ice, as we found a week later when the sun caught us on the Vuibez icefall, and started a diabolical shower of stones; on this occasion too the difference between the effectiveness of the ordinary Swiss and the improved English crampons was most marked, Bruchez being quite unable without help to get up slopes that were not particularly difficult to me. But to return to the Grand Cornier:—the S. Arête from the point we reached it to the top, gave us splendid climbing; solid, hard red slabs and pinacles equal to the best of the Aiguilles Rouges or the Petit Dent de Veisivi. The Rev. W. A. B. Coolidge (*A. J.*, XIII., 409) describes these rocks as "very jagged and difficult." They certainly are good, but unfortunately parties often pass them by a traverse on the west face. It was 1:30 when we reached the summit, 7 hours climbing from Ferpècle excluding halts. Coming down, we descended the N. Arête for a short distance, then traversed the west face, until we again struck the ice slope about half way between arête and bergschrund. The face traverse was neither safe nor interesting; fairly steep slabs freely covered with insecurely piled debris made going very slow, and we should have done better to return by our route upward. We soon descended the remainder of the ice slope, crossed the nevé of the Bricolla Glacier, and came down the laborious stone slopes that lead to the little unmapped glacier at the foot of the buttress. This we crossed to the

moraine and alps below, and reached Ferpècle soon after 7 o'clock. We were just five hours descending.

The accompanying photograph, taken by Mr. A. W. Andrews from the Col de Zarmine, gives with great clearness the details of what is, I believe, a new route. It is an expedition well worth repeating, and the ascent throughout is free from all risk of falling stones. Fresh snow on the ice slope or final rocks would, of course, make it quite impossible.

