



LADY BLANE



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TANIA HEALD—BRITISH CHAMPION

## PACKING IN ST. ANTON

BY DIANA TOMKINSON

THROUGHOUT the winter months the ski "bums" of the world descend on St. Anton to help pack the *pistes*, and I joined them to start my apprenticeship. We worked from 7.30 to 10.30 each morning to improve the *pistes* for Rudi Matt of the Ski School; in return we had free lifts and a cheap lunch. In order to begin work at 7.30 (sounds all very fine the night before), it was painfully necessary to leave one's bed at 6.30 and stumble into a cold, bleak and sometimes snowing world. We then had the torture of the chair-lift with which to combat—an ordeal similar to jumping into a bath of boiling water. Both are quite unbearable. Shovels were used for removing mogels, clearing paths and filling up holes. To ski with a shovel gives only one option in the way of taking a slope—straight! Many were the times we found ourselves in a drift, over a cliff or up a tree, still hanging grimly to the offending shovel. If we escaped using a shovel, our stamping powers were put into use; snow sometimes four to five feet had to be packed so that the beginners of St. Anton could ski on a *piste*.

In charge of the crew was an ex-Nazi Lieutenant, Hieni, his preference for girls was marked. It was Franz, though, who was in charge of us while actually working; his outlook on life was gay—he loved a schnapps to start the day! Throughout the winter there were probably about fifty people on the crew coming and going. The majority were Americans, others coming from Canada, Austria, Germany, France and England. Most of the crew had had university education, having degrees in psychology, economics, geology, fine arts, engineering or history; others were doctors, some still were students. There was one American girl, Bert, who had been "bumming" for seven years. She was a qualified instructress but preferred to pack than to teach. Perhaps the most fantastic character was one-armed Chuck; he had lost his arm in a motor accident at the age of ten and had since learnt to ski; so great was his desire to ski, that he had sold a profitable business in order to ski on the profits. He and his great friend, Gene, were the founders of the "bumming" in St. Anton. Arlberg Jim was another fantastic character. He had a degree in psychology and had been studying in Innsbruck with myself and others. His greatest desires were to be a writer and a skier; his style in ski-ing was unique, but his courage was enormous. These and many others were among the fascinating people I met.

The packers occupied the cheapest places in town. The most popular place was "the Zoo," so called on account of its smell and the different people who stayed there. Others stayed at "the Barn"—unfortunately, here the floor boards were not thick enough to prevent the intoxicating smell of the cows from drifting through. The meeting place in the evening was the "Bahnhof." The best parties of all were held in the "Zoo," with people like Franz and Mike playing the guitars, some singing, all drinking; packers, ski instructors, a few privileged tourists and the men on the ski-lifts together enjoyed the many fantastic evenings.

## EASTER IN THE HIGHLANDS

BY SUSAN MARTIN

SKI-ING in Scotland can be very entertaining, although the whole atmosphere is quite different from ski-ing anywhere in the Alps. This was to be my first visit. Our energetic Gruppenführer in Cheshire had got together a party of two dozen and smoothed all difficulties from our path: accommodation was fixed and elaborate arrangements made for our transport. I could not help feeling that each person's movements must have been plotted on a chart, so efficient was the organisation.

I left Somerset very early on Maundy Thursday and reached Liverpool by 3.30, feeling most conspicuous with a pair of ski, although at least they are an effective device for identifying other people. The traffic had not yet reached full Easter proportions and we made good time, stopping on Shap Hill for a meal, crossing the Border and eventually arriving at our destination for the night, which was Abington in Lanarkshire.

The following morning we discovered which other members of the party had also been spending the night at Abington, having arrived too late to see them all before going to bed. Each carload was now bound for the snows. We went via Glasgow to collect Sue Bourke, who had taken the night train from London, and we were horrified on scanning the notice board at the station to see that her train was due two and a half hours late. Then, whom, should we see but Sue striding across the station! Luckily for all, she had jumped on to an earlier train than that selected for her by the Gruppenführer. The drive to the Highlands took us along the shores of Loch Lomond, which was completely calm, the mountains on the opposite side perfectly reflected in the water.

At Tyndrum we stopped just long enough to drop at the hotel everything which we should not need for the all-important business of ski-ing. This turned out to be a lucky move because before long an ominous knocking started in the car, which became gradually worse. The men diagnosed all sorts of ailments. Sue, being fairly mechanical, also had some suggestions. I had no idea at all, but it was obviously pretty serious, so we drove down to Glencoe village to find a garage. The diagnosis turned out to be a big-end! There was nothing for it but to abandon the poor car for a time, so the owner stayed to supervise its reception into hospital and persuaded the rest of us meanwhile to make for the ski-ing.

A lorry obligingly took us back up the Glen but by this time it was drizzling steadily. On reaching the bottom of the chair-lift we met more of our party coming down. Plenty of advice not to go up was offered but, having got so far, we were not intending to be deprived of our ski-ing for the day. The chair-lift is new this year and a great success; it eliminates a lot of tedious walking and quite steep climbing. Above the lift there is still a walk of about twenty minutes before one reaches the ski-tow. As we climbed up a stiff wind was blowing the rain into our faces. It was quite ghastly and I thought

with envy of the others at the bottom: probably back at the hotel by now, having hot baths. We must be absolutely crazy! The three ahead of me seemed to be doing marvellously. I wonder if they were really feeling the same as I was. We did, eventually, arrive at the tow. It was preparing to shut for the night but we were kindly allowed a ride up before it stopped. The run down was a bit alarming as we could not see a thing and boulders tended to loom up from nowhere. We left our ski in the hut at the foot of the tow and walked down to the chair-lift feeling quite light hearted. When we got back to the road I had, for no particular reason, the feeling of having enjoyed it all. We hitched another lift back to the hotel and staggered in, very late for dinner but professing that we would not have missed it for anything.

Saturday was clear and fine when we reached the slopes—about 15 miles from Tyndrum. The roads around are straight and very good for driving. Some of those who had skied a lot the day before left us at about midday and went off sight-seeing. The rest of us watched an Army Ski Association Giant Slalom for which the course was set down the main run alongside the ski-tow.

Sun and clouds alternated all day and the views were very beautiful. From the top of the tow, one looked across in every direction at range upon range of mountains separated by vast stretches of moorland. The sun glinted on the water of lochs dotted about far below. It was, in its own way, just as impressive as any Alpine scene. The ski-ing does not compare with the spring ski-ing in the Alps but it did remind me slightly of a day once spent in the Haute Savoie at the end of November when I was surprised to find how very attractive the mountains can be in their "pre-season" state. There was rather the same feeling that one must make the most of the available snow—not that it was by any means scarce at Glencoe.

In the evening about half of our number had an excellent meal at the Bridge of Orchy Hotel and went on to Ballachulish, where a good party was going on. Here we rejoined our sight-seers who had returned by way of Fort William after what seemed a very comprehensive tour. The Scots were most welcoming and tolerant of us invading Sassenachs who were not all very adept at their particular forms of dancing.

On Easter Sunday some of us drove over for early service at Ballachulish and stayed to breakfast at the hotel there afterwards. We were made very welcome in spite of its already being full to overflowing. The high spot of the meal was when Joe Musgrave dashed outside and returned with a selection of Easter eggs which had been bought on the way up to Scotland by the Gruppenführer and his second-in-command. We were all delighted by this kind idea.

The Scottish Ski Club departed from precedent this year in holding the Scottish Kandahar, the traditional Easter race, in mid-March in order to ensure that there would be plenty of snow over the full course. The event of the day was the Pitman Quaich, a Slalom held on the Fly Paper and set by Louis Drysdale. The Fly Paper is a long, steep slope reached by a short walk from the top of the tow. There were

about seventy starters, so the second run had to be restricted to just under half this number, selected on the results of the first run.

The first three places went to members of the Norwegian team visiting Scotland for Easter, the winner being T. Hermanrud with 86.4". Our Gruppenführer, Sebastian Rathbone, came 5th with 101.4", a very good effort (and fitting reward for his hard work). T. Platou, also of the Norwegian team, was 11th, and first of the girls, winning the Maclean Trophy with the time of 119.6". She was followed closely by Sheila Jamieson. Molly Ingram came 20th and myself 22nd, the only L.S.C. members competing.

Although there had been a slight snow-fall overnight the conditions were fast and the second run particularly icy. The sun shone once again and it was pleasantly warm for sitting around and watching. One great advantage of holding the Slalom on the Fly Paper was that the skiers who remained had the whole *piste* by the tow to ski on, also had less queueing and more space to move about.

No one bothered much about lunch each day once one had got up to the slopes, it seemed imperative to spend the time ski-ing. Biscuits and chocolate were on sale at the Talstation of the chair-lift, but otherwise people relied mostly on getting back to some food in the car later on in the day.

On the subject of equipment, I might say that one needs, or may need, *plenty* of warm sweaters. Advice given to me was to bring one more pullover than I thought I could conceivably want; this turned out to be quite correct! It is handy to have as much spare clothing as possible in case one gets wet and cannot dry everything by the morning. To wear in the evening a skirt and blouse is suitable, and need not take up much room.

Some of the party departed on Sunday, planning to spend Easter Monday fishing or playing golf as a change from the snows. The collapse of the car, sad though it was, fortunately did not leave anyone without transport as several others had come up with some unfilled seats, so everyone could be fitted in. The weather was perfect, so seven of us decided to spend the day in a leisurely drive southwards, allowing time for some sightseeing in the Lake District. Stopping at traffic lights in Keswick, we heard someone, gazing at the loaded roof-rack, point out to his family our "water-skis"! Our scheme to stop for an evening meal near Hawkshead, in order to miss the worst of the home-going traffic, was a successful one. Although it was well past midnight when we drew up in Liverpool, a lot of the frustration of nose-to-tail driving had been avoided.

The following morning the weather turned wet and very cold, as if to emphasise how lucky we had been over the week-end. Our one remaining carload left in a furious snowstorm by way of the Mersey tunnel, but by the time we entered Shropshire the snow had turned to rain. In spite of the rain the six-hour drive to Reading seemed to pass very quickly. My kind drivers deposited me at the station and before long I was back in Somerset, where people looked incredulous when I told them where I had spent the Easter week-end. Skiers will go to any lengths, they supposed! But ski-ing among the hospitable

Scots is the greatest fun and I brought away with me a feeling of warm admiration for the way in which they are making their slopes more accessible to the enthusiastic.

## TAKEN FROM A LETTER

from PAULINE SITWELL STEBBING

OUR plans were quite ambitious, but the weather broke round about the 8th of April so that we only managed to explore three of the four areas.

My first impression of the long first night's drive through France *via* Lyon to Feurs was quite extraordinary. The moment we were over the border one noticed a sort of closed-in feeling going through all the towns and villages, quite simply explained by the fact that most of the French houses abutting on any main road (and most of the others) have metal shutters which are firmly closed very early on in the evening. We were aiming for the Station Hotel, which was going to keep open for us, and here, an awful warning—most French station hotels are excellent in every way, usually with superb cooking, but they are on corners and by the railway at the same time, and the combination of both these things makes sleep impossible. . . . This was our worst night of all.

Our second day took us to Mont-Dore to ski the Puy de Sancy, in the Massif Central, to get ourselves, as it were, into a feeling of being one party, for our first planned ski-ing day was to be from Luchon, or rather from the Hospice de France where we left the cars, and a long trek both up and down round the Col of the Pic de la Mine (2,445 m.) down to the Plan des Etangs and up to the Refuge de la Rencluse (2,125 m.), heavily laden, and, probably half in the dusk if not later, with five to seven hours as a possible time.

Though we skied in a mist it was still worth it and rather fun, and then we headed off to the aunt and uncle of one of the party, who lived near Rodez, she being the local school mistress and he running the farm.

Here we were regaled with one of the most amazing dinners on record, with two *poules au pot* first and fillets of sole afterwards, ending up with *omelettes flambées* with so much rum poured on that, with the light out, we were illuminated for some long time, from without, as well as from the abundance of excellent wine from within, sitting round a long table with festoons of sausages and other things dimly seen among the rafters. Then we had to clear the local school room and get out our sleeping bags and *pneumatiques*, only to find our hostess insistent on a midnight snack of champagne and biscuits. Out of politeness we left late in the morning, and this caused the whole of our descent to the Etangs to be in the dark, before the moon came up; and 2,500 feet down unknown steep ground of snow, boulders,

stunted trees and so forth, because the official path was absolutely untraceable, is not really my idea of fun, the danger from twisting ankles alone being considerable.

However, all was well and a fine supper at the end, with a room to oneself, lovely new blankets, and a charming hut-keeper; father, son and a number of females tucked away behind scenes.

This is well-known *gouffre* country and the season was just about to commence for this subterranean sport. In fact, we saw one lot getting ready the following day, with what looked like miners' lamps attached to their foreheads, tough-looking chaps. In a mixture of French and Spanish they tried to persuade us to join them, but even had we not had other plans the idea didn't appeal to us very much, and later we heard that some horrid tragedy occurred in the near *Gouffre de Torea*. From here, among other things, we climbed the highest mountain of the range, the *Pic d'Aneto* (3,404 m.), neither high nor far, but it slowly buttoned up most of the parties that passed us and later dropped behind. Many subscribed to the modern crampon-only technique and having brought no skins were in a sorry mess when the sun warmed the snow up. Nor did the Spanish technique, either up or down, impress us; in fact, ski seemed to be used because feet were not practicable, and hut guardians in this region use "rackets," we were told. Though skiing possibilities in the Pyrenees are both good and accessible, even the ski-lifts are being put up in the wrong places. In other words, the people with the money to build them do not seem to have got round to discovering where they should be placed; no doubt this will alter, but the so-called "development plans" are very dicy indeed, perhaps fortunately so.

The *Pic d'Aneto* is a skier's mountain and we had the most wonderful run down. We then packed up, had our evening meal rather early out in the open from our own stores, sitting knee-deep in wild cyclamen and daffodils, then over the col, back to our cars. We camped at the "camping" at *Luchon*, a splendid site, in an orchard, with a wash-house and etceteras all in working order. Though it rained a little in the night, with double-skinned tents we had no trouble and, as usual, we all slept well.

Our next spot was to camp in the valley of the *Lac d'Oo*, where we had a marvellous alfresco meal with civilised trimmings, fresh endive, mayonnaise, veal cutlets, *pomme lyonnaise*, yogort and fruits, as well as divers cheeses, but thinking to be clever—for the weather was again drizzly—we aimed to sleep in the *Electricité de France's* cement hut across the river. We bedded down early, for we were off on our longest day on the morrow, not quite knowing if the *Refuge d'Epingo* further up the valley would be open or not, for reports had been conflicting and we could really get no sense out of the man who should have had the key. We had a foul night; with the door open there was a fearful draught, with it shut we sweltered; on top of that, I alone had put a piece of sheet plastic under my li-lo, and every time the others turned over, which seemed about every five minutes, an awful gasping and grating sound occurred as their *pneumatiques* scrunched on the concrete floor. How eagerly we all

rose at 4 a.m. to hot cocoa and my famous cake. (I am always requested to bring *Cak Anglaise* on these occasions and I duly stagger under kilos of Dundee cake and its Australian counterpart.) It forms the best "iron ration" I know, as well as being a funny joke with a psychological pick-me-up from the laughter it produces, that and vitamin C. Sweets which, with dried fruit and tablets of French *Paregorique* and *Alunozol* I never go on these jaunts without.

The *Ceil de la Baque* (spelled in many different ways) was certainly a terrific day, for it was sixteen hours there and back to camp, which we then struck and made a new one the same evening in the *Cauterets* region; but though the outer Guides' part of the *Espingo* was open it wouldn't have been a very comfortable night. Higher up still there is the remains of a workman's hut, for this lake has been harnessed above and below for a power system. It was outside the latter hut that we had a very tricky time getting first down on to the lake and then up the other side, for the lake had been drained after it had frozen and we had to cross it and the twelve to twenty-metre-thick walls, which were all crevassed and at a steep angle, and yet it hardly seemed worth getting out ropes; one had to use a *Mer de Glace* technique, only more so, the main trickery being that our ski sticks didn't hold in the slightest and in some places the cracks were nearly as long as our ski. Still, good practice.

Otherwise the climb had only one difficulty, a steep icy-faced gully down which the wind blew pins and needles into our faces that made sheltering imperative at the height of the gust. Even then we all had a bit of a scare at one moment, being caught unawares. However, all was well, and though a noisy and scrambling gale, the west wind had begun, and it was far too warm.

Of our last part I can only say that the weather stopped us exploring further than the near cols round the *Refuge de Wallon*, or *Marcadau* as it is known. The weather broke, and we got wet through going up and coming back, so that our original intention of going on to the *Refuge de Baysse* by the *Col d'Aratille* and *Col des Mulets* to have a crack at the *Vignemale* had to be cancelled. Even so, we scoured the cols round the *Marcadau* in twos, enough to decide it would make an excellent base for a party less strong than ourselves for their first few days. It is only a two or three hours' trek to the hut itself and for that reason must not be attempted at Easter, as they slept both under and on the tables over the holiday.

From here we did a little sightseeing, a marble mine where the same method has been used for centuries, and other splendours such as *St. Bertrand de Cominge*, before pushing off to *Cassis via Toulouse* and *Marseille*, to have some climbing and sea bathing in the famous *Calanques* and to camp in the most exotic camp of all. Quite something, to sleep under the stars on the top of a rocky outcrop covered in rosemary and thyme, with the glittering stars above and the faint slap of the waves below with the sun rising over one's toes.

An eventful journey home, of course, and having the odd day to spare I went and did a solo from *Melchsee Früt* to the top of the *Titlis*, a gorgeous day and fitting end to a fine season.

## SKI-ING IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

SKI-ING in Australia has developed rapidly in the last three years owing to the building of roads by the Government to connect the various irrigation schemes, making the mountains accessible. The many immigrants from Europe have taken the opportunity this offered of building up typical European ski-ing resorts and the Australians have taken to ski-ing with enthusiasm.

The village of Thredbo, 330 miles from Sydney, was first opened in 1958 and has now become the principal ski resort of Australia, if not of the Southern Hemisphere. About ten years ago a handful of enthusiasts saw the tremendous possibilities that the opening up of the mountains by the Government-run Snowy Mountain Authority gave to the tourist trade. Hitherto, travelling into the mountains was unknown to the vast majority of Australians, and the ski-ing and fishing enthusiasts had for many years been forced to go to one or two out-moded resorts simply because they were accessible. But with the opening of the Alpine Way which runs right through the mountains, linking New South Wales to Victoria, many dreams were at last realised. Thredbo was formed by a public company who leased the land from the Kosciusko State Park. The company, in turn, leased the land to various clubs and to private individuals who were quick to recognise the possibilities of the site, and the village grew quickly. It is a village in the strict sense of the word—the leaseholders pay rates to the company, for which they are linked up to the main water supply, receive electricity from the main generators and get their garbage collected and disposed of twice a week. The company also keep the roads in good repair, run the village's only licensed hotel, a shop and post office, as well as the chair-lift and a first-aid service. They also arrange for top ski instructors to come from Europe each winter, so the villagers lack nothing.

Who are these permanent villagers? Almost without exception they are Continental people—Czechs, Hungarians, Austrians, Swiss and Germans. They live in the village all the year round, running guest houses, operating the chair-lift, ski-hire shop, etc., in the winter; and in summer many of them organise fishing excursions for the tourists, clean up the ski trails, put the roads in good repair, help at the riding school, and generally mark time until the snows come again.

Much the same sort of activity is going on all over the Australian Alps—villages are mushrooming as the ski-ing bug bites many new enthusiasts each year. Perisher Valley, for instance, about 40 road miles and 7 air miles from Thredbo, is another resort gaining in popularity. But this is not a community village like Thredbo—here each hut fends for itself as regards garbage disposal and the like, although they have the advantage now of mains electricity which was brought through only a few months ago. Here there are two extremely modern hotels, "The Man from Snowy River" and "Sundeck," each fully licensed and each managed by the same company. This company also controls the ski school.

Within a few miles of Perisher Valley there are several ski lodges,

hotels, ski-lifts, restaurants and ski schools—all developed within the last two or three years. Some places are more popular than others, of course. Ski-ing conditions, lift facilities, village atmosphere and comraderie all come under consideration, but the biggest deciding factor is accessibility. Thredbo is luckiest here because the Snowy Mountain Authority has undertaken to keep the access road clear throughout the year and often the snow-plough can be persuaded to go just that little bit further to clear the village street. Perisher Valley and all points skyward are not so fortunate. The road is kept open to within a mile of Perisher—after that it's a case of catching the snow-cats or ski-ing in.

Over the border, in Victoria, the situation is much the same. Old resorts like Mt. Buller, Falls Creek, Mt. Hotham and Mt. Buffalo are having to look to their laurels in order to keep up with the competition. Mt. Buller is the most popular village, being only 150 miles from Melbourne. Week-ends in winter are as crowded as Sydney's famed Bondi Beach in summer, and there are new lodge and lift facilities going up all the time.

What of the ski-ing standards of the Australian enthusiasts? Natural sport-lovers, they have taken to ski-ing extremely well and although they are not too good by international standards they will improve considerably over the next few years. They lack nothing in facilities—they have the most modern lifts, the best equipment. They lack nothing in instruction—the finest of Europe's instructors travel "down under" for the southern winters and are fast bringing the standards up to the European levels. They lack nothing in enthusiasm. What's more, they look the part.

Over the Tasman, in the spectacular New Zealand Alps, the Kiwi skiers are still enthusiastic but are lagging behind this booming development in the tourist industry which their Australian counterparts are enjoying. The situation is now much the same as it has been for years—the ski clubs hold the sway with their own ski grounds and their own lifts (if you have the strength to get there in the first place!). If you are not a member of a ski club you have one or two not-so-good alternatives if you feel like taking to the slopes for a week-end or so.

In the middle of the North Island, on Mt. Tuapehu, there is the one tourist resort the country offers which gives the visitor the comfort and facilities of overseas ski resorts. There is a luxurious hotel, "The Chateau," and three modern chair-lifts. However, "The Chateau," being Government owned, offers none of the Continental atmosphere or *joie de vivre* which abounds in the Australian Alps. In the South Island the situation, from a tourist's point of view, is even worse. There are some fantastic slopes and fantastic hotels, but oh, so far apart! It is planned, quite soon, to build a French chair-lift to Coronet Peak, the principal ski ground of the South Island. This is coming not a moment too soon and may do much to open up the Alps and attract more skiers in that direction. Visitors from Europe and Australia shake their heads in bewilderment when they see those wonderful, undeveloped mountains. But the main reason they have

remained undeveloped is lack of population. New Zealand simply does not have enough people to warrant too much investment in the mountains at present. It is something that will come in time. Meanwhile, the skiers continue to join the clubs, climb exhaustingly up to the club grounds and use the somewhat primitive huts and rope-tows of their respective clubs.

At the moment the Kiwis can still out-ski the Aussies. But after seeing the boom in this sport in Australia over the last three years many people are wondering just how long it will be before the Australians are not only out-ski-ing the New Zealanders but come level with the top skiers in Europe.

## PART OF THE HAUTE ROUTE IN THE SECOND WEEK OF MARCH

BY MADELEINE MARX

HAVING decided, with Daphne Portway, to spend a week or ten days in Verbier before going to Zermatt, it dawned on us that the sensible way to get from one to the other would be *via* a part of the Haute Route, realising however that we should be very lucky indeed if weather conditions permitted as early as the second week in March. Gordon Cridlan, an enthusiastic tourer, had told me that he was also going to Verbier and Zermatt, so I enquired whether he had similar ideas and learned that he and some friends intended ski-ing from Verbier to Arolla and had no objection to us joining. So after some enquiries and correspondence we arranged with Charles Troillet, Chef du Service d'Avalanche at Verbier, to be at our *entière disposition* for the time planned, and to discuss further details with Gordon and his party in Verbier.

By March 5th we were all in Verbier, though not all equally acclimatised, and I had made contact with our guide and arranged for us all to ski with him on the morning of the 6th so that he could decide how to plan the trip and whether we needed a second guide. At lunchtime it was decided that we should take advantage of the perfect weather and start the following morning.

On March 7th the six of us, John and Paddy Hollington, John Turnbull, Gordon, Daphne and I, caught the early chair-lift to Les Ruinettes, where we met Charles (our guide). We took the *téléferique* to Les Attelas, put on ski and traversed above the Cabane de Mont Fort to the Glacier de la Chaux, where we put on skins to climb to the Col de la Chaux. John Turnbull, being as yet unaccustomed to the brilliant sunshine, was disguised as a sheikh, and Gordon sported a linen sun-hat similar to those seen on small children at the seaside! During an hour's rest on the Col at midday a party of Swiss arrived and asked Charles if they were on the route to Mont Fort;

he told them, with great enjoyment, that we were on the way to Zermatt!

After a short run down, we climbed in hot sunshine and with fantastic views to the Col de Momin and on to the Grand Désert, a wide expanse of glacier, where we were intrigued to see an apprentice pilot practising landing his single-engined machine, the instructor having been deposited to stand knee-deep in the snow. We completed the day's climbing (about 4½ hours in all) to the Col de Mont Calme (3,200 m.), with the Rosablanche on our right, and were glad of the gentle downhill *schusses* over the Glacier de Prafleuri, ending up on some tricky snow conditions at the workmen's hutted camp at Prafleuri. Charles had arranged for us to spend the night there, and we received a most friendly welcome and excellent accommodation consisting of well-heated double rooms with Dunlopillo mattresses, blankets and pillows, with all modern conveniences in a separate hut. Large quantities of tea were consumed on arrival, and after a wash and a rest we were handsomely fed on ham and eggs, and then repaired to the bar hut for wine and conversation until bed-time.

Next morning we started at about 7.30 with a short climb up to the Col de Blava, then traversed alongside the snow-covered Lac des Dix. Charles was constantly prodding the snow and insisted on us keeping spaced out, and when we stopped at the southern end of the lake to put on our skins, he told us that he had never known that slope to be so dangerous—there was an air space between snow and earth; this explained the curious hollow feeling we had noticed, like ski-ing over crevasses.

The climb up the Gorge de Cheilon was quite lovely, high rock walls on either side of a stream which we crossed and recrossed. At one point our journey was enlivened by workmen throwing stones down from above, and only considerable shouting from Charles ensured our safe passage. At the top of the gorge we emerged on to the Glacier de Cheilon, where we saw masses of chamoix on the rocks above. Eventually the glacier levelled out and we turned left to the foot of the Pas de Chèvres, a steep rock face with two fixed ladders. The heat of the sun was terrific, and we ate our lunch in shirt sleeves, some of the party even choosing shade.

Charles led the way up the ladders, and one by one we followed carrying our ski, which left one hand to hold the ladder. The trickiest points were stepping from one ladder to the next—a distance of about a metre sideways—and getting off the second ladder on to a steep snow-covered slope. But Charles came to the rescue, relieving most of us of our ski at the change of ladders and giving a firm hand at both points. After recovering from this ordeal and enjoying the view, we had a pleasant run down to Arolla. The village was still closed, but Charles found someone to let him telephone to Les Haudères for a taxi; we then skied to meet it and were driven to the Edelweiss in Les Haudères, where Charles had arranged for Daphne and I and himself to spend the night. Here over drinks we settled up for the two days and saw Gordon, John and the Hollingtons depart in another taxi to return that evening to Verbier.

A hot shower, and excellent dinner and a comfortable bed were a good preparation for the next day, by far the most strenuous of the trip. We set off soon after 7 a.m. and our taxi took us to the end of the road through Arolla. The workmen's lift which should have taken us up the *moraine* of the Bas Glacier d'Arolla had broken down early that morning, so we carried our ski up the steep slope and through the tunnel—one of many workings of the Grande Dixence hydro-electric project. We then started a long climb on ski to the Haut Glacier d'Arolla, making only a short stop at lunch-time at about 2,800 metres, as by now there was a cold wind. After another hour's gentle climb we zig-zagged up an extremely steep slope towards the Dents de Bertol, until Charles said we should take off and carry our ski. He then kicked steps vertically up the slope and we followed, as best we could until it became so steep that he roped us together, and we finally reached the ridge at 3,374 metres over slippery loose rock. It had been an exhausting climb, but the traverse down to the Col was infinitely worse!! Still roped and carrying our ski, we started walking across, but I (at the back) slithered down and landed below Daphne, afraid that if I moved I should pull her down with me. But we somehow managed to crawl across together (the slope below seemed to go endlessly down to the glacier) encouraged by Charles, who then collected our ski and sticks and let us down one at a time on the rope, sliding ungracefully on to the Col. He then threw down our ski and sticks, which Daphne fielded, and joined us.

By now it was about 5 p.m. and getting very cold. Leaving ski and sticks on the Col, Charles hauled himself up to the Bertol Hut, which sits on a steep rock with a fixed chain as hand-hold. Daphne followed to the top and then I, relying on Charles' strength to hold us and pulling ourselves up with our arms, as foot-holds were almost non-existent. Entry to the hut was made by ladder to the first floor, the main door being snowed in.

Our enjoyment of the wonderful views in the evening light was somewhat marred by the hut being filled with smoke as soon as the fire was lit; for over an hour tears streamed down our faces and there was no hope of getting warm, as we had to leave the windows open until the chimney thawed enough to take the smoke in the right direction. When at last the atmosphere cleared, Charles made enormous quantities of hot soup, followed by pork chops eaten by the light of one very small candle aided by my pocket torch. At 8 p.m. we retired to bed in a temperature of minus six degrees Centigrade, Daphne and I sharing eleven blankets, and we actually managed to sleep.

On the morning of the 10th we breakfasted and tidied the hut and then had to face the descent, holding the icy cold chain but safely let down on the rope by Charles, who came last. The weather was no longer settled, and by the time we had climbed up the Glacier du Mont Mine to a height of 3,600 metres between the Col d'Herens and the Tête Blanche, an icy *Foehn* was blowing; even without this I should have been breathless at this altitude. But once we had skied a little way down it became warm; unfortunately the light was bad

and we could not fully appreciate the icefalls of the Tiefmattengletscher below the Matterhorn, needing all our concentration to follow our guide. This must be a lovely descent in fine weather. At Staffelalp Charles exchanged a bottle of beer for a lift in a lorry, and we found ourselves at Furri, from where we skied on alternate patches of soggy snow and bare earth, arriving in Zermatt at about 1.30 p.m., feeling rather pleased at being the first to come this way in 1961.



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